

Jury selection begins for 200 in Rand case

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE ■ TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1988

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More than 200 prospective jurors were called to state Supreme Court, St. George, as jury selection began yesterday in the trial of Andre Rand, the 43-year-old drifter accused in the kidnapping murder of 12-year-old Jennifer Schweiger.

Supreme Court Justice Norman J. Felig told the prospective jurors that despite heavy pre-trial publicity from the media concerning the case: "We hope that no matter what opinions you may have formed ... you will be able to put those opinions aside and reach a fair and impartial verdict."

Rand, wearing an open-necked pink dress shirt and blue trousers, was present in the courtroom but showed no emotion throughout the proceedings. He was silent except for infrequent, brief whispered conversations with his attorney.

The trial is expected to last "at least a month," Felig told the 202

prospective jurors who crowded the a second-floor courtroom during two separate sessions needed to handle the unusually large number.

Felig, along with Assistant District Attorney John Loughrey and Jerome V. Giovinazzo, attorney for Rand, spent most of the day in chambers adjoining the courtroom as they questioned jurors who said they wished to be excused from serving on the Rand jury.

Of the 202 prospective jurors called, Felig told 115 to return Thursday when they will take part in the next step of selecting a jury, the voir dire, in which the attorneys question and choose the final panel in open court.

Approximately a third of the 202 prospective jurors said they saw no reason why they could not serve on the jury, but many of the others called told Felig in chambers that they could not be fair

and impartial because of reports they read in the Advance or other newspapers or due to broadcast news reports on the case.

Exposure to news reports about the case is not necessarily grounds for automatic disqualification from jury duty in the trial, Felig said, but he did excuse any prospective juror who had taken part in the search for Jennifer Schweiger following her July 9, 1987 disappearance.

Felig also excused some prospective jurors on medical grounds, or if they could prove extreme economic hardship by having to serve in what is expected to be a lengthy trial.

More prospective jurors were to be screened today, but after yesterday's session, Felig said no more potential jurors were needed for the voir dire process, so today's group will be excused.

Some 700 prospective jurors were initially contacted by mail

for the trial. The number of those contacted is believed to be the largest in Staten Island criminal trial history, the Division of Jurors of the County Clerk's Office said at the time.

Felig said he hoped the entire jury selection process needed to pick 12 panel members and three alternates would take a week or two to complete.

Rand is accused of second-degree murder and first-degree kidnapping in connection with the disappearance of Jennifer Schweiger, the Westerleigh child with Down's Syndrome.

He was arrested Aug. 5, 1987 and charged with the child's kidnapping.

In pretrial hearings, witnesses testified that they saw Rand walking hand-in-hand with Jennifer onto the Staten Island Developmental Center grounds, Willowbrook, on the day she disappeared.

Her body was discovered Aug. 12, 1987, in a shallow grave near where Rand maintained a crude campsite.