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Detective: Tipster received reward in Lovette case

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HILLSBOROUGH -- The lead investigator on the Eve Carson homicide case revealed Monday that a Durham woman received a \$25,000 Crime Stoppers reward for pointing investigators toward Laurence Alvin Lovette as a suspect.

Celisa Lehew, a Chapel Hill Police detective, testified that Justina Staten-Williams contacted Crime Stoppers five days after Carson was found dead and provided information about Lovette.

Lovette, 21, is on trial in Orange County Superior Court on charges of kidnapping, robbing and murdering Carson on March 5, 2008. He has pleaded not guilty. If convicted, he faces a potential life sentence.

Though Staten-Williams has not been called by prosecutors to testify, her tip and the subsequent reward could be a significant revelation in the trial's fourth day of testimony.

Karen Bethea-Shields, one of Lovette's attorneys, said in her opening statement last week that some of the prosecution's key witnesses had "motive" and "bias" for implicating her client. She maintains there will be no forensic evidence to link Lovette to the shooting.

DeMario Atwater, a 25-year-old Durham man who prosecutors say was Lovette's accomplice, pleaded guilty last year to carjacking, kidnapping, robbing and murdering Carson.

Atwater's girlfriend, Shanita Love, a mother of four who worked at a Firehouse Subs sandwich shop, also has been a key witness for the prosecution.

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Chapel Hill Police Detective Celisa Lehew, above with Orange County DA James Woodall Jr., testified that a Durham woman got a \$25,000 reward for information leading to Laurence Alvin Lovette's arrest.



Love, a good friend and neighbor of Staten-Williams, provided investigators with big breaks in the case. She led them not only to weapons used in the homicide but also to witnesses who could help provide a full account of what happened in the hours and days after Carson was found fatally shot in a quiet wooded neighborhood in Chapel Hill.

Love, who was granted immunity by federal prosecutors for her testimony, told the lead Chapel Hill investigator on the day she led her to weapons used in the homicide that it would be "nice" if she could get some reward money.

Love, the mother of three young children at the time, lived with Atwater, his mom and several of his siblings in an apartment in Durham.

Love testified last week that it was not financial motivation or fear of being charged with crimes that prompted her to help investigators, but defense attorneys argue otherwise.

The day before Love met with investigators, the governor announced publicly that a \$10,000 reward was being offered for help solving the homicide case of the popular 2008 UNC-Chapel Hill student body president.

Love offered key details to investigators that helped them locate pieces of a handgun and sawed-off shotgun that prosecutors contend were used to kill Carson.

Love also divulged that Carson's bank account held \$9,000, a detail that had not been publicly revealed, and that her boyfriend had tried to access her account at a Durham convenience store.

Love testified last week that she provided key details to investigators because "it was the right thing to do."

Bethea-Shields on Monday put forward a different theory in her cross-examination of Lehew. She asked whether Love might have had details that had been withheld from the public because she was at the crime scene.

Love told investigators that she heard her boyfriend and Lovette describe the shooting - with Lovette saying he shot Carson several times and she was still talking.

Prosecutors contend Lovette fired the first four shots and Atwater then fired the shotgun blast.

Bethea-Shields asked Lehew whether Love could have known those details because she was at the crime scene.

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Laurence Alvin Lovette has pleaded not guilty to murder, robbery and kidnapping in the case of UNC-Chapel Hill student Eve Carson.



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Judge Allen Baddour talks to attorneys Monday at the trial of Laurence Alvin Lovette.

"I had no indication that she was there," Lehew said several times.

Bethea-Shields also pointed out that investigators told Love before she opened up and provided a full account that she was in jeopardy of being charged with being an accessory after the murder. They also told her they had other evidence that might lead them to seek to have her children removed from her home.

Bethea-Shields contended in her opening statement that many of the prosecution's key witnesses had given inconsistent accounts to investigators and a federal grand jury that also looked into the incident.

"If Ms. Love had told you she was there, she would have been charged with a crime, would she not?" Bethea-Shields asked Lehew before she stepped down from the stand. "If she had confessed to being there, yes ma'am," Lehew said.

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