

# Capital murder trial set to begin for Jackson County man charged in 2005 slaying of mother, sons

By David Sáez • DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER • September 21, 2009

Jackson County's first capital murder case in eight years opens today with jury selection in the trial of Wesley Jonathan Williams.

Williams, 25, faces charges of first-degree murder and aggravated child abuse in the death of his former girlfriend and three of her children, two of whom he fathered.

This is the first death-penalty case in Jackson County since 2001, when prosecutors sought the death penalty against Alphonso Banks. Banks received a life sentence in his murder trial.

On March 17, 2005, Athnea "Danielle" Baker, 19, and her sons — Ahmaad, 3; Amarion, 1; and 3-week-old Aaron — were found dead at their home in Cotton Village Apartments in Marianna. Baker was found shot dead, and her sons suffocated from being bound by duct tape.

An apartment manager and a day-care employee who were checking on Baker discovered the bodies and found Baker's 2-year-old daughter, Ashanti Brunson, unharmed.

Jackson County has had single- and double-homicides over the years, but this is the biggest loss of life in one case since the July 4, 1963, killing at the Jackson Hospital of two sheriff's deputies and a person visiting a patient.

"This is one of the worst I've ever been involved in," Sheriff Lou Roberts said. "Anytime you're dealing with the death of children, it's difficult.

"Adults have the ability to make a choice. These children did not have a way to make a choice."

Roberts was the Marianna chief of police at the time of the murders, and he worked closely early in the investigation.

"One of the toughest parts is thinking about the image of what those children had to go through," he said.

Williams was indicted in December 2007 on four counts of first-degree murder and three counts of aggravated child abuse. At the time, he was already in the Calhoun County Jail, serving time on a felony-battery conviction.

Public Defender Walter Smith said Williams maintains his innocence, and he believes DNA evidence found on pieces of a glove stuck to the duct tape could determine who did the killing.

Smith said neither his forensics expert nor the Florida Department of Law Enforcement experts were able to find Williams' DNA on the gloves.

Smith's expert found that there were traces of two other DNA marks aside from 1-year-old Amarion's DNA, while the FDLE had found only one other DNA trace other than the child's.

"I'm trying to find out who it could be," Smith said.

On Friday, Smith failed in his attempt to have Circuit Court Judge William Wright compel the FDLE to compare the DNA with DNA in its database. In a phone interview, Smith said an FDLE representative reported it could not be done because the sample was too complicated.

"It could generate hundreds or thousands of contributors, but I still think it's worth the effort to test it and see what you get," Smith said. "What's the harm in getting hundreds of thousands of results? It does no harm. Why object?"

Jury selection begins at 9 a.m. at the courthouse in Marianna.