

## SUSPECT SAYS HE DIDN'T KILL YOUTH HOME SOCIAL WORKER

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A Detroit youth, charged last month with the slaying of a social worker at the Green Oak Center near Whitmore Lake, said he did not kill the woman and is being set up.

**Jermell Johnson**, 19, said Tuesday in a telephone interview from the Livingston County Jail that he was not in the staff lounge at any time on April 25. Coworkers found Barbara Synnestvedt, 46, of Birmingham, on the floor of the lounge about 8 p.m. She had been strangled after a violent struggle. "Someone else did it; I have been falsely accused," **Johnson** said. He said witnesses' statements and police reports contradict what he knows to be true and confirm his theory that he is being set up. But **Johnson** said he does not know who would want to hurt him.

"I was on work detail in the kitchen and up front, but I never went in the lounge that day," he said. "I got the police reports and there are a lot of factual details that are not right.

"One person said I was wearing a white T-shirt with faded jeans, but I was wearing a red T-shirt and black jeans," he said.

In 1990, **Johnson** was sentenced to five years' probation at Green Oak Center, the maximum security unit for violent offenders at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School, after pleading guilty to raping a neighbor.

Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse said **Johnson**'s claims in the Synnestvedt slaying "are typical defendant's remarks.

"Any significant facts on this case point to him," Morse said. "We have physical evidence that disputes his claim that he was not in the lounge."

But **Johnson** said, "They tried to make it seem like I was upset by her, but we got along very well. I was supposed to go for a hearing in August to be released from Maxey. Why would I mess myself up?"

Michigan State Police detectives from the Brighton Post said Synnestvedt was last seen alive about 7:20 p.m. on April 25.

Police have said physical evidence, including blood on **Johnson** and Synnestvedt, blood on a broom found in a kitchen closet where **Johnson** had been working, and broom fibers found near Synnestvedt's body, link **Johnson** to the crime.

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Page: 7B

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