

STATE AND LOCAL

Confession ruled admissible

Death sentence upheld

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The conviction and death sentence of an El Paso man found guilty of killing a donut shop baker was upheld Wednesday when the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals said there was nothing wrong with the way the man's confession was obtained.

In its 7-2 decision, the court noted that Joseph Paul Turner voluntarily went to the police station to answer questions, signed a statement that he understood his rights, voluntarily gave a three-page confession, initiated each page and signed the document.

According to court records, Turner confessed that he had phoned the shop about 3:15 a.m.,

pretending to be an employee of another donut store which needed supplies. He went to the shop, where he found Wilson alone.

After the killing, a neighbor living near the shop, who had heard his dogs barking in the early morning, found clothing in a garbage can outside his house. Police detective Alfredo Bonilla examined the clothes and noticed that a pair of boots had the brand name "Tong Young" marked on them.

While investigating the killing, Bonilla assembled a list of former shop employees and began questioning each. Turner, who had worked at the shop, was one of them.

During questioning, Turner volunteered that he had purchased a pair of boots while serving with the armed forces in Korea. The boots had a brand name of "Tong," he told police. At that point, Bonilla said, he advised Turner of his rights.

Turner read his rights, signed a card saying he had done so, and made the confession. He then read the confession and signed it.

But in appealing his conviction, Turner claimed that the questioning and his confession were improper, because the interrogation had taken place after he had been taken into custody.

The court flatly rejected his argument.

Murder charges dropped against Fort Worth suspect

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — A murder charge accusing a Fort Worth man of shooting one of the victims in a string of disappearances and slayings of young women was dismissed Wednesday after prosecutors decided they had insufficient evidence.

A fingerprint found on the murdered woman's car — the key piece of evidence against Timothy Paul Volkmar — was misidentified and was not his, Assistant District Attorney Steve Chaney said.

Volkmar, 25, was arrested Saturday and charged with the shooting death of 20-year-old Lisa Griffin.

Griffin was the latest of five women to either disappear or be found slain in southwest Fort Worth since September. Four other area

murders of women are also under investigation.

Volkmar was arrested and charged by the Tarrant County sheriff's office. But when Fort Worth police looked at the case in connection to their own probe into the murders, they said the fingerprint found on Griffin's car did not match Volkmar's print.

Sheriff's officials later concurred. Volkmar remained in the Tarrant County jail because of a possible violation of his probation for an unrelated aggravated assault conviction.

"He's suffered considerable harm," said his attorney, Allan Butcher. "But it's premature for me to say anything about the propriety of what happened" with the murder charge.

Volkmar's parents proclaimed

their son's innocence before the fingerprint was discredited. Their son, who works as an apartment maintenance man, was "being railroaded" because law enforcement officials "in this town are desperate for a suspect in these killings," said Lloyd Volkmar, Timothy Volkmar's father.

Griffin's body was found in southwest Tarrant County on Jan. 10 with a single gunshot wound in the head. Her car was found parked behind a nearby shopping center.

The crime spree has prompted formation of a special police task force to investigate the nine different cases of missing or slain women. Tarrant County sheriff's deputies handled the Griffin case — one of the nine — because her body was found outside the city limits.

Pensions

Employees' retirement plans in jeopardy

Associated Press

DALLAS — Changing business practices and government interference have outdated the pension plans of millions of American workers, according to a study released Wednesday by a Dallas professor.

Americans' often-short tenure with a company, increased failures of companies, and inappropriate federal government policies established over 60 years have combined to push the private pension industry into a crisis, said Edward Harpham, a professor at the University of Texas at Dallas.

In the study, Harpham said pension plans based on lifetime employment are unrealistic.

American males have been working for their current employers only seven years, and female workers only five years on the average, he said.

A company's longevity also can be cut short, he said. Braniff International's bout with bankruptcy proceedings is one example of what can

happen to workers when companies get in trouble.

When the federal government took over Braniff's pension liabilities after the airline filed for reorganization in 1983, it didn't pay everything Braniff had promised, Harpham said.

Harding Lawrence, former chairman of Braniff, was counting on a pension of \$306,000 per year, but all he received was \$16,568, Harpham said.

Federal policies, too, have helped to antiquate the pension system. By promoting flawed practices over the past 60 years, they've pushed the private pension industry into trouble, Harpham said.

The government is encouraging companies with healthy pension plans to terminate them while urging firms in financial trouble to dump their pension liabilities on the government, he said.

The federal government is already the trustee for over 1,000 private pension plans, and the number is steadily growing, he said.

The study says employees of financially healthy companies have reason to worry, too. Current law often allows employers with high-performing pension funds to end their plans, pay off employees and pocket the difference.

"This comes as a big surprise to the workers, who tend to think of pension fund assets as theirs," said Harpham, an assistant professor of government and political economy.

Since 1,300 large companies have ended their pension plans and captured \$2.8 billion in surplus assets, the study said. And another 90 companies have announced that they intend to end their plans and pocket \$1.1 billion in surplus assets.

The study recommends that federal tax and labor law be changed to encourage a pension system similar to the one used at most private colleges and universities.

Under those plans, pension money is held in separate trust funds, independent of company managers and union officials.

Man sets fire to himself, 2-year-old son

Associated Press

FORT WORTH — A Fort Worth man apparently doused himself and his son, 2, with gasoline Wednesday and set it afire, killing both of them, authorities said.

James McCrary, 35, was found on a bed in a front bedroom and his son, James Andrew McCrary, was

found on the floor at the foot of the bed after firefighters put out the blaze, said Capt. W.E. Dunkin, head of the Fire Department's arson division.

"The mother was at work and two older daughters, 7 and 8, were at school," Dunkin said.

He said he didn't know what

prompted the incident.

"Apparently there were some mental problems," Dunkin said.

The cause of the fire was not firmly established but "we found some evidence of gasoline around both bodies," he said.

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