



Published: 05.08.2007

Board clears way for Arizona's first execution since 2000

By **AMANDA LEE MYERS**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX - A clemency board ruled Tuesday that Arizona's first execution in nearly seven years should take place as scheduled.

In a 3-1 decision, the Arizona Board of Executive Clemency said that Robert Charles Comer shouldn't be given a life sentence in lieu of the death penalty and shouldn't be granted a temporary reprieve.

Duane Belcher, chairman and executive director of the clemency board, said the board had the option to reconvene and reconsider its decision up until Comer's scheduled execution on May 22.

Comer, 50, was convicted in 1988 of killing an Apache Lake camper and then subjecting a young Chicago couple to a night of terror and repeated rapes during a drive through wilderness areas.

The board's decision was a welcome one for Comer, who didn't attend the hearing because he has decided that he wants to die, said Michael Kimerer, Comer's attorney.

"He would see this as a victory," Kimerer said. "This is the decision he wanted. He didn't want any delays."

In a 2002 federal court hearing, Comer told a judge he wanted to go ahead with the execution because he was tired, had killed a man and the law called for his death.

Besides the first-degree murder and armed robbery conviction for the shooting death of Larry Pritchard, Comer also was convicted in Maricopa County Superior Court of sexual assault, armed robbery, kidnapping and aggravated assault for the attacks on the female camper and her boyfriend.

Comer's girlfriend was with him at the time of the crimes and pleaded guilty to kidnapping and testified against Comer. Juneva Willis served nearly six years in prison before her 1994 release.

Arizona hasn't executed anyone since November 2000, when Tucson resident Donald Miller died of lethal injection for helping to murder an 18-year-old woman.

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or

retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.