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MEIRO

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## 2 witnesses support drive for new trial in triple slaying

By Jeff Coen

Tribune staff reporter

Two witnesses testified Thursday at a hearing on whether Jason Gray will get a new trial for a 1986 triple murder, telling Judge Fred Suria they were at the party where the slayings took place and did not see Gray.

Neither Kenneth Carmona nor Ralph Tamez was called as a witness during Gray's jury trial in 1988 that resulted in his con-

viction and sentencing to life in prison. Gray's lawyer, Jennifer Bonjean, contends Gray is innocent and that the case against him has dissolved to the point that only a single, wavering witness against him remains—a woman who was 13 when she allegedly saw Gray shoot into the party on the Southwest Side.

Carmona told Suria that he was outside the party just a minute or two before the shots rang out, and he saw three Hispanic men armed with a gun. Gray,

now 33, is Caucasian and has an alibi for the time of the slayings.

Carmona, 38, said he walked past the men on his way into the basement where the party was taking place.

"I took about eight or 10 steps inside, and I started hearing gunshots," Carmona said, testifying that men behind him and next to him were hit.

On cross-examination, he acknowledged he may not have been able to see the entire alley before the shooting.

Prosecutors have argued the shooting was a gang crime that Gray carried out. The original testimony of the single witness, Joann McGuire Campbell, known as Holly, should stand, they contend.

Two other witnesses who testified against Gray in 1988 have recanted their accounts, including partygoer Sam Rahder, a rival of Gray's who told jurors he had been in a fight with Gray at a convenience store in the hours before the shooting. Prosecu-

tors have argued that witnesses routinely change their stories in cases where gangs are involved.

In order to bolster her argument, Bonjean on Thursday presented the testimony of Tamez, 34, who is married with children and has no gang ties.

Tamez testified he was with Rahder at the convenience store and did not see Gray or a fight of any kind. He said he went to the party from there.

"It was pretty dark," he said of

the basement. "They had a disco ball hanging, if I remember."

He was just 5 feet from the doorway when the shooting began, Tamez said.

"There was just flashes of light, and it sounded like firecrackers," he said, then telling the court it was too dark to see who was firing.

Friends of his were hit, he told Bonjean, who then asked him if he would tell who the shooter was if he knew.

"Yes, I would," Tamez said.