

MURDERS

FROM PAGE A1

lives.”
After two hours of deliberations Friday, a jury convicted Alvarez of two counts of first-degree murder and one count of arson for the Jan. 8, 2006, shootings that left bullet holes in the two teens’ heads and their bodies destroyed by flames.

While state law mandates either the death penalty or life in prison without parole for first-degree murder convictions, Circuit Judge Sherwood Bauer Jr. could impose only a life sentence because Alvarez was 17 at the time of the murders.

During closing arguments Friday morning, prosecutors reviewed possible motives for Curtis’ murder, including an argument over who had better drugs or payback for a crooked drug deal or for disrespecting Alvarez’s younger brother, Junior.

Elizabeth, they said, was not originally targeted, but Alvarez killed her because she witnessed Curtis’ murder.

“Some acts are so unspeakable that we cannot place any explanation on them or understand them —



Alvarez



Johnson



Tenney

even Mark Alvarez knows that this is such a case. He couldn’t bring himself to say it,” said Chief Assistant State Attorney Tom Bakkedahl. “He knew what he had done. Not just that he shot two unarmed, innocent people in the head, but then he set a fire to their car.”
The confession note Alvarez scribbled for Detective Sgt. T.J. Brock and which prosecutors broadcast on a courtroom projection screen, said, “I meet them at the dead end street. Shot Curtis then Elizabeth.” Alvarez led the couple into an ambush, and although he pulled the .38 special’s trigger, no one truly believes he acted alone, Bakkedahl said.

It was a concession defense attorney Robert Udell expounded upon.

Junior was the one angry with Curtis, and it could just as easily be Junior’s partial fingerprint on the murder weapon as Alvarez’s. Alvarez did not take the stand in his own defense because he was protecting Junior, Udell told jurors.

“Is it so unbelievable to believe he might take the fall for his younger brother?” Udell said. “It’s what happened and it’s what’s happening in this case. I know you might not take the fall for a family member but he is.”

So far, no one else has been charged in connection with the murders, and Brock said after the trial that there was no evidence to suggest other people were involved.

No witnesses testified for Alvarez during the trial and the only person to speak on his behalf Friday was his grandmother, Barbara Sauls.

“My condolences for your loss,” she said to the victims’ families. “All I have to say is Mark did not do this. I know he was convicted, but he didn’t do it.”



Provided

Gloria Estefan’s new Vero Beach luxury hotel Costa d’Este will feature 94 deluxe guestrooms, a destination restaurant, full-service bar with indoor and outdoor seating, a pool and pool bar, spa and fitness center, and facilities for banquets and special events.

ESTEFANS

FROM PAGE A1

in Spanish.

Estefan said the family already spends a lot of time at a vacation home in Vero Beach and plan to be “very involved” in the hotel once it opens.

“We hope to welcome our friends from the entertainment world at the opening as well as members of the community,” Estefan said. “It will be a warm, special and intimate event. We will open our doors the same way that Vero Beach opened its doors to us.”

That’s music to the ears of community leaders in Vero Beach.

“They are bringing a first-class hotel to the area so, of course, it’s wonderful,” said Mayor Tom White. “It’s going to create jobs and have a great economic impact on the ocean-side business community.”

Rip Tosun, chairman of the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association and a Vero Beach resident, said the hotel will bring Vero Beach to the forefront of being a destination for luxury hotels and celebrity sightings.

“Who knows, maybe other

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Jose Perez gestures to a coworker Friday as he works on setting up steel bars during construction at Gloria Estefan’s new luxury hotel in Vero Beach.

celebrities will follow her lead,” said Tosun, who owns Rip’s — The Place for Ribs and Monte’s restaurant. “Look at what Don Shula did for his restaurant and everything Dan Marino does.”

Others are excited about including the Estefans in local events.

“We have a huge Hispanic population that have a special affinity for Gloria Estefan so it

would be great if they came out to the Fellesmere Frog Leg Festival in January,” said Beth Mitchell, executive director of the Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce.

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