

Jurors unable to reach verdict in trial

OLATHE (AP) — For the second time in five months, jurors were unable to reach a verdict Wednesday in the trial of a college music professor accused of killing his lover and trying to make the death look like a suicide.

David Lee Stagg, who teaches at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, was on trial for first-degree murder in the April 2004 death of William Jennings.

Johnson County District Judge John Anderson III declared the jurors “hopelessly deadlocked” around noon Wednesday, said Brian Burgess, a spokesman for the prosecutor’s office. The jurors began deliberations Tuesday.

Stagg’s first trial ended in October with jurors unable to reach a verdict after 11 hours of deliberation over two days.

Jennings, who owned a court reporting service, was 51 years old when he was found dead in the living room of his Shawnee home, his neck wedged in the base of a decorative wrought-iron bird cage.

During the trial, Assistant District Attorney Lannie Ornburn said an argument between the men on April 24, 2004, turned physical, so much so that the assailant knocked the

vener off Jennings’ front teeth.

Knowing that Jennings had attempted suicide the previous fall, Stagg wrote a fake suicide note on Jennings’ laptop computer, Ornburn said.

Defense attorney Tom Bath acknowledged that Stagg, 59, and Jennings had quarreled. But he said Stagg left and went to a condo that he co-owns on the Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, Mo.

The defense said there was no physical evidence tying Stagg to Jennings’ death and claimed an unknown third person must have committed the crime.

Burgess said a hearing was set for March 29 to discuss a defense motion seeking to dismiss the case.

Burgess said prosecutors will decide whether to retry the case after the hearing and a meeting with Jennings’ family.

“This is a tough situation for the family of Bill Jennings. He was a good man and he deserves justice. My thoughts and prayers go out to them,” Johnson County District Attorney Phill Kline said in a written statement. “There was a lot of evidence to consider, and I want to thank the jury for their service over the past two-and-a-half weeks.”

Corned beef big biz for St. Pat’s Day

CHICAGO (AP) — Others may identify this time of year with the last gasp of winter, the return of baseball, even the Ides of March.

For those in the meat business, however, the approach of St. Patrick’s Day can mean only one thing: It’s corned beef season.

Production lines have been working overtime for weeks and restaurants and grocery stores are laying in extra supplies of the specially cured beef as next Saturday’s holiday draws near.

Corned beef and cabbage is about as pure Irish a holiday dish as green beer. But with millions of Irish-Americans and Irish wannabes partaking of it on and around March 17, that means plenty of green for businesses that help get the star product from beef plant to customer’s plate.

After all, as Barbara Sidman put it after eating a heaping portion for lunch at Manny’s Coffee Shop & Deli in Chicago: “It wouldn’t be a holiday without corned beef, and corned beef is twice as good on the holiday.”

It’s better than that for Vienna Beef Ltd., the venerable Chicago meat company known best for its hot dogs.

The \$100 million firm has been peddling franks since Austro-Hungarian immigrants and company founders Emil Reichel and Sam Ladany introduced the Chicago-style dog at the 1893 World’s Fair. It sells \$50 million worth of hot dogs annually to about \$15 million of corned beef. But from late January to the second week of March, corned-beef production accelerates dramatically as workers shift over from soups, sausages and other deli meats to help with the St. Patrick’s rush.

All told, half its annual volume of 3 million pounds of the salty beef is churned out during the hectic six-week period.

“It’s probably the most impactful holiday that we have,” said Jack Bodman, senior vice president for production, on a recent tour of the firm’s 140,000-square-foot plant. “This holiday helps a lot with the identity of the product.”

Corned, or brined, beef traditionally is a brisket taken from the lower forequarter of a steer. The brine makes it red.

But non-devotees may not know the myths behind the meat.

For starters, its roots as a holiday dish are in New York City, not Ireland, where traditional St. Patrick’s Day meals are likely to feature boiled bacon instead. Irish immigrants substituted corned beef for

bacon in the late 1800s to save money and it caught on.

And lest there be any doubt, there’s no corn in corned beef. The name goes back to a time before refrigeration and refers to the kernel-sized grains of salt that were pressed into the meat to preserve it.

At Vienna Beef, the corned-beef production line cranks out two types: uncooked, pickled beef for delis and restaurants around the Midwest that serve old-style sandwiches and a pre-cooked version for consumers.

Employees working in a chilly production hall first remove bone from the meat and trim excess fat, then a conveyor belt moves the beef to the injector where automated needles puncture it from above to add brine: water, salt, garlic flavoring, sugar and curing and reducing agents.

The raw version gets soaked and put into vacuum packages; the rest is tumbled to mix it with brine and then lowered on racks into hot-water kettles to cook for four to six hours.

Tom Boyle, past president of the Irish-American Heritage Center in Chicago, says corned beef’s appeal in the U.S. has remained strong over the generations.

“It’s really quite a good meal,” said Boyle, 68, whose parents emigrated from Ireland in 1927. “You get a little horseradish along with that and a slice of apple pie and you’re all set.”

At Manny’s, a city institution where the storefront sign boasts “Chicago’s best corned beef since 1942,” third-generation owner Ken Raskin and his staff are gearing up for the coming holiday with a mixture of anticipation and dread. He ends up taking the phones off the hook that day because of the crush.

“We probably use four or five times the amount of corned beef that weekend than on normal weekends,” he said. “I need more coolers, more warmers, more help. ... It’s tremendous.”

There are no Irish roots at Manny’s — it’s a Jewish-style cafeteria, by Raskin’s own description. But if everybody’s Irish on St. Patrick’s Day, as the saying goes, it seems most of them want corned beef too.

“Who doesn’t like corned beef?” observes Shelly Stark, a high school administrator and long-time Manny’s regular along with Mayor Richard M. Daley, among others. “You don’t have to be Jewish, Irish or anything else to like corned beef.”

Dolce and Gabbana pulls ads

ROME (AP) — Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana said Tuesday it has decided to pull all its advertisements from Spain, after it was forced to withdraw an image condemned as sexist and violent.

The company said in a statement that it had been targeted by censorship, and had taken the step to “safeguard its creative freedom.”

The ad that the company was forced to pull weeks ago, amid protests from Spanish women’s groups, showed a half-naked man

holding a scantily clad woman to the ground by her wrists while four other men look on.

“Recently Spain, with its climate of censorship, shows that it wants to see negative messages everywhere, even where none exist,” the statement said.

Spain’s children’s rights ombudsman said Monday it had asked for a Giorgio Armani advertisement showing two young Asian girls in un-childlike poses to be withdrawn after receiving complaints.