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Illustration: Photo

Steven Van Keuren

'I JUST SHOT TERI ... I'M SORRY, DAD'//FATHER'S TESTIMONY OF FATEFUL CALL OPENS VAN KEUREN DOUBLE-MURDER TRIAL

A 4:20 a.m. phone call roused Dick Van Keuren from bed last fall.

The voice on the other end wasn't one he recognized. It was so "gargled," he said.

It was his son, Steven.

"I just shot Teri," his son told him that Sept. 22 morning.

Why are you talking funny? the father asked.

"I shot myself in the throat," his son replied. "... I'm sorry, Dad. I'm going to a better place."

Where did you get the gun? Dick Van Keuren asked.

"It's yours, Dad."

Dick Van Keuren immediately checked his gun cabinet. A gun was missing.

Dick Van Keuren's recounting of that confession closed the first day of testimony Friday in the murder case against his son.

Steven Van Keuren, 47, is charged with shooting to death former girlfriend Teri Lee and her boyfriend, Timothy Hawkinson Sr., last fall in Lee's bedroom after breaking into her West Lakeland Township home.

He faces two life sentences if convicted.

In opening arguments in a Washington County courtroom, prosecutors said Van Keuren, a former 3M pharmaceuticals technologist from River Falls, Wis., carried out a plan to kill Lee after their relationship soured.

He told a co-worker he was going to kill her, confessed to his dad after he did it and left behind a number of incriminating notes, fingerprints and pieces of forensic evidence, Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Bovitz told the court.

He also left behind a 12-year-old girl who saw Van Keuren kill her mother, Bovitz said.

"This is not a case of whodunit," she told the jury. When it comes to evidence, she said, "We have it all."

But defense lawyer Matthew Ludt said prosecutors won't be able to make their case. He asked jurors to acquit Van Keuren.

"The state has made promises ... they're not going to be able to fulfill," Ludt said. "It's your job to hold them accountable."

According to the charges, authorities learned about 4:30 a.m. Sept. 22 that Van Keuren had broken into Lee's house. He went to the room where Lee, her 12-year-old daughter, Taylor, and Hawkinson were sleeping, court records say, and shot Lee six times and

Hawkinson three times with a .22-caliber handgun. Investigators found 10 spent cartridges on the bedroom floor.

Taylor saw the shooting, prosecutors say. She fled with her 6-year-old sister to the house of a neighbor, who called police.

Lee's sons, ages 8 and 10, hid in a bedroom and were not harmed.

After shooting Lee, Bovitz told the court Friday, Van Keuren sliced her wrists with a box cutter.

About 90 minutes later, a tactical team broke into the house and shot and captured Van Keuren.

He remains in Washington County Jail on \$6 million bail.

Van Keuren and Lee dated for a couple of years before their relationship soured in 2006, relatives of Lee have said.

He began to stalk her, they said. Last summer, he was charged with breaking into Lee's house July 29 and trying to stab her with butcher knives. He was released on bail.

Lee was terrified Van Keuren would return to kill her, court records say, so she installed a security system and often stayed with Hawkinson, her new boyfriend. He armed himself in case of a break-in.

Lee's daughter Taylor told the court Friday how she was having trouble sleeping that evening and so climbed into bed next to her mother and Hawkinson.

About 3:30 a.m., prosecutor Bovitz told the court, Van Keuren called a friend and former 3M co-worker.

She said he left a voice-mail message on his friend's office phone, saying, "I'm going to kill Teri. I've been thinking of it for a while."

Bovitz said that sometime later, Van Keuren went to Lee's house, cut the phone lines, broke through the glass patio door in the basement and went upstairs.

According to court documents, the alarm system did not sound.

Lee's daughter testified she awoke to the gunshots.

She pulled the blankets over her head, but then looked out to see Hawkinson lying on the bedroom floor.

Van Keuren, she recalled, was pointing a gun at her mother, who was standing next to the window.

Then he shot her, the girl said.

"I knew (the bullet) hit her," the girl said, "because she screamed."

The girl ran out of the room and hid with her younger sister in a bathroom. She told jurors they made statements to Van Keuren out of fear for their lives, telling him they thought he was nice, even though they were "upset about what he was doing."

Van Keuren then called his father to tell him he'd just shot Lee, a claim in court records that Dick Van Keuren confirmed Friday.

The girls eventually fled the house.

About 6:30 a.m., the Washington County Special Response Team broke into the house, went upstairs, captured Van Keuren and rescued the boys, two team members testified.

Woodbury Police Sgt. Brett Billmeyer said he was checking the upstairs bedrooms for Van Keuren and the boys when he found them in a bedroom.

He said he heard "a small voice" from a closet say: "We're in here."

"Once I heard the voice," the officer testified, "it was a good feeling."

The boys left the closet with a red blanket over their heads, Billmeyer said, and asked:

"How's our mom?"

"We'll find mom," Billmeyer replied. "We'll take care of you."

Oak Park Heights police officer Brian Derosier recalled entering the bedroom where the killings took place -- and encountering Van Keuren.

When the door to the bedroom swung open, he told the court, Van Keuren was against a wall "in an ambush position," and was raising his gun and pointing it at Derosier and his team.

"Drop the gun! Drop the gun!" Derosier yelled -- and then shot Van Keuren three times when he didn't comply.

"I thought I and my team members were in jeopardy," Derosier told jurors.

Van Keuren fell forward onto the floor, he said, and the team rushed in.

Derosier saw the bodies of Lee and Hawkinson in the bedroom.

"There was blood everywhere," he said.

Testimony in the case continues Monday morning.

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