

Victim's mother not told verdict coming

By **MELISSA MOORE**
For the News-Miner

ANCHORAGE—For more than a year, Evalyn Thomas waited to hear the word “guilty” come from a jury chosen to judge her son’s murderer. But, when the verdict finally came Tuesday morning, she wasn’t there to hear it.

No one called her. “I’m very

mad at the judge and the D.A. because I was not notified,” she said later that afternoon from her motel here in Anchorage. “I’ve been sitting here by the phone since Thursday, waiting.”

An Anchorage jury on Tuesday found George Frese guilty in the beating death and sexual assault of Thomas’ son, John Hartman,
See MOTHER, Page A-10

MOTHER: Not notified

Continued from Page A-1

in October 1997. Thomas heard of the verdict through a phone call from Janice Leinhart, one of the founding members of Victims for Justice, about 15 minutes after the verdict was announced.

Members of the victims' advocacy group sat through the trial with Thomas since it began two weeks ago. As of Tuesday afternoon, Thomas still hadn't been able to find out why no one called to let her know the jury had made its decision.

When she called the Anchorage District Attorney's office, she said the person she talked to didn't even know who she was. "Why do you think I'm in Anchorage?" she said. "I wanted to be there to hear the verdict. I'm supposed to be the first person called."

Leinhart said this is not the first time a family member has missed out on hearing a verdict. She said her group is working with judges statewide to see that family members are notified.

Prosecutor Jeff O'Bryant apologized that Thomas was apparently overlooked in the normal procedure of notifying people concerned with the verdict. He said it was unfortunate that she wasn't there. "Hopefully, under the circumstances, she is at least happy with the verdict," O'Bryant said.

Thomas said she can live with the verdict, but would have preferred to see a first-degree murder conviction instead. Thomas will likely have three more chances to hear that fateful word come from the mouths of other jurors. Three other men

Thomas plans to come home today (Wednesday) and start figuring out what to do with herself. She knows



THOMAS

she'll need to find a job, but has no idea yet what she wants to do. And her outlook about people has changed, she said. "I used to like working with the public," she said. "But I don't have the same faith in people as I used to. Most people are good, but then you've got people like this who don't care about other people. It makes you more weary."

Thomas' son and daughter-in-law, Robert and Angela Kelly, say they have forgiven Freese. "It's a good thing that he won't be on the streets doing this to other people, but God will judge him when it's his time," Angela Kelly said. "I pray every day that he will repent."

But Thomas can't yet find it in her heart to forgive those who took her son away. It still hurts too much, she said.

A budding football player, Hartman had just made his first two touchdowns in the weeks before he died. He'd planned to go to college, play football and work to become a veterinarian. Because of four young men, he'll never get that chance, Thomas said.

"(Freese) tore my family apart when he killed my son," she said.