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Man convicted in murder of Fort Worth woman

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FORT WORTH — A jury convicted Rodney Owens Thursday morning in the murder of Glenda Gail Furch, a 51-year-old Fort Worth woman whose body has never been found.

Shortly after the verdict, witnesses were called to begin the punishment phase of the trial.

Owens, 41, was charged in the death of Furch, who was last seen leaving work at the General Motors plant in Arlington shortly after midnight on Sept. 28, 2007.

In closing arguments Wednesday, the opposing attorneys summarized the testimony of 30 witnesses called by prosecutors over two days. Defense attorney Mark Rosteet did not call witnesses but tried to refute the state's evidence on cross-examination.

DNA analyst Farah Plopper testified Wednesday that she matched Owens' DNA to saliva from two soft drink cans and sperm from a maroon towel. Those items were recovered from a trash bin outside Furch's apartment on Oct. 1, 2007, the day her daughter reported her missing.

Plopper said the chances that the DNA came from an African-American male other than Owens were one in 115 quadrillion. She also matched Owens' DNA to other items, including a Red Bull can on which his fingerprint was also found, she testified.

Those items linked to Owens were found in trash bags that also contained items belonging to Furch, prosecutor Rainey Webb said. The items included clothing that tests linked to Furch through her daughters' DNA and a receipt for gas that Furch bought the day she was last seen, according to testimony.

Rosteet downplayed the state's DNA evidence, pointing out that 160 items were not tested for DNA. Owens' DNA was not on several other tested items, including the handle of a knife, a towel and some phone connectors, and tests of other items were inconclusive, Plopper acknowledged.

"There was no direct evidence to prove that Mr. Owens was in that apartment," Rosteet argued. "No one saw him bring the body down. No one in that huge complex witnessed him taking out the trash or the body."

But prosecutor Bob Gill said circumstantial evidence can be more reliable than eyewitnesses. For example, Gill said, a woman whose vehicle was carjacked last year could not positively identify Owens as her assailant. But Owens was driving the woman's vehicle about a month later when police chased him.

Gill and Webb argued that Owens incriminated himself by the DNA and fingerprints he left behind; his actions — burning Furch's car and eluding police in a stolen car; and his words — telling a fellow jail inmate about the killing.

"He wiped that apartment down so there were no fingerprints," Gill said. "There were 30-some towels and numerous cleaning products in that trash. There were three soft drink cans. Murder and cleanup is a thirsty business.

"But he didn't think of one thing: The weekend trash was not picked up until Monday after the police showed up."

Gill conceded that the lack of a body is unusual. But he reminded jurors that the friends and relatives who knew Furch best and the homicide detective who has investigated hundreds of cases are all convinced that Furch is dead.

"If she was alive today, don't you know she'd be chewing through steel and crawling through glass to get back to them?" he said. "Mrs. Furch is dead at the hands of this man."