

## DA WAS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT "ALPHA DOG" PROJECT

Los Angeles Daily Journal, October 14, 2005

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LOS ANGELES - Santa Barbara prosecutor Ronald J. Zonen was "enthusiastic" about a movie project based on the killing of West Hills teen Nicholas Markowitz, and said he wanted to write a book about the case, according to a court declaration given by the film's screenwriter and director.

"Mr. Zonen agreed to assist us with the screenplay," stated Nick Cassavetes, the creative force behind the film "Alpha Dog." "At times, I consulted with him about the specifics of the case." "Alpha Dog" stars Bruce Willis, Sharon Stone and Justin Timberlake and is based on Markowitz's murder and the alleged mastermind of the killing, Jesse James Hollywood. Encino attorney James Blatt, who represents Hollywood, 25, filed Cassavetes' declaration in Santa Barbara County Superior Court last week. Zonen could not be reached for comment.

Last month, Blatt filed a motion to recuse the Santa Barbara County district attorney's office from prosecuting the case, claiming Zonen's involvement in the film was not only a conflict of interest but also a misdemeanor.

He has asked the attorney general's office to prosecute Hollywood, who was apprehended in March in Brazil after being on the lam for five years. In response to Blatt's motion, the district attorney's office admitted Zonen may have committed a misdemeanor but it should not disqualify him from the trial. It is a misdemeanor for a state Justice Department employee to disclose evidence to a person not authorized by law to receive it.

Zonen would only have a conflict of interest if he had a personal or financial interest in the outcome of the Hollywood trial, according to the response. "There is nothing to suggest that Zonen is under the influence of a private party with a personal interest in securing Hollywood's conviction," Senior Deputy District Attorney Gerald Franklin wrote.

Hollywood has pleaded not guilty to the murder charge. Prosecutors have said they will seek to execute him. District Attorney Thomas W. Sneddon Jr. personally approved Zonen's work with Cassavetes, Blatt claims. Sneddon and Zonen were the No. 1 and No. 2 prosecutors in the failed child-molestation case against Michael Jackson.

In his declaration, Cassavetes details his working relationship with Zonen and that of researcher and associate producer Michael Mehas. The movie work was done while Hollywood was on the lam. Zonen and sheriff's officials brought Cassavetes and Mehas to the site of the murder, and "participated in the synopsis of events."

Zonen also provided the movie makers with crime-scene photographs, and pictures of Markowitz's body and autopsy, according to the declaration. Zonen said, "overall he felt that these were a bunch of stoned, dumb guys," Cassavetes states. Zonen also described the

defendants' family lives.

"This went beyond the reports I received and included Mr. Zonen's impressions, which I used to try to create full, three-dimensional characters," Cassavetes stated. "I would characterize Mr. Zonen's attitude towards me and the creation of the movie as enthusiastic," he stated.

The movie is scheduled for release later this year or early in 2006. In an August declaration, Zonen acknowledged that he gave Mehas "a collection of reports and some tapes of interviews."

At the crime scene, Zonen says he "simply pointed to the grave site." "I asked only that Jesse Hollywood's picture be shown at the conclusion of the film along with a phone number to call with information as to his whereabouts," Zonen said. In his motion, Blatt said the film will only taint attitudes of potential jurors and is a "precise rendition" of the prosecution's theory of the case.

"It is my opinion, after viewing the film that the film will heighten public condemnation of defendant," Blatt said. "The film will also serve to inflame any potential jury against defendant Hollywood."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.