

Moorestown lawyer joins Ford defense in air-bag lawsuit

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Pretrial hearings in a federal product-liability lawsuit over the design of air bags against Ford Motor Co. were set to intensify with the company introducing a new attorney.

Glenn Zeitz of Moorestown, who has defended many cases that have drawn nationwide interest, filed papers with the court on Thursday indicating he will join Ford's defense team.

Zeitz appeared at a routine status hearing before U.S. Magistrate Judge Joel Rosen in the wrongful death lawsuit filed by a Cape May County dentist against the company.

The dentist, Eric V. Thomas, claims an improperly designed air bag exploded and killed his wife, Tracy, who was six months pregnant, and her fetus when their Ford Explorer crashed into a utility pole in February 1997. Tracy Thomas was at the wheel.

About a year after the lawsuit was filed, Ford changed its defense following a deposition by Cape May County Medical Examiner Elliott Gross.

Ford filed documents arguing Tracy Thomas was dead before

the accident.

Ford's defense now relies primarily on reports from forensic pathologists that link tiny hemorrhages in the woman's eyes to pressure on her neck attributed to manual strangulation, not damage from air bag impact.

Defense attorneys will also question Eric Thomas and his second wife, Stefanie, later this month about reports of an extramarital affair that began before the fatal accident.

Zeitz said his first assignments in the

case will be to conduct depositions of polygraphists who examined Eric Thomas twice.

Although polygraph results are not admissible in New Jersey courts, plaintiff's attorneys have repeatedly referred to them in motions.

Zeitz's most publicized criminal defenses involved Robert O. Marshall of Toms River, on New Jersey's death row for the contract murder of his wife; former Wilmington Teamsters President Francis J. Sheeran, acquitted of racketeering, murder and embezzlement; and Jay C. Smith, a Montgomery County, Pa., high school principal convicted of killing schoolteacher Susan Reinert and her two children in 1979.

Glenn Zeitz has been involved in several high-profile cases.