Victim’s family uneasy concerning parole of Angolite’s Ron Wikberg

By The Associated Press

LAFAYETTE — Louisiana inmate journalist Ron Wikberg soon will head home after 22 years in prison.

In the meantime, Terrell Melancon, who works behind the same grocery counter where his father was shot to death by Wikberg in 1969, wonders what to tell his mother.

Melancon said he’s heard Wikberg is a model inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. What hurts, Melancon said, is that Wikberg will work in Lafayette when he gets out of Angola.

“When he went into prison, we were told he would never come out,” Melancon said.

Terrell Melancon, 44, said he now works the same 80- and 90-hour weeks that his father once worked. He looks forward to a time when he can take it easy — something his father never had a chance to do.

“We always felt Dad was robbed of his retirement,” Melancon said.

He said parole officials have been in touch with the family. They were notified of Wikberg’s parole hearing, but they didn’t go. Now, he said, the authorities have told the family that Wikberg will work in Lafayette to be near his parole officer.

“We felt that if he goes back to Illinois, it would be easier for us,” Melancon said. “I’m disturbed about the fact that of all the places he could go, he’s going to be here.”

The state Parole Board voted Monday to parole Wikberg from a life prison sentence for the slaying of Stanley Melancon. Wikberg could be free within two weeks, said Warden John Whitley.

Wikberg pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in 1970. He was resentenced in 1973 because of a court error.

Since 1975, second-degree murder has carried a mandatory sentence of life without parole. Before that, parole eligibility was determined by trial judges.

In a suit filed in December, Wikberg argued that the judge didn’t spell out whether he could be paroled. A state district court administrator ruled in February that Wikberg’s parole had not been barred by the sentencing judge, thus setting up his successful date with the Parole Board.

Wikberg is the associate editor of The Angolite, the award-winning inmate magazine at Angola. The magazine deals with controversial prison issues, allows inmates to air uncensored grievances, and publishes in-depth interviews in which inmates tell their stories.

Wikberg’s story began on a June night in 1969, said Lafayette City Marshal Earl “Nicky” Picard. Picard was a district attorney’s investigator in those days. Also in those days, he said, Melancon Bros. grocery cashed a lot of checks.

Picard, who investigated the case, said Wikberg and two other men arrived at the grocery store about dusk. One of the men stayed in the car, while Wikberg, then a 26-year-old former Illinois resident, and the third man approached the store.

Wikberg pulled a gun, Picard said, and so did store owner Stanley Melancon. At some point a shot was fired, and the robbers turned to leave the store. Melancon followed.

When Melancon reached the door, Picard said, Wikberg was there with a two-shot, .38-caliber derringer. He shot and killed Melancon.

One of the other men died in prison, and one was released years ago after cooperating with authorities.

“I’m disappointed,” Picard said after learning of Wikberg’s parole. “That was a vicious crime.”