

12/25/2014

### **Heroin peddler sentenced to state prison**

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

A man arrested by police in Nanticoke and Wilkes-Barre for selling heroin was sentenced in Luzerne County Court to state prison.

Judge David Lupas sentenced Dwayne Myers, 36, of North Meade Street, Wilkes-Barre, and Apollo Circle, Nanticoke, was sentenced to 2.2 years to 4.5 years in state prison on two counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance and one count each of possession of a controlled substance, delivery of a controlled substance, criminal conspiracy and criminal mischief.

According to the criminal complaints:

- March 2014: Nanticoke police and the Luzerne County Drug Task Force had Myers under investigation for heroin sales from an apartment in Apollo Circle. A search warrant was served at the apartment on March 14 when police found Myers behind a locked bathroom door. Myers told an officer he was sitting on the toilet as the officer heard the slide of a handgun being pulled.

Police said Myers flushed the toilet allegedly dumping heroin in the bowl. A clear bag with white residue and rubber bands were found on the toilet and floor.

- March 8: Myers threw a baby stroller that struck another man in the head during a fight involving several people in front of his Apollo Circle apartment.

- Feb. 19: Wilkes-Barre police investigating drug sales at a hotel on Kidder Street said Myers discard a purse out a window when officers knocked on the door. Police said 26 heroin packets were in the purse.

- Dec. 4, 2013: Wilkes-Barre police served a search warrant at a residence on North Meade Street where Myers was found with heroin.

- Oct. 12, 2013: Wilkes-Barre police investigating a report that a teenage girl was being held against her will found Myers with heroin in his pockets inside a residence on Sambourne Street.

12/25/2014

### **Alleged sex offender captured in Arizona**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A man wanted by Nanticoke police for sexually assaulting a minor has been captured and arrested in Arizona.

Olman Solano, 39, was taken into custody by U.S. Marshals on Tuesday at a hotel near Phoenix, according to the U.S. Marshals Service.

Nanticoke police this month charged Solano with two counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, corruption of minors and two counts of indecent assault of a person less than 16 years of age.

The Nanticoke Police Department requested the assistance of the Scranton office of the U.S. Marshals Service Fugitive Task Force to locate and arrest Solano. The task force contacted marshals in Arizona after coming across information that Solano might be in that area, authorities said.

Marshals turned him over to local authorities in Arizona, where he awaits court proceedings concerning his extradition back to Pennsylvania.

12/24/2014

### **Cops: Woman trashed Nanticoke home after ex broke up, wouldn't buy her a ring**

elewis@civitasmedia.com - (570) 991-6116

City police arrested April Lee May, 36, of East Union Street, Nanticoke, on charges she assaulted her ex-boyfriend and his mother during a domestic dispute on Tuesday.

May was charged with simple assault and harassment. She was arraigned by District Judge Diana Malast in Plains Township and released on \$1,000 unsecured bail.

According to the criminal complaint:

Jeffrey Lewis told police he was at the American Legion with his mother, Nancy Long, and May. Lewis and May left the American Legion to go to Norky's Bar but first stopped at Lewis' residence where they argued about May not receiving a ring as a Christmas present.

Lewis told May he wasn't going to buy her a \$1,300 ring as their relationship was over. Lewis told May to gather her

belongings from his house.

May left and went to Norky's Bar while Lewis returned to the American Legion.

Lewis told police he arrived home with his mother to find May sitting on the rear porch. He entered his residence finding it had been thrashed with a Christmas tree and Santa knocked over, and a broken ceiling fan, the complaint says.

May became irate and grabbed the hair of Long who, in return, grabbed May.

12/21/2014

### **911 call leads to meth lab bust in Nanticoke**

emark@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke woman who called 911 to report she had overdosed on drugs was first rescued, then arrested on Saturday. Nanticoke police gave the following account, in a criminal complaint:

Cheryl Kemper, 31, called emergency dispatchers at about 1:30 p.m. and said she had taken too much "meth," had a chemical burn on her arm and a blood clot moving in her arm. She also said her 13-year-old son was in the home and was experiencing shortness of breath.

When police arrived at the home, at 248 Apollo Circle, they smelled a strong chemical odor, located Kemper and her son and evacuated them from the building.

Officers searched the home, looking for anyone else who might be injured. They did not find anyone there, but in Kemper's bedroom, in plain view, they observed items that police say are often used for the manufacturing of methamphetamine, such as funnels with white residue, a measuring cup, hypodermic needle caps, filter material and a garbage bag that held a two-liter soda bottle.

Kemper and her son were taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center for treatment and observation. Luzerne County Children and Youth Services was notified regarding the welfare of the boy.

Kemper told police that she had been part of a group with four other people, all of whom fled the home on Saturday. She purchased pseudoephedrine for one of the men in the group to use to cook methamphetamine and allowed him to use her home for the process. In exchange, he gave her meth for her own use, she said.

Kemper's two children, ages 12 and 8 at the time, were present during two previous drug manufacturing sessions, according to the criminal complaint.

Kemper was charged with possession of a controlled substance, possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, criminal conspiracy, endangering the welfare of a child, possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of precursor chemicals with intent to manufacture a controlled substance and unlawful manufacture of methamphetamine in a structure where a child under 18 is present.

She was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge James Dixon on Saturday and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of bail.

Newport Township and Kingston police, the Luzerne County Drug Task Force and the Nanticoke Fire Department and EMS assisted.

Police continue to investigate. Anyone with information is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200 or dial 911.

12/21/2014

### **911 call leads police to suspected meth lab in Nanticoke**

jomalley@civitasmedia.com

Police say a woman calling 911 to report she'd overdosed on drugs Saturday led officers to a suspected meth lab in her Apollo Circle apartment.

Cheryl Lee Kemper, 31, of Nanticoke, told Luzerne County 911 Saturday afternoon she had taken too much "meth," had a chemical burn on her arm, could see a blood clot moving in her arm and her 13-year-old son was experiencing shortness of breath, according to a criminal complaint.

Responding officers immediately noticed an odor of chemicals upon entering the residence, police say, and so removed both Kemper and her son from the apartment.

Police say the odor, which could be smelled from a "considerable distance," was characteristic of the process of manufacturing methamphetamine, causing irritation of the eyes, skin and throat. In Kemper's bedroom, the complaint says, police located two funnels with white residue, a measuring cup with residue, hypodermic needle caps, filter material and a 2-liter bottle containing white solids and other moist materials.

A state police Clandestine Laboratory Response Team removed these materials from the apartment along with Coleman

fuel, pseudoephedrine and other bi-products and precursor materials for methamphetamine, police say. When questioned, Kemper allegedly told police she allowed her friend to cook meth in her apartment and also purchased some of the necessary materials in exchange for quantities of the finished product. Kemper and her son were both transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center. Luzerne County Children and Youth Services were contacted and responded to the hospital. According to the complaint, Kemper said at least three other people and her two children were present during the manufacturing process. The complaint says Kemper was charged with possession of precursor chemicals with intent to manufacture a controlled substance, manufacture of methamphetamine in a structure with a child under 18 present, five counts of conspiracy, one count of possession of a controlled substance, one count of possession of drug paraphernalia, a single count of possession with intent to deliver and one count of endangering the welfare of children. Court records indicate she was scheduled for arraignment at 8:30 p.m. before District Judge James M. Dixon, and was held at Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$75,000 bail.

12/18/2014

### **Nanticoke man arrested for shooting in Wilkes-Barre**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man was arraigned Thursday on charges he shot a woman in the head near Gordon Avenue in South Wilkes-Barre last week.

Michael Angelo Foschini Jr, 25, of West Main Street, was charged with two counts each of aggravated assault and simple assault, and one count each of possession of marijuana and reckless endangerment. He was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke and jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$250,000 bail. Foschini was arrested by city police and Nanticoke police when he began driving away from his residence at about 4:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Police believe the woman, a 19-year-old, was shot in the head with a .22-caliber rifle. She survived her injuries.

According to the criminal complaint:

The woman told police Foschini picked her up in the area of Academy Street and Carey Avenue and drove to the end of Willow Street, near an abandoned building and Gordon Avenue.

She claimed they were arguing about money Foschini felt she owed him.

Foschini told the women to get out of his vehicle and became more angry because she was taking too long, the complaint says.

The woman claimed Foschini went to the trunk area of his car and emerged with a long black gun she described as a rifle. She stood outside the car claiming Foschini told her he wasn't going to hurt her and the rifle was a pellet gun, according to the complaint.

Police said in the complaint Foschini shot the woman in the head and drove away.

The woman attempted to go into the abandoned building and made her way to a residence on Academy Street. She was transported to Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre and then Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center where she underwent surgery, police said.

Police said they recovered evidence near the abandoned building and the area where the woman was shot.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Dec. 23 before District Judge Rick Cronauer in Wilkes-Barre.]

Anyone who has information about the shooting is asked to call Wilkes-Barre police detectives at 570-208-4222.

12/16/2014

### **Cops: Nanticoke woman allegedly beat mother bloody**

smocarsky@civitasmedia.com

A city woman has been charged in connection with an attack on her mother, police said.

Officers responded to the area of Lee Mine and South Hanover streets at about 10:18 p.m. Sunday for a report of a woman screaming, yelling and saying she fell out of a vehicle. The female caller was "belligerent" to the Luzerne County 911 dispatcher, saying, "you'll figure it out," according to court papers.

Police found Kimberly Wojciechowski, age not released, in the area of East Union and South Market streets running toward West Ridge Street. She was out of breath, had blood on her face, hands and clothing and told police she was beat up by her daughter, court papers state.

Nanticoke EMS was dispatched, but Wojciechowski refused treatment. At first, she would only tell police she did not want her daughter to go to jail, but then related that she had been away for a few days and, when she returned home, her daughter became enraged and began hitting her in the face.

Police said Wojciechowski was unsteady on her feet, had bloodshot eyes and exhibited signs of drunkenness and was transported to the police station.

Police then interviewed Wojciechowski's daughter, Kailey Wojciechowski, who told them her mother had not been home for several days and that she was concerned about her. She told police she then saw her mother on Lee Mine Street in a pickup with a bunch of males, that the vehicle pulled away and her mother fell out.

Police said they observed fresh blood stains on Kailey Wojciechowski's sweatshirt and jeans and asked where they came from. She allegedly responded that they came from her mother.

Police said Kimberly Wojciechowski's injuries were not consistent with falling out of a vehicle and arrested Kailey Wojciechowski pursuant to probable cause arrest in domestic violence cases.

Kailey Wojciechowski, 19, of West Washington Street, Nanticoke, was charged with simple assault, harassment and disorderly conduct. She was arraigned before District Judge Joseph Carmody and released on \$5,000 unsecured bail. Her preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1:45 p.m. Jan. 7 before District Judge Donald Whitaker in Nanticoke.

12/13/2014

### **Nanticoke pharmacy robbed at gunpoint Friday**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

An armed man robbed a pharmacy in Nanticoke on Friday morning, according to police.

The robbery happened shortly after 9 a.m. at Spotanski's Pharmacy, 243 S. Prospect St., according to Nanticoke police. A man walked into the store armed with a handgun and demanded the prescription drugs Suboxone and Xanax, as well as cash from the register, police said.

The suspect ran out of the store and was last seen fleeing east on East Green Street, according to police.

He is described as a male of average build, about 6 feet tall, wearing a black pullover sweater with big white letters that spell out SOUTH POLE. He also wore blue jogging pants with white stripes down the sides, black gloves and his face was covered with a hood and mask. The weapon used in the robbery was a black or blue pistol, police said.

Anyone with information about this robbery is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200 or dial 911.

12/13/2014

### **Nanticoke man who fled crash scene facing charges**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Hanover Township police plan to charge a Nanticoke man who they say fled the scene of a two-vehicle accident Thursday night.

The accident happened at about 9 p.m. on Hanover Street, near Front Street. A vehicle driven by Eric Legins, 28, of Nanticoke, collided with another vehicle, according to police. The driver of the other vehicle was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center for treatment of injuries from the accident. Legins fled the scene of the crash and was later located at his home, police said.

Legins' driver's license is suspended because of a DUI, according to police, who said charges against Legins are pending further investigation.

The police news release did not list the name or gender of the injured driver, or give details of the driver's injuries or medical condition. Calls to Hanover Township police seeking further information on Friday were not returned by press time. Hanover Street was closed in both directions after the accident and the media was not allowed access to the accident scene Thursday night.

12/12/2014

### **Luzerne County judge revokes parole, sends Nanticoke man to jail**

jomalley@civitasmedia.com

A man accused of leading police on a pursuit that ended in a three-car crash last month is back in prison on a 2012 charge of eluding arrest.

Douglas Arthur Johnson, 52, of Nanticoke, had his parole revoked Friday in a hearing before Luzerne County Judge

Lesa S. Gelb.

He will now serve the remainder of a six-to-12 month sentence for eluding police who were seeking him on a protection-from-abuse order violation in June of 2012.

Johnson was released from prison on May 28 after serving the required six month minimum.

Hanover Township police arrested Johnson on Nov. 7 when police say Johnson, who was driving a Dodge Nitro, led them on a pursuit through Wilkes-Barre after they attempted to stop him.

The chase ended near the intersection of River and Market streets where Johnson crashed into a Hyundai Elantra and a Toyota Corolla, police say. Two people were treated for injuries from the crash at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

Johnson faces charges of theft, receiving stolen property, fleeing or attempting to elude police, reckless endangerment, reckless driving, careless driving and two counts of accidents involving injury in the alleged pursuit.

Ashley police also have filed charges of robbery and criminal conspiracy against Johnson, alleging he assaulted an elderly woman and stole her purse on Oct. 25, before fleeing in a stolen Ford Escape.

Wyoming police say Johnson stole the Ford from a used car dealership on Wyoming Avenue the day before, allegedly taking it for a test drive and never returning.

Court documents indicate Johnson is awaiting a preliminary hearing on theft, criminal mischief and driving with a suspended or revoked license charges out of Wyoming.

Plains Township police allege Johnson, along with Marshall Dyer III, 47, of Edwardsville, robbed the Plains Meat Market on Hudson Street on Oct. 21.

Dyer was later arrested on Maffet Street and arraigned on criminal conspiracy charges.

Township police charged Johnson with robbery following his arrest in November.

Police officers from Hanover Township, Ashley, Wyoming and Plains Township appeared Friday in court to offer testimony against Johnson, but were never afforded the opportunity.

Court documents indicate a warrant for Johnson's arrest was issued in late September after he failed to appear for a hearing on arson charges stemming from a 2013 vehicle fire in Nanticoke.

Johnson is scheduled to go to trial next week on chop shop charges.

12/11/2014

### **Burglar doomed himself with 911 call, police say**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who police say committed a string of burglaries in Luzerne County in August was arraigned and sent to jail on Tuesday.

State police investigated multiple similar residential burglaries between Aug. 5 and Aug. 25, according to a criminal complaint against Daniel Olshefski, 26, of 11 Burnett St., Nanticoke. Seven burglaries in three weeks were reported in Plymouth Township, Plymouth Borough, Union Township and Nanticoke, police said.

In a strange twist, Olshefski set into motion the wheels of his own arrest when he called 911 to report that he saw a man fleeing the scene of one of the burglaries, apparently to divert suspicion, according to the criminal complaint.

Olshefski gave his name to an emergency operator who took his 911 call, and a police investigation revealed that he had been pulled over for erratic driving in Larksville on Aug. 14, police said. From there, the investigation revealed that Olshefski was under suspicion of committing a burglary in Exeter, in which a check stolen from a home was cashed in his name, according to the criminal complaint.

Olshefski, when interviewed by police in the presence of a public defender, eventually admitted to committing the burglaries and gave details of the crimes that only the perpetrator was likely to know, police said. He also pointed police to the location of stolen jewelry that he tossed over a guard rail of Interstate 81, police said. Officers found the jewelry in the spot where Olshefski said he tossed it, according to police.

Olshefski is charged with multiple felony counts of burglary and theft by unlawful taking and summary counts of criminal mischief. He was arraigned on Tuesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of bail.

A preliminary hearing before Whittaker is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Dec. 17.

12/11/2014

### **Nanticoke residents alerted to phone scam**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police warned city residents of a possible phone scam in which callers falsely claim to be part of the Nanticoke Fire Department.

Police have received complaints from residents who said someone has been calling them at home, claiming to be from the Nanticoke Fire Department and offering to clean the chimney. The callers are persistent and rude, residents told police.

The Nanticoke Fire Department does not call residents and solicit them to have their chimneys cleaned, police said. Anyone who receives a call should dial 911 to report the incident, according to police.

12/2/2014

West Nanticoke man pleads guilty to vehicular homicide

**bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com, 570-821-2055 @cvbobkal**

A West Nanticoke man pleaded guilty to vehicular homicide charges on Tuesday morning in Luzerne County Court and was immediately sentenced to a minimum of three years in state prison.

John D. Ward, 23, pleaded guilty to a charge of homicide by vehicle while driving under the influence in connection with a fatal crash last year on the Sans Souci Parkway in Hanover Township.

Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb sentenced him to three to six years in state prison.

Hanover Township police allege Ward rear-ended the vehicle of 68-year-old Nanticoke resident Daniel Markowski on April 10, 2013, causing Markowski to be ejected from his vehicle as it rolled over. Markowski died the next day in the hospital.

“He certainly acknowledged his responsibility from the time that it happened,” Ward’s attorney Vito Deluca said afterward. “He has a great degree of remorse.”

Investigators say Ward had been drinking 24-ounce cans of beer and smoking marijuana and was racing against a motorcycle at speeds nearing 80 mph before the crash.

A 17-year-old girl who was in Ward’s vehicle also sustained minor injuries, police said.

Luzerne County Deputy District Attorney Chester Dudick said the plea agreement was acceptable to Markowski’s family.

“These cases are difficult because they are not intentional homicides, but we understand how devastating they are to the victim’s family,” Dudick said. “They would have preferred not to be in this situation at all, but they were satisfied with the outcome.”

11/27/2014

**Police: Man sexually assaulted 6-year-old**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was hit with numerous felony charges for sexually assaulting a 6-year-old girl for about the last two years, according to an arrest affidavit.

Jayson S. Montanez, 28, of 209 W. Church St., was charged Monday with two counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child, two counts of aggravated indecent assault of a child, two counts of indecent assault of a person of less than 13 years-old and related charges.

The mother of the victim called Nanticoke police July 5 saying her daughter had told her Montanez sexually assaulted her.

Police interviewed the victim on July 9. Police said the girl knew the difference between the truth and a lie. Police asked the girl how high she could count. She said to 100. Police then asked her how many times the assaults happened, and she sighed and said in “a defeated voice” Montanez assaulted her “a lot,” detailing to authorities what Montanez allegedly had done to her.

Montanez remains free on \$100,000 unsecured bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. His preliminary hearing is slated for 1 p.m. Dec. 3 before Whittaker.

11/25/2014

**Nanticoke man waives hearing on purse robbery, pursuit charges**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man accused of stealing a purse from an elderly woman in Ashley and initiating a pursuit with police in

Hanover Township and Wilkes-Barre that ended in a crash waived his right to a preliminary hearing before District Judge Joseph Halesey Tuesday morning.

Douglas Johnson, 52, kept quiet when asked by a reporter if he wanted to apologize to the two people injured in a three vehicle crash at River and Market streets, Wilkes-Barre, on Nov. 7.

Johnson was sent back to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility where he remains jailed for lack of \$265,000 total bail on four criminal cases in four municipalities.

Here are the charges facing Johnson, according to the criminal complaints:

Oct. 21: Plains Township police charged Johnson and Marshall Dyer III, 47, of Edwardsville, with robbing Plains Meat Market on Hudson Road.

Oct. 24: Wyoming police charged Johnson with stealing a Ford Escape from City Auto, a used car lot on Wyoming Avenue. Johnson took the Ford for a test drive and failed to return the vehicle.

Oct. 25: Ashley police alleged Johnson, a passenger in the stolen Ford, approached an elderly woman in a parking lot in the 100 block of North Main Street. Johnson "proceeded to assault her by pushing her in her car and striking her and slamming her body against the car seat," the complaint says.

Johnson struggled with the woman before running away with her purse. The driver of the Ford picked up Johnson on Brown Street.

Nov. 7: Hanover Township police attempted to stop Johnson driving a Dodge Nitro. Johnson initiated a pursuit into Wilkes-Barre crashing into a Hyundai Elantra and a Toyota Corolla at River and Market streets. Two people in the Hyundai and Toyota were injured and treated at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

At Tuesday's proceeding before Halesey, Johnson waived his right to preliminary hearings.

Charges of robbery and criminal conspiracy filed by Ashley police, and charges of theft, receiving stolen property, fleeing or attempting to elude police, reckless endangerment, reckless driving, careless driving and two counts of accidents involving injury filed by Hanover Township police were sent to court.

Preliminary hearings on the charges filed by police in Wyoming and Plains Township are scheduled at a later date.

11/20/2014

### **Four arrested in methamphetamine bust**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

Drug agents with the state Office of Attorney General Bureau of Narcotics Investigation and Nanticoke police arrested four people on charges they were cooking methamphetamine inside a residence on Lewis Road.

Authorities said they served a search warrant at 17 Lewis Rd., allegedly finding sodium, lithium, ammonia nitrate, plastic tubing, funnels, glassware, red phosphorous and pseudoephedrine. The search warrant was obtained for the residence in an ongoing investigation of methamphetamine manufacturing in the area, according to charges filed.

Charged were:

Carissa Marie Beck, 27, 17 Lewis Road, Hunlock Township, seven counts of possession with intent to manufacture a controlled substance, and one count each of possession of a controlled substance, criminal conspiracy with intent to manufacture a controlled substance and risking catastrophe.

Kevin Lee Vernovage, 47, 17 Lewis Road, seven counts of possession with intent to manufacture a controlled substance, and one count each of possession of a controlled substance, criminal conspiracy with intent to manufacture a controlled substance and risking catastrophe.

Paul Blazick, 48, 17 Lewis Road, two counts of possession with intent to manufacture a controlled substance and a single count of criminal conspiracy with intent to manufacture a controlled substance.

Barry Blazick, 50, 17 Lewis Road, two counts of possession with intent to manufacture a controlled substance and a single count of criminal conspiracy with intent to manufacture a controlled substance.

Beck and Vernovage were arraigned by District Judge Michael Dotzel in Wilkes-Barre Township and jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$75,000 bail each.

Paul Blazick and his brother, Barry Blazick, were jailed for lack of \$50,000 bail each.

Paul Blazick and Barry Blazick allegedly admitted to obtaining pseudoephedrine and giving it to Vernovage in exchange for methamphetamine. Beck admitted to obtaining the cold medication and crushing pills to cook methamphetamine, according to the criminal complaints.

11/15/2014

### **Thanksgiving burglary suspect faces felony gun charge**

Already awaiting trial for a Thanksgiving Day burglary in Nanticoke, one of the accused was hit with a felony gun charge for a rifle police said he stole during the break-in and hocked at a pawnshop.

State and Nanticoke police said Earl Hoopingarner, now 29, ransacked and looted the home of Krystle Lampman at 201 Enterprise St., Nanticoke on Nov. 28, 2013 while Shane Hempel, now 26, served as a lookout. Hempel admitted to his and Hoopingarner's roles following their arrests in December.

Janice Hempel, 23, also awaits trial for her role in connection with the burglary for receiving stolen property. She testified against her brother, Shane Hempel, and her boyfriend, Hoopingarner, at her May 12 preliminary hearing, saying the two men came home the night of the burglary with duffle bags of stolen goods.

Arrest papers indicated she cooperated with police because she didn't want to sit in jail anymore "for stuff they did." In hopes of being released from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, Janice Hempel on Jan. 18 told investigators about a pawnshop in the area where Hoopingarner sold a television, jewelry and a rifle that were stolen from Lampman's home, and authorities were able to track down the gun.

Although she said prosecutors did not offer her anything in exchange for her testimony, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker modified her bail to \$100,000 unsecured at the end of the hearing and she was released from Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

The information Janice Hempel testified to led police to charge the two men for theft, conspiracy to commit theft and two counts of receiving stolen property. Hoopingarner was also charged in February with multiple counts of identity theft for using Lampman's credit cards, which were stolen during the burglary.

Now, authorities tacked on a felony charge of person not to possess or use firearms for the rifle Hoopingarner allegedly stole and pawned. Hoopingarner had a video arraignment before Whittaker on Friday from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, where Hoopingarner remains jailed on what is now \$350,000 straight cash bail. He has a second preliminary hearing for the gun charge slated for 1:15 p.m. Nov. 19 before Whittaker.

Whittaker bound 21 charges against Hoopingarner and 16 against Hempel over to the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas on May 28 following two days of testimony at a joint preliminary hearing for the defendants.

All defendants in the case await trial.

11/14/2014

### **Man faces charges after fleeing police pursuit**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Newport Township police were clocking speeders in a 35 mph zone Oct. 29 on Roberts Street when a motorcycle zipped by doing 80 mph.

The driver, identified as 22-year-old Eddie Vega-Pagan, turned right on Prince Street leading toward Nanticoke, then looked over his shoulder as police flipped on their emergency lights and sounded the siren, police said.

The driver was doing 100 mph now, weaving in and out of traffic and passing vehicles in oncoming lanes, and police stopped their pursuit because Pagan's recklessness could have jeopardized public safety, police said.

Police were able to get the motorcycle's registration number, which came back to the owner of Kus New and Used Tires in Wilkes-Barre. Police learned that the owner had sold the motorcycle to one of his employees. Police said the fleeing driver had the helmet's face shield up during the pursuit and the officer who saw the driver's face said the employee didn't fit the suspect's description. Arrest papers do not indicate why someone else had the employee's motorcycle. Newport Township police Chief Jeremy Blank was off duty at the tire shop Nov. 7 looking to get tire for his personal vehicle when he saw the suspect and the motorcycle.

Blank contacted police, who stopped Vega-Pagan in Nanticoke and took him into custody, according to the affidavit. He told police the man operating the motorcycle was buying the vehicle from him and that that man was taking the motorcycle for a test drive. Police told him they thought he was lying, stopped the interview and told him charges will be filed against him.

Vega-Pagan, of Wilkes-Barre, was charged with a felony count of fleeing and seven summary traffic offenses. He was jailed Wednesday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$75,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

11/12/2014

### **Police: Nanticoke man choked, kicked woman**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A woman is in critical condition after being choked and kicked during a violent domestic dispute in Nanticoke on Sunday night, according to police.

Police identified the suspect as Charles D. Davis, 51, of Nanticoke.

According to a criminal complaint against Davis:

At about 7 p.m. on Sunday, Davis assaulted a woman in his College Street home. He said he was upset with the woman for returning home late from work. Both Davis and the woman had consumed alcohol.

The argument escalated and Davis placed his hands around the woman's throat, strangled her, threw her to the ground and kicked her in the abdomen repeatedly. He then left the home.

The woman called for help, using a neighbor's phone. The woman's sister drove to the home, found the woman complaining of severe stomach pain and drove her to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. She was transferred to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center due to the extent of her injuries.

The neighbor whose phone the victim used to call for help told police that he heard the woman scream "no Charles, no" several times during the argument.

The victim was in critical condition as of Tuesday, police said.

Davis was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, reckless endangerment and harassment. He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker on Monday and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Nov. 19

11/11/14

**Police: Driver in chase involved in 2 robberies**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

A man's crime spree — that included two strong-arm robberies — ended when he crashed a stolen car in Wilkes-Barre after a police chase Friday, police said. Douglas Johnson, 52, last known address 262 E. Noble St., Nanticoke, was the driver of a Dodge Nitro that police chased through Hanover Township into Wilkes-Barre on Friday, according to police. The chase ended abruptly when Johnson's car collided with two vehicles on River Street near the Market Street Bridge at around 4:30 p.m. Johnson and two other occupants of the Dodge were taken into custody at the scene of the crash. Police said Friday's incident is still being investigated and more charges are pending against Douglas for stealing the motor vehicle and offenses related to the police chase.

Ashley police had issued an arrest warrant for Johnson following a daylight robbery on Oct. 25 in which a man assaulted an elderly woman and stole her purse as she was getting into her car. Johnson drove the vehicle the purse-snatcher jumped into as he was being chased by witnesses, police said.

The day before the purse robbery, Wyoming Borough police said Douglas went to City Auto on Wyoming Avenue where he told the owner he wanted to buy a vehicle. Douglas asked the owner to test drive a 2006 Ford Escape, but instead, he drove the vehicle out of the lot and never returned. Police recovered the vehicle near Public Square in Wilkes-Barre.

In another set of arrest papers, police said Douglas was involved in an attempted armed robbery at the Plains Meat Market in Plains Township late afternoon Oct. 21.

Plains Township police responded to an attempted robbery call at the meat market at 4:50 p.m. The owner told police that two men attempted to rob the store; one of the men held a boxcutter against the store owner's side and demanded he open the cash register, police said.

The owner yelled for a store employee, after which the would-be robber who held the boxcutter fled the store. Nothing was taken and the owner was not injured, police said.

Police arrested the other suspect — Marshall Dyer III, 47, of Edwardsville. Dyer told police Douglas was the robber and that he had met him that day, according to the affidavit.

Douglas remains jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility facing numerous charges including robbery and theft.

11/11/2014

**Police: Man committed series of robberies**

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Hanover Township Police Department arrested a man after he committed acts of robbery, attempted robbery and theft, said police.

According to police, Wayne Matthew Shoemaker, 25, entered a Sunoco convenience store on the San Souci Parkway Sunday evening, grabbed a clerk and demanded money from the cash register. He fled from the scene without any cash. Soon after, Shoemaker entered Penn Corners Food Mart, also on the San Souci Parkway, and fled with a cash register according to the press release.

Just after midnight Monday, Shoemaker entered the Cocoa Hut on East Main Street in Nanticoke and again fled the scene with a cash register containing \$50, said Nanticoke police.

According to a press release, Shoemaker was identified as a suspect by several tips and help from a local media outlet. He was taken into custody at his residence without incident, according to Hanover Township police.

Shoemaker was charged with counts of robbery, criminal attempt to commit robbery, theft and other related charges, according to the criminal docket.

He was jailed at Luzerne County Correctional Facility after being unable to post the \$75,000 straight bail. The preliminary hearing has been scheduled for Nov. 18 before Magisterial District Judge Joseph A. Halesey.

11/4/2014

### **Police: Man ties up girlfriend after disapproving of costume**

[jseibel@citizensvoice.com](mailto:jseibel@citizensvoice.com)

A Nanticoke man stripped his girlfriend naked and tied her up for hours because he was upset over her Halloween costume, according to an affidavit.

The couple was getting ready to go out Friday night, but plans fell through when 48-year-old John Branwell Chapman became upset after seeing Jennifer O’Gallagher in her French maid costume, police said.

According to the affidavit filed by Nanticoke police:

O’Gallagher told police her boyfriend was drinking vodka for about two hours on Halloween when they got into an argument around 7 p.m. over the costume.

Chapman stripped O’Gallagher of her costume and bound her wrists and ankles. Chapman was laughing and taking pictures of her while she was tied up and also choked her and grabbed parts of her body.

When Chapman left their apartment of 118 S. Market St. around 11:30 p.m., O’Gallagher crawled to the kitchen and got a knife to cut herself free. She then got dressed, locked the door and went to bed.

Chapman returned several times, but O’Gallagher refused to let him inside, telling him he was drunk and to go away. O’Gallagher was lying in bed around 3:30 a.m. Saturday when Chapman returned again and smashed the bedroom window. She ran from the bedroom and hid in a closet, but Chapman found her, dragged her from the hiding place and choked her.

Police were dispatched to the apartment for a report of a woman screaming for help. Officers could hear O’Gallagher crying and yelling for help when they arrived, and they knocked on the door several times before Chapman answered.

Chapman told police his girlfriend was “flipping out” and was trying to stop her. Police saw O’Gallagher lying on the couch crying. She had welts around her neck and bruises on her arms.

“Thank God the police are here,” she said.

Chapman was charged with two counts of simple assault, two counts of harassment and unlawful restraint.

He was jailed Saturday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$20,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge Michael Dotzel. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m. Nov. 18 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

10/29/2014

### **Second suspect arrested in Nanticoke meth lab blast**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police have arrested another suspect in the explosion of a suspected meth lab in Nanticoke on Saturday night.

Adam T. Longenberger, 27, was taken into custody on Tuesday, one day after Nanticoke police issued a warrant for his arrest. He had serious burns to his hands, arm and face, and was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center for treatment, police said.

Longenberger was charged with drug trafficking, causing a catastrophe, making meth with a child present, criminal conspiracy and possessing meth precursor chemicals.

He was arraigned Tuesday afternoon before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 cash bail, according to police.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 2 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Following his arraignment, Longenberger was taken into surgery for his injuries, police said.

Another suspect in the case, Jessica M. Collett, 28, was arrested on Sunday. She faces the same charges as Longenberger.

Police said Collett and Longenberger were in an apartment at 112 Lee Mine St., Nanticoke, with two others — Kyslie Yashkus and Alicia Gulla — when the suspected meth lab exploded. All fled the scene before authorities arrived. The force of the blast blew off one of the doors to the apartment.

10/29/2014

### **Police: Drunken man urinated, smashed bottles in alley**

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Authorities charged a man with indecent exposure, propulsion of missiles onto a roadway, disorderly conduct and public drunkenness on Saturday in Nanticoke.

The first report that Nanticoke police received said that an intoxicated man was cursing and yelling on Orchard Street. By the time the officers arrived to the scene, there was no one in the general vicinity that matched the description, according to the affidavit.

Nanticoke police received a second report that the man, John Branwell Chapman, was allegedly seen urinating and smashing bottles in an alley at the rear of Orchard Street, as well as attempting to start a fight with a couple on the street, police said.

Officers said when they reported to the scene, they found Chapman so intoxicated he could hardly stand.

Chapman was taken into custody and transported to Nanticoke police headquarters for processing. The preliminary hearing is scheduled for Nov. 12 before Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker.

10/29/2014

### **Nanticoke man accused of assaulting son over beer**

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke resident was arrested Saturday after he allegedly assaulted and injured his 15-year-old son in his home on South Hanover Street, police said.

According to the affidavit, Nanticoke police responded to a call from a neighbor, explaining that Thomas Joseph Andrejack Jr. allegedly assaulted his son for drinking one of his beers.

Officers said they spoke with the son, who admitted to drinking one of the beers before going to bed. Shortly after he went to bed, Andrejack entered his room and began beating his head and body with an unknown blunt object, officers said. The son was able to escape and take refuge at a neighbors house, where he discovered his head was bleeding.

Andrejack claimed his son attacked him after being confronted about drinking a beer, police said. Officers said they did not observe any injuries on Andrejack.

Police charged Andrejack with simple assault, recklessly endangering another person and harassment. He was released from Luzerne County Correctional Facility on Tuesday after posting \$5,000 bail. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for Nov. 5 before Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker.

10/28/2014

### **Woman on house arrest for Nanticoke bar fight granted Halloween furlough**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A woman involved in a fight that led to a notorious Nanticoke barroom slashing is getting a two-hour furlough from her court-ordered house arrest on Friday so she could take her minor son trick or treating for Halloween. Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough on Monday granted a request filed by Melanie Figueroa, 23, of South Sherman Street, Wilkes-Barr

After getting out of work on Friday, Figueroa will be allowed to take her son trick or treating between 5 and 7 p.m., the judge ruled.

Prosecutors didn't object to the request.

Figueroa was accused of being the primary aggressor in a January 2012 fight that led to a woman being slashed in the face with a box cutter at Prospect Street Cafe at 23 S. Prospect St., a bar that is now shuttered. Figueroa was not charged with the slashing. She pleaded guilty to simple assault for her role in the fight. She also pleaded guilty to underage drinking for consuming alcohol in the bar before she was 21.

In September, Vough sentenced Figueroa to six months house arrest and two years probation.

10/27/2014

### **Woman arrested in meth lab explosion**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke police have arrested one woman and say more charges are coming in connection with a methamphetamine laboratory explosion that rocked an apartment complex over the weekend.

Police on Sunday charged Jessica M. Collett, 28, with drug trafficking, causing catastrophe, making meth with a child present, criminal conspiracy and possessing meth precursor chemicals.

Police say Collett was living in an apartment at 112 Lee Mine St., Nanticoke, with three others — Adam Longenberger, Kysie Yashkus and Alicia Gulla — when a meth lab exploded inside the apartment Saturday night. All fled the scene prior to police arrival.

Authorities were called to the apartment about 9:50 p.m. after a neighbor reported the explosion accompanied by an odor of gasoline, according to a police affidavit filed in court.

Police arrived to find smoke coming from the apartment, finding the front door had been blown off the frame. Upon entering the apartment to check for injuries, police found sodium, a funnel and a plastic bag containing lithium strips in the living room, according to the affidavit.

An officer checking the apartment saw damage from an explosion before being overwhelmed by the smell of kerosene, which irritated his eyes and throat, police said. After ensuring the apartment was empty, the officer left the apartment and police ordered the other units evacuated. Two children live in the building, police said.

When police tracked down Gulla — who is the sole lessee of the apartment — she signed consent for police to search it, according to the affidavit. Police found items commonly used to make meth, including pseudoephedrine, tubing, funnels, a digital scale, baggies and gas generators. Officers also found finished meth, police said.

During questioning, Collett, Yashkus and Gulla admitted to investigators they had been making meth in the apartment, according to the affidavit. They told police Collett and Longenberger had been actively cooking meth when the lab exploded Saturday night, police said.

Investigators on Sunday filed the charges against Collett, saying additional charges were pending.

Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast arraigned Collett on Monday morning and ordered her jailed on \$150,000 bail. She was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for 1 p.m. Nov. 5.

10/21/2014

### **Police: Drunk man called 911 for ride home**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

An intoxicated man made false reports to Luzerne County 911 to try to get a ride from police, but ended up with pepper spray in his eyes and a ride to jail, according to police.

Richard J. Wright, 31, called 911 around 2:30 a.m. Sunday saying his car broke down, he was drunk and needed police to give him a ride.

According to the affidavit filed by Nanticoke police:

Police were dispatched to Cocoa Hut convenience store on East Main Street a few minutes later for a report that Wright was inside making a disturbance. Police said Wright habitually calls 911 while he is drunk to try to get police to give him rides.

When police arrived, Wright told officers he didn't want to walk and needed a ride. Police told him if he keeps making false reports, they will arrest him.

"Good luck with that," Wright told police. "I don't have an address."

He then told police he called his father and was waiting for him to pick him up to go stay at his father's residence in Nanticoke. Officers asked the store clerk if Wright could wait there. The clerk agreed to let him, and police left.

Around 3:15 a.m., Wright called 911 again asking for police to pick him up. He called again a few minutes later saying he didn't want police, but wanted an ambulance to come or else he would jump off the bridge near the Cocoa Hut.

Police arrived and told him he was under arrest, at which time he began to struggle with police. He continued to resist despite police's warning they were going to pepper spray him.

"Just take me the (expletive) home," he told police.

Wright ignored demands to stop resisting, and police sprayed him in the face with pepper spray and took him into custody.

Wright, last known address Garden Drive, Hunlock Creek, was charged with five counts of making false reports, four counts of disorderly conduct, resisting arrest and public drunkenness.

He was jailed Sunday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$10,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge James Dixon. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m. Oct. 29 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

10/17/2014

**Police: Armed man robs pharmacy**

James Halpi - Citizens Voice

A knife-wielding man held up a Nanticoke pharmacy Thursday morning and made off with \$100 and several boxes of painkillers, according to Nanticoke police.

The man entered Spotanski Pharmacy at 243 S. Prospect St. about 9:05 a.m. and pulled a "very large knife" that was about a foot long, police said. The robber demanded strips of the painkiller suboxone and money from the register, making away with a couple boxes of the drug and \$100 in cash, police said.

The robber then ran north on South Prospect Street toward East Broad Street.

Police described the robber as about 6 feet tall with a slim build and a very deep voice. He was wearing a black hoodie, a red scarf over his face and a black backpack.

State police are assisting the investigation. Anyone with information is asked to call police at 570-735-2200.

10/8/2014

**Police: Nanticoke man altered car odometer**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is facing felony forgery charges after allegedly altering the odometer and changing paperwork on a car he sold.

Terry Matthew Panetta, 33, of 151 Orchard St., is charged with forgery, tampering with a public record, washing vehicle titles, theft, changing odometer readings and illegal transfer of ownership.

Panetta is accused of selling a silver Ford Mustang to Jacob Rondinella after making it appear to have less mileage than it did.

State police said they responded to Herbie's Auto Body at 275 Pringle St., which Rondinella's grandfather owns, in June after Rondinella reported he found out the Mustang he bought after seeing an advertisement on Craigslist had an altered odometer.

During a meeting in December at a Sheetz gas station, Panetta identified himself as Robert Henry, according to a police affidavit filed in court. Rondinella agreed to buy the car and they decided to meet at Herbie's Auto Body the next day. Rondinella paid Panetta a \$1,500 cash deposit for the car, and they went to a notary service in Luzerne to complete the transfer, according to the affidavit.

Rondinella paid the remaining \$1,700 for the car, and the title documents were sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation for processing.

PennDOT caught the mileage discrepancy between the title documents and its records and rejected the transfer, according to police.

During questioning, Panetta told police he had traded a Chevrolet Silverado pickup to an unknown man from Philadelphia in exchange for the car in September 2013.

He did not properly transfer the titles for either vehicle, according to police.

Police said Panetta admitted he disassembled the odometer and altered it by "blacking out" the digits with a black marker.

Panetta then altered the vehicle title with a pencil to indicate the car had less mileage than it had accumulated, according to police.

Magisterial District Judge Paul J. Roberts arraigned Panetta on Tuesday morning and released him on \$25,000

unsecured bail. A preliminary hearing was set for 1:30 p.m. Oct. 21.

10/4/2014

### **Couple ordered to trial in infant's death**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

As she had each morning since the court order, Deborah Goodman placed a wake-up call to her daughter Feb. 14 to make sure she checked in with Children and Youth.

Minutes after hanging up with her, Goodman got a call back.

"The baby is dead," her daughter cried out.

Goodman fought back tears Friday at a preliminary hearing as she recalled Valentine's Day morning in Nanticoke when her daughter, Tracey A. Gonda, discovered her infant son wedged in a cushion of a recliner in which she had dozed off after a couple beers with him in her arms.

The death of 2½-month-old Jaxon Eckrote was ruled homicide by asphyxia.

The parents, Gonda, 40, and Corey Eckrote, 49, were in court Friday to face involuntary manslaughter and related charges. After a four-hour hearing, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker bound all charges over to the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas. They remain free on bail.

Gonda used drugs throughout her pregnancy and had no prenatal care, claiming she was unaware she was pregnant, so Jaxon Eckrote was born drug-dependant on Nov. 22. Master Romilsa Crocarno presided over a shelter care hearing on Dec. 6 and ruled that legal and physical custody of Jaxon Eckrote and Gonda's 4-year-old son from a previous relationship would be given to Corey Eckrote.

The court order prevented Gonda from being left alone with her children as well as made Corey Eckrote responsible for not leaving Gonda alone with them. Gonda also had to call Children and Youth each day and had to submit to random drug tests, at least six of which she tested positive for drugs including cocaine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone and alcohol.

Gonda's attorney, Philip Gelso, argued there was no "intent element" for the defendants to be charged with manslaughter. He described the incident as a "horrific accident." Eckrote's attorney, Michael Butera, argued the only negligence on Corey Eckrote's behalf was going to sleep in order to wake up for work, saying Gonda wasn't unsupervised because Corey Eckrote was in the house.

Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts, however, said the court order specified Gonda was never to be left unsupervised with her children, but multiple times Corey Eckrote let that happen. That final time they violated the court order cost them the life of their son.

Roberts also said Eckrote bought Gonda two 24 oz. cans of malt liquor she drank the night she fell asleep in the recliner cradling their son.

Police were dispatched to rear 340 E. Noble St. around 9:20 a.m. Feb. 14.

When police initially questioned Gonda about the death of her son, they said she insisted she had placed the child safely into his bassinet the night before.

But her other son, 4-year-old Max Gonda, told police otherwise.

While police were questioning the mother, Max interrupted, saying his baby brother "was lying face down with his head between the cushion."

Gonda tried to discredit what Max had said.

"(Max), no he wasn't," Gonda said. "He was in the bassinet. What did I tell you about making up stories?"

Police found what appeared to be dried saliva or another type of bodily fluid on the cushion, and the bassinet Gonda said she had placed Jaxon Eckrote in didn't appear to be used recently, as a neatly folded blanket was set in it.

Police said Tracey Gonda came clean Feb. 15 after investigators told her the autopsy conflicted with her story.

10/4/2014

### **Nanticoke man pleads guilty to child porn charges**

jomalley@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man pleaded guilty Friday to two counts possession and one count distribution of child pornography. Josh Gensel, 31, entered the plea in Luzerne County Court before Judge Michael T. Vough, and was immediately sentenced to two years in the Intermediate Punishment Program, followed by four years probation, court papers say. He is to serve the first nine months on house arrest.

Gensel must forfeit his laptop computer and is to have no internet access in his home, according to court documents. He also must find employment within 180 days, court papers say, have no unsupervised contact with minors and must continue mental health treatment.

He must register as a Tier III, lifetime sexual offender and have an evaluation with the state Sexual Offenders Assessment Board, court documents continue.

Police charged Gensel in February, following which he allegedly told authorities, "Half of my brain says that it isn't right and the other half says to look at it. It is the devil and angel."

Gensel allegedly admitted he preferred boys and girls from 7 to 13 years old, and used several software sharing files to download the images.

He also allegedly told authorities he was involved in many youth volunteer organizations but never had any sexual contact with children "because there were always other people around."

10/3/2014

### **Prosecutors to seek death penalty in Nanticoke correctional officer's murder**

By James Halpin, Staff Writer Citizens Voice

The U.S. Attorney's Office on Thursday filed notice that prosecutors intend to seek the death penalty against the gang assassin accused of murdering Correctional Officer Eric Williams last year, alleging in court documents that Jessie Con-  
ui has a history of violence, including involvement in a previous plan to kill a cop.

Prosecutors said they think Con-  
ui, 37, should face death if convicted of first-degree murder of a federal correctional officer in the death of the 34-year-old officer from Nanticoke, who was fatally beaten and stabbed at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan on Feb. 25, 2013.

9/29/2014

### **Police: Game console fight leads to arrests in Nanticoke**

tkellar@civitasmedia.com

Two city residents are facing criminal charges following a dispute over a video game console that Nanticoke police said included a series of threats.

Jaime, 35, and Barbara Saldana, 41, each face charges of criminal trespass, stalking, disorderly conduct, terroristic threats and harassment stemming from the incident.

Police responded to a residence on East Main Street at approximately 3 p.m. on Saturday and police were notified by resident Lora Borland that she heard yelling and screaming coming from outside. When she looked outside, she saw her stepson, Arthur Lee, 24, being cornered by her neighbors, Jaime and Barbara Saldana.

Police learned that Lee was at his brother's house waiting for his neighbor, Jaime Saldana, to come home. Lee told police that he sold Jaime a motorcycle and that Jaime Saldana gave him a PlayStation 3 video game console as partial payment, but that Jaime Saldana still owed him \$400.

Lee told police that the video game console did not work after trying it.

When Jaime Saldana returned home, Lee told police that he met him outside and tried to hand him the game console, when Jaime Saldana allegedly started to yell at him, shove him and eventually slap the video game console from his hands.

According to the criminal complaint, Jaime Saldana pushed Lee against a gold car and forced him to stay there while he and Barbara yelled and spit in his face.

Police say that Borland came outside and brought her stepson inside, when the Saldanas forced their way into Borland's residence, cornered Lee and threatened him.

Borland told police the pair also made several threats to her, her children and against her home. Borland also said that the Saldana's daughter Maria threatened that "they were all going to pay for getting their parents thrown in jail."

The pair also allegedly almost knocked over Borland's 15-year-old daughter when they left.

Jaime Saldana was taken into custody and transported to police headquarters, where he told police that he got into a disagreement with Lee over the video game console not working. He claimed that the console in question was not the original one he gave Lee as part of the motorcycle sale.

Barbara Saldana came to police headquarters and was taken into custody. She denied the allegations and asked to speak with her attorney.

Jaime was placed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$15,000 straight bail, while Barbara is free on

\$15,000 unsecured bail. Both are scheduled for a preliminary hearing before District Judge James M. Dixon on Oct. 8.

9/27/2014

### **Nanticoke police probe reports of burglaries, home invasion**

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating reports by a Christian Street couple that they were the target of two burglaries and a home invasion within a week.

In the most recent incident, on Thursday, a 29-year-old man reported a suspect wearing a ski mask entered the residence around 8:30 a.m., knocked his girlfriend unconscious, and stole prescription pills. The woman, 27, was treated by medics at the scene, but declined further treatment, police said.

There were no signs of physical injury, police said.

The man described the suspect as a white male with a muscular build wearing a black ski mask, black gloves, black leather jacket, grey sweatpants and white sneakers. Police said there was no forced entry to the home.

Investigators said the couple had reported two other burglaries in recent days.

On Sept. 19, the male resident said someone entered the home and stole various prescription drugs, including morphine sulfate pills, oxycodone, gabapentin and piroxicam. Police said there was no forced entry to the home.

Then, on Sept. 21, the man's girlfriend reported someone forced entry to the home through a bedroom window, stealing cash and more prescription drugs, police said.

Anyone with information about the reported incidents is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.

9/23/2014

### **SCI-Dallas guard faces felony drug charges**

[bwellock@citizensvoice.com](mailto:bwellock@citizensvoice.com)

[jhalpin@citizensvoice.com](mailto:jhalpin@citizensvoice.com)

Nanticoke police have charged Carl Dohl, a correctional officer at SCI-Dallas, with felony drug crimes.

Police filed two sets of charges against Dohl, 36, of Shickshinny this month. Police said Dohl altered a prescription to illegally obtain the painkiller oxycodone from a CVS pharmacy. He was arraigned Sept. 15 before Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker.

According to an affidavit, Dohl changed a prescription for different medication to get the drug twice in July. On July 16, he tried to get 50 pills of oxycodone, 15 milligrams each, when police arrested him at a Burger King in Nanticoke, arrest papers said.

Police said Dohl was "adamant" that he wasn't selling the pills and told investigating officers that he needed the medicine after surgeries.

In a phone interview Monday night, Dohl said he has suffered numerous injuries in recent years, including having his body "pulverized" in a 2008 vehicle crash and a shattered elbow when he fell off the roof while clearing snow last year.

Dealing with those injuries, as well as the repeated surgeries to repair the damage, required pain medication, he said.

But at one point he switched doctors, and his new physician urged him to go to pain management — cutting him off cold turkey, he said.

"I have an opiate addiction, obviously to pain pills because I've been on them for so long," Dohl said. "All I did was on two different occasions, I altered prescriptions to get what I was previously prescribed for the last four years."

Officers charged him with two counts of acquisition of a controlled substance by misrepresentation and two counts of forgery, which are felonies. They also charged him with two counts of illegal possession of a controlled substance, which are misdemeanors.

Police filed more charges against Dohl on Thursday, charging him with possession of drug paraphernalia, a misdemeanor. A Nanticoke officer and Newport Township officer served an arrest warrant on Dohl on Jan. 16, 2014, and when they took him into custody, they found a used hypodermic needle in a pants pocket. Police said Dohl said he was not diabetic and later said the needle was for heroin.

Dohl is a corrections officer at SCI-Dallas and has been employed there since May 22, 2000, said spokeswoman Robin Lucas.

He insisted that he had not altered the prescriptions to sell pills or to get high, adding that he would have sought a higher dosage if that were his intention.

"I am seeking help to manage and deal with my opiate addiction that has been created by all these injuries," said Dohl,

who has been suspended pending the outcome of the case.

Dohl was released on his own recognizance on the felony charges. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1:15 p.m. Wednesday in front of Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

9/13/2014

### **Twice-arrested man accused of assaulting officers**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A man arrested for the second time in a day for public drunkenness allegedly punched Plymouth police officers and urinated on an officer's boots as they loaded him into a jail cell.

Police said they arrested Daryl Lowyn, 44, last known to be of Nanticoke, on East Main Street on Thursday for public intoxication and disorderly conduct — his second arrest that day.

At the police station, Lowyn threatened to kill officers. He refused to take off his shoes, and after officers asked him the second time to remove them, Lowyn struck one officer in the face and another in the arm.

Police said they placed him in a cell and Lowyn urinated through doors onto the hallway floor and onto an officer's boots.

Lowyn was charged with two counts of aggravated assault, aggravated harassment by a prisoner, resisting arrest, institutional vandalism and public drunkenness.

He was jailed Thursday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$10,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge James Tupper. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m. Sept. 24 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

9/10/2014

### **Woman sentenced to probation for Nanticoke fight**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A woman involved in a fight that led to a notorious Nanticoke barroom slashing was sentenced Tuesday to house arrest and probation.

Melanie Figueroa, 22, of Nanticoke, was accused of being the primary aggressor in a January 2012 fight that led to a woman being slashed in the face with a box cutter.

Figueroa was not charged with the slashing. She pleaded guilty to simple assault for her role in the fight.

She also pleaded guilty to underage drinking for consuming alcohol in the bar, the Prospect Cafe, before she was 21.

Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough on Tuesday sentenced Figueroa to six months house arrest and two years probation.

The case began about 2 a.m. Jan. 1, 2012, when officers were dispatched to the former Prospect Street Cafe at 23 S. Prospect St. on a report of a brawl. Jennifer Mieczkowski had sustained severe injuries to the face after being slashed with a box-cutter.

Mieczkowski had long accused Figueroa of the slashing, but police say they could not prove that was the case.

Figueroa was arrested in January of this year, more than two years since the incident.

9/6/2014

### **Knife-wielding man robs Nanticoke store**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A man armed with a knife robbed a convenience store in Nanticoke early Friday morning, police said

It was around 12:30 a.m. when the man walked into Turkey Hill on West Main Street with his hood pulled over his head and bandana wrapped around his face, the victim told police.

According to Nanticoke police:

The man walked straight to the counter and knocked over a candy display, a money counter and numerous other items.

"Give me everything in your drawer," the man said.

"No," she said.

This agitated the suspect. He circled around the counter wielding a knife.

"Give me everything or I'll stab you," he said.

She handed over an undisclosed amount of money to the masked suspect, and the man fled the store heading east on

West Main Street.

The victim told police the suspect was a skinny white male between 5 feet 6 inches and 5 feet 8 inches tall. He was wearing a light gray hooded sweatshirt and black basketball-type shorts that had a white stripe running down the side. Anyone with information is asked to call the Nanticoke Police Department at 570-735-2200.

9/2/2014

**Former inmate targeted residence of other ex-inmate**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man suspected Thomas Worthy Painter burglarized his residence because they had served time together in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, according to charges filed.

Painter, 19, of Third Street, Glen Lyon, was arraigned Tuesday by District Judge Paul Roberts in Kingston on charges of burglary, criminal trespass, theft, receiving stolen property, possession of a controlled substance, criminal mischief and underage drinking. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$25,000 bail.

Police said William Fisher discovered the front door was forced open at his residence on West South Street Monday night. Fisher claimed a Sony Playstation 2, a baseball video game and video game components were stolen.

Fisher suspected Painter was responsible because he had served time with him at the county correctional facility and a 23.5 ounce can of Blast beer was found under his porch. Fisher told police Painter drinks Blast beer and had been at his residence on Sunday, according to the criminal complaint.

Police questioned Painter at his Glen Lyon residence. He initially denied any involvement until he allegedly admitted he went to Fisher's residence to retrieve the video game system, the complaint says.

Painter claimed the video game system was sold without his knowledge when he was jailed.

Police said in the complaint Painter had a pack of cigarettes that contained Suboxone without a prescription.

Court records say Painter was paroled on June 16 when he was awarded time served in jail on separate counts of robbery and possession of marijuana.

8/29/2014

**Nanticoke man charged with raping 5-year-old girl**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is accused of raping a 5-year-old girl multiple times in Wilkes-Barre, according to an affidavit.

William Charles Wunner, 28, unknown address, was charged with rape of a child, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child, two counts of aggravated indecent assault of a child, endangering the welfare of a child, corruption of minors, indecent exposure and indecent assault of a person less than 13 years old.

According to the affidavit filed by Wilkes-Barre police:

The grandmother of the child told officers she often babysat her granddaughter and during a weekend in June when she was helping the girl get dressed, she noticed her pulling away. The grandmother said she sat the girl down and told her there are "bad people although they may say not to tell, she could tell."

The girl started to shake and said somebody would kill her if she told. The grandmother assured her she was safe, and the girl told her Wunner would stand naked behind her and had sexually assaulted and raped her.

After being told by the grandmother, the mother of the victim came to police on June 22 to report what had happened to her daughter between April and May at a Wilkes-Barre residence. Police interviewed the victim on July 1, and the girl told police what she said to her grandmother was true and what Wunner did hurt her.

Wunner was jailed Friday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$30,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for Sept. 11 at 10 a.m. before Kane.

8/23/2014

**Nanticoke man faces charges for allegedly beating girlfriend**

Jory Heckman - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man beat his girlfriend so badly that she couldn't get out of bed, police said.

Nanticoke police arrested Michael Zagora, 42, of 60 W. Green St., on Thursday for allegedly striking Linda Spence in the head and ribs.

Officers responded to the Green Street apartment around 8:05 a.m. after Spence's daughter, Tammy Spence, reported that her mother had called her and said that Zagora had been beating her since Sunday, according to a police affidavit. Spence told officers that the line went dead and she wasn't able to call her mother back.

When police arrived at the scene, Zagora told officers that he had been sleeping, and that Spence was still in bed, according to the police affidavit. In the bedroom, officers said Spence was lying down, with a swollen face, bloody nose, and a severely bruised left ear.

Spence told officers that Zagora had kicked and punched her several times in the head and ribs since Sunday, according to the affidavit.

Police said a fresh blood stain was found on the living room floor where Spence had fallen. Officers said Spence was unable to move due to her injuries. She was transported to the Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center for treatment. Zagora was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, and harassment. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of the \$100,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. His preliminary hearing is set for 1 p.m. Aug. 27 before Whittaker.

8/21/2014

### **Guilty plea continued in Nanticoke man's child-porn case**

rdupuis@civitasmedia.com

A guilty plea in a Nanticoke man's child pornography case will have to wait until at least next week, after a representative from the Attorney General's Office was not present for a hearing on Monday.

Josh Gensel, 31, of East Green Street, allegedly told authorities his brain acted like the devil and an angel when they questioned him in February about allegedly viewing images and videos of boys and girls, mostly between the ages of 7 and 13.

"Half of my brain says that it isn't right, and the other half says to look at it," Gensel allegedly told investigators. Authorities served a search warrant at Gensel's residence and found a laptop computer that allegedly had four videos of suspected child pornography, the complaint says.

According to a criminal complaint, Gensel stated he had downloaded child pornography for 12 years, knowing he would eventually be caught.

Investigators said that Gensel told them, "when the police come to your house because of computers, it is because of child pornography."

Gensel also allegedly told authorities he was involved in many youth volunteer organizations but never had any sexual contact with children "because there were always other people around."

Court documents filed in connection with Gensel's plea continuance list seven counts: six counts of sexual abuse of children (child pornography offenses) and one count of criminal use of a communication facility.

His guilty plea hearing has been rescheduled for 9 a.m. Tuesday, at which time a representative of the AG's Office will be present, court documents state.

Contribute

8/11/2014

### **Cops: Man tried to sell gun in Nanticoke**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke police say there are many reasons Tennessee resident Sean David Brin shouldn't have had a gun. There is his lack of a concealed carry permit, his "multiple state, multiple offense" felony criminal history and a restraining order in New York that prohibits him from possessing firearms.

Nevertheless, police say Brin, 44, of Nashville, was drunk on Patriot Square peddling a stolen revolver to children. Brin set up shop hanging women's purses from a bicycle's handlebars and placing a plastic bottle filled with beer in a cup holder, according to police. In his pants pocket, police say they found a bag of synthetic marijuana.

Officers on Saturday charged Brin with illegal possession of a firearm, receiving stolen property, carrying a firearm without a license, possessing a controlled substance with the intent to distribute, drug and paraphernalia possession and public drunkenness. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

The incident began about 3 p.m. Saturday when a citizen reported someone was trying to sell a gun in the middle of Patriot Square. The man told police he had been walking through the park and asked Brin to light his cigarette when Brin offered to sell a .22-caliber Ruger revolver for \$150.

Brin also tried to sell the gun to “two kids on bicycles while waving the firearm around in the air” and also tried to sell “a nickel bag of fake weed” to the man who asked for a light, police said.

Police arrived to find Brin riding a silver Pacific Millennium mountain bike on South Prospect Street and stopped him near East Noble Street.

Police say Brin, who was nervous and “sweating profusely,” was under the influence of alcohol and admitted to drinking a beer at Patriot Square Park. He initially denied having anything illegal on him, but later admitted he had a revolver in a white purse that was dangling from the handlebars near the bottle of beer, according to a police affidavit filed in court.

When police tried to detain Brin, he pulled away and went toward the bike and the white purse, saying he wanted to stop the bike from falling over, according to police. Police then forced Brin to a patrol car and handcuffed him, police said. A subsequent search turned up the revolver, three 24-ounce cans of Keystone Ice in a silver purse that had also been on the handlebars, a silver air chuck that is often used to smoke marijuana and a cellophane cigarette wrapper containing synthetic marijuana, police said.

Police checked the firearm’s serial number and found it had been stolen during an Aug. 5 burglary of a South Prospect Street home during which the home was ransacked and a Stihl chainsaw was also taken.

Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast arraigned Brin on Sunday morning and set his bail at \$75,000. A preliminary hearing is set for Aug. 20 at 1 p.m.

8/11/2014

### **Woman charged with stabbing boyfriend**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke woman is facing felony assault charges after stabbing her boyfriend in the hand during a domestic dispute, according to Nanticoke police.

Beth Ann Bartle, 23, of 21 Agostina Drive, is charged with aggravated assault and two counts of simple assault following the stabbing reported about 4:15 a.m. Saturday.

Officers were dispatched to Agostina Drive for a report that a woman stabbed a man to the bone and that the woman was still on the scene.

Police found Shawn Ruzanski outside an apartment and saw the top of his hand was bleeding, according to a police affidavit. Ruzanski told police that Bartle, his girlfriend, had stabbed him with a knife during an argument, police said. Ruzanski directed police to a bedroom, where they found Bartle asleep in bed. After waking up, Bartle told police she had “had enough” and wanted Ruzanski to leave, but he refused, the affidavit says.

After Ruzanski continued to refuse to leave, Bartle got the knife and cut him, she told police.

Police arrested Bartle, who was arraigned Saturday morning and released on her own recognizance. A preliminary hearing is set for Aug. 13 at 1 p.m.

Ruzanski refused transport with medics and planned to go to an area hospital in a personal vehicle, according to police.

7/29/2014

### **Woman pleads guilty to charges related to Plymouth meth lab**

mguydish@civitasmedia.com

A 19-year-old woman pleaded guilty to a charge stemming from a raid at a suspected methamphetamine lab last year that left residents of an apartment building shivering in the cold Dec. 10 as law enforcement officials sifted through evidence.

Amanda Musto pleaded guilty to a charge of possession of materials with intent to make methamphetamine Monday. She faces a maximum sentence of seven years in prison and a \$13,000 fine. Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough accepted the plea Monday morning and set sentencing for Sept. 10.

Musto, of Nanticoke, was one of three people charged after a raid of Apt. 304 at 104 West Main Street in Plymouth. The others were Robert Jones, 28, and Cheryl Cupp, 44. Court documents list both as living in the apartment that was raided. Jones and Cupp also appeared before Vough Monday. He set a trial date for Sept. 15.

Initially, Musto was charged with three counts of possession of pre-cursor chemicals with the intent to manufacture methamphetamine, one count of manufacture of methamphetamine, one count of possession of methamphetamine, one count of risking a catastrophe, one count of illegal dumping of methamphetamine waste, one count of criminal conspiracy, one count of possession with the intent to deliver methamphetamine and one count of unlawful manufacture

of methamphetamine in a structure where a child under age 18 is present.

Cupp was charged with three counts of possession of pre-cursor chemicals with the intent to manufacture a controlled substance, one count of criminal conspiracy and one count of possession of methamphetamine.

Jones was charged with three counts of possession of pre-cursor chemicals with the intent to manufacture methamphetamine, one count of manufacture of methamphetamine, one count of possession of methamphetamine, one count of risking a catastrophe, one count of illegal dumping of methamphetamine waste, one count of criminal conspiracy, one count of possession with the intent to deliver methamphetamine and one count of unlawful manufacture of methamphetamine in a structure where a child under age 18 is present.

7/29/2014

### **Judge to alleged burglar: No bail change without address change**

[mgyudish@civitasmedia.com](mailto:mgyudish@civitasmedia.com)

Earl Hoopingarner had several reasons he felt his bail should be reduced in the case of a December 2013 ransacking of a Nanticoke home. But he lacked the one thing Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough required: An address other than that of his co-defendant in the case.

In a brief hearing Monday morning seeking a reduction of bail from \$250,000, Hoopingarner's argument was that he was not a flight risk, had family in the area and that his co-defendant had a lower bail and was out of prison while awaiting trial.

Vough noted Hoopingarner listed his address as the same as his co-defendant, and said bluntly he would not reduce bail as long as that was the case. Vough suggested Hoopingarner "get a new address" and try for reduced bail again.

Hoopingarner, 28, and Shane Hempel, 24, were both charged with ransacking a house on Enterprise Street on Nov. 29. Each initially had bail set at \$25,000, but it was increased to \$250,000 after police withdrew the initial charges and filed new ones on Feb. 19 this year.

At the time, the two were arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker on burglary, criminal conspiracy, theft, receiving stolen property and theft charges. Hoopingarner was further charged with identity theft, receiving stolen property, access device fraud and criminal attempt.

Items stolen included a Greater Nanticoke Area class ring, jewelry, beer, a rifle, digital cameras, computer paper, dog food and a credit card, according to the criminal complaints. Hoopingarner used the stolen credit cards at several stores in the area, according to police. Shane Hempel's sister, Janice Hempel, 23, of Nanticoke, was charged with receiving stolen property and criminal conspiracy.

7/25/2014

### **Five arrested in authorities' buy-bust operation**

[Citizens Voice](http://CitizensVoice.com)

The Wilkes-Barre police Anti-Crime Unit along with state police at Wyoming arrested five in a buy-bust operation Wednesday, police said.

Confidential informants made buys throughout the city Wednesday, resulting in busts yielding either crack cocaine or heroin, police said.

Police arrested the following: Nicholas Sando, 59, of Nanticoke; Angela Espinosa, 43, of Shavertown; John Witherspoon, 29, of Queens, New York; Amos Coker, 26, of Ashley; and Terrell Humphrey, 29, of Wilkes-Barre. During the operation, police said they also recovered two handguns recovered and a bulletproof vest.

7/21/2014

### **Woman pleads guilty to Nanticoke assault**

[jhalpin@citizensvoice.com](mailto:jhalpin@citizensvoice.com)

A woman involved in a fight that led to a notorious Nanticoke barroom slashing pleaded guilty Monday to simple assault and purchasing alcohol as a minor.

Melanie Figueroa, 22, of 140 Sharpe St., Nanticoke, was accused of being a primary aggressor in the January 2012, box-cutter slashing that severely injured Jennifer Mieczkowski — although she was not charged in the slashing.

Her attorney, Allyson Kacmarski, noted during the proceeding that Figueroa "did not cause" Mieczkowski's severe injuries and indicated Figueroa intends to seek house arrest as a punishment during sentencing, which was set for Sept. 9

at 9 a.m.

Figueroa faces up to two years in jail and a maximum fine of \$5,000, Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts said. The case began about 2 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2012, when officers were dispatched to the former Prospect Street Cafe at 23 S. Prospect St., Nanticoke, for a report of a brawl. Mieczkowski sustained severe injuries to the face after being slashed with the box cutter.

Witnesses reported that several fights took place within the bar but that the first began when a patron, Briana Engle, was assaulted, according to police.

Engle and two people who accompanied her to the bar, Justin and Shawn Eckrote, reported that Figueroa was acting disorderly, police said. Justin Eckrote suggested they leave and avoid getting into an altercation, police said.

But just before the group left, Figueroa came up behind Engle and pulled her to the ground by the hair, according to the affidavit.

Figueroa beat Engle until Justin Eckrote pulled her off, at which point Figueroa confronted Mieczkowski, who also tried to intervene, police said. Witnesses reported Figueroa then began punching Mieczkowski, police said.

Mieczkowski testified during a preliminary hearing that after Figueroa began hitting her with closed fists, she got on top of Figueroa and that someone else hit her in the back of the head.

After the fight broke up, Mieczkowski said, "I stood up and blood started running down my face."

Figueroa told police a bouncer had let her into the bar without checking her identification. She admitted pulling Engle off a bar stool in an unprovoked attack, but she denied attacking Mieczkowski, police said.

But surveillance footage and witnesses statements backed up Mieczkowski's version of events, according to police.

No one has ever been charged in the slashing.

Mieczkowski sued two weeks after the slashing, alleging the bar and its owner, Paul Halliday, should have taken steps to protect her from the assault, including properly training a bouncer and employees on security techniques; dressing the bouncer in a uniform; and maintaining a blacklist for banned patrons.

Court records indicate that case is still pending, although the bar no longer exists. Halliday lost the property in March 2013, when it was sold at a sheriff's sale because of overdue mortgage payments, taxes and other bills.

7/21/2014

### **Figueroa pleads guilty to simple assault in Nanticoke bar melee**

[mguydish@civitasmedia.com](mailto:mguydish@civitasmedia.com)

Melanie Figueroa pleaded guilty to a single count of simple assault in a case spawned by a Jan. 1, 2012 Nanticoke bar melee that left a victim with permanent facial scars from multiple slash wounds. Figueroa faces a maximum sentence of 2 years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Figueroa, 22, was charged with initiating a fight when she allegedly attacked Briana Engle, 23, and Jennifer Mieczkowski, 32, in the now-closed Prospect Street Cafe on South Prospect Street in Nanticoke. Mieczkowski suffered multiple cuts in the brawl.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough accepted the guilty plea Monday and scheduled sentencing for Sept. 9.

As she had done at the preliminary hearing in January, Figueroa's attorney, Allyson Kacmarski, noted on the record that the victim had suffered injuries she contends were not inflicted by Figueroa. During that preliminary hearing, Engle testified that Figueroa approached her from behind and punched her, knocking both of them to the ground. Engle was not hurt.

Mieczkowski then testified she went into the bar with a friend to buy a 12-pack of beer, got into a shouting match with Figueroa that led to punches being thrown and the two hitting the floor in a fight. Mieczkowski said that, when she stood up, blood was running from multiple cuts to her face.

A charge of simple assault was forwarded to Luzerne County Court and trial was set to start today, but when the parties approached the bench, she offered the guilty plea instead. Figueroa also pleaded guilty to a summary offense of purchasing alcohol as a minor. She was 20 at the time of the incident.

7/20/2014

### **Police say two women face charges after trespassing**

[jllycott@civitasmedia.com](mailto:jllycott@civitasmedia.com) - (570) 991-6120

Police said Briana Robinson, 26, of Nanticoke and Stephany Serra, 26, of Hanover Township were arrested early Saturday after they entered a home in the Marion Terrace Apartment complex without the resident's permission. The

women were seen inside the residence and later fled, police said. Robinson stole the resident's key in order to gain entry, police said. The women face charges of criminal trespass and Robinson faces an additional charge of theft, police said. Robinson and Serra were taken to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for arraignment.

7/7/2014

**Robert Monaco, 51, of Nanticoke, pleaded guilty to a charge of corruption of minors.**

Monaco was originally charged with attempting to lure a child into a motor vehicle.

He was arrested after Pittston police were called to a report of a man asking juvenile females to get in his car while they waited at a school bus stop on Mill Street in February.

Police soon located Monaco in a Pittston bar and took him into custody.

At the police station, Monaco was seen on camera smashing a light and placing a piece of the light bulb on his neck, threatening to cut himself, police said. According to police, officers used a stun gun on Monaco after he refused to drop the glass. Monaco also pleaded guilty to a charge of resisting arrest.

Luzerne County Judge Joseph Sklarosky Jr. will sentence Monaco on Sept. 4.

7/4/2014

**Nanticoke man guilty of fraud**

Times Leader

A Nanticoke man accused of presenting fraudulent prescriptions at several pharmacies pleaded guilty to related charges in Luzerne County Court.

Marc J. Zawadzki, 41, of Center Street, pleaded guilty to four counts of acquiring a controlled substance by fraud.

Prosecutors withdrew charges of forgery and criminal use of communications facility against Zawadzki.

Authorities with the state Office of Attorney General's Bureau of Narcotics Investigations and Drug Control and Pittston police accused Zawadzki with presenting bogus prescriptions using his name and a woman's name, and signing the prescriptions in the names of two physicians at a pharmacy on South River Street, Plains Township, and in Pittston on South Main Street and Kennedy Boulevard from August 2013 to February 2014, according to the criminal complaints.

Judge Joseph Sklarosky Jr. said Zawadzki will be sentenced Aug. 11.

7/3/2014

**State police: Man offered teen drugs for firearms**

Jory Heckman - Citizens Voice

Police say a Wilkes-Barre man offered a 14-year-old girl drugs in exchange for her grandfather's guns.

What he gave her, troopers said, turned out to be a bag of oregano.

State police at Wyoming arrested Robert W. Belcher, 29, on Tuesday for offering synthetic marijuana to a 14-year-old girl in Nanticoke in exchange for guns. Troopers said Belcher has a prior conviction for burglary, and his criminal record prevents him from owning firearms.

Troopers said Belcher texted the juvenile and asked her if she wanted to buy synthetic marijuana from him. When she told him she did not have any money, police said Belcher asked if she had access to any guns. She told troopers she sent a picture of her grandfather's guns to Belcher.

Police said Belcher drove to the juvenile's house and picked up the guns, which she placed near the back porch. The girl said Belcher left her a bag of oregano in exchange.

In an affidavit, troopers said Belcher is currently homeless. He had been living with friends who recently kicked him out for a physical altercation, police said.

Belcher was charged with receiving stolen property, prohibited possession of a firearm and corruption of minors. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to pay the \$75,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge James Dixon. His preliminary hearing is set for 1 p.m. July 9 before Dixon.

6/25/2014

**Two vehicles reported stolen in Nanticoke**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating a report of two stolen vehicles.

Police said a resident reported the vehicles were taken from Lawrence Street on Saturday.

Neighbors told police a black rollback truck took both of the vehicles: a 2005 black Chevrolet Equinox with a state registration of DMY1459 and a blue 2003 Mitsubishi Galant with a state registration of GMH6185.

Anyone with information can call the Nanticoke Police Department at 570-735-2200.

6/25/2014

### **Mother accused of kicking her child in the head**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A woman who allegedly kicked her 5-year-old child in the head, fought with officers and broke a police car window is charged with simple assault and other offenses, Ashley Borough police said.

Police charged Angel M. Yaskiewicz, 27, of 109 W. Grand St., Nanticoke, with two counts of simple assault, resisting arrest, institutional vandalism, disorderly conduct, harassment and criminal trespassing. Charges stem from a fight between Yaskiewicz and her ex-boyfriend on June 7 that police responded to around 11 p.m., according to an affidavit. Police said during the dispute at a home on Ashley Street, Yaskiewicz punched her ex-boyfriend in the face, kicked the child in the head and ripped off another woman's shirt and bra. She also resisted arrest and bent the back window of a police car until it shattered, police said. When police stunned her with a Taser, she started kicking one of the officers, according to the affidavit.

Yaskiewicz remains free on \$10,000 unsecured bail set by Magisterial District Judge Joseph Halesey. Her preliminary hearing is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. July 1 before Halesey.

6/25/2014

### **Man gets 3 to 6 years in prison for burglary spree**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is headed to state prison for a minimum of three years for a lengthy theft and burglary spree that targeted homes and United States military vehicles.

Adam Kuren, 30, was in court Tuesday for sentencing for seven different crimes, most of them break-ins and thefts at residential homes, including a burglary at 1002 S. Prospect St. in Nanticoke on Thanksgiving Day 2012.

In one case, Kuren broke into military vehicles at the Pennsylvania Army National Guard armory in Nanticoke while out on bail for a host of other crimes.

Luzerne County Judge Fred Pierantoni on Tuesday ordered Kuren to spend three to six years in prison.

6/23/2014

### **Nanticoke burglary defendant sentenced in county court**

rdupuis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man on Monday was sentenced to spend eight to 23 months in the Luzerne County Correctional facility in connection with a burglary case, but then immediately paroled because the 261 days he already has served exceeded the minimum sentence.

Eric Sommers, 23, of East Ridge Street, will now spend two years on probation for a second theft case, and must find a job within 90 days, county Judge Michael Vough ordered.

According to police:

On June 29, Sommers allegedly sold stolen copper and other metal to a scrap yard, then he and his brother Kenneth Sommers, 28, and another man went to Wilkes-Barre to buy heroin, interviews with the suspects revealed.

Eric Sommers pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor theft count in that case.

On Aug. 9, officers responded to a warehouse on North Market Street in Glen Lyon, where two men reportedly were stealing metal. Sommers and his brother were found in vehicle loaded up with a large amount of metal from the building.

Eric Sommers pleaded guilty to one felony count of burglary in that case.

The status of Kenneth Sommers' charges could not immediately be confirmed.

Eric Sommers must pay \$1,700 to Voynton Contractors for copper pipe stolen in the June incident last year.

6/12/2014

### **Nanticoke woman pleads guilty to stealing money from employer**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

A woman from Nanticoke accused of stealing money from her employer and checks from her boyfriend's mother pleaded guilty to theft related charges in Luzerne County Court.

Brandy Peters, 31, of Center Street, pleaded guilty to separate counts of theft by unlawful taking and a single count of false report to law enforcement authorities.

Judge Fred Pierantoni III said Peters will be sentenced on Aug. 21.

According to the criminal complaints:

Peters was hired at Lattimer Machine and Fabricating in Hazle Township in October 2012 as a secretary with duties that included processing payroll.

From Nov. 15, 2012 to April 2, 2013, state police said Peters paid herself at an unauthorized hourly rate and for hours she did not work, the complaint says.

State police said in the complaint Peters opened a Staples charge account without permission and wrote four checks to herself from the business' account.

Authorities said Peters had stolen \$16,808 from Lattimer Machine and Fabricating during her brief employment.

Nanticoke police said Peters had stolen 60 checks from her boyfriend's mother, and cashed the checks with amounts under \$10 but requested cash back during transactions, according to the complaint.

Fairview Township police said Peters was one of three people who claimed they stumbled upon an unresponsive man lying on state Route 437 on June 14. Police later determined Peters and two others were with the man who had overdosed on heroin, and made up the story that they found him unresponsive on the state roadway, the complaint says.

6/7/2014

### **Newport Twp. couple arrested in domestic dispute**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Published: June 7, 2014

Newport Township police arrested a couple after the boyfriend choked his girlfriend for throwing rocks at him, according to police affidavits.

Richard L. Rudy Jr., 39, of 1012 W. Main Ave., Nanticoke, and April L. Mitchell, 23, of 331 W. Shawnee Ave., Plymouth, were jailed Thursday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on assault charges.

Mitchell was sitting on a guardrail with Rudy beside her when police pulled up to them near Mill and Jim's Parkway Inn on the Kirmar Parkway, according to affidavits. As Chief Jeremy Blank got out of his vehicle, Rudy told him he was too late and he had already been hit with the rocks, arrest papers said.

Mitchell told the officer that Rudy choked her, according to arrest papers. Blank said there was redness and slight swelling around Mitchell's throat where she said Rudy had both his hands around her neck. Mitchell told police Rudy threatened to kill her and slammed her off the guardrail, according to arrest papers.

Police also charged Rudy with possessing drug paraphernalia after they found two marijuana pipes on him, which arrest papers said he denied were his.

The couple's preliminary hearing is scheduled for 2 p.m. June 25 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, who set Rudy's bail at 10 percent of \$10,000 and set Mitchell's at 10 percent of \$2,500.

6/3/2014

### **LCCF inmate arraigned after allegedly bringing in drugs**

Jory Heckman - Citizens Voice

An inmate at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility was arraigned on charges Friday after allegedly bringing drugs into jail.

According to agents from the state attorney general's office:

Michael Rentko, 30, of 151 Park St. in Nanticoke, brought benzodiazepine powder, which is related to drugs like Xanax and Valium, with him to court and then snuck it into prison.

Agents found the drugs on Rentko during a strip search on Aug. 27, 2013. Rentko told agents that while appearing for a court date, he hid about 4 or 5 grams of benzodiazepine powder in a piece of rubber glove and put it in his pants pocket.

When he was remanded to prison, Rentko dropped the drugs into a box that contained his prison clothes. Over the course of several days, he used the powder undetected until a majority of it was stolen during an assault by other inmates. Rentko was originally jailed on theft charges.

Rentko was charged with one count of possession of a controlled substance and one count of intentional possession of a controlled substance. His preliminary hearing is set for 10 a.m. June 12 before Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane.

5/31/2014

### **Parents face manslaughter charges in infant's death**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

When police initially questioned Tracey A. Gonda about the death of her 2½-month-old infant son — who was found wedged in a seat cushion of a recliner — they say she insisted she had placed the child safely into his bassinet the night before.

But her other son, a 4-year-old, told police otherwise.

While police were questioning Gonda, the 4-year-old, identified by police only as MG, interrupted, saying his baby brother “was lying face down with his head between the cushion.”

Gonda tried to discredit what MG had said.

“(MG), no he wasn’t,” Gonda said. “He was in the bassinet. What did I tell you about making up stories?”

Police say the mother eventually came clean.

They say Gonda drank a couple beers and dozed off sitting on the recliner Feb. 13 with the baby, Jaxon Eckrote, in her arms. Sometime during the night, she woke up and went upstairs to go back to sleep. The next morning when she came downstairs she discovered her son wedged in the seat cushion of the recliner and his legs pointing in the air.

“I feel asleep on the recliner and later found him,” she told police.

The parents involved in the death of Jaxon Eckrote are free on bail following their arraignments Friday on charges of involuntary manslaughter and endangering the welfare of children.

Gonda, 40, and Corey L. Eckrote, 49, both of Nanticoke, each posted 10 percent property bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. Gonda was also charged with recklessly endangering another person and giving false reports to law enforcement.

According to the arrest affidavit filed by the Nanticoke Police Department:

Jaxon Eckrote was alive for 84 days. When Gonda gave birth to him on Nov. 22, Gonda tested positive for “dangerous drugs.” Gonda used drugs throughout her pregnancy and had no prenatal care, but she claimed she was unaware she was pregnant.

Master Romilsa Crocamo presided over a shelter care hearing on Dec. 6 and ruled that legal and physical custody of Jaxon Eckrote and Gonda’s 4-year-old son from a previous relationship would be given to Corey Eckrote.

The couple often fought over caring for their son and complained about not getting enough rest. Gonda was permitted to have supervised visits with her two children.

Lauren Griffin, a caseworker for Children and Youth, was assigned to the supervision of those visits. However, Gonda’s mother, Deborah Goodman, told investigators Griffin wouldn’t stay all that long, noting, “Everyone got lax with Tracey being there alone.”

Gonda’s mother and her father, Goodman, also helped out with caring for the two children. Deborah Goodman said her daughter and Corey Eckrote’s relationship has its “ups and down.” Gonda had been complaining lately of him being a “slob” and not doing his fair share with the children.

That night before Gonda fell asleep on the recliner she asked Corey Eckrote to watch their son so she could lie down, but after 15 minutes, he handed Jaxon Eckrote back to her, saying he had to be up for work in the morning.

On Feb. 14, after Gonda discovered her son’s body, the first call Gonda made was to her mother. The second was to 911.

Police were dispatched to a residence at rear 340 E. Noble St. around 9:20 a.m.

Police found what appeared to be dried saliva or another type of bodily fluid on the cushion, and the bassinet Gonda said she had placed Jaxon Eckrote in didn’t appear to be used recently, as a neatly folded blanket was set in it.

Luzerne County Coroner Bill Lisman examined Jaxon Eckrote, noting the following injuries: open wounds to the left hand and fingers; impressions on the forehead, hairline and tip of the nose; and postmortem lividity to the right side of the face. A strong odor of urine also emanated from him as his clothing and diaper were saturated with urine.

Forensic pathologist Dr. Gary Ross also performed an autopsy Feb. 15 at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital and determined Eckrote’s death was a homicide by asphyxia.

MG was taken in by Children and Youth, and both Gonda and Corey Eckrote had to submit urine samples. Gonda tested positive for alcohol, and Corey Eckrote tested positive for hydrocodone, hydromorphone and alcohol, according to authorities.

A court order required Gonda to submit random drug testing. Out of the 70 days the court order stood in place, she tested positive six times for drugs including cocaine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone and alcohol. Gonda's and Corey Eckrote's preliminary hearings are set for 3 p.m. June 4 before Whittaker.

5/31/2014

### **Man who ran over friend released on parole**

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

A man who fatally ran over his best friend with a Jeep nine years ago in Nanticoke has been released from prison on parole, court records show.

Brandon Obaza, now 28, was released from custody on Sunday, according to documents filed in Luzerne County Court by the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole.

Investigators charged Obaza with intentionally driving over 25-year-old Stephen S. Novak on July 17, 2005 in a remote area of Nanticoke, leaving him pinned underneath the vehicle, where he died of head trauma.

Obaza told police Novak had a death wish and the murder was a "mercy killing," police said at the time.

After Obaza pleaded guilty to third-degree murder, then-Luzerne County Judge Mark A. Ciavarella Jr. sentenced Obaza to serve six to 12 years in state prison.

Obaza has been up for parole since July 2011 and his maximum sentence would have expired on July 16, 2017.

At the time of the murder, police said they investigated the possibility of the killing having satanic and occult overtones — as items used in satanic worship were found in the homes of Obaza and Novak — but never concluded whether there was any relation.

5/31/2014

### **Five plead guilty in prostitution sting**

Brendan Gibbons - Citizens Voice

Five of 12 people arrested in a prostitution sting by Pennsylvania State Police this month have pleaded guilty.

On May 8, undercover troopers with the state police Bureau of Criminal Investigations, posing as johns, met prostitutes at the Hampton Inn at 22 Montage Mountain Road and the Econo Lodge at 1175 Kane St. in Scranton.

Undercover troopers made contact with prostitutes over the phone, then arranged to meet them at one of the motels. The troopers and suspects met from 7 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Eight of the 12 arrived in pairs. Two came alone. One, Toni V. Korsakas, 27, of 64 S. Main St., Ashley, was dropped off by Michael J. Hausknecht, 34, of 711 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre, whose vehicle was caught on surveillance video.

Hausknecht pleaded guilty to promoting prostitution.

Caitlin Dillon, 27, of 262 Apollo Circle, Nanticoke, who arrived with Lisa Marie St. George, 32, of 145 Park St., Nanticoke, told troopers she works for another woman whose name could not be verified. She drove them there, Dillon told troopers, and agreed to split the money three ways.

Efforts to reach state police spokeswoman Trooper Connie Devens were not successful.

Prices ranged from \$100 for "full service" to \$325 for oral sex, according to state police. Once the money changed hands, troopers made their arrests.

Lauren M. Rushton, 28, of 16 Cherry St., Wilkes-Barre; Angela T. Diaz, 36, of Wilkes-Barre; Robyn L. Frederick, 38, of 148 S. Lincoln Ave., Scranton; and Korsakas entered guilty pleas on two preliminary hearing dates, May 14 and May 30.

Judges Terrence Gallagher and Theodore Giglio ordered them to pay around \$560 in fines and fees. Preliminary hearings for St. George, Dillon and Kyla C. Sepulveda, 25, of 95 Russell St., Kingston, were continued until Sept. 2. Formal arraignments for Christal L. Mutua, 28, of 82 Division St., Hanover Township; Tobitha Mozisek, 24, of 243 Hazle St., Wilkes-Barre; and Shaquana Clayborn, 23, of Trenton, N.J. are set for June 27. An arraignment for Taquana S. Jenkins, 23, of 263 Park Ave., Wilkes-Barre, is July 11.

Unsecured bail was set at \$5,000 for all but Rushton. All are free.

5/30/2014

## **Parents face charges in infant death**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Parents charged in the death of their 2½-month-old infant son are free on bail following their arraignment today on charges of involuntary manslaughter and endangering the welfare of children.

Tracey A. Gonda, 40, and Corey L. Eckrote, 49, both of Nanticoke, each posted 10 percent property bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. Gonda was also charged with recklessly endangering another person and giving false reports to law enforcement.

Nanticoke police were dispatched to a residence at rear 340 E. Noble St. around 9:20 a.m. Feb. 14 to investigate the death of infant Jaxon Eckrote, according to police. Nanticoke police said Gonda found her son dead with his head wedged in the seat cushion of a recliner.

On Feb. 15, the day after Jaxon's body was found, the Luzerne County Coroner's Office ruled the death a homicide. Forensic pathologist Dr. Gary Ross performed an autopsy Feb. 15 at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital and determined Eckrote's death was a homicide by asphyxia.

5/30/2014

### **Police: Parents fought over sleep; caring for baby**

### **Nanticoke police allege Tracey Gonda drank alcohol, fell asleep with baby in her arms**

Arrest papers for a couple charged in the death of their 2 1/2 month old son allege they often fought over caring for the baby in order to get sleep as the mother consumed alcohol before dozing off with the infant in her arms.

Tracey Gonda, 40, and Corey L. Eckrote, 49, surrendered Friday morning on involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment charges. Gonda was also charged with false reports to law enforcement and reckless endangerment. They were arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke and released after each posted \$50,000 bail. City police allege Tracey Gonda, after drinking two 24 ounce cans of a malt liquor, fell asleep in a recliner with Jaxon Eckrote in her arms on Feb. 14. The baby was found dead several hours later wedged in the recliner, according to the criminal complaint.

Police allege Gonda and Eckrote passed the baby to each other as they both needed sleep on Feb. 14. Eckrote had the baby for 15 minutes before giving the infant back to Gonda as he claimed he needed sleep because he had work the next morning, the complaint says.

An autopsy by forensic pathologist Dr. Gary Ross revealed Jaxon Eckrote died from asphyxiation. The manner of death was ruled a homicide by Luzerne County Coroner William Lisman.

Arrest papers say Gonda was using "dangerous drugs" during her pregnancy with Jaxon and had no pre-natal care. Jaxon was born with medical complications due to Gonda's drug use, the complaint says.

Luzerne County Children and Youth became involved with Gonda and Eckrote as they cared for a second, older child. Cory Eckrote was awarded custody of Jaxon and the older girl with Gonda authorized for supervised visitation.

5/29/2014

### **Shape Up sentences imposed; ring leader receives state prison term**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

Seven people arrested in Operation Shape Up, an investigation that targeted cocaine and marijuana trafficking from a barbershop in Wilkes-Barre, were sentenced in Luzerne County Court last week.

The ring leader, John "Johnny Bambimo" Miller, 27, of Plymouth, associates Anthony "AJ" Wisneski, 31, of Nanticoke, and David Atkinson, 24, of Nanticoke, were the only three who received state prison sentences.

Drug agents with the state Office of Attorney General's Bureau of Narcotics Investigation and Luzerne County Drug Task Force charged 16 people in June and July in an investigation that targeted the cocaine and marijuana smuggling of John Miller.

Authorities alleged associate Ramon Colon, 27, of Mayflower Crossing apartments, Wilkes-Barre, used the Master Cuts barbershop on Hazle Street, Wilkes-Barre, as a hub for much of the organization's cocaine and marijuana trafficking operations.

The barbershop, a furniture store, a vacant warehouse and several houses were simultaneously searched by drug agents on June 28.

Authorities believe John Miller and his associates were responsible for trafficking at least 20 kilos of cocaine with an

estimated street value of \$2 million, and at least 200 pounds of marijuana with an estimated street value of \$600,000 from November 2012 to the time of the searches.

Judge Lisa Gelb imposed sentences on the seven people on Friday. They are:

- John Miller received seven to 14 years in state prison on charges of corrupt organizations, criminal conspiracy and possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance.
- Anthony Wisneski received three to six years in state prison on charges of corrupt organizations, criminal conspiracy and possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance.
- Shannon Wisneski, 37, of Nanticoke, received three years in the county's Intermediate Punishment Program with the first six months on house arrest with electronic monitoring on charges of criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility.
- Amy Miller, 45, John Miller's mother, received three years in the Intermediate Punishment Program with the first 18 months house arrest and 12 months of electronic monitoring on charges of criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility.
- David Atkinson, 24, of Nanticoke, received two to four years in state prison and two years probation on charges of corrupt organizations, criminal conspiracy and delivery of a controlled substance.
- Kieth Wasiakowski, 27, of Nanticoke, received 12 months, less one day, to two years, less two days in the county prison on charges of criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility.
- William "Brooklyn Bill" Pezzella, 51, of Nanticoke, received three years in the Intermediate Punishment Program with the first 12 months on house arrest and six months of electronic monitoring on charges of criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility.

Those whose cases remain open include:

- Kim Chan, 50, of Lehman Township, charged with criminal conspiracy and possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. A pre-trial hearing is scheduled on July 11.
- Ramon Colon, Mayflower Crossings, Wilkes-Barre, charged with corrupt organizations and delivery of a controlled substance. Sentencing hearing is scheduled on Aug. 22.
- Alexandra Mateo, 22, wife of Ramon Colon, charged with corrupt organizations and possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. Sentencing hearing is scheduled on Aug. 22.
- Brandon Hynes, 24, of Ashley, charged with criminal conspiracy and delivery of a controlled substance. Sentencing hearing is scheduled on July 11.
- David "Pocho" Castro, 39, of Hazleton, charged with corrupt organizations, possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility.
- Freddy Reyes, 46, of Mountain Top, and David Hernandez, 25, of Wilkes-Barre, are charged with corrupt organizations, possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, delivery of a controlled substance, criminal use of communication facility and criminal conspiracy. Trial is scheduled on June 2.
- Michael "Poppi" Kane, 34, of Wilkes-Barre, pleaded guilty in February to corrupt organizations, criminal conspiracy and possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. Unknown if he was sentenced.

Previously sentenced was Michael "Tone" Rosario, 24, of Nanticoke, who received five years probation on a criminal conspiracy charge for Operation Shape Up and two to four years in state prison on a 2011 unrelated drug arrest.

5/29/2014

### **Nanticoke burglary suspects ordered to stand trial**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Two men accused in a Thanksgiving Day burglary of a Nanticoke home will face trial in county court, a judge ruled Wednesday after two days of testimony.

Police say Earl Hoopingarner, 28, ransacked and looted the home of Krystle Lampman at 201 Enterprise St. while Shane Hempel, 25, served as a lookout. After postponing his decision in order to review all the evidence presented, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker sent the slew of charges against the two men over to the Luzerne County Court of Common pleas on Wednesday.

Attorneys for the two men agree someone broke into the Nanticoke home, but argued there's no evidence that their clients were responsible.

State Trooper Bryan Fedor testified on May 20 that he had interviewed Hempel, who admitted to his and Hoopingarner's role after being arrested in December. Hoopingarner's attorney, Mark Bufalino, and Hempel's attorney, John Donovan Jr., called the trooper's testimony hearsay.

Bufalino said while he concedes the home was broken into, he disagrees with what he called a lack of proof that Hempel and Hoopingarner are the ones who committed the burglary, saying prosecutors were relying on hearsay to establish evidence.

Assistant District Attorney Michelle Hardik argued that hearsay is admissible at a preliminary hearing and said Fedor was directly involved with the investigation.

“He’s testifying to what (Hoopingarner) did, not what he said,” Hardik said.

In addition to burglary charges, Hoopingarner was charged in February with several counts of receiving stolen property and identity theft. Trooper Stephen Turinski testified that Hoopingarner appeared to be the man in surveillance recordings who used Lampman’s credit cards, which had been reported missing after the burglary.

Formal arraignments for Hoopingarner and Hempel are scheduled for 9 a.m. Aug. 1 at the Luzerne County Courthouse. They remain jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$250,000 each.

Janice Hempel, 23, also faces charges in connection with the burglary for receiving stolen property. She testified against her brother, Shane Hempel, and her boyfriend, Hoopingarner, saying they came home the night of the burglary with duffle bags of jewelry — including a Pandora bracelet Hoopingarner gave her — and other items. She said prosecutors did not offer her anything in exchange for her testimony.

Her charges were bound to the Court of Common Pleas after she waived her preliminary hearing and Whittaker gave her \$100,000 unsecured bail. Her formal arraignment is also set for Aug. 1.

5/28/2014

### **Convicted club drug smuggler Peter Sepling spent \$30,000 on women, booze, drugs**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man who served two years in federal prison for operating a drug ring that distributed steroids and ecstasy in 2007 is returning to federal prison for a longer time.

U.S. District Court Judge A. Richard Caputo on Tuesday sentenced Peter Sepling, 43, of East Grand Street, to eight years, six months in prison for importing the club drug Gamma Butyrolactone, or GBL, from China in April 2011. Sepling, who faced up to 20 years in prison, was sentenced for purchasing three kilos of GBL that he ordered under a bogus name and had it delivered to the residence of John Nikoloff in West Wyoming. Nikoloff was sentenced in November to two years probation.

During Tuesday’s court proceeding, Sepling’s attorney, Joseph Nahas, said Sepling was rearrested in January for ordering methylone, a controlled substance since 2011, from a source in China.

Assistant U.S. Attorney William Houser said investigators learned from a concealed recording device worn by a confidential informant that Sepling earned \$30,000, his share of profits for ordering methylone for another man who has not been charged.

By his own admission, Sepling said he “wasted” the money on women, booze and drugs.

“I was a mess,” Sepling said. “It’s embarrassing what I was doing. All the money I made on this, I spent on girls. I need to be in prison to break these things.”

Sepling, a former bodybuilder, spoke for more than 10 minutes describing how he felt alone after his father died in March 2013, drinking 20 shots of liquor and consuming a large amount of beer each day to help him sleep. On weekends, Sepling said he would party with girls he would call and invite to his house to consume more alcohol and drugs.

“I started calling bad girls over on the weekends,” Sepling said. “I’m a nice guy. I’m even a nice guy when I’m high.”

Sepling, who stands 6 feet, 5 inches and weighs 260 pounds, said he was addicted to food, drugs and alcohol. At one point, Sepling stopped himself after saying he was embarrassed for having, “unprotected sex.”

“Whatever I get, I deserve,” Sepling said, noting he probably would be dead in a year if he continued his party lifestyle.

Although he wasn’t charged with ordering methylone, the offense was used toward his sentence on ordering GBL, a club drug that has less impact than ecstasy. He pleaded guilty to the federal charge in October.

Sepling said he never distributed GBL to other people, and used it himself “as a bodybuilding thing.”

In 2007, Sepling pleaded guilty to conspiring to distribute ketamine, a tranquilizer that is a popular “club drug.”

Authorities said Sepling obtained large quantities of the drug from a source in India.

5/24/2014

### **Teen driver in fatal hit-and-run sent to Danville facility**

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

Lenient judges in Luzerne County cared more about a reckless, remorseless teenage driver than the man he severed into pieces in a violent, high-speed crash last July in Nanticoke, the victim's daughter said in a letter read in court Friday. In various court proceedings, Tyler Duda's plight overshadowed the horrific way Nickolas Zurilla's life ended: dismembered and instantly killed by an out-of-control speeding car driven by Duda, Zurilla's daughter Kristy Place wrote.

"His life was downplayed by these hearings," Place said in the letter read by a prosecutor during Duda's sentencing hearing Friday in juvenile court.

Duda pleaded guilty last week in juvenile court to killing 59-year-old Zurilla, cutting him into three pieces after crashing into him at 72 mph around 2:15 a.m. on July 5 as Zurilla was leaving a party held across the street from his West Union Street home.

Place slammed Duda as a constant troublemaker who lacked remorse, doubling down on a mention by prosecutors that Duda has racked up 24 infractions since being placed in custody after his arrest in September.

"He sat there yawning after pictures of my dismembered dad were shown in court at the first hearing," Place said.

Luzerne County Juvenile Court Judge William Amesbury, appearing to come to tears, told Place he understands the grief the family is going through.

Amesbury ordered Duda, now 17, to be placed in North Central Secure Treatment Unit, a secured juvenile detention center on the grounds of Danville State Hospital in Montour County that has more restrictions than other facilities that have housed Duda. The judge ordered Duda's status to be reviewed every six months to see if he has been rehabilitated, but the first review will be held in 60 days. Duda pleaded guilty last week to charges of homicide by vehicle, involuntary manslaughter, causing a fatal accident while unlicensed and several traffic offenses. Since placement until age 21 is the maximum penalty in the juvenile system, Duda is facing up to 3½ years in a detention facility, but will be released if a judge determines he's rehabilitated.

Duda was originally charged with third-degree murder in adult court and faced a maximum of 20 to 40 years in state prison. Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb recently moved his case to juvenile court.

"We did everything we could to have him held accountable in the adult system," Assistant District Attorney Mamie Phillips said in court.

She told Amesbury the district attorney's office decided not to appeal Gelb's ruling because Duda would likely be released during the appeal process. He needs to be held in custody because he currently is a threat to the community, Phillips said. Gelb ruled Duda deserves a chance at rehabilitation and didn't belong in a "criminal setting," where he'd be susceptible to sexual assaults and violence.

In imposing the sentence on Friday, Amesbury told Duda he was being given the "challenge" of a second shot at life.

"This is the chance he's requested. It's been given to him," Amesbury said.

Duda said he was remorseful and was grateful to one day be able to live a productive life.

"I'm extremely sorry for what happened that night. I can't stop thinking about what I have done," Duda said. "I promise everything I will do will be in honor of Mr. Zurilla."

5/23/2014

### **Apparent meth lab busted in Nanticoke**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police busted an apparent methamphetamine lab Wednesday afternoon.

Police Chief William Shultz said after police made a traffic stop, an individual told them meth lab materials were in a garage at 221 W. Main St.

A female living at the residence gave police consent to search the home and the garage, where police found "all the components" used to make methamphetamine, Shultz said.

No one has been charged for the bust, but suspects have been identified, he said.

State police took all items for testing. Nanticoke police are awaiting the results of the tests. Charges are pending the results of the investigation.

5/21/2014

### **Preliminaries continue for pair accused in Thanksgiving burglary**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Testimony continued Tuesday during preliminary hearings for two men accused of burglarizing a Nanticoke home on

Thanksgiving.

Police said Earl Hoopingarner, 28, ransacked and looted Krystle Lampman's home at 201 Enterprise St. while Shane Hempel, 25, served as a lookout.

Janice Hempel, 23, of 220 Enterprise St., who also faces charges in connection with the burglary, testified against her brother, Shane Hempel, and her boyfriend, Hoopingarner, on May 12 and again Tuesday. She waived her preliminary hearing last week and was released from jail on unsecured bail.

Last week's hearings were continued because Assistant District Attorney Michelle Hardik didn't have a copy of a written statement Janice Hempel gave police in January to give to the defense. On Tuesday, Hempel read the statement, an account of what happened the day of the burglary.

"They said they had a job to do," she read, testifying she didn't know what her brother and boyfriend meant by "job." The night of the burglary, Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel came home with a television, a DVD player, jewelry and other items, she said.

In January, she told police she didn't want to sit in jail anymore and helped lead police to a rifle that went missing the day of the burglary. After she spoke with police, the two men received additional charges of theft, conspiracy to commit theft and two counts of receiving stolen property. Hoopingarner was also charged with multiple counts of identity theft for using Lampman's credit cards that police said he had stolen during the burglary.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker said he will review the court notes and exhibits and will render a verdict next Tuesday.

5/20/2014

### **Teen admits to fatal crash**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Tyler Duda walked into a courtroom Monday afternoon and admitted he did it.

But that wasn't enough for the family of 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla, a pedestrian cut into three pieces last summer when Duda took his mother's car out for a joyride in the middle of the night.

Duda, who is now 17, admitted his guilt as a juvenile to charges of homicide by vehicle, involuntary manslaughter, causing a fatal accident while unlicensed and several traffic offenses. He is facing up to 3½ years in a juvenile facility at his sentencing Friday.

In a letter to the court read during Monday's hearing, Zurilla's family said the recent decision by Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb to send the case to juvenile court amounts to a "slap on the wrist" that will allow him to be free and back behind the wheel on his 21st birthday.

"We feel the wrongful death of Nickolas was barely discussed or touched upon during the time in court," the family wrote. "Why weren't the pictures from the night of the accident shown? These pictures could have painted a clear image of the severity of the reckless crime to the court. Why was the only thing that seemed important during the recent two days in court was if Mr. Duda was able to be rehabilitated for his crime?"

District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said her office "put everything we had" into the hearing to keep the case in adult court. Once Gelb ruled against the prosecution — saying Duda deserves a chance at rehabilitation and doesn't belong in a "criminal setting" — it became clear that not appealing the decision would best serve the interest of public safety, she said.

"It could take six months to sometimes a year for an appeal to go through. That would be six months to a year that this individual would be out on the streets," Salavantis said, adding that all experts have agreed Duda needs treatment. "We felt that was in the best interest of the community, and honestly, this child."

In entering his plea, Duda admitted crashing into and dismembering Zurilla while driving 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m. July 5, when he was 16. The car, which belonged to his mother and which he had taken without permission, continued down the street before crashing into a house, knocking a 16-year-old passenger unconscious and leaving him with facial injuries.

Investigators said Duda had not been drinking and was not under the influence of drugs, but he was not licensed to drive, did not have a learner's permit and had no driving experience.

Appearing in court Monday, Duda, who is being held at a juvenile facility in Northampton County, wore an orange button-up shirt and beige slacks, delivering short, soft-spoken answers to the judge's questions. He indicated he understood the charges and that he was voluntarily admitting his guilt.

Luzerne County Juvenile Court Judge William Amesbury, noting he was new to the case, said he would review the details as well as reports from mental health professionals before deciding at 10 a.m. Friday on what treatment Duda

will get. The maximum penalty Duda could face is being in custody until his 21st birthday, although Amesbury will have to review the case at least every six months to determine Duda's progress, said his attorney, Cheryl A. Sobeski-Reedy.

Noting Zurilla's family will be unable to attend Friday, Assistant District Attorney Mamie Phillips read their statement, saying the Marine Corps veteran was killed on his way home after celebrating the Fourth of July with his friends.

"Our family feels that no remorse or willingness to change was shown by Mr. Duda during each time in court, along with no willingness to address an apology to our family, which adds to the physical, mental and emotional pain we endure every day," the statement said. "Our family is frightened over the reality that this decision will enable 16 and 17 year-olds to make poor decisions if all they are receiving is a slap on the wrist and a chance to be 'rehabilitated' for their severe crime."

The judge responded, saying the only thing that can be done now is for Duda to dedicate himself to self-betterment in Zurilla's name.

"There is no way that anyone can undo what's been done," Amesbury said. "There are no words that can fill the emptiness in your hearts."

Then, for the first time, Duda publicly apologized.

"I just want to say I'm really sorry. There's nothing I can really do to fix it," Duda said during a brief statement, adding that he intends to dedicate himself to his rehabilitation.

When Amesbury dismissed court, Duda and his mother, Lori Duda, shared a tearful embrace before guards escorted him from the room, his eyes closing as his right hand pinched the bridge of his nose.

After the hearing, Sobeski-Reedy said Duda needs treatment including individual and family counseling, as well as courses in decision-making, anger management and resisting peer pressure. Duda had been ready to reach a plea from the beginning, she said.

"He was having trouble sleeping and eating, suicidal tendencies," Sobeski-Reedy said. "We have been reaching out to the commonwealth from the beginning."

Salavantis said prosecutors fought to keep the case in adult court, and noted that because the state will only have custody of Duda until he turns 21, dropping the murder charge will not have an impact on his sentence in the juvenile system.

"Ultimately it came down to the judge's decision. So we have to respect that and proceed and think about the family and what the family would have to go through as well as the safety of the community," Salavantis said. "I am actually heartbroken for the family, the way that their loved one was killed is just devastating."

5/17/2014

### **Man accused of stealing, selling seeder for scrap**

Jory Heckman - Citizens Voice

Police arrested a Nanticoke man after he allegedly stole a piece of landscaping equipment and sold it for scrap metal. State police arrested Daniel Olshefski, 26, of 11 Burnett St., after he allegedly stole a hydroseeder, a piece of equipment that sprays seeds and fertilizer.

Edward Frey, owner of Sweet Valley Landscaping, called state police in Shickshinny on Tuesday to report that his stolen hydroseeder was parked behind ABC Auto Parts in Hunlock Township. An officer arrived at the parking lot and ran a VIN number check on the hydroseeder, which was flagged as stolen.

The officer spoke with Mark Spencer, owner of ABC Auto Parts, and Sherry Petroski, a clerk, on Wednesday about the hydroseeder. They said Olshefski towed the hydroseeder into the lot and sold it to them for scrap for \$638. They provided officers with a copy of Olshefski's receipt, which listed Olshefski's license plate number. The stolen hydroseeder was returned to Frey.

Olshefski was arrested Wednesday and charged with one count of receiving stolen property and one count of theft by unlawful taking. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to pay the \$100,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. His preliminary hearing is set for 9 a.m. May 21 before Magisterial District Judge John Hasay.

5/14/2014

### **Nanticoke couple arrested following alleged altercation**

Jory Heckman - Citizens Voice

Police arrested a Nanticoke couple after they say a verbal argument eventually became physical. Nanticoke police arrested Joseph Gushock Jr., 32, and Brooke Graff, 23, both of 45 Enterprise St., for a domestic dispute in which both allegedly engaged in physical fighting after they started shouting at each other. Officers arrived at the residence around 11:15 p.m. Saturday, where Gushock told police that Graff, his girlfriend, had punched him in the face during an argument. Police found Graff inside crying, and she told them Gushock had spit on her and pushed her, causing her to bang her head, police said. Graff declined medical assistance. Police advised both Graff and Gushock to obtain protection from abuse orders and were given the necessary paperwork. Officers returned to the scene at 12:18 a.m. Sunday and saw Graff throwing Gushock's personal belongings out of the house as they continued screaming at each other, police said. Graff then threw a box at Gushock, which injured his right shoulder, police said. Graff then told police that Gushock had pushed her over after they had left. Both were taken into custody. Both Gushock and Graff were charged with one count of simple assault, one count of disorderly conduct, and one count of harassment. They were jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of the \$25,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. Their preliminary hearing is set for 1 p.m. May 14 before Whittaker.

5/13/2014

### **Woman charged in burglary testifies against brother, boyfriend**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

A woman facing charges in connection with a Thanksgiving burglary in Nanticoke testified against her brother and her boyfriend Monday. Police said Janice Hempel's boyfriend, Earl Hoopingarner, 28, hatched the plot about midday Thanksgiving last year to target 201 Enterprise St., the home of Krystle Lampman. With Janice Hempel's brother, Shane Hempel, serving as a lookout, Hoopingarner ransacked and looted the home's valuables just after 10 p.m., police said. After waving her preliminary hearing Monday, Janice Hempel, 23, of 220 Enterprise St., testified that her brother and boyfriend came home the night of the burglary with duffle bags of jewelry and other items, and Hoopingarner gave her a Pandora bracelet from one of the bags. She said prosecutors did not offer her anything in exchange for her testimony. Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker sent Janice Hempel's charges to the Court of Common Pleas and gave her \$100,000 unsecured bail. She was jailed in December after being charged with receiving stolen property and conspiracy. In January, she told police she didn't want to sit in jail anymore for crimes her brother and boyfriend committed. She helped lead police to a rifle that went missing that day. State and Nanticoke police in December charged Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel with the burglary and in February, after Janice Hempel spoke with police, the two men received additional charges of theft, conspiracy to commit theft and two counts of receiving stolen property. Because Assistant District Attorney Michelle Hardik didn't have a copy of Janice Hempel's written statement from January to give to the defense, Whittaker stopped the hearing and continued it to 3 p.m. May 20. Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel remain jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$250,000 bail each.

5/10/2014

### **Police: Mountain Top man hit couple with his vehicle**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

A Mountain Top man ran down a couple with his vehicle because he was jealous of their relationship, police said. Nanticoke police were called to the parking lot of Luzerne County Community College around 3:30 p.m. Thursday for a report of two men fighting - Jeffrey A. Golden II and Ryan Baker. Police said Baker and his girlfriend, Erica Gernhart, were walking in the parking lot when Golden, 19, of 995 Church Road, Mountain Top, swung at Baker while expressing dissatisfaction over Baker's relationship with Gernhart. Police said neither Baker nor Golden had any marks on them, and the two men agreed to leave. About 15 minutes later, police were called to the parking lot of Weis Plaza. Gernhart was lying on the ground in pain. Baker was nearby and appeared injured, police said. Baker told police he and Gernhart were walking across Lower Broadway Street into the Weis Plaza parking lot when Golden sped toward them in his vehicle. Golden swerved at them, hitting both with his vehicle, then parked his car and

ran away.

Before Golden took off into the woods, two witnesses stopped him, the affidavit said.

"I meant to hit her (Gernhart)," Golden said, according to the affidavit. "I have to go. The police are coming to get me." Another witness ran into the woods after Golden and brought him back to the scene where he was arrested, police said. EMS transported Gernhart to the Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center to be treated for her injuries, according to police. Baker, who had abrasions on his arms and hands, did not seek treatment.

Golden was charged Friday with two counts each of aggravated and simple assault, two counts of stalking, disorderly conduct and several summary driving offenses.

He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$20,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker. His preliminary hearing is set for 1 p.m. May 21 before Whittaker.

5/8/2014

### **Police: Woman stole over thousand dollars from West Pittston pizzeria**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke woman stole over a thousand dollars from a West Pittston pizzeria where she worked, police said.

According to the affidavit file by the West Pittston Borough Police Department:

Lori Deyo, 41, of 121 E. Broad St., was charged Wednesday with theft and receiving stolen property for stealing \$1,425 from Tomato Heads Pizzeria at on Wyoming Avenue in West Pittston where she was the assistant manager.

Police said Deyo took money out of the cash register 76 times between March 10 and April 28.

When police questioned her at the police station May 1, she said, "Yes, I did it," and began to cry.

Joseph Lokuta, the owner of Tomato Heads, said his computer system at the business sends an adjustment detail report to his email every night, and as he reviewed a report on April 28, he noticed Deyo had voided and compensated several orders that day hours after they were picked up or delivered.

This prompted him to review a surveillance footage, which showed Deyo take money from the cash register and walk away with it when there were no customers in the store.

Deyo began working at the pizzeria in October 2012 and was recently promoted to assistant manager.

She admitted to police that she would void or compensate orders, then take the money and put it in her pocket or purse. "I feel bad," she said as she explained how she took the money.

She told police she stole the money to pay utility bills, vehicle repairs, traffic citations and to buy sports equipment for her two children.

Deyo remains free on \$5,000 unsecured bail set by Magisterial District Judge Joseph J. Carmody. Her preliminary hearing is set for 9 a.m. May 21 before Carmody.

5/7/2014

### **Gardner pleads guilty in police chase**

rdupuis@civitasmedia.com

A wanted man who led police on a wild chase last summer pleaded guilty Tuesday in Luzerne County Court.

Zireek Rahim Gardner, 23, of Nanticoke, was facing a jury trial when he admitted to one count each of reckless endangerment, flight to avoid apprehension, accidents involving death or injury (not properly licensed) and resisting arrest.

On Aug. 10, Gardner commandeered a friend's car and, unfazed by the jolt of a police Taser, crashed the vehicle into a truck and then ran, leaving an injured man inside the crumpled Ford Taurus as he fled, according to a police affidavit.

Gardner was a passenger in a car that was pulled over by Newport Township Police Chief Jeremy M. Blank after the driver allegedly drove through an emergency response area on West Kirmar Parkway at about 4:40 a.m., ignoring flares and a police officer's order to stop.

Gardner gave a fake name, Blank said, and later locked the rear door and was climbing toward the driver's seat. Blank said he was able to reach in and strike Gardner with a Taser, but Gardner managed to put the car into gear and drive away, toward an area filled with emergency personnel and utility crews due to an earlier crash.

With Blank in pursuit, Gardner drove west "at a high rate of speed," crashing into the back of a parked utility truck about a quarter mile away, wedging the Ford Taurus beneath the truck, according to an affidavit. As Blank pulled up, Gardner climbed out of the driver's side window and ran. He was captured a short time later after falling over a guard rail.

A front-seat passenger, David Johnson Jr., was pinned in the wrecked Taurus and had to be extricated. He was treated at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Township, for injuries including a broken palate. The utility truck driver, Larry Zoscin, was treated at Geisinger for neck and back pain.

"Gardner stated that he ran because he was wanted by parole," Blank wrote, adding that a records search confirmed this, although the nature of the alleged parole violation was not indicated.

Gardner pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter in 2009 in connection with the death of William Bentley, who suffered a heart attack after Gardner punched him in the head during a fight outside Schiel's Family Market in March of that year.

Gardner must pay more than \$4,800 in restitution to various parties. He was to be remanded to SCI-Dallas pending sentencing before county Judge Michael Vough on July 11.

5/6/2014

### **Teen crash suspect's fate waiting on potential appeal**

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

The fate of a teenage fatal crash suspect is now in legal limbo as court officials wait to see if Luzerne County prosecutors will appeal a ruling that shifted his case to juvenile court.

Tyler Duda appeared in juvenile court for a hearing Monday, the first business day since Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb removed the 17-year-old's case from the adult court docket on Friday.

Luzerne County Juvenile Court Judge William Amesbury said he read Gelb's written opinion, but it's too early for juvenile proceedings to proceed.

"The appeal process has not passed," Amesbury said.

The judge postponed any future developments in Duda's case until the appeal process runs its course. Prosecutors haven't said what they plan to do.

Duda, who remains in custody in juvenile detention, is accused of crashing into and dismembering 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla while driving 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m. July 5 after taking his mother's car without permission. He was 16 at the time.

Charged with third-degree murder and related crimes, Duda spent five months in adult prison before placement in juvenile detention.

In adult court, Duda faced a maximum penalty of 20 to 40 years in state prison. In juvenile court, he'd face a maximum placement until age 21.

Gelb said Duda deserves a chance at rehabilitation and doesn't belong in a "criminal setting." A conviction of the murder charge in adult court "would require that this young man serve a number of years in (state prison) with an adult population," Gelb wrote. The judge wrote that there is "no doubt" that the charges are severe, but she said she is "troubled" by the fact that if she let the case remain in adult court, she would "deprive a young man of the benefits" of rehabilitation.

5/3/2014

### **Murder case sent to juvenile court**

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

A teenage driver involved in a fatal crash that dismembered a Nanticoke man last year must be tried in juvenile court, a Luzerne County judge ruled Friday.

Tyler Duda, 17, of Wyoming, had faced third-degree murder and related charges in adult court. Duda is accused of crashing into and dismembering 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla while driving 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m. July 5 after taking his mother's car without permission.

Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb said Duda deserves a chance at rehabilitation and doesn't belong in a "criminal setting."

A conviction of the murder charge in adult court "would require that this young man serve a number of years in (state prison) with an adult population," Gelb wrote.

"This court is keenly aware that juveniles who are convicted and sentenced to a criminal setting are likely to experience sexual assaults and violence directed at them," Gelb said.

After his arrest, Duda served five months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility before being transferred to a juvenile detention center, where he remains.

In adult court, Duda faced a maximum penalty of 20 to 40 years in state prison. In juvenile court, he'd face a maximum placement until age 21.

The ruling Friday follows a hearing held last month on the defense's request to transfer the case to juvenile court. Attorneys for Duda said "juvenile impulsivity" and "poor decision making" led to the incident on West Union Street in Nanticoke and not the malice standard that's required for a murder charge.

Gelb wrote that there is "no doubt" that the charges are severe, but she said she is "troubled" by the fact that if she lets the case remain in adult court, she would "deprive a young man of the benefits" of rehabilitation.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said she is reviewing her options to see if prosecutors could appeal Gelb's ruling.

5/2/2014

### **Nanticoke man's death focus of investigation**

Citizens Voice

The Dauphin County Coroner's Office is investigating the death of a Luzerne County man who went missing in December.

Gregory Wiepa, 61, of Nanticoke, was found April 14 along the Susquehanna River in Middle Paxton Township, north of Harrisburg in Dauphin County, according to the Dauphin County Coroner's Office.

Wiepa was last seen Dec. 9, 2013. When he went missing, police and fire crews searched for him in the area but only found his car, which was parked by railroad tracks near Broadway Bridge.

Fire destroyed Wiepa's home 10 days before he went missing, said Nanticoke police Chief Bill Shultz.

Shultz said state police in Dauphin County recovered Wiepa's body and will do DNA tests to confirm his identity. The body has been released to the family.

4/26/2014

### **Nanticoke man hit with trespassing charges**

Jory Heckman - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was charged Thursday for allegedly trespassing in an apartment complex's laundry room in March. Nanticoke police arrested Daryl Lowyn, 43, of 270 E. Main St., at the Oplinger Towers apartment complex on March 23 after officers said he was found intoxicated and sleeping on the floor of a fourth floor laundry room.

In surveillance footage of the apartment complex, police observed that Lowyn had entered the basement entrance at about 2 a.m. He then took the elevator to the fourth floor and knocked on the door of an apartment unit.

After making several trips from the apartment door to the laundry room, police said Lowyn urinated in a washing machine, soiled himself, and wiped the mess on a plastic plant and rug before falling asleep on the floor of the laundry room at approximately 3 a.m.

Lowyn was charged with criminal trespass, burglary, institutional vandalism, defiant trespass, criminal mischief, and public drunkenness. He was jailed Thursday in lieu of the \$25,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. His preliminary hearing is set for 1:15 p.m. April 30 before Whittaker.

4/23/2014

### **Teen's attorney: Case is first of its kind in county**

Citizens Voice

The current prosecution of a juvenile in adult court on murder charges for a fatal car crash appears to be a first in Luzerne County history, the teenager's attorneys wrote in court papers filed Tuesday.

Prosecutors should not be allowed to pursue a third-degree murder charge because the teenager did not have any criminal intent when he fatally struck and dismembered a man last July in Nanticoke. Attorneys for 17-year-old Tyler Duda said "juvenile impulsivity" and "poor decision making" led to the incident on West Union Street in Nanticoke and not the malice standard that's required for a murder charge.

"This was a tragic car accident and does not rise to the level of malice to support a third-degree murder conviction," Duda's attorneys, Demetrius Fannick and Cheryl Sobieski-Reedy, wrote.

Prosecutors regularly pursue murder charges for shootings, stabbings and beatings, but rarely, if ever, pursue a murder charge related to a car crash and certainly not against a juvenile, they said.

"This instant case appears to be our county's first," they wrote.

The attorneys are asking a judge to dismiss the third-degree murder charge and move the case to juvenile court, where prosecutors could pursue other charges like homicide by vehicle and involuntary manslaughter.

Duda, of Wyoming, is accused of crashing into and dismembering 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m. July 5.

4/22/2014

### **Nanticoke baby's death ruled homicide**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

The death of a 2½-month-old infant at a Nanticoke home in February was ruled a homicide, the Luzerne County Coroner's Office said Tuesday.

Nanticoke police were dispatched to a residence at rear 340 E. Noble St. around 9:20 a.m. Feb. 14 to investigate the death of Jaxon Eckrote, according to a press release sent Feb. 17.

Forensic pathologist Dr. Gary Ross performed an autopsy Feb. 15 at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital and determined Eckrote's death was a homicide by asphyxia. Coroner Bill Lisman signed the death certificate on April 8.

Because Eckrote's death was ruled homicide, the coroner's office said it cannot provide additional information at this time.

On Feb. 15, Nanticoke Police Capt. Robert Lehman, Luzerne County Detective Charles Balogh and Luzerne County Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts were seen filing a sealed search warrant at the Luzerne County Clerk of Courts Office regarding the case.

4/15/2014

### **Two men were arrested Friday on charges they were peddling heroin and crack cocaine from a residence on West Ridge Street.**

Times Leader

Jeffrey Seiwel, 30, of East Ridge Street, Nanticoke, was charged with two counts each of criminal conspiracy with intent to distribute a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and criminal use of communication facility and a single count of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. He remained jailed Monday at the county prison for lack of \$200,000 bail.

Jake Robert Zdanowicz, 30, of West Ridge Street, Nanticoke, was charged with three counts each of possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia, two counts of criminal conspiracy with intent to distribute a controlled substance and a single count of illegal possession of a firearm by a convict. He remained jailed Monday for lack of \$75,000 bail.

According to the criminal complaints:

City police and the Luzerne County Drug Task Force arraigned to buy heroin from Zdanowicz on Friday. Agents kept surveillance of Zdanowicz and Seiwel as they resupplied their heroin stash, the complaints say.

Agents searched Zdanowicz's residence and allegedly found a large amount of heroin and crack cocaine, including a shotgun in a golf bag, according to the complaints.

Preliminary hearings are scheduled on April 23 before District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

4/15/2014

### **Hit-run fatality suspect portraits emerge Tyler Duda, 17, seeking move to juvenile court**

rdupuis@civitasmedia.com

Multiple portraits of vehicular homicide suspect Tyler Duda emerged Monday during a hearing on whether his case should be moved to juvenile court.

The 17-year-old, accused of causing the crash that killed a Nanticoke man last summer, sat quietly before Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb, fidgeting occasionally as a social worker described him as a young man who suffers from depression, mood disorders and poor impulse control, who struggled with the early loss of his biological father and who reportedly told a psychologist last fall that ending up in jail "was probably the best thing that ever happened to him." But cross-examination and other testimony, including that of a parole officer, portrayed a Duda as a troubled and

rebellious youth whose school record was pockmarked by poor grades and disciplinary issues, who earlier landed himself in juvenile court following a fight with his mother, who allegedly was cited for underage drinking — violating a probationary curfew in the process — and who repeatedly has told examiners that he does not need therapy. After an all-day hearing Monday, Gelb will continue to hear testimony when proceedings resume this morning. Duda was 16 at the time of the July 5 incident that left Nicholas Zurilla, 59, dead after he was struck by an SUV outside his home at 340 W. Union St.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis has said Duda, of Kingston Township, took his mother's 2013 Ford Edge without her knowledge and was out joy riding with Donald Kinney Jr., 16, in Nanticoke on the way to visit a female friend.

A state police reconstruction of the crash alleges Duda was traveling in excess of 70 mph when he struck Zurilla, arrest papers say. The speed limit on West Union Street is 25 mph.

Duda has pleaded not guilty to charges of homicide by vehicle, third-degree murder, accidents involving death, driving without a license, speeding, reckless driving and failing to stay in lane.

He was released to a juvenile detention facility on Feb. 8 when Gelb modified his \$1 million bail to unsecured.

Duda's lawyers, Luzerne County First Assistant Public Defender Demetrius Fannick and Public Defender Cheryl A. Sobeski-Reedy, have said the juvenile justice system will provide treatment, rehabilitation and supervision for which Duda is a proper candidate because of his age, mental capacity, maturity level and adolescent decision-making abilities. Assistant District Attorneys Mamie Phillips and Stephen Lentz appeared for the prosecution.

4/15/2014

### **Teen driver wants murder case moved to juvenile court**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

If attorneys for a 16-year-old driver accused of dismembering a Nanticoke man during a high-speed collision fail to convince a Luzerne County judge to move the case to juvenile court, the teenager could face decades in prison.

Tyler Duda's attorneys, Cheryl A. Sobeski-Reedy and Demetrius Fannick, requested a decertification hearing in an attempt to get the case transferred into juvenile court, arguing he has a better chance of being rehabilitated in a juvenile detention center than in an adult prison.

Charged as an adult, Duda, now 17, pleaded not guilty Feb. 14 to third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle and related charges.

Duda, of Wyoming, is accused of crashing into 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m. July 5, severing Zurilla's legs and torso before crashing into a house.

If the case is transferred to juvenile court, where he could remain in detention until age 21, Duda is eligible for treatment programs regardless of his charges, Sobeski-Reedy said.

He was moved to a juvenile detention facility after spending five months in adult jail unable to post \$1 million bail until Luzerne County Judge Lesa S. Gelb granted him unsecured bail Feb. 18 under the stipulation that he be released to a juvenile facility in Northampton County.

Assistant District Attorney Mamie Phillips said Duda has had 14 write-ups since he went to the detention center and that he was "not receptive" to therapy he received at KidsPeace, where he was held before the July 5 accident because he violated his curfew while he was on probation for a simple assault against his mother.

Mike Weaver, treatment specialist at the State Correctional Institution in Pine Grove, which is where Duda will go if he's tried as an adult, testified the 15- to 24-month-long boot camp-style leadership development program at the prison is "built to take on juvenile offenders."

Weaver, who was the prosecution's witness, said there are also educational, trade and therapy options at the prison to help rehabilitate Duda.

Duda's stay in the leadership program would last only until Duda graduated from it, then he would be placed in the adult population of the prison.

Psychologist Ned Delaney said, however, he believes there are better alternatives.

Delaney saw Duda weekly from September to January for therapy sessions. Duda had told him incarceration has made him realize he is responsible for taking someone's life, which Delaney sees as being responsible in itself.

"The boy I met in September was a young man in January," he said.

The prison can provide treatment only to modify Duda's behavior, he said. What Duda really needs is a program that puts him in a therapeutic environment to set a foundation from an introspective point of view so he can become a contributing member of the community, he said.

Duda admitted to Delaney that jail was the best place for him right now to get him off the "wrong road," but although incarceration might have helped Duda, Delaney recommends decertification.

"He showed he could change," he said.

Testimony is scheduled to continue at 9 a.m. today before Gelb.

4/12/2014

### **Thief ordered to stay away from most cemeteries**

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

Admitted thief Scott Wylie is no longer allowed where other people are dying to go.

A Luzerne County judge on Friday banned Wylie from entering any cemetery unless he's visiting the grave of a "loved one."

Wylie, 27, was in court for sentencing after pleading guilty in February to a theft charge related to him stealing 500 feet of fencing, fence posts and rails, and two gates from the Newport Township Cemetery in Newport Township.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough determined the 214 days Wylie had already spent jailed for the crime was sufficient. Wylie was jailed from March 14 to Dec. 13 after he was arraigned by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, of Nanticoke, who ordered Wylie in prison on \$100,000 cash bail.

While on parole for the next year and five months, Wylie must attend the county's Day Reporting Center, a facility in Wilkes-Barre that nonviolent drug offenders attend for court-mandated drug-and-alcohol testing and treatment plans, Vough ruled.

Wylie, whose last known address is 219 W. South St. in Nanticoke, stole the cemetery's fencing to get money to buy synthetic marijuana, Newport Township police said at the time of his arrest. Wylie told police he was addicted to the drug, arrest papers say.

According to a police affidavit, officers received a tip that Wylie was heard talking about fencing and selling it to ABC Auto Parts in Hunlock Township. Police went there and found the missing fencing, police said. Workers at the facility said Wylie often came to sell metal and had just come days earlier with an "unusual" 500-pound load.

In addition to being banned from cemeteries, Wylie must pay \$7,000 restitution to the Newport Township Cemetery Association, Vough ruled.

4/11/2014

### **18th suspect arrested in 'Operation Shape Up' investigation waives his preliminary hearing**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

Charges against the last of 18 suspects arrested as part of an eight-month investigation into a major drug-trafficking organization that allegedly imported mass quantities of drugs into Luzerne County were bound over for court Thursday. State investigators raided two Hazle Street businesses in Wilkes-Barre, Master Barber Shop and Idely's Furniture, on June 27, 2013 as part of the investigation, arresting five, and rounded up the others on July 1, 2013 - except for one.

Rafael A. Medina-Colon, 40, of 315 Allen St., Hazleton, was arrested March 21 after being on the run for almost a year. He waived his preliminary hearing Thursday and agreed to enter a guilty plea to delivery of cocaine and criminal use of a communication device. In exchange, conspiracy to deliver cocaine, another count of possession with intent to deliver and two charges related to corrupt organizations were dismissed.

According to investigators, the barbershop owner, Ramon A. Colon, 26, is the leader of the conspiracy, responsible for bringing large quantities of cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine from New York City to sell in Luzerne County. All 18 suspects were charged with multiple offenses, including drug distribution, felony conspiracy, criminal use of a communication facility and working as a corrupt organization.

According to the 162-page affidavit filed in court by detectives with the state Attorney General's Office, authorities began investigating in the winter of 2012 into an operation of smuggling drugs and firearms for distribution in the **Plymouth and Nanticoke areas of the county.**

The investigation - called "Operation Shape Up" after the barbershop - initially centered on John Allan Miller, 26, of 115 Downing St., Plymouth, and his associates, the affidavit says. A confidential informant provided police with information about "mid- to upper-level drug traffickers," and initiated a controlled buy of cocaine from Miller on April 24, 2013, when the informant reported Miller had five ounces of cocaine at his residence, the affidavit says.

The informant went on to buy about 11 ounces of cocaine from Miller during seven controlled buys, spurring a massive investigation replete with high-tech surveillance and information from other informants, the affidavit says.

Like Miller, Medina-Colon was one of Colon's customers who would buy several ounces of cocaine from him at a time. Deputy Attorney General Timothy Doherty said he wasn't picked up during the raids because he was on the run. Investigators passed along information to the National Crime Information Center after Medina-Colon had eluded authorities, and when he applied for a job in the area, investigators were able to pick him up on the warrant. Medina-Colon remains jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$1 million bail set by Magisterial District Judge Roberts. Roberts told Medina-Colon's Spanish interpreter that he would be willing to reduce his bail to \$500,000, but Medina-Colon's attorney, Joseph J. Yeager, had straighten out a detainer Immigration and Naturalization Service had on him that might get him deported to the Dominican Republic. Doherty said all cases have been assigned to Luzerne County Judge Lesa S. Gelb. He said eight have already pleaded guilty, and today, he is meeting with three other defendants to determine whether they too will enter guilty pleas. Sentencing for those who plead guilty is set for May 23, he said.

4/1/2014

### **Hanover Township police seek robbery suspect**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Hanover Township police are searching for a man they say robbed a Nanticoke man of the contents of his wallet and pain medication outside of a Turkey Hill late Sunday night.

Michael Faux reported to police that he stopped at the convenience store at Carey Avenue and Division Street just before midnight, parking in the Spinning Wheel restaurant parking lot. When he returned to his car, a man pressed something against his back and took \$30 and gift cards worth about \$50 from Faux's wallet, according to police. The man also took three pain medication prescriptions from the center console of Faux's car.

The suspect left on foot and crossed the closed bridge on Division Street next to the store, police said. Faux described the man as wearing a hat, black hooded sweatshirt and dark blue jeans, police said.

Anyone with information can call Hanover Township police at 570-825-1254.

4/1/2014

### **Police: Nanticoke man charged with trespassing, assault**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man pushed his way into the Glen Lyon home of a woman he used to have sex with to beat up another man on Sunday, police said.

Eric B. Legins, 27, of 118 Oak St., was charged with burglary, criminal trespassing, simple assault, harassment and disorderly conduct after Newport Township police said he assaulted the woman's male friend. When the woman tried to stop Legins, he punched her in the head, police said. The woman told police she had a sexual relationship with Legins in the past, and she believed he was jealous that she was there with another man.

Legins was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$25,000 set by Magisterial District Judge Joseph A. Halsey.

3/30/2014

### **Man charged with violating PFA**

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police early Saturday filed charges against a city resident after a domestic dispute.

Police said officers were dispatched to an Apollo Circle address at about 5:40 a.m. on the report of a protection-from-abuse violation.

According to police, Corey James Kittle, 20, of West Broad Street, saw an ex-girlfriend at a party in the 400 block of East Main Street. The ex-girlfriend then decided to leave "after observing Kittle's presence," but he followed her outside before getting into a verbal argument with her, police said. Police said Kittle left, but returned between 4 and 4:30 a.m., again having "verbal communication with her."

The protection-from-abuse order was filed March 11 and will not expire until next year. Kittle is charged with indirect criminal contempt of protection-from-abuse and was jailed at Luzerne County Correctional Facility on \$2,000 bail.

3/27/2014

## **Suspect in high-speed chases reaches plea agreement**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke man accused of leading police on two separate high-speed chases on the same night with a pregnant woman in the car will not face a child endangerment charge as part of a plea agreement with state police on Wednesday. State police on Jan. 15 charged James Michael Hughes, 26, of 287 State St., with endangering the welfare of a child, reckless endangerment, criminal mischief, unauthorized use of a vehicle, resisting arrest, fleeing police and 13 summary traffic offenses, alleging Hughes put Brandy Peters and her unborn child at risk by fleeing from police.

Newport Township police first encountered Hughes at about 12:40 a.m. Dec. 5, when he refused to pull over for an officer while driving southbound on Interstate 81 near the Nuangola exit, according to a police affidavit filed in court. The officer ended the pursuit after the vehicle, a red GMC Jimmy, exited onto Blue Ridge Trail, police said.

A state trooper spotted the vehicle a little more than an hour later turning into the Walden Park housing development, police said. Hughes tried to make a U-turn but was blocked by the police cruiser, the affidavit said. Hughes then sped down Walden Drive, his vehicle straddling the double yellow line, police said.

The officer chased the vehicle through the development and into the back yard of a home on Red Coat Lane, until the driver lost traction on an embankment along Colony Drive, according to police.

Police said the vehicle slid down the embankment, but Hughes continued driving for about a quarter mile until the vehicle got stuck on a downed tree.

Hughes then fled the scene through the woods in an unknown direction, leaving behind his passenger, Peters, police said.

Peters, who at the time was seven months pregnant, told troopers Hughes is her boyfriend's cousin. Hughes had called and asked her to give him a ride, but when she arrived at a Nanticoke house to get him, he insisted on driving and took the keys from her, police said.

Peters told police she thought Hughes fled from officers because he might have had drugs or weapons in his possession. Magisterial District Judge Ronald W. Swank set Hughes' bail from \$30,000 to \$5,000 straight cash bail after he waived his preliminary hearing Wednesday.

Hughes' attorney Allyson L. Kacmarski said he also has a federal detainer for aiding and abetting, but didn't know the details because another attorney was assigned to the case and the affidavit was sealed. Because federal cases often take precedence over local ones, she said, Hughes might end up being jailed somewhere other than Luzerne County Correctional Facility until he has his day in court.

3/26/2014

## **Nanticoke man accused of kicking officer**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man kicked a Hanover Township officer in the leg numerous times as he was being arrested on drug charges, police said.

Tyler J. Degraffenreid, 20, of 105 E. Union St., was charged with aggravated and simple assault against law enforcement, resisting arrest, possession with intent to deliver and possession of a controlled substance after he kicked an officer five times in the leg and once in the waist, according to an affidavit.

Degraffenreid was sitting in his car for awhile in the parking lot of Kentucky Fried Chicken on Oxford Street, Hanover Township, on Monday night when police went to see why he wasn't there to eat.

Police found about 10 Suboxone pills in Degraffenreid's pocket when they searched him.

When Degraffenreid was handcuffed and told he was under arrest, he turned and kicked the officer five times in the lower left leg and once in the waist. Police subdued him with a stun gun.

Degraffenreid was jailed Monday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$75,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge Joseph Zola.

3/25/2014

## **Convicted Nanticoke man awarded new trial**

### **Richard Shaw was sentenced to 2-4 years in prison**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

The state Superior Court has declined to hear an appeal by prosecutors of an appellate court ruling that vacated a

Nanticoke man's sentence in a 2011 marijuana case.

Richard Shaw, 30, was sentenced in November 2012 by Luzerne County Judge Joseph Sklarosky Jr. to two to four years in state prison after a jury convicted him of marijuana trafficking and possession offenses.

State parole agents found Shaw inside a residence on East Main Street, Nanticoke, with marijuana and a scale on Feb. 25, 2011.

Shaw's attorney, Nanda Palissery, appealed the conviction to the state Superior Court, which vacated the sentence and remanded the case for a new trial.

Prosecutors appealed the Superior Court's ruling to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear the appeal.

What does this mean for Shaw?

Palissery said the recent ruling by the Supreme Court upholds the decision by the Superior Court for a new trial.

"Obviously, (prosecutors) have no evidence against Mr. Shaw," Palissery said. "I'm going to say (prosecutors) will have to nolle pros the case." Nolle pros means to abandon or discontinue the case.

Palissery said the appeal was based on evidence presented during that trial should have been thrown out by Sklarosky. According to court documents, state parole agents went to an apartment on East Main Street, Nanticoke, on Feb. 25, 2011, and found Shaw and marijuana and contraband. As agents escorted a handcuffed Shaw to a bedroom to put his shoes on, Shaw allegedly swept aside a pile of clothes with his foot, revealing a small bag of marijuana, documents say. A more detailed search uncovered more marijuana, according to court documents.

Prior to trial, Palissery tried to have the alleged evidence suppressed, claiming the search was illegal because state parole agents and Nanticoke police had "no reasonable suspicion" that illegal activity was taking place inside the residence.

Superior Court in its ruling stated the warrantless arrest of Shaw was illegal and evidence obtained from the search was the "fruit of the poisonous tree," sending the case back to Luzerne County for a new trial.

District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis, in response to the Supreme Court Ruling, said her office is "left without a choice but to dismiss the charges."

Salavantis said she is disappointed with the decision but nonetheless respects the ruling and will abide by it.

3/24/2014

### **Police Blotter**

Times Leader

State police Friday filed drug charges against Heather Rittenhouse, 28, of Nanticoke in connection with a burglary on July 4 in Fairmount Township.

Rittenhouse was a passenger in a yellow 2000 Volkswagen Beetle stopped on U.S. Route 11, by state police. The car was suspected to be involved in the burglary, state police said. Rittenhouse provided a false name and did not produce identification for state police, state police said. She was released at the time.

On July 8 state police secured a search warrant and seized hypodermic needles, a silver spoon, a red straw and numerous empty packets with residue in the magazine pocket behind the passenger's side seat where Rittenhouse was sitting. Also seized were items reported stolen during the burglary.

The residue in the packets was later tested and identified as methamphetamine and cocaine, state police said.

Rittenhouse was charged with possession of a controlled substance possession of drug paraphernalia and providing false identification to law enforcement. She was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker, Nanticoke and committed to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$50,000 bail.

3/21/2014

### **Nanticoke man faces drug charges**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was caught with 11 ounces of marijuana in the backseat of his car in Kingston, police said.

William L. Jimmerson Jr., 27, of 134 Orchard St., was charged with possession with intent to deliver, criminal use of a communication facility, possession of a controlled substance and drug paraphernalia.

Kingston narcotics detectives sent a confidential informant to the CVS parking lot at 401 Market St. around 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday to see whether Jimmerson had 12 ounces of marijuana on him, the affidavit says.

The informant gave police the signal that the marijuana was there in Jimmerson's car, and they moved in to arrest Jimmerson, according to the affidavit.

After he was taken into custody, Jimmerson told police the marijuana was in a backpack in the backseat of his car, the affidavit says.

Jimmerson was jailed Wednesday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$15,000 cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge Joseph A. Halesey.

3/19/2014

**Police: Nanticoke man attacked girlfriend with boot**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man struck his girlfriend with a motorcycle boot shortly after he pulled her out of bed and punched her numerous times, police said.

John B. Chapman, 48, of 416 Front St., was charged with aggravated and simple assault, recklessly endangering another person, harassment and disorderly conduct after he came home from drinking all night Sunday and got into an argument with his girlfriend because she didn't go out with him, according to Nanticoke police.

Chapman's girlfriend said after being hit with the boot, she blacked out and couldn't remember anything until Nanticoke EMS arrived, according to the affidavit. Police said she had red marks and bruises on her, as well a bite mark on her right hand.

Chapman was jailed Monday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$75,000 bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker.

3/18/2014

**Police: Two arrested in Nanticoke raid for drug trafficking**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke man was flushing his heroin stash down the toilet when authorities raided his home and arrested him and his roommate for drug trafficking, according to the affidavit.

Dwayne A. Myers, 35, of 274 Appollo Circle, and Lisa M. St. George, 32, of the same address, were each charged with 18 counts of possession with intent to deliver, multiple counts of possession of a controlled substance and multiple counts of drug paraphernalia.

Nanticoke police and the Luzerne County Drug Task Force had been investigating heroin sales at Myers' residence since March 7 after receiving neighbor complaints about the amount of foot and vehicular traffic into the apartment, the affidavit says.

With the three controlled buys along with the complaints and surveillance operations, authorities obtained and executed a search warrant Friday evening, police said.

An officer thought he had heard the slide of handgun being pulled back behind the door of the second floor bathroom where Myers locked himself inside, so another officer kicked in the door, the affidavit says. Police found several small rubber bands, which police say are used to bundle bags of heroin together, and the top of a knotted plastic bag, the affidavit says.

When police searched the apartment, they said they found two bags of heroin, numerous pills and \$1,105.

St. George told police that Myers had moved in about two weeks before and was supposed to pay her rent in exchange for allowing him stay there and sell heroin from the apartment, the affidavit says.

Myers admitted to police he had been selling heroin with St. George for about two weeks and that St. George would set up the deals, the affidavit says. He admitted to selling two bricks and two bundles of heroin in the past two weeks, according to the affidavit.

Both were jailed Saturday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$100,000 bail each set by Magisterial District Judge Alexandra K. Kravitz. Their preliminary hearings are scheduled for 1 p.m. today before Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker.

3/4/2014

**Cops: Nanticoke man forged prescriptions**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Pittston City police are searching for a Nanticoke man wanted on three active felony warrants for acquiring a controlled substance by fraud, forgery and related charges, police said.

Marc Zawadzki, 40, last known address at 1253 Center St., entered into CVS pharmacy on Kennedy Boulevard on Feb. 26 and used a falsified prescription in an attempt to get painkillers, but fled the area prior to police arrival, according to a press release from the Pittston City Police Department.

Zawadzki is facing 12 felony counts of acquiring a controlled substance for getting Vicodin and Oxycodone prescriptions filled, courts records show.

He successfully filled prescriptions at Advanced Pharmacy Services at 220 S. River St., Plains Township, according to an affidavit.

Pharmacist technician Robert Klinger said he learned of the fraudulent prescriptions on Feb. 2 after Zawadzki gave the pharmacy a prescription for another person with the date whitened out, the affidavit says.

Klinger identified Zawadzki from a photo lineup on Feb. 27, a day after he fled from CVS, and police said neither of the doctors listed as the prescribers had issued the prescriptions.

Zawadzki had also been charged on Jan. 2 with burglary when he broke into the home of his sister-in-law, Helene Zawadzki, in Swoyersville and stole two aquamarine rings and about \$1,000 in cash from a safe, according to court records.

Jewelry had also been stolen from numerous boxes in her dresser, and a shotgun was also missing, police said. Helene Zawadzki told police her former brother-in-law, Marc Zawadzki, had a drug problem, the affidavit says.

Zawadzki has yet to be arraigned and is awaiting a preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast. Anyone with any information on Zawadzki's whereabouts can contact the Pittston City Police Department at 570-654-2425 or 570-654-2424.

2/24/2014

### **Nanticoke man charged with attempted luring**

[jllynott@civitasmedia.com](mailto:jllynott@civitasmedia.com)

Police said a Nanticoke man tried to lure a girl into his car and later was subdued with a Taser after refusing to drop a piece of glass he held to his neck while in custody.

Robert Monaco, 51, was arraigned on 17 charges: luring a child into a motor vehicle, disorderly conduct, harassment, simple assault, terroristic threats, resisting arrest and recklessly endangering another person. He was committed to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$25,000 bail.

According to police:

A group of boys and girls was standing at the corner of Mill and North Main streets around 6:30 p.m. Friday when a blue Kia automobile pulled up. The man driving the car put down a window and asked if they were waiting for a bus. He got out of the car and told one of the girls several times to get inside.

The juveniles were frightened and walked away, but the man got back into the car and, while cursing and threatening them, followed them. The man again told the girl whom he earlier ordered to get in his car to do the same, but she yelled for him to leave and he drove off.

The juveniles provided police a description of the car and driver, the license plate and the direction of travel. Police located the car and the driver at a local bar and identified the suspect as Monaco. He was taken into custody and placed in a holding cell at police headquarters while waiting to be taken to a district judge for an arraignment.

While watching a surveillance camera of the cell, police saw Monaco smash a light and pick up a piece of broken glass. He held it to his neck and threatened to cut himself. Several times police ordered Monaco to drop the glass, but he refused to comply.

Police used a Taser to subdue him and placed him in handcuffs. He was treated by Pittston EMS and taken to a local hospital. Upon his release he was taken to the county prison.

His preliminary hearing is at 1:30 p.m. March 5 before District Judge Alexandra Kokura Kravitz in Pittston.

2/24/2014

### **Cops: Nanticoke man tried to lure girl into car**

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke resident was arrested Friday after allegedly following a juvenile female in hopes of luring the girl into his car.

Pittston police said officers were dispatched to a Mill Street address on the report of a man attempting to lure girls into his car. Police said a victim was approached by the man, who was driving a blue Kia, at about 6:30 p.m. Friday.

According to police, the man, later identified as Robert Monaco, allegedly asked a group of juvenile girls if they were waiting for the bus. The man then told one of the girls to get in his car, police said. After repeatedly telling the girl to get inside his car, the girls became frightened and walked away, which is when Monaco allegedly followed them with his car, yelling and cursing at them, police said. According to police, Monaco was later located at a local bar after officers were provided with a description of the man and his Pennsylvania vehicle registration. While in a holding cell, Monaco was seen on camera smashing a light and placing a piece of the light bulb on his neck, threatening to cut himself, police said. According to police, officers used a stun gun on Monaco after he refused to drop the glass. Police handcuffed him before he was transported to a local hospital for treatment.

2/21/2014

### **Burglary charges refiled against two men**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

It will cost two men more bail money if they want to be released from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. Bail originally set at \$25,000 each for Shane Hempel, 25, and Earl Hoopingarner, 28, on Dec. 21 was increased to \$250,000 each when they were recharged by city and state police at Wyoming on Wednesday with ransacking a house on Enterprise Street on Nov. 29.

Authorities gathered evidence of the burglary during the homicide investigation of Gertrude Price, 97, who was found beaten to death inside her home on East Grand Street on Nov. 29.

State police Lt. Richard Krawetz said Thursday the investigation into Price's homicide is progressing. He would not state the reason for the higher bail for Hempel and Hoopingarner, noting bail is set by the district judge.

Krawetz said city and state police decided to withdraw the initial set of burglary charges against the two men when additional evidence was gathered that led to more charges.

Hempel and Hoopingarner were arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker on burglary, criminal conspiracy, theft, receiving stolen property and theft charges. Hoopingarner was further charged with identity theft, receiving stolen property, access device fraud and criminal attempt.

Price had last spoken to family at about 10:20 p.m. Nov. 28, Thanksgiving Day. It was reported to authorities that lights were on inside her home at about 11 p.m. Authorities believe Price was killed at about 10:45 p.m. by someone who forced open a basement window and ransacked the house.

In the burglary case, authorities allege Hoopingarner and Hempel ransacked the house on Enterprise Street, which is about 10 blocks away from Price's house. Items stolen were a Greater Nanticoke Area class ring, jewelry, beer, a rifle, digital cameras, computer paper, dog food and a credit card, according to the criminal complaints.

Hoopingarner used the stolen credit cards at several stores in the area, the complaints say.

Shane Hempel's sister, Janice Hempel, 23, of Nanticoke, was charged with receiving stolen property and criminal conspiracy.

2/21/2014

### **New charges filed in Nanticoke Thanksgiving burglary**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

Facing charges in connection with a Thanksgiving burglary at 201 Enterprise St. in Nanticoke, Janice Hempel recently told police that she didn't want to sit in jail anymore for crimes her brother and boyfriend did, so she decided to try to help lead police to stolen goods that went missing that day.

Arrest papers say Hempel's boyfriend, Earl Hoopingarner, 28, hatched the plot about midday Thanksgiving to target the home of Krystle Lampman, 29, that night. With Janice Hempel's brother, Shane Hempel, serving as a lookout, Hoopingarner ransacked and looted the home valuables just after 10 p.m., police said.

In an interview with police, Shane Hempel, 25, described how Hoopingarner was "tearing things up" and collecting items in a bed sheet that he eventually tied and carried away like a sack, according to police.

Hempel on Jan. 18 told investigators the about a pawnshop in the area where Hoopingarner sold a television, jewelry and a rifle that were stolen from Lampman's home, and authorities were able to track down the gun.

State and Nanticoke police in December charged Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel with the burglary, and on Thursday, Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel received additional charges of theft, conspiracy to commit theft and two counts of

receiving stolen property.

Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel are jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$250,000 bail each.

Janice Hempel, 23, of 220 Enterprise St., was charged in December with receiving stolen property and conspiracy, but the affidavit gives no indication that she is getting anything in return for the information she provided authorities, and records she is still jailed at LCCF.

2/20/2014

### **Nanticoke man charged with child porn possession**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

A man charged with possessing child pornography allegedly told authorities his brain acted like the devil and angel. Josh Gensel, 31, of East Green Street, was arrested Tuesday by the state Office of Attorney General on charges he downloaded videos and pictures of children engaged in sex acts.

Gensel allegedly admitted he preferred boys and girls from 7 to 13 years old, and used several software sharing files to download the images.

Authorities allege in the criminal complaint that Gensel stated he had downloaded child pornography for 12 years knowing he would eventually be caught.

Gensel told authorities, "Half of my brain says that it isn't right and the other half says to look at it. It is the devil and angel," the complaint says.

Gensel was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke on four counts of child pornography, two counts of dissemination of children engaged in sex acts and a single count of criminal use of communication facility. He remained jailed Wednesday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

Authorities served a search warrant at Gensel's residence and found a laptop computer that allegedly had four videos of suspected child pornography, the complaint says.

Gensel was arrested at his place of employment on Pierce Street in Kingston. When asked why authorities wanted to speak with him, he replied, "When the police come to your house for your computers, it is because of child pornography," according to the complaint.

Gensel allegedly told authorities he was involved in many youth volunteer organizations but never had any sexual contact with children "because there were always other people around."

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Feb. 26.

2/20/2014

### **Nanticoke man heading to jail turns over more drugs**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was already arrested and heading into the cell block when he handed an officer 200 bags of heroin he was hiding, police said.

Jeffery Seiwel, 30, of 343 Ridge St., Nanticoke, is charged with possession with intent to deliver, possession of a controlled substance, paraphernalia and driving without a license.

Kingston police stopped Seiwel around 2 a.m. Wednesday for a traffic violation. Seiwel told police he didn't have a license and that the car was a rental, according to the affidavit, but he wasn't on the rental agreement. Police asked him to get out of the car, and as Seiwel did, an officer saw two bundles of heroin on the driver's floor, the affidavit says.

After Seiwel was taken to the police station, Seiwel told officers that he had more heroin stuffed in his right boot, the affidavit says. Police said they found 22 wax bags stamped with the word "transformers" in red ink.

Police asked him if he had anything else on him, the affidavit says. He said no, but when he was going into the cell block, Seiwel handed over "a block of white wax paper bags stamped transformers" that had 200 bags of heroin in it taped together and said, "Here, I'm already going to jail," according to the affidavit.

He is free on \$5,000 bail, awaiting a preliminary hearing for 1:30 p.m. on Feb. 26.

2/19/2014

### **Teen murder suspect will leave adult jail**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

The teenage driver accused of dismembering a Nanticoke man during a high-speed collision will move to a juvenile detention facility after spending five months in adult jail because he was unable to post \$1 million bail, a Luzerne County judge said Tuesday.

Judge Lesa S. Gelb granted Tyler Duda, 17, of Wyoming, unsecured bail under the stipulation that he be released to a juvenile facility in Northampton County. Gelb did not rule on whether the case would remain in adult court, where Duda could face decades in prison, or be sent to juvenile court, where he could remain in detention until age 21.

Duda is accused of crashing into Nickolas Zurilla, 59, at 72 mph on a Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m., July 5, severing Zurilla's legs and torso before crashing into a house near where the man had been crossing the street. Duda was 16 at the time.

Duda's attorney, Demetrius Fannick, said forensic psychiatrist Richard Fishbein determined Duda is unfit for adult jail, but Assistant District Attorney Mamie Phillips said prosecutors were not given enough notice to prepare their own expert and needed more time before a hearing on moving the case to juvenile court.

Duda pleaded not guilty last week to third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle and related charges. Gelb set a hearing for 9 a.m., April 14 on the juvenile court issue.

2/19//2014

### **Stolen car driven into funeral home fence**

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Plymouth man drove a stolen car into the fence of a funeral home on Sunday and begged a witness not to call the cops, police said.

Anthony J. Spudis, 31, of 73 Academy St., is charged with receiving stolen property, loitering, damaging property and driving without a license. William Reese called police after Spudis hit the fence at William A. Reese Funeral Chapel, 56 Gaylord Ave., at about 10 p.m., according to an affidavit. Spudis begged Reese not to call police, and fled on foot when Reese told him he had to call, police said.

Police found that the car Spudis drove was reported **stolen from Nanticoke**. Police said they later found Spudis trying to get inside a shed in the backyard at 144 Gaylord Ave.

2/19/2014

### **Unsecured bail OK'd in vehicular homicide case**

### **Hearing to determine whether Duda's case goes to juvenile court**

rdupuis@civitasmedia.com

The teenage suspect in a crash that killed a Nanticoke man last summer was granted unsecured bail on Tuesday, with a hearing scheduled on whether to transfer the case to juvenile court.

Tyler Duda was 16 at the time of the July 5 incident that left Nicholas Zurilla, 59, dead after he was struck by an SUV outside his home at 340 W. Union St.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis has said Duda, of Kingston Township, took his mother's 2013 Ford Edge without her knowledge and was out joy riding with Donald Kinney Jr., 16, in Nanticoke on the way to visit a female friend.

Duda was arraigned in September by District Judge Donald Whittaker on charges of homicide by vehicle, third-degree murder, accidents involving death, driving without a license, speeding, reckless driving and failing to stay in lane.

Duda has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Duda, now 17, originally was held in lieu of \$1 million bail.

Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb on Tuesday set unsecured bail, releasing Duda to juvenile probation. He was to be held on an unrelated juvenile detainer, according to court records.

The girl whom Duda and Kinney were en route to visit told police about a phone call she said she had with Duda while he was driving that night.

While talking to Duda, the girl told police, she heard Kinney tell Duda to "slow down," and then heard the crash that sent Zurilla through the Ford's windshield and knocked Kinney unconscious.

A state police reconstruction of the crash alleges Duda was traveling in excess of 70 mph when he struck Zurilla, arrest papers say. The speed limit on West Union Street is 25 mph.

Zurilla had been sitting on the porch of his neighbor, Paul Murphy, at 341 W. Union St. As Murphy was about to enter his house, Zurilla was crossing the street and said in a loud voice, "This car is going to hit me," according to arrest

papers.

Murphy turned around and “had seen a car, and a body in front of it going directly upward and to the left,” arrest papers say.

Judge Gelb also set an April 14 hearing date on whether the case against Duda can be transferred to juvenile court. Court documents list Duda’s legal team as First Assistant Public Defender Demetrius Fannick and Assistant Public Defender Cheryl Sobeski-Reedy.

2/14/2014

### **Teen accused of killing pedestrian pleads not guilty**

Citizens Voice

A 16-year-old driver accused of dismembering a Nanticoke man during a high-speed collision in July pleaded not guilty Friday during his initial appearance in county court.

Tyler Duda appeared before Luzerne County Judge Fred A. Pierantoni for his formal arraignment on third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle and related charges.

On Tuesday, Pierantoni will preside over a hearing to determine whether to move Duda's case to juvenile court and whether Duda's bail should be reduced.

Duda remains jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$1 million bail.

Duda, of Wyoming, is accused of crashing into 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street around 2:15 a.m. on July 5, severing Zurilla's legs and torso before crashing into a house 467 feet from where Zurilla had been crossing the street. Prosecutors say Duda took his mother's vehicle, went to pick up a friend and was driving to another classmate's house when the incident occurred,

2/10/2014

### **Hanover Township police at about 3:45 a.m. Saturday arrested a Nanticoke woman on several charges after allegedly refusing to leave J.P. Mascaro & Sons at East Main Street.**

Citizens Voice

According to police, Jennifer Lee Mieczkowski, 32, was involved in a reported domestic incident. Police said Mieczkowski arrived at the location and after being told to leave, she refused.

Officers arrived shortly after and asked Mieczkowski to leave, but after beginning to leave, she exited her vehicle and began yelling at a male worker.

Police said the suspect was advised to leave several times and officers struggled to handcuff her.

Mieczkowski is charged with defiant trespass, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.

2/8/2014

### **Daughter hits dad with 2-by-4 in domestic incident**

Josh Horton - Citizens Voice

Police were called to a Nanticoke home for a domestic dispute where a woman struck her father in the head with a 2-by-4, police said.

Police arrived at 126 W. Washington St. for a physical domestic between John Wojciechowski, 45, and his daughter, Kailey Wojciechowski, 18. Kimberly Wojciechowski, John Wojciechowski's wife and Kailey Wojciechowski's mother, answered the door when police arrived and appeared to be intoxicated, police said.

The mother stated John Wojciechowski broke down Kailey Wojciechowski's door and began striking her. Police reported red marks on Kimberly Wojciechowski's face in the area of her left temple and right cheek.

Kailey Wojciechowski told police her father was choking her mother and admitted to striking her father in the back of the head with a 2-by-4. She told police she was protecting her mother, who she said was turning blue.

John Wojciechowski told police his daughter's boyfriend brought drugs to his wife and daughter and he asked him to leave.

John Wojciechowski is charged with two counts of simple assault, while Kailey Wojciechowski is charged with simple assault and harassment. Both were arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast on Wednesday. Both are free on \$1,000 unsecured bail and a preliminary hearing is set for 1 p.m. Feb. 12.

2/1/2014

### **Three accused of manufacturing methamphetamine**

Josh Horton - Citizens Voice

Two men and a woman from Luzerne County were arrested and identified as methamphetamine manufacturers late Thursday night, police say.

Kevin Jones, 32, of 152 Valley View Drive, Hunlock Township; Nicole Booth, 20, of 127 Grand St., Nanticoke and James Hauer, 19, of 4 Thomas St., Nanticoke, were arrested and charged with two counts of manufacturing with intent to deliver, one count of possession of a controlled substance, three counts of possession of red phosphorus with intent to manufacture a controlled substance, risking catastrophe, illegal dumping of methamphetamine waste and conspiracy. Jones was driving a Ford Focus when police pulled him over. Jones, Booth and Hauer were taken into custody without incident.

Police noticed a plastic bag containing isopropanol antifreeze, iodine, hydrogen peroxide and packages of pseudoephedrine in plain site. During a search of the vehicle, police found methamphetamine and more items used to manufacture the drug, including red phosphorous, fuel, funnels, glassware. Numerous containers containing unidentified liquids were also found, police said.

Jones, Booth and Hauer were unable to post bail and are currently lodged at Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

1/31/2014

### **New arrest delays sentencing for drug trafficker**

elewis@civitasmedia.com

The sentencing hearing for a Nanticoke man who pleaded guilty to trafficking a party drug from China was continued because of a new arrest.

Peter Sepling, 43, was scheduled to be sentenced Thursday by U.S. District Court Judge A. Richard Caputo, but the judge continued Sepling's sentencing hearing until April 15 based on a request by attorney Joseph P. Nahas.

Nahas stated in court papers that he was notified on Jan. 23 that his client, Sepling, was rearrested in another matter and was jailed.

It could not be learned where Sepling was arrested. Amanda Endy, secretary for the U.S. Attorney's Office, had no comment. Nahas could not be reached for comment.

A review of court databases in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, New Jersey and Ohio, and the federal court docket PACER for recently filed criminal complaints for Sepling returned zero results on Thursday.

Sepling on Oct. 28 pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting the trafficking of gamma butyrolactone in April 2011. Under the terms of the guilty plea, Sepling maintained his right to challenge whatever sentence is imposed.

Sepling and John Nikoloff, of West Wyoming, were indicted by a federal grand jury in June 2011, after a parcel containing 1.1 kilograms of gamma butyrolactone was delivered to Nikoloff's address on April 26, 2011.

U.S. Custom officers working at a DHL Courier facility in Kentucky targeted a parcel from China to Nikoloff. The parcel was delivered by an undercover state police trooper to Nikoloff's residence.

Nikoloff told authorities he accepted the parcel on behalf of Sepling. He delivered it to Sepling when they met later on April 26, 2011, on Wyoming Avenue in Kingston.

A search of Sepling's residence uncovered 111 bottles of anabolic steroids and numerous bottles of pills and liquids, court records state.

Nikoloff pleaded guilty to conspiring to distribute a controlled substance. He was sentenced Nov. 25 to two years probation.

1/30/2014

### **Nanticoke woman faces trial in 2012 bar brawl**

jseibel@citizensvoice.com

More than two years after a bar brawl in Nanticoke that ended with a woman getting her face slashed, the alleged primary aggressor will stand trial on several charges, none of which are related to the slashing.

Melanie Figueroa, 22, of 140 Sharpe St., Nanticoke, was charged in October with two counts each of simple assault and harassment and one count each of disorderly conduct and purchasing alcohol as a minor.

The charges stem from a Jan. 1, 2012, box-cutter slashing incident that severely injured Jennifer Mieczkowski. Figueroa

was not charged with being the slasher, however.

"We could not prove that Melanie Figueroa was the slasher," Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said when her charges were filed. "Our investigation revealed that was not the case."

According to the police affidavit, officers were dispatched to the former Prospect Street Cafe at 23 S. Prospect St. about 2 a.m. New Year's Day to a report of a brawl. Among the injured was Mieczkowski, who suffered severe cuts to the face.

Mieczkowski testified that at some point during the fight, Figueroa was hitting her with closed fists. She said she then got on top of Figueroa and that someone else had hit her in the back of the head.

After someone broke up the fight, Mieczkowski said, "I stood up and blood started running down my face."

She began to cry and said, "Someone had slashed my face multiple times."

Witnesses reported that several fights took place within the bar that night, but the first began when Briana Engle, was assaulted, the affidavit says.

Figueroa told police a bouncer had let her into the bar without checking her identification.

Engle and two people who accompanied her to the bar, Justin and Shawn Eckrote, testified that Figueroa was acting disorderly. Justin Eckrote suggested they leave and avoid getting into an altercation, but just before they could, Figueroa came up behind Engle and pulled her to the ground by the hair.

Figueroa beat Engle until Justin Eckrote pulled her off, at which point Figueroa confronted Mieczkowski, who also tried to intervene, Engle testified.

Engle, who was not hurt, said Figueroa was the primary aggressor during the fight.

Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker dismissed one count of simple assault because Engle had no reported injuries. Figueroa will go to trial on the others.

1/28/2014

### **Guilty plea entered in theft, trespassing**

Times Leader

A Nanticoke man pleaded guilty Monday in Luzerne County Court in connection with two theft and trespassing cases from last summer.

Joshua G. Bobbin, 21, entered the pleas before county Judge David W. Lupas.

According to investigators, on July 16 Bobbin and another man cut the battery out of a recreational vehicle, and fled in a vehicle registered at Bobbin's address. The owners later identified Bobbin from a photo line-up.

On July 18, police were dispatched to a burglary in progress at a barn on Huntsville Road in Shavertown. Police said found one suspect in the woods nearby who identified Bobbin as the other person with him.

He must pay \$360 restitution for the battery and \$3,738 for the barn burglary and will be sentenced in March.

1/24/2014

### **Four charged after Nanticoke drug raid**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com 570-821-2058; @cvjimhalpin

Four Nanticoke residents are facing drug trafficking charges after police raided a home across from Greater Nanticoke Area High School on Thursday evening and found thousands of dollars in drugs.

Police say Irene Louis, 19, Khalif Jabar Gillespie, 24, Johnny Al Quara Jamison, 33, and his brother, Lamarr Jamison, 27, all of 424 Kosciuszko St., are facing numerous drug offenses after officers found some 500 packets of heroin worth \$10,000 along with 95 packets of crack cocaine, \$5,000 in cash, drug paraphernalia and five guns.

"They were all loaded and ready to go," Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said.

Police and the Luzerne County Drug Task Force raided the home at 424 Kosciuszko St. about 4:30 p.m. Thursday following a series of controlled drug buys, he said.

Officers found Lamarr Jamison in possession of "Diesel" heroin packets marked with a fuel dispenser, the same as packets sold to a confidential informant, according to a police affidavit. Near him, police found bags of crack stamped with a dinosaur or a blue rabbit, police said.

Police say they found hundreds of dollars in documented buy money during the search.

All of the drugs, cash and handguns were found in the area of Lamarr Jamison, Gillespie and Louis, police said. Two revolvers were stolen, and Lamarr Jamison and Gillespie are convicted felons, according to police.

Police charged all four with multiple counts of possessing a controlled substance with the intent to deliver, drug

possession and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Louis, Lamarr Jamison and Gillespie were also charged with counts of receiving stolen property, and Lamarr Jamison and Gillespie were charged with possessing firearms as felons.

Magisterial District Judge Paul Roberts arraigned all four Friday morning and set their bail at \$75,000. They were being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for Feb. 5 at 1 p.m.

1/24/2014

### **Drugs, guns found in house across Greater Nanticoke Area schools**

Edward Lewis - elewis@civitasmedia.com

Four people from Newark, N.J., were arraigned Friday after authorities said they used a house in a school zone to package and peddle a large amount of heroin, crack cocaine and marijuana.

Police Chief Bill Shultz said city police and drug agents with the Luzerne County Drug Task Force under the state Office of Attorney General “quickly reacted” to shut down the drug haven at 424 Kosciuszko St. late Thursday afternoon.

The house is located directly across the street from Greater Nanticoke Area high school, middle school and elementary schools, and the recess yard for children.

Authorities said they found five loaded handguns, ammunition, 450 heroin packets in a shoe box, more than 50 heroin packets scattered in different bedrooms, 95 bags of crack cocaine, a small amount of marijuana, two marijuana grinders and smoking pipes, a marijuana water bong and nearly \$5,000 throughout the house, Shultz said.

“This was a quick one,” Shultz said. “In less than 24 hours, we were able to get a couple of (drug) buys out of there. We got our buys that we needed and moved quick because of the school zone and not knowing the individuals in the house.”

Arrested from the house were:

- Lamarr Jamison, 27, charged with eight counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, four counts each of possession of a controlled substance, receiving stolen property and possession of drug paraphernalia, three counts of illegal possession of a firearm and two counts of criminal use of communication facility.
- Johnny Al Quara Jamison, 33, charged with four counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, three counts of possession of drug paraphernalia, two counts of possession of a controlled substance and a single count of possession of marijuana.
- Khalif Jabar Gillespie, 24, charged with four counts each of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and receiving stolen property, three counts of illegal possession of a firearm, and two counts of possession of drug paraphernalia.
- Irene Louis, 19, charged with four counts each of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance, receiving stolen property and possession of drug paraphernalia.

They were arraigned by District Judge Paul Roberts in Kingston, and all were jailed at the county correctional institution for lack of \$75,000 bail each.

The four are originally from Newark, N.J., Shultz said.

Johnny Jamison was first to reside in the Kosciuszko Street residence, with his brother Lamarr Jamison and his girlfriend, Louis, moving in a few months ago. Gillespie is believed to have moved in a few weeks ago, Shultz said.

Shultz said Lamarr Jamison was the “major dealer” at the house.

Under state law, anyone convicted of selling illegal drugs within 1,000 feet of a school faces a mandatory two-year prison sentence.

Court records from Essex County, N.J., say Gillespie was sentenced in August to two years probation on a charge he had narcotics in a school zone in May.

1/17/2014

### **Wilkes-Barre homicide case closed after suspect's death**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com 570-821-2058; @cvjimhalpin

Prosecutors have dropped the case against homicide suspect Brandon Leigh Switzer after his unexpected death earlier this month, according to court documents.

Switzer, 23, of 168 E. Union St., Nanticoke, was charged with a single count of involuntary manslaughter in the death of Zachary J. Williams, 23, of 135 Park St., Nanticoke.

Switzer claimed he accidentally shot Williams, his close friend, while playing with a Beretta 9mm pistol at his friend's

house on Sherman Street in Wilkes-Barre on June 25.

His obituary says Switzer died Jan. 3, but does not say how. Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said an ambulance was dispatched to his home that day for a choking call and that Switzer was taken to an area hospital.

The case was not handled as a police matter, he said.

“We were not called to that residence,” Shultz said. “We later found out that he died.”

Switzer’s cause and manner of death are still pending the results of toxicology testing, according to the Luzerne County Coroner’s Office.

Wilkes-Barre police arrested Switzer on June 25 after Williams was fatally shot in the head at 32 N. Sherman St. Court documents say Switzer told police he brought the weapon to his friend’s house and began playing with it along with Williams. The pair loaded and unloaded the weapon, operated the slide and passed it back and forth, according to police.

Switzer told investigators Williams handed the weapon back to him at one point and he reloaded it, but then Williams asked to see it again.

Switzer ejected the magazine and began to hand the weapon to Williams when he remembered the gun had a round chambered, according to police. Switzer told police he took the weapon and began to release the hammer with his thumb when his thumb slipped and he shot Williams in the head.

Williams was pronounced dead at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township later that day.

Police arrested Switzer at the scene and charged him with involuntary manslaughter, a first-degree misdemeanor.

Switzer posted \$250,000 bail through a bondsman the next day and in August waived his right to a preliminary hearing, with his attorney saying he had reached a tentative plea agreement with prosecutors for what he termed a “horrible accident.”

Prosecutors on Thursday moved to cease prosecution of the case because of Switzer’s death. The same day, Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas signed the order that the case be nolle prossed.

1/17/2014

### **Teens charged in West Side tire slashings**

By James Halpin and Denise Allabaugh, Staff Writers Citizens Voice

Four Luzerne County youths are implicated in a series of tire slashings that hit West Side communities this week. Police captured the four early Friday in connection with a vandalism spree in Wyoming, West Pittston and Exeter on Thursday.

Wyoming authorities alone reported 24 vehicles had their tires slashed while parked along Moosic Street, Wyoming Avenue, Atherton Avenue, Institute Street and the Midway Shopping Center.

A home window was also broken during the spree, which took place Thursday between 1-5 a.m.

Exeter police arrested the suspects after finding them walking along Wilson and Whitlock streets and in possession of knives.

Police identified the suspects as Harley Davidson Johnson, 19, of West Pittston; Allan Recine Herring Jr., 19, of Nanticoke; Joshua Tyler Rose, 18, of Exeter; and a 15-year-old juvenile.

The juvenile is being charged as a minor, and Rose was released without charges because he cooperated, police said. Investigators charged Johnson and Herring with 35 counts of criminal mischief, six counts of conspiring to commit criminal mischief, six counts of loitering or prowling at night, two counts of corruption of minors, two counts of interfering with the custody of a committed person and one count of possession of a weapon.

Magisterial District Judge Michael G. Dotzel arraigned them Friday morning and set bail at \$30,000. They are being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for Jan. 29 at 9 a.m.

1/16/2014

### **Nanticoke man charged with marijuana possession**

By Edward Lewis - elewis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man facing marijuana possession charges filed in December was arrested on similar offenses when police allegedly found 110 heroin packets and three bags of marijuana hidden in his pants.

Jahleel Khiry Owens, 21, of East Main Street, was a passenger in a vehicle that was stopped on Main Street for a license plate that was unreadable at about 7:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Police detected an odor of marijuana coming from Owens, according to the criminal complaint.

Owens allegedly told police he smoked marijuana about 20 minutes before the car was stopped. Police detained Owens transporting him to Kingston Police Headquarters where he said, "I have dope," and unzipped his pants and removed a plastic bag allegedly containing 110 heroin packets and three plastic bags containing marijuana, the complaint says.

Owens admitted to police he sells marijuana and gives heroin to "friends" to sell on his behalf, according to the complaint.

Court records say Owens was released from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on Dec. 26 when he posted \$50,000 bail on similar offenses filed by Kingston police on Dec. 19.

In that case, Owens was driving a vehicle that slid into a snow pile on North Maple Avenue. An odor of marijuana was detected in the car.

Police allege they found a gallon-size bag completely filled with marijuana and ammunition inside the car. A juvenile passenger in the car was found with a loaded .22 caliber handgun concealed under his clothing.

Police said the handgun was reported stolen to Wilkes-Barre police on Nov. 12.

Owens was arraigned Thursday by District Judge Joseph Carmody in West Pittston on two counts each of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

1/15/2014

### **Police: Nanticoke man led cops on chase with pregnant woman in car**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com 570-821-2058; @cvjimhalpin

A Nanticoke man is charged with endangering the welfare of a child after police say he led officers on two separate high-speed chases on the same night with a pregnant woman in the car.

State police on Wednesday took out a warrant also charging James Michael Hughes, 26, of 287 State St., with reckless endangerment, criminal mischief, unauthorized use of a vehicle, resisting arrest, fleeing police and numerous summary traffic offenses.

Newport Township police first encountered Hughes about 12:40 a.m. Dec. 5, when he refused to pull over for an officer while driving southbound on Interstate 81 near the Nuangola exit, according to a police affidavit filed in court.

The officer ended the pursuit after the vehicle, a red GMC Jimmy, exited onto Blue Ridge Trail, police said.

But a state trooper spotted the vehicle a little more than an hour later turning into the Walden Park housing development, police said.

The driver, later identified as Hughes, tried to make a U-turn but was blocked by the police cruiser, the affidavit says.

Hughes then sped down Walden Drive, straddling the double yellow line as he drove down the middle of the road, police said.

The officer chased the Jimmy through the development and into the backyard of a home on Red Coat Lane, until at last the vehicle lost traction on an embankment along Colony Drive, according to police.

Police say the vehicle slid down the embankment, but Hughes continued driving for about a quarter mile until the SUV got stuck on a downed tree.

Hughes then fled the scene through the woods in an unknown direction, leaving behind his passenger, Brandy Peters, police said.

Peters, who at the time was seven months pregnant, told troopers Hughes is her boyfriend's cousin. Hughes had called and asked her to give him a ride, but when she arrived at a Nanticoke house to get him, he insisted on driving and took the keys from her, police said.

Peters told police she thought Hughes fled from officers because he might have had drugs or weapons in his possession. Police on Wednesday got a warrant for Hughes' arrest. Court records indicate he was still wanted Wednesday afternoon.

1/15/2014

### **Split verdict in Nanticoke acid-trip trial**

### **Carl May tangled with police in his boxers, said he was Jesus**

By Roger DuPuis - rdupuis@civitasmedia.com

A Nanticoke man who scuffled with police after they found him high on acid and sitting in the street in his underwear was found guilty of resisting arrest and disorderly conduct after a jury trial in Luzerne County Court. Carl John Thomas May, 22, was acquitted on charges of aggravated assault and simple assault, however

According to an affidavit, police patrolling Kosciuszko Street shortly after 3 a.m. April 7 saw May sitting in the crosswalk at East Church Street, wearing only boxer shorts. When officers pulled up next to May and asked if everything was OK, he stood up, grabbed the passenger door of the squad car, growling, and grabbed Patrolman Joseph Buchalski's jacket, police said.

Sgt. Brian Williams got out of the car and approached May, putting out his hand and trying to calm him down. But May kept moving toward the officer, according to court documents, and Williams grabbed the man's arm, taking him to the ground.

That's when May's mother came out of the house and pleaded with her son to stop fighting with police, telling the officers that May had taken acid. May responded by telling her he was Jesus, according to the affidavit.

As the struggle between Williams and May continued, Buchalski warned May that he was going to use a Taser on him. Two jolts were required before May was subdued, Buchalski wrote.

"May appeared to be totally incoherent, making growling, grunting, inaudible utterances which did not make any sense," Buchalski wrote.

May was transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center. Williams, who suffered a knee injury and ripped uniform, was taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for treatment, police said.

Jurors in May's trial before Judge Michael T. Vough were seated Monday afternoon. Jurors deliberated for just over half an hour Tuesday before rendering a verdict.

May was ordered to report to probation pending sentencing at 9 a.m. March 10

1/11/2014

### **Nanticoke police activity**

Citizens Voice

City police responded to the following incidents:

Pamela Aftewicz of Nanticoke reported someone entered a property on New Grant Street and stole copper pipes, fittings and wiring.

Henry Nowak of South Hanover Street reported someone stole a package from his porch containing five boxes of 16 Keurig Vue cups.

Jacob Garner of West Field Street reported someone threw an egg on his girlfriend's vehicle and dumped a type of tomato paste on it.

1/7/2014

### **Nanticoke police activity**

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police responded to the following incidents:

Krista Fetterman of East Church Street reported someone keyed her vehicle.

Dora Molina of East Washington Street reported someone slashed all four of her vehicle tires and keyed the driver's side.

Gary Grey of Espy Street reported someone slashed the rear driver's side tire of his vehicle while it was parked in front of his home.

Robert Olsen of East Grove Street reported someone entered his vehicle and stole a Verizon Blackberry cellphone and a Dell Inspiron laptop computer.

Police cited George A. Spencer, 35, of Nanticoke, with public drunkenness after he was allegedly found intoxicated and yelling for police to arrest him in the area of 100 W. Church St. on Jan. 1.

1/7/2014

### **Police: Nanticoke man growing marijuana in bedroom**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke resident is accused of being a marijuana dealer after police say they found a growing operation and packaged drugs in his bedroom.

Michael Bilby Coombs, 23, of 260 E. Green St., is charged with two counts of possessing marijuana with the intent to deliver and one count of possessing drug paraphernalia.

Nanticoke police raided Coombs home about 4:30 p.m. Friday with a warrant allowing them to search his bedroom. Investigators found two flower pots containing sprouting plants in the bedroom closet, according to a police affidavit. The plants had recently been watered and had a fan blowing on them with lights shining from a rod above, police said. Officers also found empty marijuana bags, small bits of marijuana and a blunt, the affidavit says. Police say Coombs came home as they were searching his room. After being arrested, police found Coombs in possession of a marijuana grinder, a pipe and a sock containing nine bags of marijuana, according to the affidavit. Coombs also had a joint tucked behind his ear, police said. Asked what he was doing, Coombs told police he was smoking marijuana, the complaint says. Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane arraigned Coombs on Saturday morning and set his bail at \$20,000, which records show Coombs subsequently posted. He is due back in court for a preliminary hearing at 1 p.m. Jan. 15.

1/4/2014

Work-release inmate who failed to return captured

### **Citizens Voice**

A Luzerne County Correctional Facility inmate wanted for escape has been captured. John Patrick McNew, 42, of 1210 S. Prospect St., Nanticoke, is charged with felony escape after authorities say he left for a work-release program Christmas Eve and never returned. McNew was set to be released between Feb. 16 and Feb. 15, 2015, on convictions of driving under the influence, receiving stolen property and driving drunk with a suspended license. Court documents show he crashed a stolen car into a guardrail in Plymouth in February 2012, then fled the scene. Court records show that after his capture, McNew was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer, who set bail at \$25,000. McNew was returned to the county jail with a hearing set for 10 a.m. Jan. 9.

1/3/2014

### **Police: Nanticoke man stole to support drug habit**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke man is accused of breaking into a relative's home and stealing jewelry, cash and a shotgun to feed a drug habit. Marc J. Zawadzki, 40, of 1253 Center St., is charged with burglary and two counts each of theft and receiving stolen property. According to a police affidavit, the burglary was discovered the afternoon of Oct. 25 after Helene Zawadzki's daughter got locked out of her house at 47 Gillespie St. in Swoyersville. A hidden spare key was missing, and upon entering her home Helene Zawadzki found things out of place in her bedroom, police said. She discovered a safe under her bed had been opened and two aquamarine rings and about \$1,000 in cash had been stolen, the affidavit says. Jewelry had been stolen from numerous boxes in her dresser, and a shotgun was also missing, police said. Helene Zawadzki told police her former brother-in-law, Marc Zawadzki, had a drug problem and may have been responsible, the affidavit says. On Nov. 10, Helene Zawadzki got some of the stolen jewelry back from Marc Zawadzki's mother, and she showed police text messages he sent her apologizing for breaking in, police said. One message said the shotgun was at the home of Helene Zawadzki's ex-husband, Paul Zawadzki, so police went to his home at 27 Pomona St., Kingston, and recovered the weapon, the affidavit says. But some of the property was gone. Police say Marc Zawadzki sold a stolen necklace to a gun shop in Nanticoke for \$127 and a gold ring with a blue stone to a pawn shop in Swoyersville. About two weeks after selling the necklace, Marc Zawadzki went back to the gun shop "very distraught," saying he had made a mistake, police said. The necklace, however, had been melted after the required five-day holding period. During questioning, Marc Zawadzki told police he went to Helene Zawadzki's home to get his brother's truck and that his brother told him to go inside and get some jewelry to sell to pay for repairs to the truck, the affidavit says. He also claimed he thought the shotgun was his father's, police said. But Paul Zawadzki told police he never gave his brother permission to enter the house or take anything, and that Marc Zawadzki already knew about the hidden key because he had been present when Paul Zawadzki got them in the past, the

affidavit says.

Magisterial District Judge David Barilla arraigned Zawadzki on Thursday morning and set his bail at \$1,000. Zawadzki was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for 10:05 a.m. Jan. 9.

1/3/2014

### **Armed man robs Nanticoke convenience store**

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating an armed robbery of a convenience store that took place early Thursday. Police say a man armed with a knife or box cutter walked into the Cocoa Hut at 61 E. Main St. about 12:55 a.m. and demanded cash.

The clerk handed over an undisclosed amount of cash and the robber fled on foot, police said.

The robber was described as wearing a gray ski mask, a red and black striped shirt and dark jeans.

Anyone with information on the robbery is asked to call police at 570-735-2200.

1/2/2014

### **Leads still being followed in homicide**

joconnell@timesleader.com

The daughter of a woman slain Thanksgiving night said she and her family are getting by, but it's tiresome with no answers to who killed Gertrude Price in her home on East Grand Street in Nanticoke.

"We're doing. But we'd feel better if we knew who did it," Carol Belmonte, of Jackson Township, said softly.

Gertrude Price, 97, who lived alone, was beaten to death Thanksgiving night during a home invasion.

Price was known by family and neighbors as a strong-willed, independent woman who shoveled her own sidewalk, cut her own grass and kept a cozy little home in Nanticoke, the city where she raised her children and worked as a union dressmaker for a factory downtown.

Belmonte said she and her family spent a quiet New Year holiday at home. She spoke well of investigators and was confident in their abilities.

"The police have been super. I know that they're working to the fullest extent that they can," Belmonte said. "It's just a matter of time. We pray every day."

Active case

State police Lt. Richard Krawetz said the investigation continues with new leads followed daily. "On a daily basis, we're conducting interviews, following up on information we have received as a result of the investigation," Krawetz said.

As is common in homicide cases, the bulk of the evidence was uncovered at the investigation's onset. As more than a month has passed, new leads have slowed, Krawetz said. Still, the investigation has been an all-troop effort, and detectives from other stations have contributed in the search for Price's killer, Krawetz said.

Police have not made clear whether a burglary that happened a few blocks away on Enterprise Street was related to Price's murder.

Two Nanticoke men, Shane Hempel and Earl Hoopingarner, were arrested Dec. 21 and charged with burglarizing a home about 10 blocks away from where Price lived on the same night she was murdered.

A few days later, Janice Hempel, Shane's sister, was charged with felony counts of receiving stolen property. The three remain jailed at the county prison for lack of bail.

Krawetz said that through testimony gathered during the homicide investigation, police were able to collect enough evidence to charge the three in the burglary.

Krawetz did not say the burglary was connected to the homicide, only that the arrests were made with evidence gained as a result of its investigation.

### **Two rewards offered**

**Two reward funds have been set up for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of Price's killer. Kevin Grevera, owner of Hunting Depot along Prospect Street and a former city police officer, started a fund that has exceeded \$5,300. Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers later put up a second reward for \$2,500 for information that leads to a conviction.**

Anyone with information about Price's death should call state police headquarters in Wyoming at 570-697-2000.