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Jury Seated in Capital Murder Trial

By Scott E. Williams
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TEXAS CITY — Seven women and five men will decide the fate of a man charged with killing his grandparents in the course of burglarizing their Texas City home.

With jury selection finished in the capital murder trial of Thomas Justin “T.J.” Thomas, testimony in the case begins today, in the 122nd State District Court.

Thomas was one of four teens charged in the February 2004 beating deaths of William and Lorena Pearl Clement. The elderly couple had been beaten to death with a tire iron that police said they later found in a van in which Thomas had been riding with the trio who would become his co-defendants.

Jurors had completed questionnaires Monday. On Tuesday, the questions came from the attorneys in the case. Defense attorney Tad A. Nelson asked whether potential jurors could consider matters of diminished capacity and sanity, if they were raised in the trial.

Galveston County Criminal District Attorney Kurt Sistrunk and fellow prosecutor Stacey Jones worked with Nelson to weed out those for whom a lengthy trial would likely be a hardship. Attorneys warned prospective jurors that the trial would likely last two weeks.

The jurors will not sit through punishment evidence, though, even in the event of a conviction. A guilty verdict in this case would mean an automatic life sentence for Thomas, as prosecutors are not seeking the death penalty.