

# Denied for murderer

back to jail until a trial can be scheduled.

Wood was arrested just hours after the body of Pamela Ashcraft, 24, was discovered in a field off Old Cash Road. A tip to the Cheraw Police Department led Chief J.A. Graves to her body. When Wood was arrested at 11:35 a.m., Ashcraft's car was found parked in his front yard.

Additional details about the crime came to light during the bond hearing. According to Baker, Wood went to the home of a friend after the murder, and asked to borrow a gun "to kill again."

Baker also said Wood penned a letter to an unidentified woman that allegedly indicated

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# capable of big wellness study says

mills, exercise bikes and other equipment to get the heart healthy, strength training or weight room, women and children's fitness areas



Jimmy Jackson (center) responds as the jury's verdict is announced. Last week was the second time Jackson has stood trial for a 1996 murder charge. The first ended with a hung jury. Also pictured are attorneys Jack Swerling (left) and John O'Leary, former director of the S.C. Criminal Justice Academy.

Photo by Wallace McBride

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WELLNESS, PAGE 8A

Jimmy Jackson (center) responds as the jury's verdict is announced. Last week was the second time Jackson has stood trial for a 1996 murder charge. The first ended with a hung jury. Also pictured are attorneys Jack Swerling (left) and John O'Leary, former director of the S.C. Criminal Justice Academy.

# 'Not Guilty'

## Jefferson police officer acquitted of murder

By Wallace McBride  
Chronicle Staff

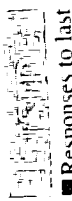
A Jefferson police officer accused of murdering a man in 1997 was found not guilty by a jury last Friday afternoon.

The verdict capped off James "Jimmy" Jackson's week-long trial, the second hearing this case has received. Jackson stood

trial in December of 1997, but the jury could not reach a unanimous verdict. It was an unsatisfactory conclusion to a difficult week for both the prosecution and defense. Presiding Judge Edward Cottingham declared the first case a mistrial and described the trial as a failure.

Jackson was arrested on Sept. 27, 1996, by the State Law Enforcement Division after he shot

and killed a fleeing suspect. The victim, James "Piggy" Miller, had been released from prison only two months before his death, and had an extensive criminal record. He previously had been convicted of



Responses to last week's verdict from defendant, victim's family

Pages 5-6A

cr i m i n a l record. He previously had been convicted of

three counts of resisting arrest, two counts of assaulting a police officer, two counts of distribution of crack cocaine, and one count of distribution of crack cocaine near a school.

Jackson claimed he shot Miller during a foot chase near Water Oak Apartments in Jefferson. During the first trial, the defen-

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WELLNESS, PAGE 8A

## Ordinance prohibits exotic pets

By Wallace McBride  
Chronicle Staff

Keeping exotic animals as pets has been outlawed in Chesterfield County.

This is one of the many aspects of a new animal control ordinance, approved by the Chesterfield County Council on Jan. 5. It is the first such law in the county's history, providing a set of rules and laws governing the



dant said in court that he observed a "large bulge" in Miller's pants pocket, a bulge which he was unable to identify.

Jackson said he stopped Miller because the car he was driving was registered to a woman, and he believed the vehicle might have been stolen. When police questioned Miller, Jackson said the man acted belligerent and refused to be frisked. He ran from the scene, and that's when the shooting took place.

Miller turned to look behind him, Jackson said on the stand, and he saw a silver flash as the man's hand went into his pants pocket. The defendant testified he believed the metallic flash was a gun, and fired twice.

One bullet hit Miller in the arm, and he continued running. His body was found later that night near the Jefferson Rescue Squad building. An autopsy determined the man had bled to death.

"I think the truth's coming out more here," Jackson told the Cheraw Chronicle last week, comparing the two trials. "The prosecution's testimony has changed a lot."

The prosecution's evidence was the only evidence submitted to the jury last week. Jackson's defense submitted nothing in his defense, and called no witnesses. This is a big change in strategy from the first trial, where the defense presented as much evidence as the state, including putting Jackson, himself, on the stand in his own defense.

Last week, the jury didn't

Jackson's attorneys for the methods SLED used to document evidence, the flow of information along the chain of command, and the manner in which the state opted to include (or exclude) pieces of evidence.

To listen to the defense's arguments, an observer might get the impression that the only police officer who behaved appropriately on Sept. 27, 1996, was the man on trial for murder.

"There's good guys and there's bad guys," Swerling said. "Like it or not, that's the way it is."

Swerling argued that Jackson followed standard operating procedure on the night of the shooting. Jackson stopped Miller because the car was not registered to him. Miller was questioned when Jackson and his partner allegedly saw him walk erratically, suggesting to them that he might have been

drunk. They saw a bulge in his pants pocket, giving them cause for concern that he might have a weapon. When he refused to be searched, he ran away from the police officers.

Arguing the case for the Fourth Circuit Solicitor's Office was John Milling, who also prosecuted the first trial. Milling suggested that the defendant was waiting for Miller, who had once assaulted Jefferson's then-chief of police. No weapon was found at the scene to suggest Jackson's life was ever in danger, he said.

Jackson's reasoning for following and stopping Miller was also flawed, according to Miller. Milling said many people drive cars that aren't registered in their name, hardly giving police probable cause to follow Miller in the first place.

The jury took less than 30 minutes to return with a verdict of not guilty. Jackson and members of his family left the courtroom under watch by law enforcement officers.

# replacer assistants

By Wallace McBric  
Chronicle Staff

Mary Johnson been hired to replace Ruffner at the Solicitor's Office. She will serve the remainder of the first term ending June 30, a salary of \$12,500.

According to Circuit Solicitor Ja Ruffner resigned Jan. 1 to take a job in the private sector. Lei Assistant Solicitor Rogers in the County as a local solicitor.

"We appreciate it doing this," Hodges

# ACCIDENT

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# Acquitted by a jury, but a different sort of prison awaits Jimmy Jackson discusses changes in his life since the night he ended another's

By Wallace McBride  
Chronicle Staff

The trial may be over, but Jimmy Jackson said he believes that a threat on his life still exists.

Jackson said he has feared for his life since the night he killed Jeffrey Miller in 1996. Then, he was an active police officer for the town of Jefferson. With only a few months of experience under his belt, his career came to a halt when the State Law Enforcement Division charged him with murder.

Entered into the state's evidence was Jackson's statement to SLED, used by attorneys to illustrate the defendant's remorse over his actions.



Jimmy Jackson



Photo by Wallace McBride

Items of evidence submitted during the trial. Stuffed into the middle of crime scene photos and other records is the handgun used by Jackson in the 1996 shooting. Both Jackson's and his partner's weapons were confiscated by SLED, but will eventually be returned to them.

He said he didn't want to put his own recklessness. Opinions weren't offered if there was a possibility of them showing up in print.

believes is wrought with enough contradictions to qualify for a conspiracy organized to put him in prison.

Lt. Buster Edwards, in charge of SLED's investigation of Jackson, testified that Jackson ran after Miller with his gun in his hand. Edwards testimony, Jackson said, was "the biggest (expletive deleted) lie you've ever seen." Jackson said he didn't draw his gun until after he saw a metallic flash in Miller's pocket. John O'Leary and Jack Swerling, Jackson's attorneys, said Edwards' testimony was bent to illustrate Jackson pursuing a suspect gun-in-hand with the intent of killing him.

Swerling attracted an audience of his own last week. Local attorney Larry Knox was present to watch the man in action.

"He wrote the book," Knox said. A figure of speech that is accurate in this case. Swerling

has written a number of textbooks used by law school students in the state. Knox said Swerling's seminars can be expensive, and the trial last week was a good chance to see Swerling's methods in action.

Swerling and O'Leary highlighted areas of contradiction between 1997 testimonies and what was presented last week, as well as with what was said or written by investigators at the time of the shooting. These strategies had their cost, though. Jackson might have won his freedom, but he said the price tag attached to the two trials cost him his house.

"It wiped us out," he said. "My credit is diminished to hardly nothing."

Right now he's working at a grocery store in Monroe, N.C. He asked for the name of the store not to be printed for the same reason he chose to wear body armor under his clothes.

He fears for his life. It's a different kind of prison than the state of South Carolina has to offer. Despite the state's arguments that he acted inappropriately, Jackson maintains he was just doing his job that night. "Any law enforcement officer could have wound up in my situation," he said.

Ultimately, the decision was not left up to the higher power that Miller's family and friends offered their prayers. It also wasn't decided by SLED or the Solicitor's Office. It wasn't even a matter for popular opinion to decide.

It took less than 30 minutes for the three men and nine women on the jury to deliberate on the evidence they received. "I feel like justice is served," he said after the jury returned with a verdict of not guilty. "It may not have been what (Miller's) family wanted, though."

"I don't want to be dead and not see my family again," were the words he reportedly used after he learned Miller had died from his wound.

"It was either him or me," he told *The Chronicle* last week, sounding a little less sorrowful than when he explained his actions to SLED. "There are no winners here, I assure you."

This week he wore a bullet proof vest beneath his suit. County deputies acted as security for the courtroom, but there was an unspoken distance between them and Jackson. He wasn't one of them anymore. He was accused of being a murderer, a man who might have

A state trooper shared a single observation, saying, "If you're born dumb, you might as well be mean, too." He asked that his name not be printed.

Since the shooting, Jackson has moved away from the Jefferson area, but he is still an employee of the town. Technically. Since his arrest, he has been suspended from work pending the outcome of the trial, a situation he plans on resolving this week. Not by trying to return to duty, he said, but by cutting some of his ties with the town.

"The last year's been really hard on me," he said. "I'm just trying to put my life back together."

Accompanying him into the courtroom was his mother. Jackson's wife is recovering in a hospital following surgery and couldn't attend, he said. His teenaged daughter accompanied him during the last trial, but had to study for exams last week.