

CONNECTICUT

Move Sought For Murder Trial

Publicity in the 1994 murder-for-hire case has been too intense to try Beth Ann Carpenter in New London, her lawyer says.

By COLIN POITRAS
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NEW LONDON — An Old Saybrook lawyer facing possible life in prison for her alleged role in a lurid murder-for-hire plot claims she can't get a fair trial in New London Superior Court.

Attorneys for Beth Ann Carpenter are asking that her trial be moved from New London County to another part of the state because of widespread publicity surrounding the case.

"All we're asking for is a fair shot," New Haven defense attorney Hugh Keefe said Tuesday. "You can't try a case where people already have pre-determined the outcome."

Steeped in titillating details involving sex, drugs, money and scandal along Connecticut's affluent shoreline, Carpenter's case has attracted a lot of media attention because of its soap opera-like scenario.

Carpenter, 36, is accused of conspiring with her former lover and law partner, Haiman Clein, to pay a hitman \$10,000 to kill her brother-in-law because she suspected he was abusing her 3-year-old niece.

The plot was carried out on March 10, 1994, when Clein's drug dealer, Mark Depres, lured Anson "Buzz" Clinton III of East Lyme to a secluded road off I-95 near Rocky Neck State Park and shot him five times in the chest. Clinton was 28.

As police started closing in, Clein fled. He was captured in California after an international search. Police say it was Carpenter — who left the country and went to Europe — who helped lead authorities to Clein.

Clein, 60, pleaded guilty to charges of murder and conspiracy to commit murder as part of a plea agreement reached with prosecutors in November 1997. As part of the same deal, Clein agreed to testify against Carpenter if prosecutors dropped a more serious capital felony charge.

During a recent hearing on Carpenter's case, Clein — a married father of five and once prominent shoreline real estate lawyer — admitted he was sexually obsessed with Carpenter and using cocaine extensively in the days leading up to the slaying.

Carpenter's attorneys say that their client had no role in the murder and that Clein hired Depres on his own to impress the woman he loved. But prosecutors say it was Carpenter who urged Clein to kill Clinton



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and who provided Depres with Clinton's photo and address to help carry out the crime.

New London prosecutors issued a warrant for Carpenter's arrest shortly after Clein admitted his guilt. She was apprehended in Ireland and fought extradition for 19 months before deciding to return to the United States last year to face trial.

Carpenter has pleaded not guilty to charges of capital felony, murder and conspiracy to commit murder. She remains held in lieu of \$1 million bail.

When Carpenter arrived in New London County, she was greeted by a phalanx of television and newspaper reporters, some of whom have followed the story for six years.

That Clein is well-known in the area because of his law practice and that Clinton's mother, Dee Clinton, has been outspoken about the case in the press have worsened the problem, Keefe said.

Assistant State's Attorney Paul Murray, who is prosecuting the case, was not in court when Keefe asked for a change of venue. Reached later, he had no comment on the proposal.

To boost his claim, Keefe and co-defense counsel Tara Knight of New Haven said they are conducting a public opinion survey of 800 households in New London County to see what people know about the case and whether their opinions have been biased by media coverage.

Judge Susan B. Handy scheduled a hearing on Carpenter's request for mid-September.