

## Flowers pleads guilty: Faces life in prison for murder of pregnant woman

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Shannon Flowers of Huron faces life in prison without parole after pleading guilty Tuesday morning in the February 2009 deaths of Brittney Chua of Woonsocket and her unborn baby girl, Hannah.

The plea agreement with prosecutors means Flowers, 43, avoids a potential death penalty had he been convicted of the original charges during a jury trial, which was scheduled to begin in late February.

In a short court appearance before Circuit Judge Jon Erickson, the defendant pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter in the death of Chua, 20, and fetal homicide in the death of Hannah. Chua was 16 to 20 weeks pregnant when the deaths occurred.

Flowers will receive a mandatory sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole when he returns to court in about a month. After accepting the pleas, Erickson ordered a presentence investigation by court services.

Beadle County State's Attorney Mike Moore said he was satisfied with the outcome of the case. He said his goal was that Flowers serve a mandatory life sentence without parole.

"The (victim's) family is 100 percent behind this agreement we reached," he told reporters after the court appearance. He said he met with the family on numerous occasions to discuss matters such as a trial and a plea agreement.

"I was very surprised we were able to work out a plea agreement," Moore said.

But he said the desired result was obtained and Chua's family can have closure.

Flowers was originally charged with two counts of first-degree murder and, in the alternative, one count of fetal homicide.

In August, Moore filed a notice of intent to seek the death penalty, saying in his opinion the evidence in the case met the aggravating circumstances due to the nature of the crime and the fact that a child was killed.

The cause of Chua's death was blunt force trauma to the head. Flowers admitted striking her four or five times with a pipe, although Moore said the autopsy results were that she was hit five to seven times. There were no other injuries to her body.

Moore also said Tuesday that Chua and her unborn baby were killed at the city's

compost site on the east side of Huron.

More details surrounding the deaths will be released after Flowers is sentenced, he said. Members of Chua's family are also expected to speak.

First-degree manslaughter is defined as causing a death in the heat of passion and in a cruel and unusual manner. Authorities said Flowers should reasonably have known Chua was pregnant, which led to the charge of fetal homicide.

Investigating the case were the Huron Police Department, Beadle County Sheriff's Office and the state Division of Criminal Investigation.

Plea agreements have now been reached in two of the four homicides which occurred in Huron last year.

In December, Christopher Aguayo, 24, pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of first-degree manslaughter in the February 2009 shooting death of Richard Bosque-Gonzalez, 23. He is scheduled to be sentenced early next month.

Still pending are the cases involving Edwin Thompson, 24, charged with second-degree murder in the death of Ryan Treadway, 21, in November, and John LeGrand, 41, of Sturgis and formerly of Huron, charged with second-degree murder and an alternative count of manslaughter in the shooting death of Ricardo (RJ) Hein, 23, last April.

LeGrand's trial is tentatively set for April, while no date has been set for Thompson.