

Secretary testifies on opening day of school-shooting trial

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Joy Fausel, secretary to Placerville elementary school principal Sam LaCara and his friend of 20 years, described the scene in vivid detail: the enraged school janitor bursting into the office at the Louisiana Schnell School, clutching a cell phone to his left ear and holding a gun in his right hand.

As the trial opened Wednesday in the first-degree murder case of John Luebbers, 45, a longtime golfing buddy of the man he is accused of killing, Fausel and school clerk Dawn Cooper recounted the searing events that culminated in a beloved principal getting gunned down in his office.

It was Feb. 2, 2011, and LaCara had sent Luebbers – the school's lead custodian – home to cool off after he lit into the principal in a profanity-laced eruption over a pending decision to hire a night janitor, according to testimony Wednesday in El Dorado Superior Court.

Cooper, the prosecution's opening witness, said Luebbers left the premises, only to call the school office repeatedly, demanding to speak to the principal. She put some of the calls through, and the janitor was still talking to LaCara when he stormed back in. "This is for you!" Cooper said Luebbers shouted as he opened fire in the principal's office.

Cooper said she rushed into the office after Luebbers ran out and found the principal sprawled behind his desk, struggling to rise.

Read the whole story