

Parolee given death penalty for murder

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CORPUS CHRISTI — A jury sentenced Carlos DeLuna on Thursday night to death by injection for killing a service-station cashier during a robbery.

The recent prison parolee killed the woman while she was on the telephone, frantically describing her assailant to a police dispatcher. The only other sentence the jury could have recommended was life in prison.

Wanda Jean Lopez had called police and asked for help minutes before she was stabbed to death while begging her assailant not to kill her.

After deliberating for 4½ hours Wednesday afternoon, a Nueces County jury found DeLuna, 21, guilty of capital murder in the Feb. 4 killing of Ms. Lopez, 24, during a Sigmor service-station robbery.

Jurors heard a portion of a tape of the telephone call Ms. Lopez made to police only minutes before her death.

The prosecutor described Ms. Lopez's voice as "scared and terrified" when she screamed her last words, "You want it, I'll give it to you. I'll give it to you. I'm not going to do nothing to you. Please!"

DeLuna, recently paroled from a 1980 conviction of attempted rape in Dallas County, claimed another person committed the crime. He said he ran away from the murder scene because he did not want to be implicated in the crime.

A prosecution witness who said DeLuna tried to rape her took the stand Thursday morning as the punishment phase of the trial began. The woman testified that she had met DeLuna through her son, whom she said served time in prison with him.

The attempted rape occurred in May 1982, two days after DeLuna's parole, said prosecutors, who told jurors that DeLuna has the "mind of a convict."