

AUGUSTA

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[Nun's killer out of Riverview](#)

Survivor of 1996 Waterville attack: Psychological impact is still with us

BY BETTY ADAMS Staff Writer

AUGUSTA -- Mark Bechard, committed to a state psychiatric hospital after killing two nuns and injuring two others in a Waterville chapel in 1996, will be moving from the hospital to a nearby group home.



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Mark Bechard

AP file photo

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Bechard, in jeans with his long gray hair tied back in a tight braid and with a thick, grayish-white handlebar mustache, did not address the judge Friday during his hearing in Kennebec County Superior Court.

However, Sister Josephine Roney, of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, spoke on behalf of those who were the victims of Bechard's attack.

"We are here so as to keep before the public eye the tragedy of 1996, when two sisters were murdered in our convent and two sisters were injured," she said. "The psychological impact is still with us."

She said she wanted to "emphasize the necessity for medication for those with mental illness" and for those people to be supervised with regard to medication and activities.

Sister Mary Catherine Perko accompanied her to the hearing.

Bechard was suffering a psychotic episode on the night of Jan. 27, 1996, when he entered the chapel at the convent and attacked four elderly nuns, killing Mother Superior Edna Mary Cardozo, 68, and Sister Marie Julien Fortin, 67.

Sister Patricia Ann Keane survived the attack but died later from her injuries. The other victim, Sister Mary Anna DiGiacomo, who was left paralyzed on her right side, died July 20, 2006.

Bechard was found not criminally responsible for the attack and was committed to state custody. Since then, he has been on antipsychotic medication.

Bechard's attorney, Harold Hainke, told Justice Donald Marden that Bechard wanted to continue with his part-time job -- janitorial work -- at Riverview Psychiatric Center even after he moves to a group home.

Under the modified treatment plan approved by Marden, Bechard will walk to his work and to other group housing on the same campus. He will continue to be driven to and from Alcoholics Anonymous meetings by Riverview staff, and can take an educational course under the same conditions.

Dr. Robert Fisher, a psychiatrist who has treated Bechard since September 2006, said Bechard is particularly conscientious about his work.

"His fidelity to responsibilities he regards as some type of atonement for this horrendous crime," Fisher told the judge.

Psychologist Ann LeBlanc, director of the State Forensic Service which evaluates people for the court, concurred with Fisher's assessment.

"I get the impression from looking at his behavior and file, he's determined that the rest of his life have a penitential quality," LeBlanc said. "He goes through his life in a steady, patterned, routine way."

LeBlanc said Bechard is more reliable than most people but that the risk is for his safety rather than the public's.

"The problem is we don't know who he is going to run into," she said.

Deputy Attorney General William Stokes said he supported the modification Hainke sought in the treatment plan as long as Bechard's time is structured and supervised.

Betty Adams -- 621-5631

badams@centralmaine.com

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