

Nevada and made his way to Oregon, where he attacked and stabbed a woman in a parking lot. He was returned to Nevada to serve the rest of his sentence before being paroled and sent back to Oregon to begin serving his life sentence there for the attack he committed as an escapee. When he was moved to Oregon, he was required to give



DNA evidence has linked Michelle Mitchell's murder to Rodney Halbower.

the sample of his DNA that authorities would later say links him to Mitchell's murder—a finding the FBI disclosed in September of 2014. Halbower's DNA not only matched that found at the scene of Mitchell's murder but also several others that had occurred in California around the same time.

As a result, Woods was released from prison on bond on Sept. 11, 2014. The prosecution dismissed the charges against her on March 6, 2015. A year and a few months later, she filed her federal civil rights lawsuit alleging violations of her Fourth, Fifth and 14th Amendment rights against those who'd put her in jail. The nearly four-year-old lawsuit may finally go to trial this year.

And justice?

"We don't have a trial date set yet," said Elizabeth Wang, one of Woods' attorneys, in a recent interview. "In the fall of last year ... we settled with Washoe County and the former prosecutor, Calvin Dunlap. And we are continuing to proceed against the City of Reno and the former Reno police officer who was involved in her interrogation, Lawrence

Dennison, and two former Shreveport police officer, Donald Ashley and Clarence Lewis."

Woods' suit alleges that the police officers, whose legal representatives declined or did not respond to interview requests for this article, fabricated her confession. And her attorneys feel confident they'll be able to prove it to a jury.

"I think what's important to know is that whatever the record was back in the '80s and at her first and her second trials, it's not the record today," said Wang. "What the record shows is that her confession was completely fabricated. And the detective [Dennison] claimed in his deposition that he didn't even remember any of it. He claimed not to remember going to Shreveport. I mean, I'm sure he's only gone to Shreveport once in his entire life to interrogate a severely mentally ill person in a psychiatric unit, but he claimed ... not to remember any of it. He claimed not to remember going to Shreveport. He claimed not remember anything about her interrogation. So we'll see what a jury thinks about that testimony."

With a Feb. 1 deadline for the discovery phase and the opportunity for the defense

to file for judgments on certain pieces of evidence, it will likely be at least autumn before a jury has the opportunity to deliberate on the facts of the case.

In the meantime, Woods' legal team will remain busy. They're preparing to represent her in a second lawsuit, this one against the State of Nevada, in which Woods will be the first person to sue under a new state law that would allow people released from wrongful imprisonment to receive a certificate of innocence, have their conviction records sealed and receive monetary compensation.

Those who spent more than 20 years in prison could receive \$100,000 per year every year they spent behind bars. For Woods, that could mean up to \$3.5 million dollars.

Woods' attorneys filed her complaint against the state in December. According to Wang, the state's response is expected sometime in late January. But, depending on the state's appetite to settle the matter or allow it to proceed to trial, it could be quite some time before the longest wrongfully imprisoned woman in this nation's history sees the conclusion of her quest for justice and compensation. □

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