

## **Bobby Petty pleads not guilty in Nina Keown murder case during court hearing**

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 05 October 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 05 October 2010 13:37

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Robert "Bobby" Petty sat alone on Thursday morning, September 30, at the defendant's table in Scott Circuit Court.

With his manacled hands resting on the table, Petty quietly responded when requested as Judge Roger Duvall took him through the formalities of the court hearing at which Petty was charged with the murder of his ex-wife, Nina Rae Keown.

Hearing proceedings took about five minutes to conclude. Petty was then escorted out of the courtroom by Sheriff John Lizenby, Chief Deputy Wayne Williams, Detective Rick Barrett and Chief Jailer Chris Judd. The officers and prisoner faced a veritable maze of television reporters and photographers posed outside the courtroom door, all eager to capture any words Petty uttered and the image of the young man garbed in a bright orange jumpsuit.

Keown is the woman whose body was found off a country road in northern Clark County on August 27. Petty is now facing murder and other felony charges in Scott Circuit Court in connection with that crime.

Petty, 31, had been quickly identified by law enforcement agencies as a "person of interest" in the disappearance of the 26-year-old Keown in early August. The petite blonde was seen leaving with her ex-husband late on the night of August 7 from a music festival near Petty's home. Petty's story at that time was that he and Keown had argued and Keown got off the ATV on which they were riding and told him that she was going back to the music festival. She then allegedly walked into a corn field.

After nearly three weeks of intensive searching, Scott County Sheriff John Lizenby and officers with the Clark County Sheriff's Department were led by Petty to the site where Keown's decomposing body was found off an isolated country road near Bethlehem.

Following a funeral service at a Lexington church on September 11, Nina Keown now rests in Lexington Cemetery.

Petty faces one count of Class A felony murder and two Class D felonies, removal of a body from (the) scene (of a crime) and obstruction of justice.

The news release provided by Scott County Prosecutor Jason Mount related that, on Wednesday, September 29, the day the charges were filed, Petty was still incarcerated on a probation violation charge at the Clark County Jail in Jeffersonville.

He was then transported to Scottsburg for his initial appearance in Scott Circuit Court on that Thursday morning. After entering a preliminary plea of not guilty, Petty's case was assigned to the local Public Defender Board. No bond was set in the case.

The press release noted that the charges filed "...are a formal method of bringing the defendant (Petty) to trial. The filing of a charge or the defendant's arrest is not evidence of guilt. Robert F. Petty is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt."

Prosecutor Mount also filed a motion for higher than standard bond, just in case abail was considered. When the woman died, Petty was out on bond in a pending case in which he had been charged with domestic battery, a Class A misdemeanor. The alleged victim in the case was Nina Keown.

Additionally, Petty faces Habitual Offender status. That charge, prepared and filed by Chief Deputy Prosecutor Chris Owens and approved by Mount, stated that Petty has been convicted on two Class B felony charges of robbery, one in 1999 and a second in 2002. Petty was also convicted in 2007 on a Class D felony charge of theft. Up to 30 years can be added to Petty's

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sentence if he is found guilty with an Habitual Offender Status.

In the probable cause affidavit prepared by Chief Deputy Williams, information from several interviews of Petty is listed. In it, Petty allegedly admitted to arguing with and then choking Keown on a bed at his mobile home in the early morning hours of August 8. The argument was over phone calls Keown had made and was receiving on her cell phone. He said he could not get Keown to talk to him after choking her, that she was "...like a rag doll..." and could only mumble.

Petty said he then left the trailer for an hour or so. When he returned, he said Keown was blue and unresponsive. He said he tried to shake her awake and blow air into her lungs. Petty allegedly said he did not call 9-1-1 because he was "flipping out."

Petty purportedly transported Keown's body to a site off Bethlehem-New Washington Road using the four-wheeler. On the way, he said he threw away her cell phone and its battery off Reed Road and boots she had been wearing further down the road where he is alleged to have placed the body.

Later on August 8, Petty reportedly told officers that he had revisited Keown's body to remove clothing because he feared it would contain evidence. He purportedly burned the clothing along with a comforter that had been on the bed, a pillow and pillow case at a site behind his home. He said he later dug all of the ashes and material out of the burn site and took it to his father's home, where he placed it in a dumpsite.

Petty also allegedly admitted visiting the area where Keown's body had been placed a third time some four or five days later after dark. The statement related that Petty had hoped to bury Keown, but he could not find the body.

A few days later, Petty was arrested on the Clark County probation violation and incarcerated in the facility in Jeffersonville.

If he is convicted on the murder charge, Petty will face up a sentence of from 45 to 65 years in prison. Judge Duvall told Petty that the advisory sentence is 55 years. The Class D felonies carry sentences of from six months to three years with an advisory sentence of 1½ years. All of the charges carry possible fines of up to \$10,000.

Judge Duvall set a preliminary hearing for November 8 and Petty's jury trial on February 28.