

The Andre Rand case: Anger to anguish

By LAURA BRUNO
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

The angry mob that turned out for Andre Rand's arraignment last year didn't return yesterday to witness the start of his trial for the kidnapping and murder of Jennifer Schweiger.

But in the absence of hysteria emerged the quiet anguish of Jennifer's parents, Karen and Kenneth Schweiger.

The couple was ushered into the St. George courtroom only in time for Mrs. Schweiger to be called as a witness for the prosecution.

Spectators, who occupied little more than half the seats, included four women of the nearly 1,000 volunteers who helped search last summer for the Down's syndrome child. The largest contingent in the courtroom consisted of Wagner College students observing

the trial, and other onlookers dribbled in and out during the day.

Immediately after defense attorney Jerome Giovinnazzo declined to cross-examine Mrs. Schweiger, she walked quickly into the hallway where her husband was waiting with a reassuring kiss.

During his wife's testimony, Schweiger sat attentively in the first row. One of two female relatives reached forward to squeeze his arm when he took his seat. Like Mr. and Mrs. Schweiger, they declined comment on the case.

One of the women appeared to be taking notes on the trial. Her pen filled pages of a white legal pad and stopped only with pauses in the proceeding.

As Justice Norman J. Felig was recessing the court for lunch, the Schweigers slipped out of the state Supreme Court building. The

couple, and their 19-year-old son, Ken, now live in New Jersey, where friends say they are trying to get on with their lives.

Interspersed with some tearful responses to Assistant District Attorney John Loughrey, there were hints of healing.

Mrs. Schweiger smiled when she described her little girl as a child who "liked to hug a lot."

Said Fran Aortori, a New Dorp resident who helped search for the 12-year-old: "She's reliving whatever moments she could hold onto.

"The strength that Karen had to do this is beyond belief," she said. "We can only assume what she's going through, and what we can assume is beyond belief."

Mrs. Aortori said she stays in touch with the Schweigers through a mutual friend.

"They need their privacy. They have to go on with their lives," she

said. "We're all holding on very tight," she said, referring to other searchers. "Many of us have remained close."

The turmoil of Jennifer's death cannot be put to rest, Mrs. Aortori said. But the trial, which she hopes will result in a guilty verdict, "will bring a finalization" that everyone involved needs, she said.

"The concern about finding a child stays with you the rest of your life. We weren't fortunate enough to find her alive, but we don't accept it," she said. "We have to live with it."

Around the corner, in the first-floor ladies' room, a well-dressed woman said she couldn't bring herself to enter the courtroom, even though she was right in the building.

"I knew the child," she said. "I just don't want to go in there."