

Robert Brunet trial facing more delays as resumption date sought

By Matthew Talbot
L'ORIGINAL – The trial of Robert Brunet, the man charged with the 2000 murder of Violet Graves, is still in limbo as a date to resume has yet to be finalized.

Brunet was in court before Justice Michel Charbonneau on March 27 in a session to set a date for the resumption

of the trial. However, that decision was postponed until April 3 pending consultation with trial judge Robert Maranger.

When Brunet returned to court on April 3, again before Charbonneau, it was decided that the date setting would be handled personally by Maranger in an Ottawa

court on April 18.

Brunet's lawyer Ian McKechnie said the delays are normal, but attributes the court's use of Maranger, an Ottawa judge, as part of why the case has lasted a year and a half, with no end yet in sight.

Maranger took on the case after the "local judge

didn't want to hear it," McKechnie said.

"I imagine it was because he had had contact with either the accused or the family in the past when he was a lawyer down here," he added of the local judge.

Meanwhile, Dr. Reguvaran Kunjukrishnan's psychiatric assessment has been com-

pleted, and McKechnie said the doctor will testify when the trial resumes, probably in the fall of this year.

According to the lawyers involved, the trial could last about two weeks when it resumes.

Brunet has been in custody since April 2005.



Handheld cell phone ban not enough: CAA-Quebec

According to a Québec study, the chance of having an accident rises 38% when drivers are using a cell phone.

By Dominique Millette
MONTREAL – Handheld, or hands-free: what's the difference? CAA-Québec says "none", as do many studies on cell phones use behind the wheel.

The Québec Ministry of Transportation banned the use of handheld cell phones while driving on the province's roadways on April 1, with a grace period ending June 30. However, the Québec chapter of the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) insists that still allowing hands-free devices "sends the wrong message".

In an interview with The Review, senior director of public and government affairs Sophie Gagnon reiterated CAA-Québec's position: "It isn't just the fact of ma-

nipulating the phone with your hands, but the conversation while you're driving" that causes the potential for accidents, she stated. Gagnon says the CAA believes allowing the use of hands-free devices, despite ministry warnings that no cell phone use is safe, will give people a false sense of security. She points out that studies show any cell phone use, handheld or otherwise, increases the potential for accidents.

In fact, the government-run Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) acknowledges in its pamphlet on the new law that "the simple fact of carrying on a telephone conversation is still a source of distraction that diverts the attention of the person be-

hind the wheel. Despite the fact that a motorist's hands are free to drive, using a "hands-free" device is not a risk-free option and is not advisable." The SAAQ pamphlet specifies that "driving while you're making a call increases the risk of an accident. According to a Québec study, the chance of having an accident rises 38% when drivers are using a cell phone. The likelihood of violating the Highway Safety Code (for example, running a red light, failing to obey a mandatory stop) also increases. The number of times a driver uses a cell phone also raises the risk: drivers who use a cell phone a lot run a higher risk of collision than occasional users."

In Québec, the coroner's

office has determined cell phones were at fault in 24 fatal car crashes from 2000 to 2006.

What about other distractions, such as listening to the radio or disciplining children? During the April 1 meeting of the municipality of Grenville-sur-la-Rouge, councillor Raymond Larose observed that while cell phone use was curtailed and would be more closely monitored on Québec roads, women were still free to apply their makeup while driving. Gagnon acknowledges that any action can potentially make a driver inattentive, but states that a Montreal study found cell phone use was a bigger distraction than other things.

For his part, Nicolas Poulin, communications agent for the Argenteuil office of the Sûreté du Québec, is glad of anything that might lower motorists' chances of having an accident: "In the past, cell phones have distracted people. I think we're going in the right direction."

Several U.S. states have passed laws banning handheld cell phones behind the wheel, as has Australia and the United Kingdom. Here in Canada, Newfoundland

and Labrador was the first province to pass a ban, in 2003. Since the law was introduced there, the number of traffic accidents attributed to driver inattention, including cell phone use, has decreased.

While Ontario has not yet considered a ban on cell phone use by drivers, the problem exists there as well. The use of a messaging device was considered a possible factor in a mid-day February 29 collision which claimed the life of a Québec driver on Highway 417 between St. Isidore and Highland Rd., leading to a pile-up involving three tractor-trailer units and closing the road for hours.

Dos and don'ts – the details:

The following are from a pamphlet issued by the SAAQ. As of July 1 the total fine for use of a handheld phone, including court costs, will be \$115 and drivers will lose three demerit points. To use a handheld device, drivers must pull over by the side of a road where this is allowed, or park in a safe area. Drivers who are holding a cell phone in their

hand are presumed to be using it. Drivers who are waiting at a red light or delayed in traffic are considered to be driving their vehicle. Any device that has a telephone function, such as a wireless information device, such as a BlackBerry, is deemed to be a cell phone and is therefore prohibited when it is held in the hand.

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Road work in Lachute

By Tara Kirkpatrick
LACHUTE – Municipalities across the region are facing similar problems: the arrival of spring has brought with it potholes, pitted roads and aggravated drivers and pedestrians alike.

At the April 7 Lachute council meeting, the councillors approved plans to commence construction on a number of specific roads in Lachute. An amount of \$260,000 has been approved for the improvement of roadways, paving and lighting along Kenny and Benjamin Road; \$155,000 has been requested to install traffic lights at the corner of Principale and Aeroparc and to resurface Grace, Hamelin and Saint Jean Road, as well as Avenue Hamford and Chemin de la Rivière-du-Nord. Further funding has been approved to continue work on Phase II of Kenny Road, at a further expense of \$13,000. Weather permitting, Lachute Mayor Daniel Mayer estimated that construction will commence this June.

In association with the Québec provincial foundation for the development of sport and physical

activity, Lachute has budgeted \$10,000 for the reconstruction of the swimming pool and the preparation of water games at Ayers Parc. The municipality is still researching how best to approach this project but plans to start construction this summer.

The department of recreation and leisure released its budget commitments for the summer. Lachute has promised \$1,500 to accept the title of partner to be named amongst the Laurentian towns participating in the 2013 Canadian Games. Lachute further contributed \$20,000 to the "Festivale de la Famille 2008". In order to encourage health and recreation the city gave a \$500 bursary to the football department of the Polyvalente scolaire for the purchase of equipment. The municipality granted an additional \$500 to the organization called, "Samedi Velo" which promotes health and endurance with weekly bicycle rides. Entering its third year, Samedi Velo promotes socializing in a safe and healthy environment that encourages vigorous exercise, regardless of age

or social circumstance. The group meets at Saint André D'Argenteuil elementary school and welcomes new members.

Visit The Review's website for a link to the Samedi Velo website.



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Fatal accident on Bethany Road

By Dominique Millette
LACHUTE – A Lachute man lost his life in town in an accident on Bethany Road on the morning of April 3 after his car hit a cube van. The accident shut down the street from Tessier Blvd to Watson Drive. The driver was identified as Tim Brown, 30.



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