

# Murder charges upgraded

By Kris Hilgedick

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Peter Merlati, the man charged with stabbing Jefferson City woman Debbie Kolb, will face first-degree murder charges, Cole County Prosecutor Bill Tackett said Saturday.

Tackett indicated he is "leaning heavily" toward seeking the death penalty. He's awaiting certified copies of Merlati's earlier convictions before filing notice of his intention to seek it.

According to police, Merlati confessed to killing Kolb, 48, on May 5 at her home in the 600 block of Oak Creek Court.

Tackett said the first-degree murder charge is appropriate because the prosecutor's office believes Merlati was deliberative and acted with "cool reflection" in planning the crime. Merlati had previously faced second-degree murder charges.

Merlati faces a preliminary hearing before Judge Tom Sodergren at 1:30 p.m. Monday.

Police believe Merlati was intoxicated when he got into a heated argument with Kolb and stabbed her to death before driving to St. Louis.