

CHARGES FILED IN 1991 SLAYINGS

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Author: FRANK WITSIL and CARMEN JOHNSON FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Investigators said they have solved a 13-year-old mystery: Who gunned down a Southfield couple suspected of dealing drugs?

Lester Milton, 46, was charged Thursday **in** 46th District Court **in** Southfield with two counts of first-degree murder. He is currently serving a 25- to 45-year sentence for second-degree murder **in** the 1990 **slaying** of reputed drug-dealer Demetrious Holloway **in** Detroit.

Thomas and Alice Tye -- ages 46 and 34 -- were found dead **in** their red Chevrolet Corsica outside their upscale Southfield apartment on June 6, **1991** , two years after they survived gunfire during the drug-related firebombing of their Detroit shop, Blessed Candles.

In that shooting, Thomas Tye was shot and lost part of an ear.

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Beth Hand said the new **charges** clear up lingering questions about one of many area drug-related turf wars **in** the late '80s and early '90s.

The case was unsolved despite a federal grand jury investigation into Detroit-based drug trafficking rings involving the defendant, the victims and other drug-dealing suspects.

According to police reports, the Tyes were killed at about 5:30 a.m. They were found **in** their bullet-riddled car, which was still parked **in** the garage with the engine running. The windows were shattered.

Thomas Tye, who was behind the wheel, had a handgun tucked **in** his waistband. Alice Tye, **in** the passenger seat, had a pistol concealed **in** her purse.

Nineteen rounds had been fired from an AK47 assault rifle into the car. The gun's serial number was rubbed off and the gun was left behind -- a marker to indicate the killings had been executions, Hand said.

The gun was wiped clean of fingerprints.

Hand said the **charges** also bring justice for the victims' families.

"Even though they were suspected drug dealers, they are still human beings," Hand said. "Their families are entitled to have closure, and someone should be held accountable."

If convicted, Milton could be sentenced to life **in** prison without parole.

Hand said Milton confessed **in** 1999 to being hired to kill the Tyes for \$10,000. But she declined to discuss any corroborating evidence. A hearing is scheduled for July 7. Police are still investigating who allegedly hired Milton.

Milton admitted to killing the Tyes when Detroit police interviewed him **in** connection with the Holloway **slaying**, Hand said. Notes from those discussions were turned over to Oakland County investigators **in** 2000. After that, detectives interviewed 33 witnesses **in** five states.

Richard Cunningham, a Detroit defense attorney who was a Wayne County assistant prosecutor when the Tyes' candle shop was torched and who prosecuted several drug-related cases, said the hit was a loose end **in** a complex web of drug dealers.

"Now," he said, "I see how this all ties together."

Contact FRANK WITSIL at 248-351-3690 or witsil@freepress.com"

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