

12/31/2013

Mom convicted of raping son denied new trial

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When she filed her appeal, child sex predator Carol Hann listed 27 complaints regarding why she deserves a new trial. A Luzerne County judge on Monday said not one has merit.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley - who previously sentenced Hann to 20 years, nine months to 41 years, six months in state prison - on Monday denied an appeal Hann filed after she was convicted of raping her own son.

"As noted, the defendant raises twenty-seven issues for appeal," Gartley wrote in an opinion handed down Monday.

"None of the issues raised, however, have any merit."

Hann's appeal will now be forwarded to the state Superior Court for review.

Hann, 45, was convicted in December 2012 of rape of a child, criminal conspiracy, incest, corruption of minors and three counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

Hann's lawyer argued that the court erred by not ordering the boy to submit to psychological and psychiatric examinations to assess his competency to testify at trial or determine if he was prone to lie. The trial judge also should have told the jury that the boy's failure to tell anyone about the abuse for years may "justifiably produce doubt," the attorney said.

Hann's son, now 14, testified at trial about how his father, Robert Caravella, introduced him to pornography at age 7. On his 8th birthday, the boy said Caravella led him upstairs and demanded he have intercourse with Hann, the first of many rapes. The abuse occurred at homes on North Chestnut Street in Nanticoke and Gould Street in Plymouth, police said. Gartley sentenced Caravella to 35½ to 71 years in state prison in October.

12/31/2013

Man sues Nanticoke woman over drunken driving/texting crash

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A Scranton man filed a lawsuit against a woman he claims was drunk and texting when she slammed into the rear of his car.

Kevin Lepka, of Railroad Avenue, claims he suffered serious neck and back injuries after his 1992 Jeep was struck by a 1995 Pontiac Grand Am driven by Michelle Marko, of Garfield Street, Nanticoke, on Dec. 31, 2011.

According to the lawsuit filed in Luzerne County Court by attorney Michael Pisanchyn of Scranton:

Lepka was driving in Plains Township when Marko, who was distracted while texting on her cellphone, struck the rear of his vehicle. The impact caused injuries to Lepka's head and spine, forcing him to spend money on medical care and lose income because he was unable to work.

The suit also alleges Marko was intoxicated. Court records from Luzerne County show she was charged with drunken driving and careless driving in connection with the crash. She pleaded guilty in August 2012 and was sentenced to six months probation under the county's Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition Program.

12/30/2013

Guilty plea in sex assault on teen

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A Hanover Township man has pleaded guilty to one count of institutional sexual assault in connection with a March incident involving an underage teen.

Lee Alex Snyder, 24, of Lee Park Avenue, remains free on bail with sentencing set for April 7.

Snyder, who was an employee at a Nanticoke group home, knew the youth from work. Township police arrested Snyder on April 16 on charges he sexually assaulted the girl inside his own residence.

According to court records, Snyder took the girl to his residence where he had sex with her twice during the weekend of March 29.

In addition to Snyder's own admission, investigators said they recovered an iPad from the girl's room in the group home which contained text messages and video chats between the two. The victim told investigators that the day following their encounter, Snyder communicated with her via Face Time and asked her to take her clothes off during the conversation. Snyder confirmed that the two were both nude during the conversation, investigators said.

According to the terms set by Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough, Snyder is to have no contact with the group

home or the victim.

Snyder also must attend and complete sexual offender treatment, and will have to register with state police as an offender.

12/28/2013

Couple sentenced to prison for not reporting abuse

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke couple accused of doing nothing to stop the sexual assaults of a 14-year-old girl is headed to prison. Police said Laurie Ann Davis, 35, and her husband, John Davis, 43, of West Noble Street, discovered a 16-year-old boy had been raping a 14-year-old girl, but did nothing to stop it. Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough on Friday sentenced Laurie Ann Davis to nine to 23 months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on two counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

Vough sentenced John Davis to three to 12 months in prison on a child endangerment charge.

During an interview with the victim Feb. 1, the girl reported that the Davises found out she was being raped about a year earlier and had merely counseled the boy about his conduct, police said.

The couple was arrested in March. The 16-year-old boy was charged as a juvenile.

They had been free on bail, but Vough ordered them remanded to prison following their court appearance Friday.

12/28/2013

Woman tied to Nanticoke meth lab will soon be free

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke woman who allowed a methamphetamine lab to operate at her home is expected to be released from prison after spending a year in jail.

Linda Buckley of Nanticoke was sentenced Friday by Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough to one to two years in prison, with immediate parole upon reaching her minimum sentence. Buckley, 52, has already served 331 days on a conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamine charge, court records show.

According to police, Buckley told police two other residents of the house manufactured meth in her basement. She said she received meth from them in exchange for allowing them to stay at her home at 232 E. Washington St.

12/27/2013

LCCF inmate fails to return from work release

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Luzerne County Correctional Facility inmate is wanted for escape after he left the facility on a work-release program Christmas Eve and never returned.

John Patrick McNew, 42, of 1210 S. Prospect St., Nanticoke, is facing a felony escape charge after disappearing shortly after 5 a.m. Tuesday, court records show.

McNew, who could have been released as early as Feb. 16, was serving time for crashing a stolen car into a guardrail while drunk.

According to a police affidavit:

McNew was involved in a hit-and-run crash on U.S. Route 11 in Plymouth in February 2012. Police say McNew crashed into a guardrail and fled the scene until the 2000 Dodge Durango he was driving, which had severe front-end damage, was inoperable.

Police removed McNew from the car, which had been reported stolen in Nanticoke the same day, and found him reeking of alcohol with glassy, bloodshot eyes and slurred speech. Court records show McNew pleaded guilty to driving under the influence, receiving stolen property and driving drunk with a suspended license. It was McNew's third DUI conviction in the county, and added to a list of convictions on offenses including drug possession, indecent exposure and disorderly conduct. McNew was also convicted of escape in May 2004, court records show.

Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas sentenced to between one year, one month and two years, two months in jail, according to court records. McNew would have been released between Feb. 16 and Feb. 15, 2015.

But the complaint filed Thursday alleged McNew walked out of the jail about 5:15 a.m. Tuesday to attend work-release at Municipal Recovery at 495 Stanton St. He was due back at 3:30 p.m., but never showed. Anyone with information on

McNew's whereabouts is asked to call 911.

12/27/2013

Squabble over bacon results in restraining order

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A beef over bacon led to an assault that prompted a Wilkes-Barre woman to file a restraining order against a man with a lengthy criminal background and a history of violence against women.

Alonzo McClinton, 31, beat the mother of his child following an argument over bacon earlier this month at 390 E.

Northampton St. in Wilkes-Barre, according a protection from abuse affidavit the woman filed in county court.

The woman, Jackelyn Oviedo, said McClinton started an argument over the breakfast food on Dec. 1 and things quickly escalated.

"Before you know it, he started putting his hands on me in front of the children. He busted my nose and gave me a black eye," Oviedo said.

It was not clear whether the woman ever contacted police. No charges have been filed in the incident.

The woman said McClinton showed up at her residence again on Dec. 16, his birthday, and "started another fight with me because I didn't buy him a card." He showed up again the next day and started another fight about things he had stored in her home, she said.

Oviedo was granted a protection from abuse order for her and her three children, one of which is McClinton's 1-year-old child.

The state Attorney General's Luzerne County Drug Task Force arrested McClinton in September on multiple drug dealing charges. He is awaiting trial.

McClinton was also arrested in March 2011 for a slew of crimes he was wanted for. Nanticoke police said McClinton smashed a woman's face off a storm door as his brother put a gun to her head during a robbery Dec. 3, 2010, at 603 S. Hanover St. in Nanticoke. In addition to the robbery, he was also wanted for a parole violation and drug charges out of New York and a car theft in Nanticoke.

12/24/2013

Third person faces charges in Nanticoke Thanksgiving burglary

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State and Nanticoke police on Monday filed additional charges in connection with a Thanksgiving burglary at 201 Enterprise St. in Nanticoke.

Investigators charged Janice Hempel, 23, of 220 Enterprise St., with receiving stolen property and conspiracy.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker arraigned Hempel on Monday afternoon and ordered her jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 cash bail.

On Saturday, police charged Hempel's boyfriend, Earl Hoopingarner, 28, and her brother, Shane Hempel, 25, with committing the burglary at 201 Enterprise St. on Thanksgiving night.

Police say Janice Hempel and Hoopingarner live nearby in a low-income housing complex at 220 Enterprise St. Arrest papers for Janice Hempel said a majority of the stolen goods were recovered from her residence during a search Friday and "she was well aware" that her brother and Hoopingarner burglarized the home.

Arrest papers say Hoopingarner hatched the plot about midday Thanksgiving to target the home of Krystle Lampman, 29, that night. With Shane Hempel serving as a lookout, Hoopingarner ransacked and looted the home of valuables just after 10 p.m., police say.

In an interview with police, Shane Hempel described how Hoopingarner was "tearing things up" and collecting items in a bedsheet that he eventually tied and carried away like a sack, according to police.

Shane Hempel also told police his sister was "well aware of what he and Hoopingarner were doing," arrest papers said.

Hoopingarner and Shane Hempel were arraigned Saturday by Magisterial District Judge Paul Roberts. He set Hoopingarner's bail at \$45,000 cash and Shane Hempel's at \$25,000. Shane Hempel was temporarily released into the custody of state police on Monday morning for "processing" at the state police barracks in Wyoming, according to a court order signed Monday by Luzerne County Judge Fred Pierantoni.

State police have confirmed that the arrests of Hoopingarner and the Hempels were a result of the widespread investigation into the home invasion murder of a 97-year-old Nanticoke woman that also occurred on Thanksgiving night. While police have not linked the two cases, they confirm the probe into the beating death of Gertrude Price at 23

E. Grand St. led to information that solved the burglary at 201 Enterprise St.

The homicide investigation is still active and police continue to seek any common threads regarding past crimes in the city in hopes of developing suspects, state police say.

Anyone with information should call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

12/24/2013

Guilty pleas for Nanticoke drug suspect

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A Nanticoke man has pleaded guilty in connection with a 2011 drug case and is scheduled to enter a guilty plea next month after his arrest during a major drug sting last summer.

According to documents filed in Luzerne County Court, Michael Rosario, 24, of East Union Street, pleaded guilty before Judge Joseph Sklarosky Jr. on Friday to one count of possessing heroin with intent to deliver and one count of possessing cocaine with intent to deliver after police seized weapons, cash, narcotics and drug paraphernalia during an Aug. 8, 2011, raid on a Sans Souci Parkway residence in Hanover Township, where Rosario was then living.

Documents filed Monday indicate that Rosario will plead guilty in connection with a July 1 raid when he appears before Sklarosky on Jan. 21.

That arrest came as part of "Operation Shape Up," in which Rosario and eight other people were arrested after an undercover drug investigation that targeted cocaine and marijuana trafficking centered at The Master Barbershop on Hazle Avenue in Wilkes-Barre.

According to police, officers recovered cocaine, heroin, marijuana, ecstasy, \$1,140 in cash, a stolen semi-automatic handgun, a military body armor vest, digital scales, cellphones and plastic baggies in the 2011 raid for which Rosario was first arrested, and that the seized narcotics had a street value of more than \$5,000.

Sentencing is set for Jan. 21 at 9 a.m., same as the plea in the 2013 case.

The charges against Rosario from 2011 carry a potential prison sentence of 15 months to two years, six months.

He also must pay \$239 in restitution to the state police for lab work, with the \$1,140 forfeited to the Attorney General's Office.

Last summer, Rosario appeared barefoot in a white tank-top when he was arraigned on charges in connection with "Operation Shape Up," allegedly a ring in which drugs from New York City were being channeled to "sub-dealers" for sale throughout Luzerne County.

According to court documents, the charges Rosario is facing in that case are two counts of corrupt organization (possession of marijuana with intent to deliver and possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver), criminal conspiracy, possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver, delivery of a controlled substance and criminal use of a communication facility.

It was not immediately clear whether the plea would cover each and every charge.

12/23/2013

Nanticoke man threatened to kill officers

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man faces multiple charges after a scuffle with security and police Friday afternoon in Plains Township. Joseph Skladzien allegedly headbutted a security officer and threatened to kill police officers.

Police said officers received a report of an erratic driver on state Route 315 at 4:15 p.m. Friday. According to police, the vehicle had almost hit several vehicles before getting stuck in the snow after pulling into the Mohegan Sun Casino parking lot.

According to police, they then found Skladzien with his pants pulled down around his ankles, exhibiting signs of alcohol impairment.

Police said Skladzien began fighting with police after being advised he was under arrest for driving under the influence. Once taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, he was combative and disruptive, headbutting a security officer, kicking a police officer and threatening to kill police, according to police.

Skladzien is charged with driving under the influence, aggravated assault, simple assault, terroristic threats and related offenses.

12/22/2013

Nanticoke murder probe nets 2 in nearby break-in

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Investigators tracking down leads in the Thanksgiving night murder of a 97-year-old woman in Nanticoke say the homicide probe has led to the arrest of two men who committed another burglary in the city that same night. State and Nanticoke police on Saturday filed burglary and conspiracy charges against Earl Hoopingarner, 28, and Shane Hempel, 25, in connection to a break-in at 201 Enterprise St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 28.

Arrest papers say Hoopingarner lives nearby at a low-income housing complex at 220 Enterprise St. and hatched the plot about midday Thanksgiving to target the home of Krystle Lampman, 29, that night.

With Hempel serving as a lookout, Hoopingarner ransacked and looted the home valuables just after 10 p.m., police say. Lampman came home the next day to find her house in disarray, with a long list of belongings stolen, including jewelry and electronics.

At the time, state and Nanticoke police were only a few blocks away investigating the beating death of 97-year-old Gertrude Price in a home invasion robbery they believe occurred around 11 on Thanksgiving night at 23 E. Grand St. They sped over to Lampman's home, and said they would investigate whether the two Thanksgiving crimes were connected.

Arrest papers filed Saturday for the Enterprise Street case make no mention of the Price death investigation, but state police Lt. Richard Krawetz confirmed that the homicide investigation led them to solve the burglary of Lampman's home.

"The fact of the matter is, through the course of our investigation into the homicide of Mrs. Price, we uncovered information that led to the arrest of these individuals," said Krawetz, crime unit commander for state police at Wyoming. "Because we interviewed so many individuals, information was brought forward."

The homicide investigation is still active and police continue to seek any common threads regarding past crimes in the city in hopes of developing suspects, Krawetz said.

"We're communicating and working with Nanticoke police to see if there is any connection with any of the burglaries over the past several months," Krawetz said.

Police said they were led to Hoopingarner because he used one of Lampman's stolen credit cards multiple times on Dec. 11 to buy gas at Cocoa Hut in Nanticoke, hair dye and a \$25 prepaid VISA card at Rite Aid on Northampton Street in Wilkes-Barre, toilet paper and dog food at Family Dollar in Wilkes-Barre. His fourth attempt, police said, was rejected when he tried to buy a \$100 VISA card at another Rite Aid in Wilkes-Barre on Amber Lane.

Investigators obtained surveillance footage from the stores, and officers believed the man "resembled" Hoopingarner, according to arrest papers. Police said they had an informant, not named in arrest papers, who positively identified the person as Hoopingarner.

State and Nanticoke police on Friday prepared an arrest warrant for Hoopingarner on charges of identity theft, receiving stolen property, access device fraud, and attempted access device fraud on accusations he used Lampman's credit card. They then served a search warrant at his home at 220 Enterprise St., where he was taken into custody, police said.

Janice Hempel, the mother of Hoopingarner's children, told police he arrived home earlier that day carrying two bags. Police searched the bags and found some of Lampman's belongings, including her class ring, arrest papers say.

Police say they then interviewed Shane Hempel, of 247 Apollo Circle, in Nanticoke.

According to arrest papers, Hoopingarner called Shane Hempel on Thanksgiving around midday and asked if he "wanted to make money." Hoopingarner claimed the house they would target for copper piping at 201 Enterprise St. was abandoned, arrest papers say. Hempel said he agreed to assist Hoopingarner because he "needed money."

Hempel said he helped Hoopingarner "scope out" the house, but then retreated back to Hoopingarner's residence while Hoopingarner broke inside, according to police. Hoopingarner returned home with a bag of jewelry, cash, and other items, then convinced Hempel to return to the victim's residence because there was a lot more stuff to steal, police said. Hempel said he complied and served as a lookout while Hoopingarner was "tearing things up" and collecting items in a bedsheet that he eventually tied and carried away like a sack, according to police.

Nanticoke Police Chief Bill Shultz said he was happy that one of the city's Thanksgiving crimes is now solved, and focus will continue to be on the homicide case, which is being led by the state police.

Magisterial District Judge Paul Roberts arraigned Hoopingarner and Hempel on Saturday and ordered them jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. Hoopingarner's bail is set at \$45,000 cash, while Hempel's bail is \$25,000.

12/18/2013

Strip club robber gets 33-66 year sentence

Convicted strip-club robber William Gronosky will serve 33-66 years in prison for multiple offenses including his role in robberies and two separate incidents in which he fired guns at a state trooper and a city police officer.

Under a plea agreement reached as a trial was set to begin on Monday, Gronosky, 31, of Nanticoke, admitted to his role in the March 15, 2012, Carousel Lounge robbery in Plymouth Township in which he made off with \$3,500.

The sentence handed down Wednesday morning by Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough was for six charges a jury found him guilty of in September related to the robbery as well as in connection with the March 23, 2012 burglary of a state trooper's home. He was also sentenced for four other cases he pleaded guilty to on Monday. They were:

- On March 25, 2012, Gronosky tied up a man and robbed the victim's Hanover Township home, stealing more than \$8,000 worth of belongings and a 2004 Ford Focus.
- On March 26, 2012, a Wilkes-Barre city police officer spotted the stolen Ford on Wilkes-Barre Boulevard. A pursuit ensued, with Gronosky firing three or four shots toward the police car on Pittston Boulevard in Bear Creek Township. The officer lost sight of Gronosky in Thornhurst Township.
- On April 7, 2012, Gronosky participated in the robbery of a Bear Creek home, in which the owner was again tied up. Cash, a pickup truck and guns were stolen.
- On April 13, 2012, Gronosky fired a handgun out the window of a car toward state trooper James Packer during a chase in Plymouth Township. He was under surveillance following earlier incidents when troopers began following him. At least one round struck the trooper's vehicle.

According to an affidavit, Gronosky later told police, "Yeah, I saw the unmarked car and then the marked car, I knew it was on."

Gronosky and a fellow fugitive were taken into custody on April 15, 2012, in Montgomery County.

If not for Monday's plea, Gronosky could have faced a combined maximum of 120 years behind bars if convicted on each of the four cases.

12/17/2013

Gronosky pleads guilty in 4 cases

Convicted strip-club robber admits shooting at police

Convicted strip-club robber William Gronosky pleaded guilty to four more crimes Monday afternoon, including his role in robberies and two separate incidents in which he fired guns at a state trooper and a city police officer.

Under a plea agreement reached as a trial was set to begin, Gronosky, 31, faces 20 to 40 years in prison, in addition to whatever time he receives in the March 15, 2012, Carousel Lounge robbery in Plymouth Township and another case when he is sentenced Wednesday morning before Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough.

A jury in September found Gronosky, formerly of Nanticoke, guilty of all six charges stemming from the strip-club robbery in which he made off with \$3,500. He is to be sentenced in that case Wednesday, as well as in connection with the March 23, 2012 burglary of a state trooper's home.

Gronosky's pleas on Monday covered the following:

- On March 25, 2012, Gronosky tied up a man and robbed the victim's Hanover Township home, stealing more than \$8,000 worth of belongings and a 2004 Ford Focus.
- On March 26, 2012, a Wilkes-Barre city police officer spotted the stolen Ford on Wilkes-Barre Boulevard. A pursuit ensued, with Gronosky firing three or four shots toward the police car on Pittston Boulevard in Bear Creek Township. The officer lost sight of Gronosky in Thornhurst Township.
- On April 7, 2012, Gronosky participated in the robbery of a Bear Creek home, in which the owner was again tied up. Cash, a pickup truck and guns were stolen.
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According to an affidavit, Gronosky later told police, "Yeah, I saw the unmarked car and then the marked car, I knew it was on."

Gronosky and a fellow fugitive were taken into custody on April 15, 2012, in Montgomery County.

If not for Monday's plea, Gronosky could have faced a combined maximum of 120 years behind bars if convicted on each of the four cases.

Under the plea, he is likely to serve 20 to 40 years for shooting at the trooper, with any time in the other cases to be

served concurrently.

Judge Vough reminded Gronosky that he still has the right to sentence Gronosky to concurrent sentences, should he so choose.

The two other cases, according to reports at the time of Gronosky's September conviction, could add a maximum of 27 years to the tally.

Sentencing is set for 9 a.m. Wednesday.

12/17/2013

Nanticoke police activity

Citizens Voice

Megan Petrochko, of East Street, told police Thursday that someone entered her vehicle and removed a Magellan GPS, along with a Christmas bag containing hot chocolate and coffee.

About \$10 in change was taken from Dale Kivel's vehicle on East Church Street, Kivel told police.

Donald Komorski, of Fairview Drive, reported to police that someone entered his vehicle and stole about \$6 in change.

A resident of South Prospect Street told police on Thursday that someone attempted to gain entry to his residence, but did not get inside.

12/13/2013

Sexual assault suspect faces charges tied to machete incident

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A Nanticoke man arrested last week on allegations he sexually assaulted a missing 14-year-old girl was hit with new charges Thursday that he was involved in a machete encounter with other youths.

Jeremy Tyler Tencza, 19, of 215 W. Ridge St., is charged with possessing an offensive weapon, disorderly conduct and corruption of minors.

Police allege he and another youth, Dylan Monelli, jumped out a vehicle that "whipped sideways" and abruptly stopped in the 400 block of East Green Street about 2:15 p.m. Dec. 5.

They went to the back of the Chevrolet Cavalier and Tencza grabbed a pair of machetes, handing one to Monelli, according to a police affidavit.

The pair then confronted a student, Na-Shawn Wright, challenging him to fight, police said. The encounter ended when a witness who knows Tencza and Monelli from working at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, Kathy Labenski, told them she was calling police, the affidavit says.

Police filed the charges against Tencza on Thursday. It wasn't immediately clear whether Monelli will face charges.

Tencza is free on \$100,000 bail after his arrest Friday on charges of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, statutory sex assault, corruption of minors and indecent assault, according to court records.

He is accused of having sex with a 14-year-old girl who was missing from CRR Group Home. Police say they found Tencza and the girl in his bedroom on Sept. 12 and that the girl later reported having intercourse with Tencza, although he admitted only performing a sex act on her.

Court records show he is due in court for a preliminary hearing at 1 p.m. Jan. 22 in both cases.

12/12/2013

Nanticoke man accused of assaulting girlfriend

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police arrested Brandon Smith, 18, of Nanticoke, on Sunday on simple assault and harassment charges.

According to a police affidavit, Smith's girlfriend told police that he choked her and squeezed her tightly around her body. Emergency personnel took the girlfriend to a hospital for treatment.

According to the police report:

Smith told police he became upset when a cat got something on some papers and planned to leave the East Church Street home to take a walk. He told police his girlfriend tried to stop him from leaving and he grabbed her around her body to move her. She then said she was hurt.

The girlfriend told police she didn't want Smith arrested because of his medical issues. Smith confirmed to officers he does have medical issues and had not taken his medication for three days.

Smith was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and released on his own recognizance.

12/12/2013

Nanticoke police responded to the following incidents:

Citizens Voice

Samuel Robert Stavitski, 23, of Nanticoke was walking near South Prospect Street and East Washington Street around 1:30 a.m. Saturday when he was spotted by police. An officer said Stavitski matched the description of a suspicious person in the area from earlier in the week. Police said Stavitski appeared to be drunk and stumbled as he walked. They arrested him for public drunkenness and a search turned up a switchblade knife and a small amount of marijuana. Police charged him with public drunkenness, possessing offensive weapons and possession of a controlled substance. He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Joseph J. Carmody and released on unsecured bail set at \$2,500.

Dora Molina of East Washington Street reported someone slashed a tire on her vehicle.

James Brodgerski of Fairview Drive reported someone entered his vehicle and stole a toaster oven and \$2 in change.

Jennifer Zwibel of Espy Street reported someone entered her vehicle and stole a coffee maker and \$4 in change.

12/12/2013

3 charged in Plymouth meth lab bust

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State agents on Wednesday filed charges against three people accused of running a methamphetamine lab out of a Plymouth apartment.

Cheryl Cupp, 44; Robert Jones, 28; and **Amanda Musto, 19**, all of 104 W. Main St., Plymouth, were arrested Tuesday after agents with the Attorney General's Office raided their home and found an apparent meth lab.

According to a police affidavit:

A search of the apartment - in a building housing numerous children - turned up materials used to make meth such as red phosphorus, pseudoephedrine, iodine, Coleman fuel, plastic tubing and glassware.

Officers also found finished meth and bags containing discarded waste from previous meth cooks.

The trio admitted during questioning to making meth in the apartment.

The investigation caused authorities to evacuate the apartment building across from Wyoming Valley West High School.

Jones and Musto are charged with three counts of possessing red phosphorus, two counts of drug trafficking and one count each of drug possession, risking catastrophe, illegally dumping meth waste, conspiracy to deliver meth and making meth with children present.

Investigators charged Cupp with conspiracy to possess red phosphorus, drug possession and three counts of possessing red phosphorus.

Magisterial District Judge Daniel O'Donnell arraigned the group Wednesday morning and set bail for each at \$150,000. They were booked into the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for 1 p.m. Dec. 18.

12/9/2013

Nanticoke police responded to the following incidents:

Citizens Voice

Tom Sullivan reported someone tried to enter the back door of an apartment building he owns on West Union Street. Paul Roccograndi reported someone entered an apartment building he owns on West Union Street and stole copper pipes from the basement.

Anna Galinski of Bliss Street reported someone entered her vehicle and stole prescription medicine.

Mac's Auto reported someone broke into two vehicles on the lot and vandalized them.

Tracy Butczynski of Meadowcrest Drive reported someone entered her vehicle and stole binoculars and change.

Nicole Brown of Meadowcrest Drive reported someone entered her vehicle and stole two DVD players, two phone chargers and a GPS device.

Joseph Przywara reported someone broke the gate to his mini-golf course in the rear of the Dream Whip at 2 Alden Road. The thief stole a miniature lighthouse and four miniature houses.

12/7/2013

Machetes wielded during Nanticoke incident

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating an encounter between three people involving two machetes.

Police say a witness reported a vehicle traveling north on Kosciuszko Street about 2:15 p.m. Friday recklessly turned onto Green Street and then got out to challenge a student to fight.

Two occupants of the vehicle grabbed machetes, and the student took off his jacket in preparation for a fight, police said.

But the witness then yelled that police were coming and everyone scattered.

No fight occurred and there were no injuries, police said.

12/6/2013

Teenager charged with sexually assaulting girl

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City police on Friday arrested 19-year-old Jeremy Tyler Tencza on charges he sexually assaulted a girl who had ran away from a group home in September.

Tencza, of West Ridge Street, Nanticoke, was charged with involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, statutory sexual assault, corruption of minors and indecent assault. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

According to the criminal complaint:

Police received a report of a missing 13-year-old girl on Sept. 10. The girl was found in Tencza's bedroom two days later. She was taken to a hospital for a medical exam.

Tencza told police he met the girl while he was a senior at Greater Nanticoke Area High School last year. They became acquaintances over the objection from the girl's mother.

The girl's mother sent Tencza two messages warning him to stay away from her daughter at which he ignored.

Tencza told police the girl had been at his house less than 24 hours prior to police finding her on Sept. 12. He admitted to performing lewd sex acts with the girl but denied having intercourse, the complaint says.

The girl told police in October she did have intercourse with Tencza, according to the complaint.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Dec. 11.

12/4/2013

Police to review surveillance footage in search for killer

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

As family members prepare to bid farewell to 97-year-old homicide victim Gertrude Price, state police are analyzing surveillance footage from throughout Nanticoke City in an attempt to identify her killer.

"I hope they catch this culprit," Price's daughter, Carol Belmont, 76, of Jackson Township, said Tuesday. "You didn't have to kill her."

Saddened area residents streamed through the Davis-Dinelli Funeral Home on Tuesday during a viewing for Price, the great-great-grandmother beaten to death on Thanksgiving night inside her 23 E. Grand St. home.

Meanwhile, state police say they are reviewing surveillance footage obtained from businesses and residential homes to see if the attacker was caught on tape somewhere in the city before or after the murder.

"We pulled it from everywhere," state Trooper Martin Connors, spokesman for state police at Wyoming, said Tuesday. Connors said investigators continue to follow up on information gathered in recent days.

"We're just running down leads and any tips that come in," he said.

Following funeral services this morning, Price will be laid to rest in Edge Hill Cemetery in West Nanticoke.

Belmont and other relatives of Price said they are overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from the Nanticoke community and beyond, including the reward fund that has been established. More than \$3,000 has already been pledged to the person who provides information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer.

Anyone with information is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

12/4/2013

Two charged in Pittston prostitution ring indicted

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Two of the four men accused of operating an underage prostitution ring in Pittston have been indicted by a federal grand jury, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Gregory "C-Lo" Boone, 29, and Randy "Holliday" Coleman Jr., 33, both of Pittston, are charged with federal counts of conspiracy to commit sex trafficking of children, sex trafficking of children and multiple counts of producing child pornography, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors say the pair conspired with others to prostitute out underage girls in August and September, using cellphones to take suggestive pictures of the girls to post as advertisements on Backpage.com.

They are accused of recruiting at least three girls and possibly a fourth into their ring, which operated in Luzerne, Lackawanna and Dauphin counties, prosecutors said.

Gregory Boone and Coleman were previously charged in state court along with two alleged accomplices - Pittston resident Anthony Lamont "D-Lo" Boone, 30, who is Gregory Boone's brother, and **Jose Alvelo, 19, of Nanticoke**. They are facing counts of promoting the prostitution of a minor and related offenses.

The federal charges could mean significantly stiffer sentences for Gregory Boone and Coleman. Prosecutors say they face up to life in prison if convicted.

12/4/2013

A Nanticoke man was arraigned Tuesday on drug and firearm-related charges.

Citizens Voice

Arnell Alan Cobb, 36, of 1106 New Grant St., appeared before Magisterial District Judge Joseph A. Halsey in Hanover Township. A police affidavit states police conducted a knock and talk investigation at Cobb's residence on Jan. 24, 2012. Authorities were greeted at the door by Cobb and Melissa Hunter, who consented to a search of the residence. The search yielded a small amount of marijuana in the upstairs bedroom, crack cocaine in the basement and two handguns - a .44 magnum and a .38 caliber weapon - in the upstairs bedroom, authorities said. According to the affidavit, Cobb later admitted that the marijuana and cocaine were his. He also told police he did not want to mention the handguns because he is already a convicted felon.

Cobb was charged with four counts of possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver, two counts of possession of firearms by a convicted felon and one count of possession of a small amount of marijuana for personal use. Cobb's bail was set at \$150,000.

12/3/2013

Nanticoke man charged in vehicle fire

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City police charged Douglas Arthur Johnson, 51, of East Noble Street, Nanticoke, with intentionally setting the fire to a vehicle next to a house along East Union Street last month.

Police allege Johnson set fire to an Oldsmobile outside the residence at 278 E. Union St. on Nov. 20.

Firefighters responded to the blaze and found Dominick Toback using a garden hose in attempt to extinguish the flames that destroyed his vehicle, according to the criminal complaint.

Toback told police that Johnson allegedly set the fire to his vehicle, which was 20 feet from Toback's residence with children inside.

Johnson was arraigned by district Judge Donald Whittaker on charges of arson, reckless burning, criminal mischief and reckless endangerment.

Johnson was jailed at Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

11/30/2013

Autopsy: Nanticoke woman died from 'blunt head trauma'

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The 97-year-old Nanticoke woman killed in her home on Thanksgiving night died from "blunt head trauma," Luzerne County Coroner Bill Lisman said Saturday following an autopsy.

Gertrude Price's death, during what investigators have said was a home invasion robbery, was officially declared a homicide after the medical examination by forensic pathologist Dr. Gary Ross, Lisman said.

Meanwhile, police guarded Price's 23 E. Grand St. home overnight to protect the crime scene. Investigators from state and Nanticoke police returned this morning to continue to collect evidence.

Family members found Price dead inside her home just before 10 a.m. on Friday, about 12 hours after they last saw her alive. Investigators believe the killing occurred around 11 p.m. Thanksgiving night -- because lights were on in the house at a time she would be sleeping.

It appears the killer entered the house through a basement window that had been broken out, police said.

Unlike many other killings recently, police said this one is different: it appears to be a random attack.

"I know a lot times we say there is no cause for concern because it doesn't look random," Trooper Martin Connors said at a press conference at the scene Friday. "This, unfortunately, is exactly the opposite of that. It looks as if this poor lady, 97 years old, lived her whole life and has to leave this world this way."

No arrests have been made and police have not identified any suspects.

Anyone with information - especially anyone who saw something between 10 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m. Friday - is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

Retired Nanticoke police officer Kevin Gervera is offering a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person responsible. Grevera said he plans to open a bank account for the reward so local merchants and residents could add to the bounty.

11/30/2013

Random robbery leads to murder of 97-year-old Nanticoke woman

By Bob Kalinowski and James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A 97-year-old woman was killed in an apparently random home-invasion robbery on Thanksgiving night, according to state police.

The body of Gertrude Price, was found in her 23 E. Grand St. home by her family Friday morning, Trooper Martin Connors said. No arrests have been made.

"I know a lot times we say there is no cause for concern because it doesn't look random," Connors said. "This, unfortunately, is exactly the opposite of that. It looks as if this poor lady, 97 years old, lived her whole life and has to leave this world this way."

Price last spoke with her family about 10:20 p.m. Thursday, but around 11 p.m., when Price would normally be asleep, neighbors reported seeing lights on in the house, he said.

Family members discovered her body Friday morning, he said.

"They were unable to get her on the telephone," Connors said. "Obviously, being 97 years old, she doesn't answer her phone, family was concerned. From what I understand, they live nearby. They came over and found her in the house." The 911 dispatch center got the call at 9:45 a.m. Friday.

Connors said it appeared the killer entered the house through a basement window that had been broken out. It appears the motive was a burglary that escalated to a homicide, he said.

"The home was ransacked," Connors said. "We're still trying to determine if anything was taken. Being the state of the disarray, we don't know if anything is missing yet."

Police did not release how Price was killed.

Distraught family members who remained on the scene Friday morning declined to comment.

The investigation prompted police to close East Grand Street from South Market to South Prospect streets for much of the day. A state police forensics team could be seen taking measurements and photographing evidence at the scene.

Yellow evidence tags were set up next to the broken basement window.

At one point, a number of officers left the scene and raced to a home at the intersection of Enterprise Street and Lincoln Avenue.

Nanticoke Police Chief William Shultz said officers had gotten a report of a burglary at the home and they were investigating whether there was a connection.

Back on East Grand Street, neighbors and passers-by watched on as Luzerne County Coroner Bill Lisman wheeled out a gurney carrying Price's body, some making the sign of the cross.

Lisman said pathologist Dr. Gary Ross was scheduled to perform an autopsy on Price at 10 a.m. today.

Neighborhood resident Michael Wright said he would often see Price sitting on her porch during the summer.

"She was a nice, quiet lady," Wright said. "She never did anything to anybody. She was always quiet. It's kind of

upsetting that somebody could do that to some old lady, because she can't defend herself."

Nanticoke resident Diane Lewis said she had gone out shopping Friday morning and returned to find police swarming the scene.

"It's really sad, and I don't expect it in Nanticoke," she said. "I really couldn't believe it."

Anyone with information - especially anyone who saw something between 10 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m. Friday - is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

11/30/2013

Woman found dead inside Nanticoke home Authorities treating 97-year-old's death as a homicide

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The body of a 97-year-old woman was found Friday inside her East Grand Street home where she lived for decades. Authorities are treating her death as a homicide.

Police Chief William Shultz called the investigation "a major case" with the state police at Wyoming, Luzerne County Detectives and Coroner's Office involved.

Authorities identified the woman as Gertrude Price, who lived alone.

Trooper Martin Connors said Price was last seen at about 10:20 p.m. Thursday and neighbors reported seeing lights on inside her house at about 11 p.m., which neighbors said was "unusual" for that time of night.

County Coroner William Lisman said he is treating the woman's death as an "open homicide." An autopsy is scheduled today by forensic pathologist Dr. Gary Ross at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

Law enforcement sources say Price was beaten to death and it was a "complex scene" inside and outside the house.

Connors said the interior of the house was ransacked, describing it as a "robbery turned homicide."

"I hope they catch the son of a ——— who did this to her," said Harry Mazucka, of Nanticoke. "She didn't bother anybody and certainly didn't deserve this. Something like this doesn't happen here."

The discovery of Price's body was made at about 11 a.m. by a family member who went to the house when a phone call went unanswered.

Investigators put up yellow police tape directly in front of the house and expanded the crime scene closing the block of East Grand Street between Prospect and South Market streets. An alley behind Price's house was also closed as investigators searched the rear yard.

Investigators concentrated on a specific area of the house where a small basement window appeared open.

A trooper with the forensic services unit took pictures and video of the window and inside the house.

Lisman removed the body from the house at about 2:30 p.m. after the scene was processed by the state police forensic services unit.

Within the first hour after Price's body was found, the number of investigators quickly grew to include state police Lt. Richard Krawetz, commander of the criminal investigations unit; Cpl. Steve Turinski, criminal unit supervisor; Trooper Stephen Polishan of the criminal investigations unit and other troopers.

"This is unbelievable and to think it's right here in Nanticoke," said Gary Urbanski, of Nanticoke. "We've had nuisance troubles here with drugs and that bar (Prospect Street Cafe) that closed down a few months ago, but not something like this."

The woman's death is the second police-related incident in the neighborhood.

A white man in his 50s or 60s about 5 feet 10 inches tall assaulted another person at about 10 a.m. Thursday at Prospect and East Grand streets, about 70 yards from where Price lived. The assailant punched the victim in the face and stole a wallet after asking the victim for a cigarette, Nanticoke police said.

11/29/2013

Nanticoke police seek suspect in assault, robbery

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating a robbery that took place Thanksgiving morning.

Police say the victim, who was not identified, was approached after exiting a vehicle about 11:30 a.m. Thursday in the area of Prospect and Grand streets.

The robber asked the victim for a cigarette, then punched the person several times in the face, knocking the victim to the ground, police said. The robber then grabbed the victim's wallet and fled eastbound on East Grand Street, police said.

The robber was described as between 50 and 60 years old with gray hair and a goatee. He was about 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighed between 180 and 190 pounds, police said.
He was wearing a green Philadelphia Eagles sweatshirt, blue jeans and sneakers.
Anyone with information is asked to call police at 570-735-2200.

11/27/2013

Police probing 'sexting' report at GNA High

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Police said it could take time to determine whether there is any substance to reports of possible sexting among students at Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

"We still don't know what's there, if anything," police Chief William Shultz said Tuesday of a cellphone that has been seized in the case.

School officials on Nov. 15 received information that sexually explicit photos of minors were being traded using cellphones, according to court documents.

Once forensic investigators have extracted information from the phone, they will present that data to police on a disk or computer drive, Shultz said. Police then will have to sift through the material to determine whether any of it constitutes illicit material.

Shultz said he doesn't expect any further developments this week, given the Thanksgiving holiday.

"It's going to take a little while," the chief said.

Shultz also said police currently are looking only at one phone in the case.

"For now, anyway," he said, reiterating that investigators don't even know yet whether any illegal activity has occurred.

Shultz did say that parents have been cooperative in the investigation.

11/26/2013

Nanticoke police investigating alleged sexting among students

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating a report of sexting taking place among high school students.

Police Chief William Shultz says school district officials reported to police that a student had possibly sent some inappropriate pictures by cellphone to classmates and asked them for pictures in return.

Police seized a cellphone in the case and are awaiting the results of a forensic exam to determine if anything inappropriate was actually sent.

"We don't even know if a crime has been committed yet," Shultz said.

He said he hopes to have the results of the exam in several days.

11/23/2013

Former fire company treasurer pleads guilty to fraud

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The former treasurer of Franklin Hose Company No. 2 in Edwardsville pleaded guilty Friday to stealing nearly \$5,000 from the fire department.

Daniel Boyd West, 40, of West Main Street, Nanticoke, pleaded guilty to a felony count of theft for allegedly writing himself checks between January 2009 and October 2012.

Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb set sentencing for 1:30 p.m. Dec. 19.

As part of the plea, West agreed to pay \$4,984 in restitution to the fire department, court records show.

According to police, West stole small amounts for several years and lied to department members about the account balance at monthly meetings.

11/22/2013

Teen will stand trial for killing Nanticoke man

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The 16-year-old driver accused of dismembering a Nanticoke man during a high-speed collision in July will stand trial on charges including third-degree murder, a judge ruled Thursday.

Tyler Duda, of 49 Tamanini Drive, Wyoming, is accused of crashing into 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street, severing his legs and torso before crashing into a house 467 feet from where Zurilla had been crossing the street.

"He drove his car as if it were a guided missile that night, and he hit and killed Mr. Zurilla," Assistant District Attorney Mamie Phillips said during Duda's preliminary hearing. "He was going so fast that he possibly didn't see Mr. Zurilla." The crash took place about in the 300 block of West Union Street about 2:15 a.m. July 5. Testimony in court Thursday painted a picture of the moments leading up to the impact.

Prosecutors say Duda took the Ford Edge from his mother, Lori Duda, after she came home from a party and left the keys on the kitchen counter. He went to pick up a friend, Donald "D.J." Kinney, in Newport Township. At 1:38 a.m., shortly before he picked Kinney up, Kinney sent Duda a text saying, "Remember, don't drive like an idiot," according to prosecutors.

Kinney got in the car and they called a classmate, Macey Pudlosky, and asking if she wanted to hang out, she testified. Pudlosky said she hung up on Duda but then answered a call from Kinney and heard the engine "revving up" followed by Kinney saying, "Slow down" repeatedly.

"I heard a crash and what sounded like shattering glass," Pudlosky said. "I heard Tyler just saying D.J.'s name over and over again, and it sounded like somebody was throwing up."

Zurilla's neighbor, John J. Murphy, testified that he and Zurilla had been sitting on his front porch starting about 11 p.m. July 4 and that they each drank about six beers, possibly more.

When Zurilla went to go home, Murphy gave him some macaroni salad and told him he would see him the next day, turning back into the house, he said. That's when he heard Zurilla's last words.

"He said, "This car is going to hit me,"" Murphy said. "As I turned around, I heard a bump and I seen what I thought was Nickolas flying through the air."

The vehicle, which appeared as a "blur," kept going until it swerved and crashed, he said.

Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz testified that he arrived on scene to find Zurilla's lower torso in the street, a severed leg on a sidewalk and his upper torso inside the car that crashed into a tree and a porch at 409 W. Union St. Macaroni salad was scattered on the front of the car, he said.

There was no evidence at the scene the driver had hit the brakes before hitting Zurilla, who was standing on the double yellow lines in the middle of the road, he said.

"I haven't seen anything like that in a long time, even after 40 years" in law enforcement, Shultz said.

Kinney had already been extricated and rushed to a hospital for treatment of facial injuries, he said. Duda, who remained on the scene, told police he simply hadn't seen Zurilla, he said.

Duda did not have a license or learner's permit, and toxicology testing found no drugs or alcohol in his blood, Shultz said.

Police charged him with third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle, leaving the scene of an accident, reckless driving, failing to keep right, driving without a license and speeding. Prosecutors on Thursday added a count of involuntary manslaughter to the complaint.

Duda's attorney, Demetrius Fannick, argued that the state had not established that he had acted with criminal negligence or malice. He characterized the incident as an accident arising from a "joy ride" and said it would be more appropriately handled as a civil lawsuit. The fact Duda doesn't have a license doesn't mean he doesn't know how to drive, he said.

Zurilla, he noted, was wearing dark clothing, did not have a light or reflective gear, had been drinking and stepped out from between parked vehicles when he began "jaywalking" across the street in the middle of the night.

"Tyler Duda didn't see him. That's what this is," Fannick said. "This was a tragic accident. It's an accident and he's going to have to live with it."

Phillips countered by saying the notion that the case was a civil matter was laughable. Duda, she said, was not even driving in his own lane.

"If he knew how to drive, why is he driving his car three times the speed limit in a residential neighborhood?" Phillips said.

Magisterial District Judge Michael Dotzel found the state made its case and forwarded all charges for trial. He set a formal arraignment date of Feb. 14.

Duda, who is being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on \$1 million bail, declined to comment.

11/15/2013

Police: Man threatened guard, officer

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man jailed for public intoxication is facing new charges alleging he spit on a jailer and threatened to make her "watch and beg" while he murdered her entire family, according to court records.

Jacob R. Cartwright, 22, of 14 W. Kirmar Parkway, is also accused of threatening to kill a Wilkes-Barre police officer after he was removed from his cell for a psychological evaluation.

According to a police affidavit, Cartwright was being held on public intoxication and disorderly conduct charges Tuesday when he began screaming and jumping on a steel bed in a holding cell. Police tried to move him to another cell for his safety, and Cartwright spit on Officer Erika Oswald and toward Sgt. Joseph Mangan, police said.

Once in the new cell, Cartwright tied his T-shirt around his neck and the cell door, and police decided to take him to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for an evaluation, according to the affidavit.

Officers removed Cartwright from the cell and, as Oswald was handcuffing him, he again spit on her, police said. Cartwright began spewing a stream of threats and obscenities that ended only after police dropped him off at the hospital, according to the affidavit.

"Oswald, I'm going to find where you live and rape your family in front of you before I slit your throat," the affidavit quotes Cartwright as saying. "I know where you live and I'm going to put my .40-caliber in your mouth and blow your (expletive) head off."

Cartwright is facing charges of aggravated harassment by a prisoner and making terroristic threats. He had not yet been arraigned Thursday.

11/15/2013

Nanticoke man accused of running meth lab stays out of jail

Peter Cameron - Citizens Voice

In a decision that will keep him out of jail, Luzerne County Judge Fred A. Pierantoni III sentenced methamphetamine cook Jeffrey DeLuca of Nanticoke to a four-year court-supervised treatment plan Thursday, starting with a year of house arrest.

Police arrested DeLuca in September 2011 after finding a meth lab and a recently cooked batch of the drug in his Nanticoke home.

Inside the apartment, police said they also found items consistent with methamphetamine production: various chemicals, hot plates, lye, Coleman fuel, anti-freeze, funnels and electronic scales.

A 2011 press release from the attorney general's office called it a "sophisticated" operation that "had allegedly been constructed using professional-grade materials."

DeLuca must wear an electronic-monitoring ankle bracelet for the first year, but is credited with 194 days of previous time served.

He must also pay \$2,831 to reimburse the state police lab that analyzed the seized material and serve 15 community service hours.

DeLuca had faced a much heavier sentence, but six other criminal counts, including risking a catastrophe due to the volatility of the meth-making process, were withdrawn.

As part of his sentence, DeLuca must continue to attend treatment at Wyoming Valley Drug and Alcohol Services Inc.

11/12/2013

Man charged in second motorcycle incident

Zachary Hallas accused of fleeing police for second time since August

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A Nanticoke man was charged by city police with crashing a motorcycle during a pursuit. Police said it was his second offense within two months involving a police chase.

Zachary Hallas, 30, of West Ridge Street, fled while driving a motorcycle with an 18-year-old passenger on Oct. 24, police said.

Police allege Hallas passed several vehicles stopped on Kosciuszko Street for a red traffic signal at East Main Street. Hallas turned onto East Main Street through the red traffic light and passed several vehicles in his lane on Main Street, police allege.

Police terminated the pursuit due to traffic congestion when Hallas was spotted turning onto Fairchild Street, where he crashed into a parked car.

Hallas and the passenger were ejected from motorcycle. They were transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township, police said.

Hallas was charged with three counts of fleeing or attempting to elude police, and one count each of driving with a suspended license, driving an unregistered vehicle and multiple vehicle violations. He was released without bail after he was arraigned Thursday by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Wednesday.

Court records say Hallas was free on \$7,500 bail on similar charges filed by Newport Township police on Aug. 21.

In that case, a township police officer attempted to stop Hallas for driving a motorcycle without eye protection on Robert Street. A woman was a passenger on the motorcycle, township police said.

Hallas failed to stop and drove in excess of 100 mph while being pursued by township police, according to the criminal complaint.

Township police said in the complaint Hallas crossed into Nanticoke passing several vehicles on Prince, West Main and Hanover streets.

Hallas eluded township police during the pursuit.

A Nanticoke police officer detained Hallas when he was spotted walking with a woman on Maple Street, township police said.

Hallas was charged by township police with nine counts of reckless endangerment, eight counts of illegal passing other vehicles, and one count each of fleeing or attempting to elude police, reckless driving, driving with a suspended license and operating a motorcycle without a license. He is scheduled to be formally arraigned in county court on Jan. 3 on the charges filed by township police.

Court records say county Senior Judge Chester Muroski imposed a \$275 fine for Hallas on Feb. 4, 2008, for a motorcycle pursuit involving Nanticoke police on June 27, 2007.

11/11/2013

Police: Man tried to rob Forty Fort agency

Citizens Voice - Staff Report

Within the span of 35 minutes Friday, a man attempted to rob a Forty Fort insurance office, fled, was stopped by police and identified by a witness as the suspect, police said.

Reginald Taylor Jr., 45, of Nanticoke, is charged with one criminal count of attempted robbery for allegedly attempting to rob Nationwide Insurance in Forty Fort.

Police said a tall man with a large build entered Nationwide Insurance at 976 Wyoming Ave. at about 12:13 p.m. and jumped over a secretary's desk, knocking the secretary out of her chair.

According to police, the man then left the building and fled toward Slocum Street. Police said witness reports state the man entered a blue Chevrolet Avalanche and left the area.

An off-duty Kingston policeman observed a possible matching vehicle, which was then stopped by police at the Wells Fargo Bank parking lot on Pierce Street, police said.

The driver was identified as Taylor and he was transported back to the Forty Fort police station, where a witness at about 12:47 p.m. identified Taylor as the man who allegedly attempted to rob Nationwide Insurance, police said.

Taylor is charged with one criminal count of attempted robbery, along with one charge of simple assault. He was arraigned on these charges in front of Magisterial District Judge Richard J. Cronauer.

Taylor was then lodged at Luzerne County Correctional Facility, where his bail was set at \$35,000. Along with bail, a parole detainer was attached by Pennsylvania State Parole and Probation.

11/2/2013

Nanticoke man fires shotgun during confrontation

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is facing charges after police say he fired a shotgun during a dispute with an all-terrain vehicle driver. Thomas Sadowski, 47, of Pine Street, is charged with reckless endangerment, disorderly conduct and firing a weapon in Hanover Township limits.

Police say Sadowski confronted the ATV driver Thursday in the Hanover Recreation Field on Front Street and then discharged a shotgun. No injuries were reported.

Charges have been filed but a preliminary hearing had not yet been set.

11/1/2013

Court: Man led police on wild ride through Plymouth, Larksville

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Police described a wild ride in their arrest papers charging Corey J. Kittle, 20, of Nanticoke.

Kittle was the driver of a black Audi that sped through Larksville, pulled a U-turn, sped through Plymouth and several red lights before eventually crashing into a utility pole, through a steel fence and colliding with a parked minivan, according to police.

Kittle had a preliminary arraignment Thursday in front of Magisterial District Judge David A. Barilla. He is free on \$5,000 unsecured bail.

Police said an officer saw Kittle speeding on East Main Street in Larksville in July and tried to make a traffic stop but had to give chase after Kittle reversed course and sped down Route 11 into Plymouth at speeds that topped 100 miles per hour.

With a patrol car in pursuit, police said Kittle went through red lights and around traffic before crashing near Coal Street. There, he fled on foot while police detained a passenger, according to arrest papers.

An officer chased Kittle on foot, running through yards and streets before a Kingston officer caught him near the rear of the 300 block of West Main Street, according to police. Kittle and his passenger went to a local hospital for treatment, and police said Kittle told them he was trying to buy drugs from someone who argued with him, hit him in the head and put him in his Audi. Kittle said the next thing he was aware of was crashing and running from officers, arrest papers report.

Police charged Kittle with 16 counts of crimes, including fleeing an officer, resisting arrest, driving under the influence, reckless driving, several counts of failure to stop at a red signal and other charges.

11/1/2013

Ex Nanticoke bar owner hit with drug charges

Citizens Voice - Staff report

The former owner of the now-defunct Prospect Street Cafe in Nanticoke was hit Thursday with misdemeanor drug charges, according to court records.

Paul Halliday, 38, of 237 W. Ridge St., is charged with manufacturing a controlled substance, possessing a controlled substance and public drunkenness, court records show. He was charged by summons Thursday and ordered to appear in court Dec. 4.

Halliday is awaiting sentencing in four cases from earlier this year on counts of simple assault, tampering with evidence, possessing drug paraphernalia, driving under the influence, fleeing police, leaving the scene of an accident and reckless endangerment.

Halliday, who lost the Prospect Street Cafe last month, is accused of nearly hitting a police car on March 3 and then leading officers on a 1½-mile high-speed chase that included him hitting another car - which then struck a third vehicle - and two telephone poles before he jumped from his vehicle and hid in the woods.

Halliday was free on \$5,000 bail when police were called to his bar March 18 to a report he had beaten his girlfriend in a drunken rage and then nailing his office door shut as he threatened to shoot police.

The assault charges in that case were dismissed because his girlfriend declined to testify.

Police found him in possession of anti-anxiety medication, a crack pipe and a piece of crack cocaine.

10/29/2013

Nanticoke man pleads guilty to obtaining party drug from China

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A Nanticoke man pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting the trafficking of a party drug from China but maintains his right to challenge whatever sentence is imposed.

Peter Sepling, 43, entered his guilty plea that was accepted by U.S. District Judge A. Richard Caputo at the federal courthouse in Wilkes-Barre on Monday.

Sepling and John Nikoloff, of West Fourth Street, 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. Nikoloff pleaded guilty in February 2012 to conspiring to distribute a controlled substance. He is scheduled to be

sentenced on Nov. 25.

The negotiated plea deal with the U.S. Attorney's Office and Sepling's attorney, Joseph Nahas, gives Caputo the option to exclude or use Sepling's prior criminal convictions when Sepling is sentenced on Jan. 30. He could face probation or up to 20 years in a federal prison.

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. He was sentenced to two years in federal prison.

In the latest complaint, U.S. Customs officers working at a DHL Courier facility in Kentucky targeted a parcel from China to Nikoloff in April 2011. The parcel contained gamma butyrolactone, a scheduled controlled substance, which was delivered by an undercover state police trooper to Nikoloff's residence on April 26, 2011.

Authorities served a search warrant the same day, finding the empty parcel box behind a garage on the property, and steroids, pills, syringes and packaging from previous deliveries to Nikoloff's residence, according to court records. Nikoloff told authorities he accepted the parcel on behalf of Sepling. He delivered the parcel to Sepling when they met later on April 26, 2011, along 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.

10/25/2013

Motorcyclist could face charges for wreck

Citizens Voice

A motorcyclist will face charges after being involved in an accident that injured himself and his passenger, Nanticoke police said.

Nanticoke police Officer Bryan Kata saw a motorcycle that was driving north on Kosciuszko Street, passing vehicles stopped at a red light at Kosciuszko and East Main streets just before 3:30 p.m. Thursday.

After illegally running the red light and passing the stopped cars, the motorcycle made a left turn, and Kata followed, activating the lights and sirens on his police cruiser.

The motorcycle, operated by a man identified as Zachary Hallas, 30, of Nanticoke, sped west on East Main Street, continuing to pass vehicles. Kata had to slow down because of the time of day and congestion on Main Street.

The motorcycle then turned left onto Fairchild Street and crashed into a parked car. Hallas and his passenger, an 18-year-old woman from Nanticoke, were ejected from the motorcycle and landed on the west side of the sidewalk on Fairchild Street. Both were wearing helmets.

Hallas and the woman were transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township by Nanticoke and Newport Township ambulances. Police did not specify their conditions. Police are continuing to investigate the crash, and expect to file criminal charges against Hallas.

10/25/2013

Court tosses Nanticoke man's 2012 drug sentence

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State Superior Court has vacated a Nanticoke man's sentence in a 2011 marijuana case, finding that state parole agents illegally arrested Richard A. Shaw and that evidence they found in his girlfriend's apartment should have been suppressed prior to trial.

On Sept. 27, 2012, Shaw was found guilty at trial of possession with intent to deliver marijuana, intent to possess a controlled substance and use or possession of drug paraphernalia. On Nov. 7, 2012, he was sentenced to 24 to 48 months in prison on the first count, as well as a concurrent sentence of 12 months' probation.

Luzerne County Assistant District Attorney Jill Matthews Lada, who prosecuted the original case, said the DA's Office is still weighing whether to appeal in the wake of Wednesday's ruling, written by Superior Court President Judge John T. Bender.

But Lada also said she still believes the agents acted appropriately when they arrested Shaw at his girlfriend's apartment on East Main Street in Nanticoke on Feb. 25, 2011.

Shaw, 30, is represented by Kingston attorney Nanda Palissery.

According to court documents, probation agents went to the apartment that morning for a routine field visit with Shaw, who had pleaded guilty to drug charges in a previous case. They were met at the door by Shaw's girlfriend, Shawnese

Taylor, who was wearing a nightgown.

Parole agent Lisa Lewis asked Taylor to put a robe on. That took five minutes, which Lewis considered “an inordinate amount of time,” according to court documents.

Taylor also denied Shaw was present, the officers said. After Taylor began screaming at the officers, Shaw banged open a bathroom door, and came out with his hands up. He was ordered to the ground by parole agent Jeff Ruzicki, who handcuffed him. Lewis believed he may have been trying to hide from officers, and she intended to take him to the Nanticoke Police Department for a drug test, documents say.

As the agents led Shaw to a bedroom to find his shoes, he swept aside some clothes with his feet, revealing a small bag of marijuana, documents say. The agents stopped what they were doing to await police, who obtained search warrants and seized items from the apartment.

Prior to trial, Palissery argued the arrest and seizures were illegal, and should be suppressed. On June 29, 2012, Luzerne County Judge Joseph F. Sklarosky Jr. denied Palissery’s suppression motion.

Bender wrote that while Lewis’s suspicions about Taylor’s and Shaw’s behavior might have been sufficient to justify a search of Shaw and his property, they were “inadequate to provide probable cause to conduct his warrantless arrest.” “Therefore, we are constrained to conclude that (Shaw’s) warrantless arrest was illegal, and consequently, the evidence obtained from the search of Ms. Taylor’s apartment was the ‘fruit of the poisonous tree,’” Bender wrote, concluding that the lower court should have granted the motion to suppress.

But while the question of a further appeal has yet to be settled, Shaw remains incarcerated. In addition to his conviction in the drug case, county Judge Lesa S. Gelb sentenced him to 9 to 18 months of prison time earlier this year after he pleaded guilty in connection with a 2012 assault case in Nanticoke.

10/18/2013

Fourth prostitution ring suspect caught in Oklahoma

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The fourth suspect in an underage Pittston-area prostitution ring was captured Thursday morning in Oklahoma, according to police.

Randy “Holliday” Coleman, of Pittston, had been wanted since Oct. 8, when Pittston police charged him and three other men with running an underage prostitution ring in which they convinced and coerced teens to sell themselves using online classified ads.

Two brothers, Anthony Lamont “D-Lo” Boone, 30, and Gregory “C-Lo” Boone, 29, both of Pittston, were arrested Oct. 10, and the third man, Jose Alvelo, 19, of Nanticoke, was captured the next day.

Oklahoma City police captured Coleman on Thursday morning in Central Oklahoma City, police Master Sgt. Gary Knight said. A two-officer unit got information about 11:25 a.m. that a fugitive from Pennsylvania was staying in a room in the 1900 block of Northeast 20th Street, he said.

As the officers approached the room, they heard men talking inside. But when they announced themselves, the voices grew quiet, police said.

Eventually someone opened the door and police found Coleman sitting on the floor. A woman in the room got combative and had to be restrained, but Coleman was taken into custody without incident, police said.

Coleman is being held at the Oklahoma County Jail pending extradition to Pennsylvania.

All four men are facing three counts of promoting the prostitution of a minor and one count each of conspiring to promote the prostitution of a minor, criminal use of a communication facility, unlawful contact with a minor and corruption of minors.

The Boones and Alvelo remain jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$500,000.

10/17/2013

Police: Suspect charged in bar brawl didn't slash woman

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Police on Wednesday filed criminal charges in connection with a notorious assault at a now-defunct bar that happened more than a year and a half ago - but they say they are still seeking the slasher.

Melanie Figueroa, 22, of 140 Sharpe St., Nanticoke, is charged 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.

However, Figueroa was not charged with being the slasher.

"We could not prove that Melanie Figueroa was the slasher," Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said. "Our investigation revealed that was not the case."

The slasher, he said, has not been identified and police are continuing to investigate.

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

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.

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

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

Police issued a summons to Figueroa on Wednesday. A preliminary hearing was set for 2 p.m. Nov. 6.

Mieczkowski filed suit against the bar 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.

But the Prospect Street Cafe no longer exists. Halliday lost the property in March, when it was sold at a sheriff's sale because of overdue mortgage payments, taxes and other bills.

Halliday himself landed in trouble several times earlier this year, finding himself accused of leading police on a drunken high-speed chase and assaulting his girlfriend in a jealous rage. Police say they found him after that incident covered in blood and in possession of a bottle of anti-anxiety medication, a crack pipe and a piece of crack-cocaine.

The charges in connection with the assault were dismissed when his girlfriend declined to prosecute.

Court records show Halliday pleaded guilty in September to charges of driving under the influence, fleeing to elude, leaving the scene of an accident, reckless endangerment, tampering with evidence and possessing drug paraphernalia. He remains free on \$25,000 bail while awaiting sentencing on the charges.

10/15/2013

Newport Twp. man faces drug charges

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A Newport Township man free on bail in a robbery case was charged Tuesday with dealing drugs in Patriot Square Park in Nanticoke, according to court documents.

Thomas Worthy Painter, 18, of 10 Third St., is charged with possessing a controlled substance with the intent to deliver, three counts of drug possession and one count each of possessing marijuana and allowing a dog to run loose.

Nanticoke police confronted Painter about 6 p.m. Monday, when he was observed acting suspiciously in the company of Tyler Degraffenreid, 20, of Nanticoke, and an unidentified man, according to a police affidavit.

An officer circled the park as the men watched, and when the officer pulled up to confront them, he found Painter and Degraffenreid sitting on the table of a park bench and the third man walking down East Green Street.

Painter and Degraffenreid appeared nervous, police said. Painter had a dog running loose in the park and Degraffenreid was smoking a cigarette in violation of city ordinance, according to police.

The officer knew Degraffenreid's name, but he repeatedly gave police a fake name and birthday, police said.

A pat-down revealed Painter was in possession of three small bags of marijuana, an opened plastic bag of marijuana, two small bags imprinted with eight balls containing crack cocaine and crystal methamphetamine, and \$260 in cash, according to police.

Police said charges are pending against Degraffenreid for providing false identification and smoking in the park.

Painter was arraigned on the drug charges Tuesday morning before Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane, who set bail

at \$25,000. He is being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for Oct. 23 at 1 p.m.

Court records show Painter was charged in July with two counts of robbery and one count each of disorderly conduct, theft, simple assault, harassment, filing a false report, and possessing marijuana and drug paraphernalia.

Police said he repeatedly punched David Beggs of 220 Apollo Circle, chipping a tooth, before he robbed Beggs of a bottle of Grey Goose Vodka and \$3. Painter then flagged down a police officer and reported Beggs had been "bothering him and starting with him," according to court records.

Surveillance footage, however, clearly showed Beggs did nothing to instigate the attack, according to police.

Kane in that case set Painter's bail at \$20,000. But at an Aug. 23 preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, Painter's bail was reduced and he was released on his own recognizance, according to court records. He is awaiting a formal arraignment in that case scheduled for Nov. 1 at 9 a.m.

10/12/2013

Suspect in local prostitution ring case captured

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One of two suspects police have been searching for in a local prostitution ring case has been captured.

Nanticoke police, assisted by Newport Township police, took Jose Alvelo, 29, of Nanticoke, into custody at the home of his sister, who lives at 132 Espy St., Nanticoke, Nanticoke police officer Rick Vietz said.

Nanticoke police held Alvelo for Pittston police, who are conducting the prostitution investigation.

Police believe Alvelo, Randy Coleman, of Pittston, and brothers Anthony Lamont Boone, 30, and Gregory Boone, 29, also both of Pittston, posted topless photos of two teens on a website advertisement for escorts.

According to court papers:

The Boones coerced a 16-year-old girl and an 18-year-old woman to be prostitutes.

The 16-year-old girl told police she and another 16-year-old girl were driven to a motel room in Tunkhannock, where a man paid them \$300 for 30 minutes with them, according to charges filed.

While inside the room, the girls took off their clothes and sat on a bed, stalling for time as the man performed a lewd act, the complaints say.

After leaving the room, they returned to a car, where they allegedly gave Alvelo \$300. Alvelo in return gave each girl \$50, and the rest of the money was divided up among Alvelo, Coleman and Gregory Boone for being bodyguards, according to criminal complaints.

Alvelo was charged with three counts of promoting prostitution of a minor, and one count each of unlawful contact with a minor, corruption of minors, criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility. He was arraigned before District Judge Ronald Swank in Wright Township and jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional for lack of \$500,000 bail.

The Boone brothers were arrested, arraigned and jailed on the same charges on Thursday. Coleman remains at large.

10/9/2013

Luzerne County man charged in Wyoming County burglaries

Andrew Michael Chewey was already facing several charges related to stolen vehicles

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A West Nanticoke man facing vehicle theft charges was accused by state police at Tunkhannock with using stolen cars to burglarize two businesses in Wyoming County.

State police allege Andrew Michael Chewey, 29, of West Poplar Street, smashed a window at Lorbeez Country Store on state Route 29 in Monroe Township, Wyoming County, on Sept. 10 and tried to steal a cash register. He allegedly forced his way into The Dock Doctor, a deck construction business, on Route 29, Eaton Township, on Sept. 17.

State police said Chewey drove away from the businesses after burglar alarms sounded.

Chewey allegedly used a Ford Explorer for the Lorbeez Store attempted heist and a Ford Econoline plumbing van for the burglary. The two Fords were reported stolen from the Wilkes-Barre area, state police said.

Arrest records in related cases say state police found the Ford Explorer crushed at a scrap yard in Hunlock Township on Sept. 23.

Chewey was arraigned Monday by District Judge Carl W. Smith in Tunkhannock on two counts each of burglary, criminal trespass and criminal mischief, and a single count of theft. Court records say Chewey was also arraigned on

charges he burglarized a place of worship in Northmoreland Township, Wyoming County, on June 6. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$600,000 bail. He has been jailed since his arrest by state police on Sept. 20, when he was spotted sitting in a 2003 Chevrolet Venture in the area of Wood and South Franklin streets in Wilkes-Barre.

State police allege Chewey stole the Chevrolet from a church parking lot in West Nanticoke earlier on Sept. 20. He allegedly admitted to state police he stole the van and used it to go buy heroin, according to arrest records. Chewey and Donald Mosely, 43, of Wilkes-Barre, and Douglas Johnson, 51, of Nanticoke, are also facing chop shop charges related to crushing the Ford Explorer, court records say.

10/8/2013

Charges filed against men allegedly involved in chop shop

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State police on Monday filed new charges against three men they say were involved in a chop shop being run out of a Hunlock Township scrap metal business.

Douglas Johnson, 51, of Nanticoke, who works at General Metals and Auto Parts Recycling at 108 Garden Drive, Hunlock Township, is wanted on charges of running a chop shop, conspiring to receive stolen property and receiving stolen property.

Donald Mosley Jr., 43, of Bear Creek Township, is wanted on charges of trading in property illegally obtained from a chop shop, receiving stolen property and conspiring to receive stolen property.

Andrew Michael Chewey IV, 29, of Nanticoke, is facing counts of theft, receiving stolen property and criminal mischief.

The charges are in addition to counts state police filed last month charging all three men with dealing in the proceeds of unlawful activities, conspiracy and receiving stolen property.

Police say a Wilkes-Barre man reported that his 2006 Ford Explorer was stolen from 115 S. Main St., Wilkes-Barre, on Sept. 9. Two days later, a witness saw Chewey driving the Explorer in West Nanticoke, police say.

Chewey told police he got the vehicle from Mosley and that they took it to General Metals and Auto Parts Recycling, where Mosley sold it for a few hundred dollars, no questions asked, according to police.

After getting permission from the business owner, Jason Tricarico, police searched the yard and found the Explorer crushed among other vehicles, police said.

Tricarico, who told police he did not know how the Explorer got there, has not been charged in the case. He has declined to comment.

Chewey is being held on \$15,000 bail at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on charges of theft by unlawful taking, receiving stolen property and several misdemeanor charges.

Mosley and Johnson remained wanted Monday morning.

10/4/2013

Man sentenced for pharmacy robbery

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A man charged with robbing a Nanticoke pharmacy at gunpoint and getting away with painkillers was sentenced Thursday to one to two years in state prison.

Mark Steven Benjamin Sr., 41, of North Sherman Street, Wilkes-Barre, was sentenced on two counts of robbery and one count each of theft and a weapons charge.

Luzerne County Judge Fred Pierantoni said Benjamin must also serve three years probation after his prison term and gave him credit for nine days of time already served in prison.

Benjamin, who was represented by attorney John Donoavan, pleaded guilty to the charges in June. Assistant District Attorney Tom Hogans prosecuted the case Thursday.

Benjamin, who had been free on \$100,000 bail since July, was taken to the county prison to be transported to a state prison to begin serving his sentence.

According to court papers, Nanticoke police responded to Spotanski's Pharmacy on Prospect Street on June 25, 2012, after an armed robbery was reported. Pharmacist Kathy Smith told police a man entered the store and demanded fentanyl or painkillers while pointing what appeared to be a shotgun in a large garbage bag in her direction. Smith said she could see only the end of the shotgun barrel and feared for her life.

Smith told the man she had no fentanyl but quickly gave him a bottle of generic Oxycodone and acetaminophen tablets she had in front of her. The man took the bottle and ran from the store. A store employee told police the robber ran north on South Prospect Street.

A short time later, police were notified by Hanover Township police they spotted a man who fit Benjamin's description on Middle Road near the entrance to the Hanover Industrial Park. Benjamin was pulled over in a truck owned by his mother.

Police said Benjamin told them he committed the crime, he was sorry and he had intended to sell the drugs. He told police he hid a "broken shotgun" under a bed in a spare bedroom of his mother's house in Nanticoke, changed his shirt and hid it and a baseball cap in the truck.

Benjamin will be required to pay \$105 in restitution to the pharmacy and is not permitted to enter Spotanski's.

10/3/2013

Mother's concern leads cops to alleged heroin dealer

Kelci P. Jones was wanted by Nanticoke police

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A mother's suspicion about her daughter's activities led police to arrest a visiting friend who was wanted as an alleged heroin dealer.

Officers were called to an Elm Street home at 2:30 a.m. Monday by the unnamed woman, who claimed she entered her daughter's room and found several empty packets thought to have contained heroin, a spoon and a needle.

Police did not find any of those items upon arrival. They proceeded to run records checks on the daughter and one of her friends who was in the house, Kelci P. Jones, 25, of 1038 South Market St., Nanticoke. Officers soon learned that Jones was wanted on a Nanticoke Police Department warrant.

According to court records, Jones sold several bags of heroin, in packages labeled "the best," to a confidential informant in August.

Investigators said the informant made the purchase from Jones using \$60 in serialized currency, and that state police lab tests confirmed that the substance was heroin.

The informant watched as Jones allegedly purchased an unknown amount of heroin from an unknown man in a black Nissan in the 300 block of East Noble Street on the afternoon of Aug. 12, then sold four of those bags to the informant.

"The bags were typical white wax paper and appeared to have been reused/recycled. This is a common practice in the Nanticoke area amongst heroin traffickers (who) have the users return the empty bags," police wrote in an affidavit.

The next day, the informant called Jones and arranged a second buy, investigators said, picking Jones up at her home and driving to meet her alleged supplier, whose name was not indicated. The informant turned four more bags over to police after the encounter, according to the affidavit.

Jones faces six counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, and two counts each of criminal use of a communication facility, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Larksville police on Monday transported Jones from the Elm Street home to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. She remained there Tuesday in lieu of \$20,000 bail.

A preliminary hearing before District Judge Donald L. Whittaker was set for 1 p.m. Oct. 9.

9/25/2013

Cousins charged with assault

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Two Nanticoke cousins were arrested early Saturday morning in an assault on another man they say threatened them with a machete, police said.

According to Nanticoke police:

A patrolling officer spotted Robert William Belcher and Robert Harold Belcher III beating Walter Breita on the ground outside the Cocoa Hut convenience store along Middle Road around 12:30 a.m., according to police reports.

Handcuffed and stowed in a police cruiser, the Belchers hit their heads on the partition glass, spit and shouted obscenities. The officer called for an ambulance as it appeared Breita needed medical attention.

Breita, who appeared intoxicated, told police the two men approached him in the parking lot and began hitting him. He went to his car to get the large knife and the Belchers retreated. He said after he put the machete back in his car, he tried to go inside the food store when the Belchers attacked him again, police said.

The Belchers stories matched each other's and both appeared to be drunk, police said. The Belchers said Breita approached them first with his machete. Officers found the machete in Breita's car. The Belchers could not explain how the knife got back inside the car.

A store clerk said it looked like the Belchers confronted Breita, though she said they were out of view for part of the altercation. She told police she tried calling 911 three times but got a busy signal, police said.

Police said the Belchers continued their aggressive behavior all the way to police headquarters, where Robert William Belcher intentionally clogged his cell's toilet, threatened to shoot an officer and summon a "crew of skin heads to clean the place up."

Court records show Robert William Belcher was charged with misdemeanor counts of assault, making terroristic threats and disorderly conduct. He was also charged with public drunkenness. Robert III was charged with simple assault and criminal mischief. Breita was charged with carrying prohibited offensive weapon and public drunkenness.

9/25/2013

A Nanticoke man charged with receiving a video of a young girl was sentenced Monday to 18 months probation.
Times Leader

Joshua Decker, 19, of South Walnut Street, was sentenced on a charge of corruption of minors. He also pleaded guilty to the charge Monday.

Judge Fred Pierantoni said Decker must have no contact with the girl involved and is to have no unsupervised contact with minors.

According to court papers, in January 2012, Decker reportedly asked a 12-year-old to send him a nude video of her. At first the girl refused, but did send Decker a video from the waist up.

9/24/2013

Birthday celebration ends in arrests
Police say they were called to drunken party where a handgun was pulled
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City police officers were unexpected guests at a Nanticoke man's birthday celebration.

Charles Jonathan Halchak, 28, was celebrating his birthday in an alcohol-fueled party and was arrested Sunday on charges he threatened another man with a gun, police alleged. A woman was also arrested after police alleged she kept interfering with officers when they were questioning witnesses.

Police allege Halchak called Luzerne County 911 just before 5:30 a.m. and said a person was refusing to leave an apartment at Apollo Circle where the party was being held.

As it turned out, several drunken witnesses told police Halchak aimed a handgun at Michael Hummel, who refused to leave the party, according to the criminal complaint.

Hummel told police he was in the apartment with several people and all had been drinking since 1 p.m. Saturday.

Hummel stated Halchak began arguing with Kimberly A. Mascelli, 27, during the party. Hummel said he "stood up for her" knowing Halchak was "in the wrong" with regard to their argument, the complaint says.

Halchak told Hummel to leave the apartment. When Hummel refused, he said Halchak grabbed a handgun from the top of a refrigerator and aimed it at his head, according to the complaint.

Police allege in the complaint Halchak called 911 and told dispatchers he was going to kill Hummel if police did not appear.

Party-goers told police they wrestled the gun from Halchak and locked it in a car trunk.

Police said witnesses they questioned, including Hummel and Halchak, smelled of alcohol.

Mascelli kept interfering officers when questioning witnesses, and used two cellphones to record the interactions, according to the complaint.

Halchak, who also listed an address in Wapwallopen, was charged with reckless endangerment, simple assault, possessing instruments of crime, terroristic threats and public drunkenness and released on bail. Mascelli was charged with obstruction of justice, disorderly conduct and public drunkenness.

Preliminary hearings are scheduled on Oct. 2 before District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

9/21/2013

Man to plead guilty 2nd time on steroid trafficking charges

Peter Sepling, of Nanticoke, also pleaded guilty in 2007 and spent two years in prison

A Nanticoke man who served two years in federal prison for operating a drug ring that distributed steroids and Ecstasy in 2007 has agreed to plead guilty a second time to trafficking steroids from overseas, according to federal court documents.

Peter Sepling, 43, submitted a statement he plans to plead guilty to importing Gamma Butyrolactone from China in April 2011.

Sepling and John Nikoloff, of West Fourth Street, West Wyoming, were indicted by a federal grand jury in June 2011. Nikoloff, age unknown, pleaded guilty on Feb. 23, 2012, to conspiring to distribute the performance-enhancement drug. His sentencing hearing has been continued several times as Sepling's case remained open.

Sepling was scheduled for trial in federal court in October.

U.S. District Court Judge A. Richard Caputo must accept Sepling's guilty plea before it becomes official.

Sepling could face up to 20 years in prison and a \$1 million fine, court records state.

According to court records: Customs officers working at a DHL Courier facility in Kentucky targeted a parcel from China to Nikoloff in April 2011. The parcel contained 1.1 kilograms of Gamma Butyrolactone. The parcel was delivered to Nikoloff's address on April 26, 2011.

Authorities served a search warrant the same day, finding the empty parcel box behind a garage on the property, and steroids, pills, syringes and packaging from previous deliveries in Nikoloff's apartment above the garage, court records state.

Nikoloff told authorities he accepted the parcel at his residence on behalf of Sepling. He delivered the parcel to Sepling when they met later on April 26, 2011, along 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.

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.

9/17/2013

Nanticoke woman suspected of threatening people with Taser

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A drunken Nanticoke woman threatened passersby on Patriot Square with a stun gun Sunday evening before police arrested her in possession of Whip-It canisters, according to court records.

Leann R. Telesky, 48, of 153 E. Grant St., is charged with possessing an offensive weapon, possessing a solvent to release toxic vapors, disorderly conduct and public drunkenness.

According to a police affidavit, Nanticoke officers were called to the East Broad Street side of the square about 5:55 p.m. Sunday to a report of a woman who threatened another woman with a Taser.

A witness reported Telesky had been in the park activating the stun gun for about 15 minutes, including activating it toward some people in a passing car, police said. Even after the car left, Telesky continued to activate the Taser for no apparent reason, police said.

Police found Telesky on a bench across from the Bus Stop Cafe. She began to deny having a weapon, but some kids riding by on their bikes interrupted her to say she put the stun gun in her purse, the affidavit says. Telesky told the children to "shut their mouths," according to the affidavit.

Police arrested Telesky, who smelled of alcohol, for being drunk in public and saw a stun gun in plain sight in her purse, which was open, police said.

The weapon was turned on and sitting near a box of European whipped-cream chargers - canisters of nitrous oxide commonly abused as an inhalant - and a can of Budweiser, the affidavit says.

Magisterial District Judge David Barilla arraigned Telesky on Monday morning and released her on \$1,000 unsecured bail. A preliminary hearing was set for 1 p.m. Oct. 2.

9/14/2013

Former GNA secretary avoids jail in theft case

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A former secretary at the Greater Nanticoke Area Educational Center must pay back \$19,427, the amount she stole from

the school over six years, but avoided a jail sentence Friday.

Jacqueline M. Ruchinski, 62, will be on probation for three years, according to a sentence from Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough. She must pay back the district in 45 days, the judge said, adding her crimes were "out of character," Vough said.

Ruchinski didn't speak during Friday's court proceeding, but her attorney told Vough his client was remorseful. Edward F. Bezdecki, of Toms River, N.J., is listed as her defense attorney.

She confessed in April 2012 almost immediately after a colleague discovered the gap in her accounts and told Superintendent Anthony Perrone that she sometimes took "a 10 here or a 20 there" from the daily cafeteria collections, investigators said.

Admired and respected by coworkers and students during her two decades with the district, Ruchinski handled cash from the cafeteria, dress-down day, the "lost book fund," school plays, the parent-teacher organization and other events, investigators said. The education center serves the sixth and seventh grades.

Ruchinski pleaded guilty in July after agreeing a plea bargain with the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office. She was arrested in December.

Nancy K. Butzek, a secretary in the district's business office, confronted Ruchinski in April 2012 after discovering a series of payments Ruchinski had logged into the district's computer system but never sent for deposit into the district's bank account, investigators said.

Ruchinski panicked, and told Butzek she could "fix it." Butzek told Ruchinski she would look for missing deposits from previous months.

"Please don't go backwards, please don't go backwards," Ruchinski pleaded, according to investigators. "How far do you have to go backwards?"

A subsequent review by Butzek and a district accounting consultant found a \$7,500 gap dating to August 2010 in the accounts Ruchinski handled. Investigators later discovered a total of \$19,427 missing since the 2006-2007 school year.

9/13/2013

Nanticoke man accused of threatening to shoot wife

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A Nanticoke man drinking and upset his wife is divorcing him is accused of brandishing a rifle and threatening to kill her and himself, according to court records.

John Joseph Wojciechowski, 44, of 126 W. Washington St., is charged with four counts each of making terroristic threats and harassment, and one count each of illegally possessing a firearm and disorderly conduct.

According to a police affidavit, Nanticoke officers were dispatched to the area of 124 W. Washington St. about 10:40 p.m. Wednesday to a report of a man outside with a gun threatening people.

A neighbor reported he had been drinking with Wojciechowski, who was upset that his wife, Kimberly Wojciechowski, was filing for divorce, the affidavit says.

She told police she had gotten threatening text messages from her husband, one of which said, "I am going to smash your face in, break your neck, and I am going to kill you," the affidavit says.

Kimberly Wojciechowski was in the kitchen trying to avoid her husband, who kept going over to her and yelling, police said. The neighbor reported hearing yelling out front a short time later and seeing John Wojciechowski with a black .223-caliber rifle equipped with a scope, according to police.

Witnesses called police, and as they waited for officers to arrive Kimberly Wojciechowski reported getting a text from her husband saying, "I have the 223 and that's what I am using," the affidavit says.

The neighbor confronted John Wojciechowski about having the weapon in public, and John Wojciechowski put the gun to his chin, threatening to pull the trigger, according to the affidavit. John Wojciechowski eventually ejected a round and took the weapon inside, police said.

When officers arrived, John Wojciechowski denied being involved in a confrontation but eventually admitted to having a pellet gun outside, the affidavit says. A search of the house, however, turned up a pellet rifle, a .22-caliber pump-action rifle, a .223-caliber rifle, a bag of marijuana and drug paraphernalia, police said.

Magisterial District Judge Gerald L. Feissner arraigned Wojciechowski on Thursday morning and set his bail at \$25,000. Wojciechowski was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for 1 p.m. Sept. 25.

9/13/2013

Former GNA secretary sentenced for theft

Michael Buffer - Citizens Voice

A former secretary for the Greater Nanticoke Area School District avoided jail time, but must pay back \$19,427 she stole from a school cafeteria, a judge ruled Friday.

Jacqueline Ruchinski, 62, will be on probation for three years, according to a sentence imposed by Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough. She must pay the district \$19,427, the amount she stole from a school cafeteria over six years, in 45 days.

9/11/2013

Teen charged with murder in Nanticoke death

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Investigators say it was one of the most gruesome wrecks they've ever seen. Prosecutors on Tuesday called it murder. Authorities filed charges alleging 16-year-old Tyler Duda sneaked out of his Wyoming home to meet up with friends, took his mother's car without permission and then crashed it into 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at speeds in excess of 70 mph - in a 25 mph zone.

Zurilla's body was dismembered in the impact, with his torso crashing through the windshield and landing on a passenger's lap. His legs were found hundreds of yards away from where the car ultimately crashed.

"It was a terrible night and it was a horrific scene, and a way that no individual should have to lose his life," Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said.

Duda declined to comment at an arraignment Tuesday in which he was charged with third-degree murder and other offenses. His godmother, Michaelene Brown of Nanticoke, claimed the passenger told Duda to take the car and she took exception to him being held at the county jail with adults.

"He's a good boy. Things just happened," Brown said. "It was a tragedy, but this poor boy is suffering and will suffer now for the rest of his life as to what happened. He is very remorseful. He didn't mean to do what he did."

According to a police affidavit, officers arrived at the scene in the 300 block of West Union Street about 2:15 a.m. July 5 and found Duda, Zurilla's remains and a teenage passenger entrapped in Duda's vehicle. After hitting Zurilla, the car continued hundreds of feet until it struck a vehicle on the left side of the road, knocking it into three other vehicles before it crashed into the porch of a home at 409 W. Union St., police said.

The passenger, who was not identified, was unconscious and transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center for treatment of facial injuries. Police say Duda took his mother's Ford Edge from the family home at 49 Tamanini Drive, Wyoming. His mother, Lori Duda, her boyfriend and daughter had been out to a party until about 12:30 a.m., when they parked the car in the garage and left the keys on the kitchen counter, police said.

Duda went to pick up a 16-year-old boy in Newport Township about 1:40 a.m. Police say the boy sneaked out of his house to meet Duda so they could hang out, and that Duda greeted him by saying, "Happy Fourth of July," the affidavit says.

The pair drove around Nanticoke listening to music for a while before deciding to go meet a girl with whom cellphone records show the boys spoke to just prior to the crash, the affidavit says.

The girl, who is not named in court records, told investigators the boys called her to hang out and she declined to go with them because they were underage. But she did agree to meet them at her house, and the boys headed there, police say.

The girl told police that shortly after learning the boys were coming to her house, she heard the passenger screaming "Slow down!" followed by the sound of a crash, the affidavit says. Moments later, she heard Duda screaming the passenger's name and someone else yelling to call 911, police said.

At the scene, Duda told police he did not see the person crossing the street, the affidavit says.

The person standing on the double yellow line was Zurilla, a Marine Corps veteran who was crossing the street on his way home to 340 W. Union St. after spending the Fourth of July at a neighbor's house.

The neighbor, John Murphy, of 341 W. Union St., told police he turned to go inside the house when he heard Zurilla call out, "This car is going to hit me," according to the affidavit.

As Murphy turned back toward the street, he saw the car speed past with a body being thrown forward, police said. The car continued down the street, swerving, police said.

Investigators found hair and blood on the windshield and an accident reconstruction revealed no mechanical defects to the car. Duda had been traveling in excess of 70 mph in the 25 mph zone, according to the affidavit.

Investigators say 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.

Prosecutors on Tuesday charged him with third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle, leaving the scene of an accident, reckless driving, failing to keep right, driving without a license and speeding.

Salavantis said charges were months in coming because the accident reconstruction that revealed how fast Duda had been traveling took time to complete.

She argued in court for \$1 million bail for Duda, saying his actions represent a threat to the community.

"The defendant took his mother's vehicle and was involved in the accident without his mother's consent," Salavantis said. "We are concerned about the supervision of this child."

Duda's attorney, Thomas Killino, argued for significantly lower bail, in the neighborhood of \$25,000, saying Duda is involved in "other matters" in juvenile court and that he requires low bail to participate in the juvenile system.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker sided with prosecutors, setting Duda's bail at \$1 million. He was ordered jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for Sept. 20 at 10:30 a.m.

Brown took issue with the hearing, saying she thinks there is a conflict of interest because it was held in Nanticoke - Duda's uncle is Nanticoke City Council President Stephen E. Duda - and because Tyler Duda has worked as a "canoe boy" for Salavantis' father at Frances Slocum State Park.

"She should have never been there to pass judgment on him and make a million-dollar bail on a 16-year-old who's not going anywhere," Brown said.

Salavantis said she first learned of the allegation when a reporter called Tuesday. She said she did not know Duda may have worked for her father and that she does not personally know Duda or his family.

"I don't believe it is a conflict of interest," she said.

Still, she said she would contact the state Attorney General's Office to see if its agents think a conflict exists.

Reached on his cellphone Tuesday, city council President Stephen E. Duda declined to comment.

"It has nothing to do with me," he said.

9/10/2013

Teen charged with murder in Nanticoke man's death

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Nanticoke police arrested a 16-year-old boy Tuesday on murder charges in connection with a July 5 crash that dismembered a city man.

Tyler Duda, of Wyoming, is charged with third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle, leaving the scene of an accident, reckless driving, failing to keep right, driving without a license and speeding.

Police say he hit and killed Nickolas Zurilla, a 59-year-old Marine Corps veteran who was crossing the street after spending the Fourth of July at a neighbor's house.

Duda was traveling without a driver's license in excess of 70 mph on a roadway with a speed limit posting of 25 mph, the Luzerne County District Attorney's office said.

"This incident is a tragedy that has already unnecessarily taken one life affecting the victim's entire family," District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said in a statement. "It will doubtlessly forever change the lives of the Defendant and his family."

Duda was arraigned Tuesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whitaker, who set his bail at \$1 million.

Zurilla was walking to his house at 340 W. Union St. about 2:15 a.m. Friday when he was hit and killed by a westbound vehicle occupied by two 16-year-old boys, police said.

Zurilla spent the night at the house of his friend, John Murphy, of 341 W. Union St., talking and having a few beers before heading home, according to his family.

As he crossed the street to go home, a vehicle hit and dismembered Zurilla, his family has said.

The vehicle ended up several hundred feet down the road from where Zurilla was hit. Zurilla was pronounced dead at the scene.

The vehicle was occupied by two 16-year-old boys. The passenger, who has not been identified, was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Township, to be treated for facial injuries, police said.

9/10/2013

Vehicular homicide charges filed in Nanticoke fatal

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A 16-year-old boy is facing vehicular homicide and third-degree murder charges for the July 5 crash that claimed the life of Nicholas Zurilla on West Union Street.

The charges against Tyler Duda, of Wyoming, were filed with District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke on Monday. Duda has not been arraigned.

Zurilla, 59, was struck by a 2013 Ford Edge allegedly driven by Duda in front of his own home at 340 W. Union St. at about 2:15 a.m. on July 5. Zurilla was across the street sitting on a porch watching fireworks, neighbors said at the time. Zurilla was thrown through the windshield of Duda's vehicle, which careened out of control and struck several parked vehicles. It came to a stop about 115 yards away in front of 409 W. Union St., according to a search warrant filed on July 10.

A 16-year-old passenger in the Ford was treated at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

Duda is also charged with accidents involving death, reckless driving, driving without a license, speeding and failure to stay in lane.

8/29/2013

Nanticoke police charge woman on heroin offenses

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For more than one week, drug agents with the Luzerne County Drug Task Force and police kept watch of an apartment on East Union Street.

Late Wednesday, authorities made their move allegedly finding 91 heroin packets, two bags of marijuana, a box containing a large quantity of partially consumed marijuana cigarettes, a water bong and contraband, according to charges filed.

Temeeeka Shantell Gaddis, 27, of 120 E. Union St., Nanticoke, was arraigned Thursday morning on multiple drug offenses.

Arrest records allege Gaddis sold heroin at and near her apartment on Aug. 19, Aug. 21 and Wednesday before authorities served a search warrant at her residence.

Gaddis was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$175,000 bail.

8/29/2013

Nanticoke police find gun, drugs in sleeping driver's SUV

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Nanticoke police officers found a man with a pound of marijuana, an illegally carried gun and nearly \$4,000 in his backpack Wednesday morning when he passed out in a sport utility vehicle in an alley, according to a criminal complaint.

Police arrested Christopher J. Jacobs, 22, of Nanticoke on charges of possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver and carrying a firearm without a license, which are felonies. Police also charged Jacobs with possession of a controlled substance, possession of a small amount of marijuana, driving without a license and public drunkenness.

According to a criminal complaint, officers were dispatched at 7:54 a.m. to an alley near the 600 block of South Walnut Street for a report of a man passed out behind the wheel of a green Nissan Xterra.

An officer said he turned off the SUV and woke up Jacobs, who seemed to be under the influence of marijuana and told the officer he had been drinking earlier and had taken Xanax.

Jacobs' eyes were red and his speech was very slurred, to the point where the officer could only make out parts of what he was saying, the complaint read. Police said Jacobs kept reaching into his shorts pockets and did not follow an officer's order to stop, prompting the officer to take Jacobs out of the SUV.

Police said they found the following on Jacobs during a search: A plastic bag with six alprazolam pills, a bag with a small amount of marijuana and a .25-caliber handgun with four rounds. Police said Jacobs does not have a license to carry a concealed weapon and could not do so because of bail conditions for previous drug trafficking charges.

An officer taking an inventory of the SUV found a backpack, unzipped a compartment and saw a large amount of cash, according to a police report. Police said they stopped the search and applied for a warrant.

A warranted search later that day turned up a pound of marijuana, \$3,980 in cash, a digital scale, acetaminophen and hydrocodone pills and a glass container.

Police said they also found .22- and .223-caliber rounds, fireworks, Jacobs' cellphone and Pennsylvania license plate DNK5580.

Jacobs was lodged in Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$250,000 cash bail.

8/21/2013

Nearly naked man charged with burglary

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Nanticoke police say a man high on drugs broke into his mother's house wearing only underwear and socks and began crushing cigarette packs before threatening to throw himself off the porch in an attempt to frame her, according to court documents.

Timothy Lee Deitz, 33, of 304 E. Washington St., is charged with burglary, criminal trespassing, trespassing and theft in the incident reported Tuesday morning.

According to a police affidavit, officers were called to 104 W. Main St. about 10:05 a.m. Tuesday when the resident, Gloria Deitz, reported her son was high on drugs and refusing to leave.

Officers arrived to find Timothy Deitz standing in the yard wearing only underwear and socks as he argued with his mother and grandmother, Lily Tomassaci, the affidavit says.

The women reported they had been grocery shopping and returned to find Timothy Deitz in the kitchen. He refused to leave the home, and when told they were calling 911, Timothy Deitz grabbed three packs of cigarettes and brought them to the back porch, police said.

Gloria Deitz reported that her son came after her and tried to push her on the porch, but was unable to because of his level of intoxication, the affidavit says.

She pushed Timothy Deitz away from her, and he walked over to a side rail, threatening to throw himself over and then blame her when police arrived, according to the affidavit.

Timothy Deitz threw two of the packs of cigarettes at his mother and crushed the third while cursing at her, police said. Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker arraigned Deitz on Tuesday afternoon and set his bail at \$75,000.

Deitz was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for 1:30 p.m. Aug. 28.

8/17/2013

Suspected Nanticoke burglar arraigned

Denise Allabaugh - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who allegedly burglarized the home of a retired police chief's mother was arraigned Friday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

Nicholas Brandon McManus, 18, is charged with burglary, criminal trespass and theft.

According to the police criminal complaint, retired police Chief Leonard Nardozzo said the man burglarized his mother's house at 124 W. Church St. on Thursday afternoon.

When Nardozzo arrived at her home, he said he heard a noise in the living room area and he saw McManus attempting to leave through the front door.

Nardozzo yelled for McManus to stop, but he fled west on West Church Street after removing \$20 and a blue plastic piggy bank containing \$35 in change from a dresser.

Nardozzo provided police with a description of the suspect. He said he recognized him as the neighboring tenant's brother.

McManus' brother, Joseph, told police his brother resides with him and his girlfriend at 126 W. Church St.

Nanticoke Police Chief William Shultz determined McManus entered the home through a shared attic.

Joseph McManus found his brother and convinced him to turn himself in to police.

8/17/2013

A Nanticoke man accused of breaking into vehicles was caught in the act twice - once by a citizen who detained him and another time when his cousin snapped his picture on a cellphone camera, according to police.

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Joseph Sinkiewicz, 27, of 48 E. Ridge St., is charged with two counts of theft from a motor vehicle and one count each of theft by unlawful taking, receiving stolen property, loitering or prowling at night and trespassing.

According to police affidavits, officers began investigating Sinkiewicz on June 14, after Peggy Stewart of 121 E. Broad St. called 911 about 10:30 p.m. to a report her neighbor, Greg Zagata, had detained a man who broke into her Jeep

Cherokee.

Officers arrived to find Zagata leading a man police recognized as Sinkiewicz through the backyard, according to the complaint.

Zagata reported he had come home from work and seen Sinkiewicz acting suspicious, so he watched him and saw him looking into car windows and trying car door handles, the affidavit says.

Eventually Sinkiewicz made his way to Stewart's Jeep and entered it, rummaging through the contents, police said.

Zagata confronted Sinkiewicz and told Stewart to call 911, but Sinkiewicz tried to run, according to the complaint.

Sinkiewicz ran through several yards, jumping over fences, but Zagata caught him in an alleyway and brought him back to the scene, police said.

Police discovered he had stolen a single fake rose that police found on the sidewalk, the affidavit says.

Then about 2:10 p.m. Sunday, police were called to 277 E. Broad St. to a report of a theft from a vehicle.

The victim, Jamie Karmon, reported a Garmin GPS, a gold bracelet and cash with a combined value of about \$860 had been stolen.

Karmon's neighbor, Amy Cramer, told police she saw the theft and recognized the thief as Sinkiewicz, her cousin, the affidavit says. Cramer had also taken cellphone pictures of the theft, which she emailed to investigators, police said.

Police filed charges in both cases on Tuesday, and Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane arraigned Sinkiewicz on Thursday afternoon.

The judge set Sinkiewicz's bail at \$10,000. Sinkiewicz was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for 1 p.m. Aug. 21.

8/15/2013

Police Blotter

City police reported the following incidents between Aug. 2 and Tuesday:

- Brian Zegarski, of West Grand Street, reported someone ripped off and broke the rear wiper of his vehicle.
- James Provon, of South Hanover Street, reported someone stole a package containing Callaway golf balls from his porch.
- Joan Raski, of Fairchild Street, reported someone smashed the rear window of her vehicle while it was parked in her driveway.
- Dustin Swantek, of East Green Street, reported someone keyed the passenger doors of his vehicle while it was parked by his home.

8/13/2013

Police searching for woman accused of stealing checks

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police have filed an arrest warrant against a woman accused of using dozens of stolen bank checks belonging to a Nanticoke resident.

Brandy Peters, 30, last known address of Nanticoke, is wanted on charges of access device fraud, forgery and theft, Nanticoke police said.

Peters is accused of using stolen bank checks belonging to Nanticoke resident, Elizabeth Hanko, to make 46 debit transactions at Weis Markets in Nanticoke and Gerrity's Supermarket in Hanover Township.

Anyone with information on Peters' whereabouts is asked to contact city detectives at 570-735-2200.

8/12/2013

Nanticoke man leads police on chase, crashes into truck

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A wanted Nanticoke man who was riding in a car stopped by police early Saturday jumped into the driver's seat and got zapped with a Taser before speeding off and crashing into a truck a quarter mile away, according to Newport Township police.

Police say Zireek Rahim Gardner, 22, of 810 E. Main St., was wanted on a parole violation when they stopped a car he was riding in along Kirmar Parkway about 4:40 a.m. Saturday.

Gardner was sentenced in November 2009 to two to four years in state prison after pleading guilty to a count of

involuntary manslaughter. Police said Gardner punched 24-year-old William Bentley in the head during a fight outside Schiel's Family Market in Wilkes-Barre in March 2009.

Bentley died after suffering cardiac arrest as he was transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township.

According to a police affidavit, Newport Township police Chief Jeremy Blank was on patrol at the time when he saw a black Ford Taurus drive through an emergency response area despite flares burning and a uniformed officer waving light wands ordering the driver to stop.

The area was closed off because of an accident earlier in the morning that knocked out power in the area, according to the affidavit. Police stopped the vehicle and identified its occupants, who reported they were coming from Gentlemen's Club 10. A passenger in the back seat, later identified as Gardner, gave police a fake name, according to the affidavit. Police asked Gardner to get out of the car and he locked the back door as he began to climb toward the driver's seat, police said. Blank reached in the driver's side window and tried to push Gardner back, but Gardner was able to start the car and reach for the gear shifter, according to the affidavit.

Blank hit Gardner with his Taser as Gardner threw the car into gear, and the vehicle sped off westbound on Kirmar Parkway, police said.

The car sped toward emergency responders and utility crews who had responded to the earlier accident as Blank chased after it. Gardner sped about a quarter-mile in the car before crashing into the back of a parked Metrocast Communications truck, according to the affidavit.

The car ended up jammed under the truck. Police say there were no skid marks indicating Gardner had tried to stop. As Blank arrived at the scene, Gardner jumped out the driver's side window and tried to flee the scene, but police caught him when he fell over a guard rail, according to the affidavit.

Gardner told police he fled the scene because he was wanted on a parole violation.

The front seat passenger, David Johnson Jr., was pinned in the car and had to be extricated. He was transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Township. Police said he sustained a broken palate.

The driver of the truck, Larry Zoscin, reported neck and back pain and was also taken to Geisinger along with Gardner, who was bleeding from the head and complaining of chest pain, police said.

Gardner is charged with reckless endangerment, flight to avoid apprehension, fleeing police, accidents involving injury, resisting arrest, stripping an abandoned vehicle, driving with a suspended license, accidents involving property damage, false identification to police, careless driving, reckless driving and operating a vehicle without required financial responsibility.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker arraigned Gardner on Saturday evening and set bail at \$100,000. He is being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for Aug. 28 at 2 p.m.

8/8/2013

Nanticoke police search for hit-and-run driver

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are trying to find a Jeep Cherokee that fled the scene after crashing into four parked vehicles early Tuesday.

Police say the hit-and-run took place about 1:50 a.m. in the 1000 block of South Market Street.

An older white Jeep Cherokee crashed into four legally parked vehicles on the side of the road and kept going, police Chief William Shultz said. No injuries were reported.

The Jeep sustained heavy front end damage, and police were able to track its movements for a few blocks because of leaking fluid, he said. But officers lost the trail when the fluids dried up, he said.

Anyone with information on the incident is asked to call police at 570-735-2200 or 911.

8/3/2013

Nanticoke police activity

Citizens Voice

Shannon Wisneski of East State Street reported someone broke into her home and stole a toaster over.

Dean Margalski of West Noble Street reported someone entered his yard and stole a bicycle.

Michael Foschini of Nanticoke was arrested on an outstanding warrant from the Edwardsville Police Department.

Daryl Lowyn of Nanticoke was arrested on a probation violation.

Daniel Scholl of Nanticoke was arrested for violating a protection-from-abuse order.
Benjamin Fortner of Nanticoke was arrested on warrants for failing to appear in court and simple assault.

8/2/2013

Lawyer: Wilkes-Barre shooting suspect working on plea agreement

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Manslaughter suspect Brandon Leigh Switzer waived a preliminary hearing Friday, with his attorney saying he has reached a tentative plea agreement with prosecutors.

Switzer, 22, of 168 E. Union St., Nanticoke, is charged with a single count of involuntary manslaughter in the death of Zachary J. Williams, 23, of 135 Park St., Nanticoke.

Court documents say Switzer told police he and Williams were playing with a Beretta 9mm pistol when his thumb slipped off the hammer, causing the weapon to shoot Williams in the head at a friend's house at 32 N. Sherman St., Wilkes-Barre, on June 25.

Switzer, who is free after posting \$250,000 bail through a bondsman, appeared in court surrounded by family members. He declined to comment.

As a result of Switzer waiving his hearing, Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane forwarded the case to trial, setting a formal arraignment for Oct. 11.

But Switzer's attorney, Tom Marsilio, said his client will waive that arraignment, setting up the case to go before a judge by the end of the year or early next year.

"There's a tentative agreement in place," Marsilio said, declining to provide details. "This is a horrible accident, unfortunately. It shouldn't have occurred, but that's what it is. It's an accident and unfortunately the law in this particular instance could be interpreted to be the involuntary homicide offense, and if we were to take that before a jury, then that could go one way or another."

According to police, Switzer brought the gun to the Sherman Street house owned by Edward Daniel Berkowitz 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 a short time later. Marsilio said since the shooting, Switzer has been the recipient of threats "veiled and otherwise." He wouldn't disclose who is alleged to have made such threats.

The attorney said Switzer and Williams were good friends and called the shooting a tragedy.

"They'd known each other for years and it's indeed unfortunate," Marsilio said. "My client is terribly sorry at what happened. It's a sad, sad situation."

8/1/2013

Police discover hitchhiker wanted by sheriff's office

Citizens Voice

Hanover Township police picked up a hitchhiker Wednesday and learned he was a wanted man.

Police say 26-year-old Anthony Thomas Corsey, of Nanticoke was arrested about 4:30 a.m. along the Sans Souci Parkway after officers saw him hitchhiking near police headquarters.

Police say Corsey lied about his name, and officers learned he was wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff's Office for failing to appear in court in June on a charge of disorderly conduct.

He had also been wanted since May on a probation violation, police said.

Police say additional charges are pending against Corsey for drug violations and providing false information to police.

7/30/2013

Thomas Worthy Painter, 18, of South Hanover Street, Nanticoke, was arraigned Sunday on charges he assaulted

and robbed another man.

Times Leader

Painter was charged with two counts of robbery, and one count each of theft, disorderly conduct, simple assault, harassment and false reports to law enforcement. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$20,000 bail.

Police allege Painter punched David Beggs and stole Beggs's bag containing alcohol and money near the Apollo Circle apartment complex on July 3, according to the criminal complaint.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Aug. 7.

7/26/2013

Nanticoke man accused of barn break-in

Citizens Voice

Jackson Township police on Wednesday arrested a man in connection with a break-in at a barn earlier this month. Joshua Gerald Bobbin, 21, of Nanticoke, is charged with burglary, criminal trespassing and conspiracy in the July 18 break-in at a barn owned by David Roskos at 1540 Huntsville Road, police said.

Magisterial District Judge James Tupper arraigned Bobbin and sent him to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$5,000.

Police say another man, Ryan Briggs, 25, of Benton, was caught at the scene of the crime and has been held on parole violations at the county jail. He is being arraigned Friday on burglary, criminal trespassing, resisting arrest and conspiracy charges in the case, police said.

7/23/2013

Police Blotter

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police responded to the following incidents:

- > Joshua Rogozinski of West Green Street reported someone stole a 55-inch LED TV and a PlayStation 3 from his home.
- > Tracy Mister of South Prospect Street reported someone stole her son's green and white Avigo React bicycle.
- > Raymond Konetski of West Union Street reported someone stole a spare tire from his vehicle.
- > Mary Konopczyk of Depot Street, Glen Lyon, was cited for animal cruelty after police say she shut her dog in a car with temperatures exceeding 90 degrees. Police tried to find the owner and after about 30 minutes they unlocked the vehicle and seized the dog.
- > Robert Hughes of East Washington Street reported someone stole a Dell computer, a GPS device and a Fossil watch from his vehicle.
- > John Antolik of East Grand Street reported someone stole change from the cup holder in his vehicle.
- > Kenneth Smith reported someone tried to break into the Nanticoke Little League concession stand behind Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

7/16/2013

Inmate pleads not guilty to killing Nanticoke guard

Michael R. Sisak - Citizens Voice

Arizona killer Jessie Con-ui pleaded not guilty Tuesday to charges he attacked and killed Nanticoke correctional officer Eric Williams in February at the U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County.

Con-ui, charged with first degree murder and the first-degree murder of a federal correctional officer, could face the death penalty. U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Blewitt set his trial for Sept. 16 at the federal courthouse in Wilkes-Barre.

Con-ui, 36, appeared at his arraignment via video conference call from the federal supermaximum security prison in Florence, Colo. A court-appointed death penalty attorney, Mark Fleming, stood by his side. Another court-appointed attorney, James Swetz, appeared in the courtroom.

Swetz would not say whether Con-ui would go to trial or attempt to negotiate a plea agreement to avoid the death penalty. Con-ui, a reputed member of the New Mexican Mafia prison gang, must still serve 25 years to life in Arizona

prison for a 2002 gang killing in Phoenix.

"We are not going to have any comment on today's proceeding," Swetz said, as he left court.

An indictment charging Con-ui gave little detail about the alleged attack. Williams' colleagues told The Citizens' Voice in March that Con-ui ambushed Williams during nightly lock down, pushing him down a flight of stairs and stabbing him with a makeshift knife.

U.S. Attorney Peter Smith watched the arraignment from the jury box, alongside Williams' family. Afterward, he declined comment on the case.

7/16/2013

Charges in deadly West Nanticoke hit-and-run

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

Almost a year after a vehicle struck and killed Richard Stadts while he was bicycling in West Nanticoke, state police charged a Hunlock Township man with vehicular homicide.

Matthew Perkins, 20, was arraigned Monday before District Judge Donald Whittaker and transferred to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. Bail was set at \$100,000.

Perkins was also charged with involuntary manslaughter and accidents involving death or injury.

The arrest affidavit said:

Stadts was riding a bicycle along with another bicyclist, Stephen Snyder, in the area of Stookey's Famous Bar-B-Que on the north berm of U.S. Route 11 about 10 p.m. Aug. 7. Perkins was driving a 2007 Saab sport-utility vehicle outside the northbound lane of travel, struck Stadts and drove away.

Stadts died from multiple traumatic injuries at 2:27 p.m. Aug. 8 at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township. According to Snyder, Stadts was 10 feet behind him, and they were bicycling 5 to 6 feet inside the white line. A front passenger-side mirror was found at the homicide scene. Robert Ridall, a witness who was driving in front of Perkins, noticed the bicycles and saw Perkins' vehicle swerve behind him.

Perkins sped up and passed Ridall's vehicle, and Ridall jotted down the license-plate number. When Roberts later drove back south down the road, he saw police and fire personnel and stopped.

Police checked the license plate number and determined the vehicle was owned by Sharon Lynn Robey, Perkins' grandmother.

At 11:29 p.m. Aug. 7, a trooper talked to Robey at her home on Hartman Avenue in Hunlock Creek and observed the vehicle was missing the front passenger-side mirror.

At 12:30 a.m. Aug. 8, Perkins told the trooper he wanted to talk to his grandmother after realizing he hit someone, adding he drank a shot of liquor and did heroin in the woods after returning home, the affidavit said.

7/11/2013

Nanticoke man's tirade results in charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is accused of stealing a former friend's dog and threatening to burn down a house during a drunken tirade.

Edward Ryan Nork, 39, is charged with criminal trespassing, making terroristic threats, stalking, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief and two counts of harassment.

Police say Nork, of 280 W. Main St., punched open a screen door and took Concho, a pit bull, from a home at 333 S. Hanover St. and later threatened to burn the place down. Nork also threatened to beat up his former friend, Jonah O'Brien, and stab his girlfriend, Jill Robinholt, police said. Magisterial District Judge James Tupper arraigned Nork on Wednesday and ordered him jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$10,000 bail.

7/9/2013

Secretary reaches deal for embezzling \$19K from Greater Nanticoke Area district

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The secretary accused of embezzling more than \$19,000 from the Greater Nanticoke Area School District will likely avoid jail time, but she's got a lot of work to do.

Jacqueline Ruchinski agreed to a deal Monday that requires her to plead guilty to all six counts of felony theft against

her - each carrying a maximum sentence of seven years and/or a maximum fine of \$15,000 - but will keep her out of prison.

Under the conditions of the agreement, she would receive probation that would allow her to work and pay back the \$19,427.32 she stole from a school cafeteria over the past six school years as well as the county's legal fees. Her shoulders slumped while she stood in front of Judge Michael Vough, Ruchinski spoke quickly and quietly while sitting nearby a line of jumpsuited and shackled inmates from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility waited their turn. Ruchinski's not completely safe from prison time, though. Vough held off sentencing until September to allow the court time to conduct a background check on Ruchinski to be sure she is in agreement with the probationary agreement, assistant district attorney Michelle Hardik said.

The former secretary, an employee of the district for more than two decades before she was fired last year, refused to comment as she left the courtroom. She covered her face with a court document while one of her lawyers, Edward Bezdecki, bickered with TV news cameramen trying to shoot her as she left the courthouse.

Reached by phone Monday, Ryan Verazin, president of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board, said while the punishment "seemed like a slap on the wrist," he was partially satisfied the former employee would be forced to pay back the stolen public money.

"The legal process is the legal processâ?" Verazin said. "You gotta take it where you can get it."

7/6/2013

Favorite NFL team and hug offer leads to bar fight

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An argument about a NFL team led to a bar fight that left one man injured and another man facing charges.

Thaddeus Vincent Krysiuk Jr., 30, of Walnut Street, Alden, was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault and reckless endangerment.

He remained jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on Friday for lack of \$100,000 bail. He was arraigned on Wednesday by District Judge Donald Whittaker.

Police allege Krysiuk struck Lucas Scheitrumf with a beer mug inside Rbar & Grill on West Union Street on June 29, according to the criminal complaint.

Krysiuk told police Scheitrumf asked him if he was a football fan and stated his favorite team is the Pittsburgh Steelers. Scheitrumf responded that he was going to give Krysiuk a hug. Krysiuk did not want a hug and put his hands up striking Scheitrumf in the chin with a beer mug, the complaint says.

Krysiuk said Scheitrumf was fidgeting and feared the hug offer was street slang to stab or cut him.

Police said Scheitrumf sustained a laceration that required stitches and a fractured nose.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on July 10.

7/6/2013

Man struck, killed while crossing Nanticoke street

By James Halpin and Bob Kalinowski (Staff Writers) - Citizens Voice

Published: July 6, 2013

As Nickolas Zurilla crossed West Union Street early Friday, a friend heard him say, "Is this car going to hit me?"

By the time the friend turned around, Zurilla - and the vehicle - were gone, Zurilla's family said.

A Marine Corps veteran who had worked as a heavy equipment operator for the Army Corps of Engineers until becoming disabled several years ago, Zurilla, 59, was walking to his house at 340 W. Union St. about 2:15 a.m. Friday when he was hit and killed by a westbound vehicle occupied by two 16-year-old boys, police said.

His sister, Diane Washik, also of Nanticoke, said Zurilla spent the night at the home of his friend, John Murphy, of 341 W. Union St., talking and having a few beers before heading home.

"I was talking to John and he said he was enjoying the kids with the fireworks - and teasing them," Washik said. "That's Nick, though, for you."

When Zurilla told Murphy he planned to leave, Murphy told him to wait so he could take home some macaroni salad, she said. Murphy gave it to his friend and turned around to go inside, seeing no cars in the area, she said. Then he heard Zurilla's last words.

"This kid had to be flying, because Nick was almost there and he says, 'Oh my God, is this car going to hit me?'"

Washik said in an interview Friday. "When he heard that, he turned around and there was nothing there."

Noting her brother had a bad back, Washik said, "He couldn't even run over, you know?" The impact dismembered Zurilla, with part of his body pinned to the windshield and the rest falling to the pavement, she said.

"I've never seen no accident like this in my life," Washik said. "It was just so bad. When you're separated in parts, it's horrible. â? I haven't slept since I got the phone call this morning."

Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said the vehicle ended up several hundred feet down the road from where Zurilla was hit, but he was reluctant to call the accident a hit-and-run. The roadway has a 25 mph speed limit.

"The vehicle came to rest in a yard west of the scene, leaning up against a house," Shultz said. "We don't know what the intentions were."

Zurilla was pronounced dead at the scene. Acting Luzerne County Coroner Bill Lisman said a ruling on the cause and manner of death had not been made. An autopsy was planned for Sunday morning.

The vehicle was occupied by two 16-year-old boys, neither of whom was identified. The passenger was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township, to be treated for facial injuries, police said.

Shultz said the driver had been interviewed and released while police did accident reconstruction, executed search warrants on the vehicle and conducted interviews. He declined to say whether the boy had a driver's license.

"There's a lot of things we have to do. We're not going to know anything about criminal charges yet," Shultz said.

"There's not going to be any quick determination."

Police say county prosecutors along with the state police Forensic Unit and Accident Reconstruction Unit had been called to assist with the investigation.

Police asked anyone with information on the crash to call 570-735-2200 or 911.

Neighbors, meanwhile, were shocked about the violent wreck.

"He was just crossing the street coming home," said next-door neighbor Nicole Tomlin, 27. "It's sad."

Washik said she last spoke to her brother Tuesday, when he asked about his niece and nephews and was thinking about a holiday that has become bittersweet for the family since his mother, Mary Zurilla, died July 4, 2002, at age 74.

"I'm done with the Fourth of July, believe me," Washik said.

Zurilla's family said funeral arrangements were still pending for a well-liked man who always offered a hand to those in need. He is survived by an adult daughter who lives in Hanover Township and was an outgoing, kind man who enjoyed spending time with his family and friends, Washik said.

"Everybody loved Nick," she said. "Nick was a superhero. He was. He'd be there for you. He didn't care who you were. It's so horrible he had to go this way."

7/6/2013

Man killed when struck by car in Nanticoke

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A man was killed when he was struck by a vehicle in front of his house on West Union Street early Friday morning. Nicholas Zurilla, 60, was pronounced dead at the scene by the Luzerne County Coroner's Office.

Zurilla was struck as he crossed the street in front of his house, 340 W. Union St., at about 2:30 a.m.

The driver of the vehicle struck several parked vehicles and came to a stop in front of a vacant house at 409 W. Union St., about 115 yards from where Zurilla was struck.

Neighbors said the street has become a "raceway" since it was paved about two years ago.

It was not immediately known if any charges will be filed.

7/5/2013

Woman admits theft from LCCC

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A Nanticoke woman charged with taking \$16,000 from Luzerne County Community College while working there as a secretary pleaded guilty Wednesday in Luzerne County Court.

Janet M. Griffith, 52, of Center Street, pleaded guilty before Judge David Lupas to a felony charge of theft by failure to make required disposition of funds.

Griffith faces a maximum of seven years in prison when she is sentenced on Sept. 3. Griffith will be required to pay a \$5,000 deductible to LCCC and \$11,809 to an insurance company at the time of her sentencing.

After an investigation by Nanticoke police and the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office, investigators said Griffith took about \$16,000 while working as a secretary at the school's Public Safety Training Institute.

According to the criminal complaint, Nanticoke Detective Capt. William Shultz spoke on Feb. 22 with the college's director of security, Bill Barrett, who said an accounting firm had completed an annual 2011 audit for the training institute and that discrepancies were uncovered regarding missing funds.

The institute, which opened in 2008, trains police officers, firefighters, paramedics, EMTs and truck drivers in a variety of courses.

An accountant reported to the college that the missing money came from student tuition payments that had been made in cash.

On March 9, Luzerne County Detective Lt. Gary Capitano became involved in the investigation and spoke with college President Thomas Leary, who said Griffith was responsible for collecting fees for many courses and for transporting the payments to the finance office every day.

According to the college, Griffith was hired as a custodian in August 2007 and moved into the secretary position in December 2008. In October 2011, Griffith was moved back to the custodian position before she was placed on unpaid suspension in March 2012.

She was formally terminated from employment when she was arraigned on charges in November. Her annual salary had been \$23,585.

She is represented by attorney Matthew Kelly. Assistant District Attorney Shannon Crake is prosecuting the case.

7/1/2013

Nine more arrested in barber-shop drug case

James Halpin

State investigators arrested nine more people this morning in connection with a major drug trafficking operation linked to two businesses on Hazle Street in Wilkes-Barre, bringing to 17 the number of people charged with importing mass quantities of drugs for sale in the county.

Authorities say their eight-month investigation turned up evidence that the organization was importing marijuana by the pound and cocaine by the ounce from New York City to Luzerne County for sale in the Plymouth and Nanticoke areas. The alleged ringleaders, Ramon A. Colon, 26, and his wife, Alexandra V. Mateo, 21, both of 544 Mayflower Crossing, Wilkes-Barre, are accused of using Ramon's Hazle Street business, Master Barber Shop, as a front for dealing dope. Another Hazle Street business, Idely's Furniture, was also searched last week as part of the probe.

Magisterial District Judge Paul Roberts arraigned the nine new defendants this morning in Kingston on charges of participating in a corrupt organization and multiple drug dealing offenses. They are:

n Michael Kane, 33, of Wilkes-Barre; \$500,000 bail

n Kim Fia Chan, 49, of Shavertown; \$1 million bail

n David Atkinson, 23, of Wapwallopen; \$1 million bail

n Michael Rosario, 23, of Nanticoke; \$500,000 bail

n Amy Miller, 44, of Plymouth; \$500,000 bail

n Anthony James Wisneski, 30, of Nanticoke; \$500,000 bail

n Shannon Wisneski, 36, of Nanticoke; \$500,000 bail

n Steven Moore, 51, of Hanover Township; \$500,000 bail

n William F. Pezzella, 50, of Nanticoke; \$500,000 bail

All were being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for 1:30 p.m. July 15.

Authorities say the investigation is ongoing.

6/29/2013

Three more arrested in W-B barbershop drug raid

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Authorities on Friday made three more arrests in connection with a major drug trafficking operation linked to two businesses on Hazle Street in Wilkes-Barre.

Those arrested include Brandon R. Hynes, 23, of Ashley, John A. Miller, 26, of Plymouth, and Keith Wasiakowski, 26, of Nanticoke.

Hynes, Miller and Wasiakowski all face charges of participating in a corrupt organization and various drug dealing offenses.

Five others were arrested Thursday as part of an ongoing eight-month investigation into a major drug-trafficking

organization that imported mass quantities of cocaine and marijuana from New York City for sale in Luzerne County, authorities said.

Two Hazle Street businesses, Master Barber Shop and Idely's Furniture, were searched Thursday morning as part of the investigation, with Deputy Attorney General Timothy Doherty calling the barber shop the "hub and epicenter of the organization."

According to the criminal complaint filed by detectives with the state Attorney General's Office, authorities began investigating the suspects while tracking an operation smuggling cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine and firearms for distribution in the Plymouth and Nanticoke areas.

Following arraignment by Magisterial District Judge Paul Roberts in Kingston, the suspects were jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$1 million cash bail.

6/27/2013

Police: Suspect claims deadly W-B shooting was accidental

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The Nanticoke man charged in the homicide in Wilkes-Barre on Tuesday told police he and a friend were playing with a gun that fired accidentally when his thumb slipped off the hammer, shooting his friend in the head, according to documents released Wednesday.

Brandon Leigh Switzer, 22, of 168 E. Union St., Nanticoke, is charged with a single count of involuntary manslaughter in the death of Zachary J. Williams, 23, of 135 Park St., Nanticoke.

Police were called to 32 N. Sherman St., Wilkes-Barre, about 3:50 p.m. and found Switzer and the homeowner, Edward Daniel Berkowitz, in the driveway saying their friend had been shot, according to a police affidavit.

Investigators took Switzer and Berkowitz into custody for questioning, and Berkowitz gave police permission to search the home, police said.

Berkowitz told police Williams and Switzer had been playing with a Beretta 9mm pistol Switzer brought with him by loading and unloading it and operating the slide, the affidavit says. Berkowitz reported he was coming from the bathroom looking at his phone when he heard a gunshot and then saw Williams' head bleeding as it rested on his shoulder, police said.

During questioning, Switzer told police that Berkowitz had taken Williams to Switzer's house in Nanticoke about 1 p.m. and that they stayed there for about an hour before going to Berkowitz's house.

Switzer brought along the gun in a shoulder holster and put it down on a table or couch - he couldn't remember which - at Berkowitz's house, police said.

Williams repeatedly asked to see the gun, and Switzer pulled it out of the holster to show it, he told police. Switzer told police he cleared the weapon, dropping the magazine and ejecting the round from the chamber, before handing it to Williams.

Williams proceeded to assemble and disassemble the weapon several times, and was "amazed at the ease" he was able to do so, the affidavit says.

When he was done, Williams returned the weapon to Switzer, who reloaded it, according to the affidavit. But then Williams asked to see it again, Switzer told police.

Switzer ejected the magazine and began to hand the weapon to Williams when he remembered the gun had a round chambered, according to the affidavit.

"Switzer said he took the weapon, began to release the hammer with his thumb when his thumb slipped off the hammer causing the weapon to fire," the affidavit says.

The friends then called police to report the shooting. Officers found Williams bleeding from his head and medics transported him to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township, where he was pronounced dead. Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer arraigned Switzer on Tuesday night and set his bail at \$250,000 with a preliminary hearing set for 9 a.m. July 11. Switzer immediately posted bail through a bail bondsman.

Williams was a graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area School District and worked at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs, according to his Facebook profile.

Court records show that Switzer was charged in March 2011 with a theft count, his only other criminal case in the county. Switzer also has arrests for trespassing, shoplifting, recreational spot searching for wild game, and several traffic citations, court records show.

There was no answer at Switzer's or Berkowitz's doors on Wednesday afternoon. Family members of Williams, contacted at his home, declined to comment, saying they had been instructed not to say anything. They would not say

who instructed them.

6/26/2013

Manslaughter charge filed in Wilkes-Barre shooting

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A Nanticoke man was charged with involuntary manslaughter for what he says was an accidental shooting that killed his friend on Tuesday.

Brandon Leigh Switzer, 22, of East Union Street, told police his thumb slipped off the hammer on his 9mm handgun that discharged a round striking Zachary Williams, 23, in the head inside 32 N. Sherman St. just before 4 p.m.

Williams was pronounced dead at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township.

City police and Luzerne County detectives charged Switzer with the manslaughter charge Tuesday night. Switzer was arraigned by District Judge Rick

Cronauer and released after posting \$250,000 bail.

Williams, a graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, was employed at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs casino in Plains Township, according to his Facebook profile.

Switzer told police in a statement that Williams asked to see his .9mm handgun. Switzer ejected the magazine and began to hand it to Williams when he realized he had chambered a round, according to the criminal complaint.

Williams grabbed the firearm's muzzle when Switzer said his thumb slipped off the hammer, causing it to discharge a round that struck Williams in the head, the complaint says.

6/26/2013

Inmate charged in killing prison guard

Eric Williams, of Nanticoke, was stabbed while on duty at federal prison in Wayne County.

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Four months to the day that corrections officer Eric Williams was stabbed to death while on duty at a federal prison in Wayne County, the inmate that federal officials say is responsible has been charged with first-degree murder.

Jean Williams, Eric's mother, in a brief phone conversation said: "We knew this day was coming and finally it's here. We really don't have any other comment."

A federal grand jury in Scranton returned an indictment Tuesday charging Jessie Con-Ui with the murder of Williams, of Nanticoke.

Con-Ui, 36, was charged in U.S. District Court in the Middle District of Pennsylvania with one count of first-degree murder, one count of first-degree murder of a U.S. corrections officer and one count of possessing contraband in prison.

The indictment alleges Con-Ui killed Williams, 34, on Feb. 25, in a premeditated attack at the Canaan Federal Correction Complex near Waymart. According to the indictment, Con-Ui stabbed Williams with a sharpened weapon and struck him repeatedly.

If convicted, Con-Ui faces a maximum penalty of death or life in prison.

The charges against Con-Ui resulted from an investigation by the FBI, with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The case is being prosecuted by the Justice Department's Criminal Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

A spokeswoman said U.S. Attorney Peter J. Smith had no comment on the indictment and charges.

Phillip Glover, regional vice president for the American Federation of Government Employees Council of Prison Locals, the union that represents prison guards, hailed the news.

"The union is pleased the justice system is moving forward and has formally charged the inmate in the horrible murder of Officer Eric Williams," said Glover. "We believe the charge is appropriate and believe the inmate will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Following the deadly attack, Con-Ui was transferred to the Federal Correctional Institution at Allenwood. After a stay there he was sent to the Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colo., which according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons "houses offenders requiring the tightest controls." He remains there today.

A message left with his attorney, James Swetz, of Stroudsburg, was not returned Tuesday.

Williams' funeral at St. Faustina Kowalska Parish in Nanticoke drew hundreds of mourners, including fellow corrections officers, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Charles E. Samuels, director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, who told those gathered "We're going to do everything we can to bring the perpetrator to justice for this

ruthless and senseless act.”

Williams “will forever be a hero in our agency,” Samuels said, adding that his name would be inscribed in the National Law Enforcement Officers’ Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the Correctional Workers’ Memorial at the prison bureau headquarters, also in Washington. “His loss will not be in vain.”

Williams was the 24th federal prison employee to be killed in the line of duty since 1901.

Con-Ui was at Canaan serving an 11-year prison sentence stemming from a 2003 guilty plea for his role in a wide-scale drug ring run by the New Mexican Mafia. Following that sentence he was set to begin serving a life sentence after pleading guilty in 2008 to first-degree murder.

6/18/13

Man pleads guilty to pharmacy robbery

Mark Steven Benjamin Sr. entered plea to two counts of robbery and one count each of theft and a weapons charge.

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A city man charged with robbing a Nanticoke pharmacy at gunpoint and getting away with painkillers pleaded guilty Monday to related charges.

Mark Steven Benjamin Sr., 41, of North Sherman Street, entered the plea to two counts of robbery and one count each of theft and a weapons charge.

Benjamin faces a maximum of 10 years in prison on one of the robbery charges when he is sentenced on Sept. 3.

Assistant District Attorney Jill Matthews Lada said prosecutors will be seeking a deadly weapon enhancement at the time of Benjamin’s sentencing.

The deadly weapon enhancement is applied to a defendant’s sentence when a judge determines the offender possessed a deadly weapon while committing the offense and when any of the following happened: the firearm was loaded or unloaded, the weapon is dangerous or the weapon can cause death or serious bodily injury, according to Pennsylvania law.

Benjamin is represented by attorney John Donovan and is free after posting \$100,000 bail in July.

According to court papers, Nanticoke police responded to Spotanski’s Pharmacy on Prospect Street on June 25, 2012, after an armed robbery was reported.

Pharmacist Kathy Smith told police a man entered the store and demanded fentanyl or painkillers while pointing what appeared to be a shotgun in a large garbage bag in her direction. Smith said she could see only the end of the shotgun barrel and feared for her life.

Smith told the man she had no fentanyl but quickly gave him a bottle of generic Oxycodone and acetaminophen tablets she had in front of her. The man took the bottle and ran from the store.

A store employee told police the man, later identified as Benjamin, ran north on South Prospect Street.

A short time later, police were notified by Hanover Township police they spotted a man who fit Benjamin’s description on Middle Road near the entrance to the Hanover Industrial Park. Benjamin was pulled over in a truck owned by his mother.

Police said Benjamin told them he committed the crime, he was sorry and he had intended to sell the drugs. He told police he hid a “broken shotgun” under a bed in a spare bedroom of his mother’s house in Nanticoke, changed his shirt and hid it and a baseball cap in the truck.

Benjamin will be required to pay \$105 in restitution to the pharmacy and is not permitted to enter Spotanski’s.

6/18/2013

Man sentenced in June 2012 assault

Richard Shaw, 29, was sentenced to nine to 18 months in prison on a charge of simple assault.

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A man serving a state prison sentence on drug-related charges was sentenced Monday in a case in which police say he stabbed a man last June.

Richard Shaw, 29, with a last known address of West Union Street, Nanticoke, was sentenced to nine to 18 months in prison after pleading guilty to a charge of simple assault.

County Judge Lesa Gelb said Shaw’s sentence will run concurrently with the two-to-four-year prison sentence he now is serving on drug charges.

According to court papers, on June 30, 2012, police were called to the area of Janison's Floral on East Main Street in Nanticoke. When police arrived, they saw blood on the ground in a parking lot and broken pieces of wood. Floyd Bernard had injuries to his head, face and arm and was taken to the Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for treatment. He was treated for lacerations to his head, chest and arm.

Bernard said two people, Shaw and George Richards, were angry with him because Bernard would not allow Richards to live with him any longer.

Bernard told police Shaw called him and threatened him. Bernard got in his car near his home and waited in Janison's parking lot to see if Shaw was coming.

Shaw pulled up with Richards in the passenger seat, Bernard told police.

Bernard said "words were exchanged" and Shaw pulled out a knife. Bernard said he tried to defend himself, but Shaw cut him on the chest and elbow.

Bernard said he then saw Richards coming from the side with a wooden object, and that he was struck in the head, according to court papers.

Bernard said he started bleeding and another man yelled across the street asking him if he was all right. Shaw and Richards then allegedly left the scene.

Gelb ordered Shaw to have no contact with Bernard and to pay any out-of-pocket medical expenses that were not covered by Bernard's insurance.

Shaw also had been convicted by a county jury in September 2012 of drug-related offenses stemming from a February 2011 incident.

He was sentenced in November 2012 to two to four years in state prison.

Richards, 27, was also charged in the assault on Bernard, and has agreed to plead guilty, according to court records.

With a last known address of East Main Street, Nanticoke, he is scheduled to be arraigned in county court on July 12.

According to court papers, at his preliminary hearing Richards agreed to plead guilty to a charge of simple assault.

Charges of simple assault and harassment were forwarded to county court. Prosecutors withdrew a count of aggravated assault.

6/1/2013

Nanticoke police charged a man they say assaulted a woman in her home before taking the keys to her rental car and leaving.

Citizens Voice

Kevin K. Atkinson, 44, of Nanticoke was upset that police were in the home on the evening of May 19, so he attacked Nancy Giberson shortly after midnight by punching her in the head and kicking her in the face when she was on the ground, police said in a criminal complaint.

According to court documents, Atkinson was arraigned before Magisterial District Justice Donald Whittaker on May 20 on charges of simple assault, recklessly endangering another person, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle and harassment. He went to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail.

5/31/2013

Police Blotter

Times Leader

Police said they charged Denise Veza, 47, of West Ridge Street, Nanticoke, with two counts of retail theft after she allegedly stole socks and a bra from Dollar General on the Sans Souci Parkway on Tuesday. Veza was jailed at the county prison for lack of \$5,000 bail.

5/29/2013

Court Brief

Times Leader

David Marinus, 47, of Apollo Circle, Nanticoke, was charged with simple assault and harassment after his girlfriend, Heather Szymaszek, with whom he resides, reported on Tuesday that he grabbed her and pushed her in the chest area onto a bed, according to court papers.

5/23/2013

Court brief

Times Leader

A woman charged after cocaine allegedly was found in her toddler's bloodstream waived her right to a preliminary hearing on Wednesday.

Amber Morgan, 19, of West Church Street, waived a single count of child endangerment to Luzerne County Court. Nanticoke police charged Morgan on Feb. 22 after an investigation revealed her 2-year-old son ingested cocaine. Morgan initially told police she assumed her son accidentally ingested her mother's prescription medication. She said the child began acting funny and then seizing, authorities said.

A toxicology exam revealed the only drug in the toddler's blood stream was cocaine, police said. Morgan remains free on \$75,000 bail.

5/21/2013

Nanticoke man allegedly tried to smother woman during assault

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A Nanticoke man is accused of trying to smother a woman and beating her in the head, chipping one of her teeth, during an assault early Monday, according to court records.

Kevin Karl Atkinson, 44, of 54 W. Grand St., is charged with simple assault, reckless endangerment, authorized use of a vehicle and harassment.

Nanticoke police say they were called to Atkinson's home about 12:10 a.m. Monday to a report of an assault. Nancy Giberson, no age or address given, reported that Atkinson was upset about police being called to the house earlier in the night and that he had become "enraged and paranoid," according to a police affidavit.

Atkinson put his hand over Giberson's mouth twice, trying to smother her, and punched her in the head, police said. When Giberson went down, Atkinson kicked her in the face, chipping a tooth and bruising her eye cheek and lip, according to police.

Giberson also reported that Atkinson took her car keys and cellphone so she couldn't call police.

Atkinson, who does not have a valid driver's license, fled the area in a car Giberson had rented, police said.

Giberson and her 10-year-old son were given shelter at the Domestic Violence Services Center, police said.

Police arrested Atkinson later Monday morning and brought him before Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker for an arraignment.

Whittaker set his bail at \$100,000 with a preliminary hearing set for 1 p.m. May 29. Atkinson was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

5/15/2013

Man charged in cemetery fence theft

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is charged with stealing fencing from the Newport Cemetery to get money to buy synthetic marijuana. Scott A. Wylie, 27, of 219 W. South St., is charged with theft, receiving stolen property, institutional vandalism and criminal trespassing.

Newport Township police say 500 feet of fencing, fence posts, several feet of top rail and two gates were taken on several occasions.

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.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker arraigned Wylie on Tuesday morning and set his bail at \$100,000. Wylie was taken to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in Wilkes-Barre.

5/10/2013

Two arraigned in home invasion

Police seek two others in alleged intrusion that included binding elderly Bear Creek Twp. couple.

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State police at Wyoming believe three men — one of whom is in jail on other robbery and assault charges — used code names “Mr. Black,” “Mr. Blue” and “Mr. Green” after forcing their way into a Bear Creek Township house and tying up the elderly homeowners 13 months ago.

They ransacked the house on Pittston Boulevard for nearly an hour, talking to each other using the code names while the couple in their 70s sat on a couch bound by wire and a cord with blankets over their heads. The three men stole jewelry, cash and guns, police said.

State police allege a fourth participant acting as a lookout drove away. The three suspects left behind stole the couple’s Nissan Frontier truck to make their getaway, police said.

Two of the four men allegedly involved in the April 7, 2012, home invasion were arraigned Thursday by District Judge Michael Dotzel in Wilkes-Barre Township.

William Albert Gronosky, 30, last known address as Nanticoke, and Charles R. Conden, 46, of Hanover Township, were charged with robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft, unlawful restraint and criminal conspiracy, according to court records.

Gronoski was “Mr. Black” and Conden was “Mr. Green” during the home invasion. They were jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$50,000 bail each.

Arrest warrants have been issued for Nathaniel L. Vestal, 39, of Wilkes-Barre, who used the name “Mr. Blue,” and the alleged get-away driver who got cold feet, Wesley Steven Hendricks, 51, of Wilkes-Barre.

Gronosky is no stranger to state police. He is facing numerous charges in county court related to an armed robbery at an adult strip club in Plymouth Township, a burglary at a state police trooper’s residence in Laflin, firing shots at a trooper and a Wilkes-Barre police officer during separate pursuits, and a home invasion in Hanover Township in March and April 2012.

Preliminary hearings are scheduled on May 22 before Dotzel.

5/10/2013

Police Blotter

Times Leader

A man was arraigned Wednesday on charges he stole items from Boscov’s Department Store and fled on a Martz bus in February after being followed to the bus terminal by a store security officer.

Police later stopped the bus as it was leaving the city and he was arrested.

Wade J. Thomas, 26, address listed as West Broad Street, Nanticoke, was charged with providing false identification to law enforcement, retail theft and public drunkenness. He was released on \$2,000 unsecured bail.

Police said Thomas admitted to using heroin and provided another name to identify himself.

5/3/2013

Police: Burglar regifted stolen items

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

State police say they cracked the case of a Hunlock Township burglary after stolen loot was handed out as gifts at a birthday party the next day.

Adam Joseph Kuren, 28, of 1210 S. Prospect St., Nanticoke, was charged Thursday with burglary, criminal trespassing, theft, receiving stolen property and criminal mischief in the break-in reported last July.

According to a police affidavit filed in court, troopers were dispatched to a report of a burglary at 370 Old Tavern Road the evening of July 7, 2012. The homeowner, Jennie Kulakowski, reported that she had left her home about 3 p.m. and returned at 7:45 p.m. She found a side door had been forced open.

Cabinets and drawers were opened in the kitchen, living and dining rooms, and paperwork was scattered across the floors, troopers said. Kulakowski at the time reported some prescription medications and a checkbook had been stolen, according to the affidavit.

The next night, troopers were called back to the home to talk to Kulakowski and a neighbor who lives about a quarter mile away, Danielle Klinefelter of 324 Old Tavern Road, police said.

Klinefelter told police that she had a birthday party at her home the day before and had gotten gifts from a friend of Kuren's - a glass clock in a pink box, a recipe card holder and an unopened pack of tissue paper in a gift bag.

Klinefelter's daughter told her the presents had been stolen in the break-in, she told police.

Court records indicate Kuren's friend has not been charged in the incident. Authorities secured a warrant for Kuren's

arrest in November and arrested him Thursday morning, according to court records. Magisterial District Judge James M. Dixon arraigned Kuren and set his bail at \$25,000 with a preliminary hearing at 9 a.m. May 8. Kuren was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

5/3/2013

Parents, son waive hearing in sex assault case
Nanticoke police allege parents were aware sons were having sex with teen girl
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A father and mother waived their rights to preliminary hearings Thursday on charges they did not stop their sons from sexually assaulting a girl.

John E. Davis, 43, of West Noble Street, Nanticoke, waived a single count of child endangerment to Luzerne County Court, while his wife, Laurie Ann Davis, 35, waived two counts of child endangerment to county court.

Nanticoke police said the parents were aware their two sons, Nicholas James Molino, 19, and a 16-year-old, had sex with the teenage girl but did not stop them, according to the criminal complaints.

Molino waived his right to a preliminary hearing Thursday, sending two counts of indecent assault to county court. The 16-year-old boy was petitioned to county juvenile court.

The cases were transferred to District Judge Joseph Halsey in Hanover Township from District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke due to a conflict of interest.

According to the criminal complaints:

A teenage girl told police on Jan. 29 she was sexually assaulted by a 16-year-old boy known to her. She said the boy's parents, John Davis and Laurie Davis, knew about the assaults and did nothing to stop the acts.

Laurie Davis allegedly told a child caseworker she found out her son was having sexual relations with the girl about a year ago. She said she admonished her son, telling him, "You're not suppose to do things like that. ... You did not even use a condom. What if you got her pregnant?"

The girl said she was sexually assaulted by the 16-year-old boy on Jan. 27, two days before reporting the alleged assaults to police.

The Davis' other son, Molino, was charged with molesting the same girl inside the family's West Noble Street home on Sept. 20, the complaint says.

4/25/2013

Ex-bar owner faces trial for police chase
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Charges alleging the former owner of the embattled Prospect Street Cafe beat his girlfriend in a jealous rage at his bar were dismissed Wednesday, but Paul Halliday will face trial on charges that he led police on a drunken high-speed chase.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker ordered Halliday, 38, of 237 W. Ridge St., to stand trial on charges including fleeing police, reckless endangerment, causing an accident involving personal injury, drunken driving, tampering with evidence and possessing drug paraphernalia.

But charges connected to an alleged assault on his girlfriend, Kristyn Hischak, were withdrawn.

"She didn't want to press charges, and she didn't want to testify," said Halliday's attorney, Mark Mack.

Halliday declined to comment after his hearing Wednesday.

Halliday, who lost the Prospect Street Cafe last month, is accused of nearly hitting a police car on March 3 and then leading officers on a 1½-mile high-speed chase that included him hitting another car - which then struck a third vehicle - and two telephone poles before he jumped from his vehicle and hid in the woods.

Halliday was freed on \$5,000 bail when police were called to his bar March 18 to a report he had beaten his girlfriend in a drunken rage and then nailing his office door shut as he threatened to shoot police.

Police say they found Halliday drunk, yelling curses and covered in blood with cuts on his stomach. Hischak was found lying on a bathroom floor and told police Halliday had thrown her to the ground, banged her head on the floor and kicked her in the stomach in a jealous rage because she was talking to another man, according to police.

A search of Halliday turned up a bottle of anti-anxiety medication, a crack pipe and a piece of crack-cocaine, police said.

Halliday had been charged with offenses including simple assault, making terroristic threats, disorderly conduct and harassment in that incident. But they were withdrawn Wednesday, leaving him facing only charges of tampering with evidence and possessing drug paraphernalia in connection with that incident.

Halliday lost his bar last month after Nanticoke landlord Dan Warakowski said he bought the property at a sheriff's sale because Halliday owed back payments on his mortgage, taxes and other bills. Warakowski has said he plans to resell the property.

Halliday remains free on \$25,000 bail. He is scheduled for a formal arraignment at 9 a.m. July 12.

4/17/2013

Group home worker charged with sexual assault of 14-year-old girl

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A staff member of a Nanticoke group home is charged with sexual assault after allegedly bringing a 14-year-old girl home with him to have sex, according to charges.

Lee Alex Snyder, 23, of Hanover Township, is charged with statutory sex assault, institutional sex assault and unlawful contact with a minor.

Hanover Township and Nanticoke police began investigating Snyder after learning that a member of the group home was having sex with a teen who lived there, police said.

The alleged offenses took place March 29, according to the charges.

Magisterial District Judge Gerald L. Feissner arraigned Snyder Tuesday evening and set his bail at \$50,000. Snyder was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

4/13/2013

City police reported the following:

Times Leader

- Thomas Brown of College Street reported three unknown juveniles threw a rock that smashed a front glass door and damaged an interior door.
- Joseph Foley of Main Road, Hunlock Township, reported someone kicked the body panels and keyed his vehicle when it was parked in the 1200 block of South Prospect Street.
- Alice Kay of South Market Street reported eggs were thrown at her vehicle when parked in front of her house.
- Bradley Perkowski of Glen Lyon reported someone removed the top rails, support rails and liner from a swimming pool behind a Park Street house he had purchased.
- Mill Memorial Library reported someone smashed glass at its main building and ripped a window screen at Mill House next to the library.
- Walkowiak Inc., operating as Walkowiak's Cafe, 407 E. Noble St., was cited with violating the state Liquor and Crimes codes on Feb. 3 by possessing or operating gambling devices or paraphernalia or permitting gambling or lotteries, poolselling and/or bookmaking on the premises, the state police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement said.

4/12/2013

Police Blotter

Times Leader

Walkowiak Inc., operating as Walkowiak's Cafe, 407 E. Noble St., was cited with violating the state Liquor and Crimes codes on Feb. 3 by possessing or operating gambling devices or paraphernalia or permitting gambling or lotteries, poolselling and/or bookmaking on the premises, the state police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement said.

4/10/2013

City police reported the following:

Times Leader

- Kyle Capie reported that someone slashed the passenger side tires of his vehicle while it was parked near his house on East Noble Street.
- Joseph Skladzien, of West Union Street, Nanticoke, reported that someone keyed the side of his son's vehicle and tried

to pry open the passenger door.

• Peter Sepling, of East Grand Street, reported that someone stole plywood and scrap metal — including an old refrigerator — from under his porch.

4/8/2013

Police: Nanticoke man resisted arrest, called himself Jesus

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who was tripping on acid called himself Jesus and had to be subdued with a Taser after growling at and fighting with police, according to charges.

Police say Carl John Thomas May, 20, of 328 Kosciuszko St., was wearing only boxer shorts when they found him sitting in the middle of a street, prompting a confrontation in which May was zapped with a Taser twice.

“May appeared to be totally incoherent, making growling, grunting, inaudible utterances which did not make any sense,” according to a police affidavit filed in court.

Police were on a routine patrol at East Church and Kosciuszko streets about 3:10 a.m. Sunday when they saw May sitting in the middle of a crosswalk on Church Street.

The officers pulled up to the semi-nude May and asked if everything was OK. May responded by standing up, putting his hands on the passenger door and beginning to growl as he grabbed Patrolman Joseph Buchalski’s jacket, according to the affidavit.

The other officer, Sgt. Brian Williams, got out of the car and approached May, who advanced toward him with his fists clenched. Williams put out his hand, trying to calm May down, but May continued to close in, prompting Buchalski to get out of the car.

May grabbed hold of Williams’ arm and took him to the ground, at which point his mother came out of her nearby house and began pleading with May to stop fighting the police.

“May responded to his mother that he was Jesus,” the affidavit says, noting that his mother told police he had taken acid.

May refused to stop struggling with Williams, prompting Buchalski to pull his Taser and zap May with a five-second burst. May fell to the ground, but then again went after Williams, grabbing him in an attempt to wrestle him back to the ground, according to police.

Buchalski hit May with another burst from his Taser, prompting May to comply with officers who arrested him.

Williams, whose uniform was torn in the altercation, sustained a knee injury and was taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for treatment.

Police charged May with four counts each of aggravated assault and simple assault, two counts each of disorderly conduct and harassment and one count each of resisting arrest, public intoxication, obstructing highways and criminal mischief.

Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned May on Sunday and set his bail at \$25,000. May remains jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility today.

4/4/2013

A Nanticoke man charged with sexually assaulting a young boy over a two-year period pleaded guilty Tuesday to a related charge

Times Leader

Thomas Wydra, 26, of East Green Street, entered the plea to a charge of corruption of minors. Judge David Lupas said Wydra will be sentenced on June 10. Prosecutors withdrew five other charges. Wydra was ordered to have no contact with the boy in the case and to have no unsupervised contact with minors.

According to court papers, on Jan. 20, 2012, a boy told police that Wydra had been sexually assaulting him beginning in the fall or winter of 2009.

4/3/2013

Nanticoke police activity

Citizens Voice

City police responded to the following incidents:

Autumn Coleman of Coal Street reported Monday that someone scratched the side of her vehicle while it was parked near her home.

Kenneth Bartuska of State Street reported Monday that someone smashed a plate-glass window at the back of his home. Eclipse Enterprise on West Union Street reported Monday that someone entered the yard and smashed the passenger window of a Honda Accord.

Pat Aulisio of Overlook Drive reported Monday that someone stole two backpacks from his vehicle while it was parked at Tommyboy's Bar & Grill.

3/30/2013

Man allegedly flees crash scene

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

HANOVER TWP. — Township police earlier this week filed drunken-driving charges against a Nanticoke man after an alleged crash and a foot chase in February.

Police allege James Hughes, 24, attempted to hide in the woods on Feb. 26 near the site where he crashed into the rear of a Toyota driven by Theresa Morgan, of Nanticoke, on an exit ramp from state Route 29 to the Sans Souci Parkway. A passerby helped police to locate Hughes hiding in the woods, police said.

Morgan was not injured in the crash.

Hughes was transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township for minor injuries and for a blood test.

Police on Monday filed three counts of driving under the influence, two counts of accidents involving injury and one count each of accidents causing damage to vehicle, possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, tampering with evidence, speeding and driving without a license.

The charges against Hughes were filed with District Judge Joseph Halesey in Hanover Township; they were mailed to Hughes. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on April 30.

After Hughes was apprehended, police say they learned he was wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff's Department on an arrest warrant issued by Senior Judge Joseph Augello on Nov. 2. The arrest warrant was issued when Hughes failed to appear for a hearing on allegations he violated probation on two unrelated cases, police said.

Court records indicate Hughes was sentenced on Feb. 7, 2011, to three years probation for the following offenses:

- Oct. 23, 2009: Hanover Township police detained Hughes while investigating a suspicious person slashing a car's soft top and damaging a basement window on Oaklawn Avenue. A paramedic was summoned to treat Hughes for a head injury. Hughes shoved and kicked the paramedic.
- May 7, 2010: Wilkes-Barre police during a traffic stop at Carey Avenue and New Alexander Street found heroin on the passenger side floor where Hughes had been sitting. Seven heroin packets were found in Hughes' groin area. Augello resentence Hughes on March 11 to 30 days house arrest with electronic monitoring, according to court records.

3/27/2013

City police reported the following:

Times Leader

- David Wiatrowski of West Union Street reported an unknown person threw an object that cracked the windshield on his vehicle while he was traveling in the 100 block of West Main Street.
- Richard Cooper of West Grand Street reported someone entered his residence and stole copper pipe from the basement.
- Police said they charged Shannon Zagora, 40, of East Noble Street, Nanticoke, with simple assault and harassment after Stephen Small said she punched him seven to nine times in the head on Saturday. Small said Zagora was upset he let a dog outside to do its business, according to the criminal complaint. Zagora was released on \$5,000 unsecured bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on April 3.

3/24/2013

Police Report

Citizens Voice

Police said they cited Dataima Cabble, 26, of Nanticoke with public drunkenness, disorderly conduct and criminal trespass after a neighbor reported that Cabble was banging on her apartment door.

Joseph Dannheimer reported to police that someone keyed his Jeep while it was parked in front of his house on West South Street.

Police cited Sherry Turner, 36, of Nanticoke for public drunkenness and disorderly conduct, saying she was urinating in the parking lot of Cocoa Hut on East Main Street.

Charles Alles reported to police that someone dumped black paint on his garage on Welles Street.

3/23/2013

Police charge man with assaulting his mother

Times Leader

A Nanticoke man is charged with assaulting his mother during a discussion about his problems.

Timothy Lee Dietz, 33, of 104 W. Main St., Apt. 1, is charged with simple assault and harassment following the March 16 assault.

Police were called to the apartment about 12:45 a.m., when Gloria Dietz reported her son had told her to stop talking about his problems and then began throwing kitchen chairs. Timothy Dietz also pushed the refrigerator several feet, police said.

Police said Timothy Dietz was high on drugs at the time.

3/23/2013

Disorderly Nanticoke man faces drug charges

Times Leader

A Nanticoke man who stumbled through a convenience store before trying to pay for items with blood-soaked money was charged with drug offenses after police found pills and drug paraphernalia.

Aaron James Mulhern, 22, of 269 Mountain View Drive, is charged with disorderly conduct, public drunkenness and two counts of possessing a controlled substance.

Police were called to the Cocoa Hut convenience store at 61 E. Main St. about 4:30 a.m. Thursday to a report of a man doing "weird things at the ATM and on the floor nearby," according to the complaint.

Police contacted Mulhern, and a subsequent search turned up screens frequently used to smoke drugs, pieces of pills and other drug paraphernalia.

Mulhern told police the blood was from a "dead nail" on his finger, for which he declined treatment.

He was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$10,000.

3/22/2013

Nanticoke Area teacher's actions under investigation

Peter Cameron - Citizens Voice

Police are investigating a teacher at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School after he allegedly directed three female students to change clothes in a closet last week that may have been visible to the rest of the mixed-gender class, Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said Thursday.

The school district, which alerted law enforcement to the makeshift dressing room incident, has put the teacher, whom Shultz refused to name, on paid leave while police and the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office conduct a joint investigation.

There are no allegations of any contact between the changing students and the teacher, the chief said, but police still need to conduct interviews with the three girls to determine if any criminal misconduct took place.

"It may be something, it may be nothing," Shultz said.

Speaking generally, Greater Nanticoke Area School District solicitor Vito DeLuca said the district puts an employee on paid leave whenever there is concern about student safety. He refused to comment on the situation other than to say the district was cooperating with law enforcement.

3/22/2013

Treasurer of fire department charged with theft

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

KINGSTON - The former treasurer for the Franklin Hose Co. in Edwardsville surrendered Friday on charges he stole nearly \$5,000 from the fire department.

Daniel Boyd West, 40, of West Main Street, Nanticoke, was charged by Edwardsville police with a single count of theft, a third-degree felony. West surrendered on the charge at the office of District Judge Paul Roberts, who released him on \$7,500 unsecured bail.

West was accompanied by Attorney Vincent Cappellini at the arraignment.

Members of the Franklin Hose Co. in Edwardsville in October learned that their checking account was over drawn. An audit allegedly showed several checks were drafted to West.

West was the treasurer for the hose company and would issue payroll checks to members from 2009 until he was removed from office in October, according to the criminal complaint.

Investigators reviewed cancelled checks allegedly learning West wrote out and cashed checks totaling \$4,983.70, beginning in January 2009.

West allegedly told investigators he wrote checks to himself that he cashed because he was being evicted from an apartment and needed money to pay rent, the complaint says.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on April 11.

3/19/2013

Prospect Cafe owner arrested on assault charges

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

Police arrested the owner of the Prospect Street Cafe after investigating an assault inside the troubled tavern Monday night.

Police said Paul Halliday, 37, of West Ridge Street, nailed an office door shut and threatened to shoot police if they forced open the door, according to charges filed.

Halliday allegedly kicked his girlfriend when he saw her talking to another man inside a restroom, police said.

It is the second time this month Halliday has been arrested.

Police charged Halliday on March 3 with drunken driving after a pursuit that was initiated at the tavern. He was released on the drunken driving charges after posting \$5,000 bail on March 4, court records say.

According to the latest criminal complaint:

Police responded to the tavern to investigate an assault just after 10 p.m. Police heard pounding inside the tavern and learned Halliday had nailed an office door shut, threatening to shoot police if they did not have a warrant and if the door was forced open.

Halliday met an officer in the back of the tavern.

Police said Halliday was covered in blood and claimed he was slashed with a box cutter, the complaint says.

Halliday's girlfriend, Kristyn Hischak, was found lying on the floor in the women's restroom. She claimed she was talking to a man in the restroom when Halliday attacked her, kicking her in the stomach, according to the complaint.

Police allege they found a 12 mm socket with copper Brillo and a small piece of crack cocaine inside Halliday's pocket. The socket was used as a pipe to smoke crack cocaine, police said.

Police said Halliday took the socket and banged it on the bar attempting to dislodge the Brillo and crack cocaine, the complaint says.

Halliday is facing charges of simple assault, terroristic threats, tampering with evidence, possession of drug paraphernalia, disorderly conduct, harassment and public drunkenness, police said.

3/19/2013

Nanticoke bar owner charged with girlfriend's assault

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The owner of the embattled Prospect Street Cafe in Nanticoke is once again in trouble with the law — this time charged with beating his girlfriend in a drunken rage and then nailing his office door shut and threatening to shoot police. Paul Halliday, 38, of 237 W. Ridge St., Nanticoke, is charged with simple assault, making terroristic threats, tampering with evidence, possessing a controlled substance, harassment, public drunkenness and two counts of disorderly conduct following his latest run-in with police about 10:15 p.m. Monday.

Police said they were called to the bar at 23 S. Prospect St. to a report of an assault. An anonymous caller reported Halliday was beating his girlfriend.

Officers arriving at the scene encountered a woman identified as Carol Moyer, who led them to Halliday's office at the back of the bar, according to a police affidavit.

Police heard pounding from inside the office, and realized Halliday was nailing the door shut. Moyer knocked on the door and told him police were there. Halliday responded by cursing and saying the police better have a warrant and "anyone who walks through this door is getting shot," according to police.

Officer Lee Makowski then knocked on the door and identified himself, but Halliday again responded by saying he better have a warrant and that if the officer entered, Halliday would shoot, according to the affidavit.

Halliday then told the officer to meet him out back, a comment police understood to be a challenge to a fight. Makowski went around back and knocked on a back door that was opened a crack. Halliday emerged from his office.

"He was visibly intoxicated. He was covered in blood and had superficial cuts on his stomach," the affidavit says.

"Halliday became loud and boisterous and was yelling profanities in the alley behind his establishment."

Police inquired about Halliday's girlfriend, Kristyn Hischak, and were told she was "lying on the bathroom floor," the affidavit says.

Halliday went on to say his injuries were caused by a man with a box cutter who was talking to Hischak in the bathroom, according to police.

Police went to the bathroom and found Hischak on the floor. She reported that Halliday had thrown her to the ground and kicked her in the stomach in a jealous rage because she was talking to a man named Brandon from Philadelphia. She also told police Halliday banged her head off the floor and that she did not see anyone slash Halliday with a box cutter while she was in the bathroom, police said.

As an ambulance approached the scene, Halliday began yelling that he didn't want one because it costs money and began cursing at Hischak, police said.

Police arrested and searched Halliday, finding a bottle of the anti-anxiety medication Lorazepam, a 12mm socket that had been converted into a crack pipe and a piece of crack-cocaine, police said. Halliday then grabbed the socket and tried to remove the crack by slamming the pipe off the bar, police said. He was then handcuffed and arrested.

Court records show Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast set his bail at \$20,000. He remained in custody at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility this morning.

Halliday was already out on \$5,000 bail following his arrest March 3 on charges including fleeing police, causing an injury accident, reckless endangerment and drunken driving.

He is accused of nearly hitting a police car and then leading officers on a 1½-mile high-speed chase that included him hitting another car — which then struck a third vehicle — and two telephone poles before he jumped from his vehicle and ran to hide in the woods.

Halliday's ownership of the Prospect Street Cafe is slated to come to an end Saturday, when Nanticoke landlord Dan Warakowski is due to take possession of the property. Warakowski has said he intends to resell it later this year.

3/17/2013

Times Leader

City police reported the following:

- Danielle Becker, of East Grand Street, reported that someone entered her residence and stole a Pro Scan 50-inch, flat-panel television.
- Robin Jones, of Loomis Street, reported that someone recently damaged the windshield of her parked vehicle.
- Jonah O'Brien, of South Hanover Street, Nanticoke, was taken into custody and cited with public drunkenness after police observed a suspicious person in the 300 block of Maple Street running through backyards, police said. O'Brien was found lying in the backyard of a home after he tried — unsuccessfully — to jump a fence, police said.

3/16/2013

A Freeland man is accused of driving drunk with his two young children in the car.

Citizens Voice

Daniel Robert Scholl, 33, of 352 Washington Blvd., is charged with aggravated assault, unauthorized use of a vehicle, resisting arrest, simple assault, endangering the welfare of a child, driving under the influence, reckless endangerment and failing to use a booster seat.

Nanticoke police say Melissa Stanton reported Scholl, her former boyfriend, had taken their two children and her car while she was at school Monday evening. Stanton also said she found an empty 375 ml bottle of whiskey, police said. Police called Scholl on his cellphone and he admitted taking the car but denied drinking, according to the criminal complaint. He refused to tell police where he was and instead put the phone to the car's stereo speakers. Officers later found Scholl back at Stanton's home. Scholl, whom police described as belligerent and threatening, "reeked of an odor of an alcoholic beverage" and was slurring his speech, according to charges. The car had a fresh contact mark on its front bumper and was leaking anti-freeze, police said. Scholl was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$20,000.

3/15/2013

Police Blotter

Times Leader

Brittany Shemanski, 23, of West Grand Street, Nanticoke, was sentenced by Judge Joseph Sklarosky Jr. to 12 months probation on a charge of criminal conspiracy to deliver a controlled substance. Shemanski drove Ryan Briggs, 25, of Nanticoke, to a parking lot on the Sans Souci Parkway, Hanover Township, to exchange heroin for cash on April 1, 2012, according to the criminal complaint.

City police reported the following:

- David Rowlands of South Market Street reported a temporary registration sticker was stolen from the rear window of his vehicle.
- Antonik and Associates reported copper tubing was stolen from property that is for sale on West Church Street.
- David Sudimak, of Shavertown, reported a tool box with tools valued at \$300 was stolen from the basement of a property he owns on East Ridge Street.
- John Casey, of Chestnut Street, Warrior Run, reported someone damaged the driver-side mirror on his vehicle.
- Police cited Lisa Marie Daubert, 31, of Mill Street, Wilkes-Barre, with public drunkenness after she allegedly was located stumbling at West Ridge and South Hanover streets. Daubert pleaded guilty to public drunkenness on Tuesday and was fined \$291, according to court records.
- Police arrested Jeffrey Breyan, 52, of East Grove Street, after he allegedly kicked a woman and yelled profanities in public on Saturday.

Breyan was charged with simple assault, harassment and two counts of disorderly conduct, police said. He was released on \$2,500 unsecured bail.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on March 20 before District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

3/14/2013

Nanticoke man accused of assaulting girlfriend

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is charged with attacking his girlfriend and cursing at police following a day of heavy drinking. Police say Jeffrey Joseph Breyan, 52, of 414 E. Grove St., kicked his girlfriend, Deborah Hardik, in the leg after a day spent drinking Saturday.

After being arrested, Breyan began cursing at police and at one point lunged forward, nearly pulling an officer down some steps, according to the charges.

Breyan was charged with simple assault, harassment and two counts of disorderly conduct. He was released on \$2,500 unsecured bond.

3/13/13

Police: Man drunk while driving car with two children

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

A Freeland man was arraigned Tuesday on evidence of drunken driving with two children in the vehicle.

Daniel R. Scholl, 33, was charged with aggravated assault, unauthorized use of a vehicle, resisting arrest, simple assault, driving while under the influence of alcohol, reckless endangerment, child endangerment and failing to secure child to a

safety seat. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$20,000 bail.

According to the criminal complaint:

Melissa Stanton told police her boyfriend, Scholl, was watching her two children while she attended a class at Luzerne County Community College on Monday. She claimed Scholl and her two children were not at her residence where she found an empty bottle of whiskey. Her vehicle was also missing.

Police called Scholl who placed the phone to a car speaker.

Police later learned Scholl returned to Stanton's residence where an officer claimed he "reeked of an odor of an alcoholic beverage," the complaint says.

Police said in the complaint Stanton's car was damaged and was leaking anti-freeze after Scholl returned.

Scholl was transported to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for a blood test.

The two children were unharmed.

3/9/2013

Police said they charged David Joseph Paveletz Jr., 48, of West Noble Street, on evidence of drunken driving.

Times Leader

Police allege Paveletz was seen passing through stop signs and failing to use turn signals on Church, Fairchild and West Noble streets on March 1. Paveletz stopped his vehicle in front of his residence and backed up, causing the officer to reverse his cruiser, according to the criminal complaint.

Police said in the complaint they found an open can of beer inside the vehicle. Paveletz displayed signs of intoxication and failed field sobriety tests, the complaint says.

Charges of driving under the influence and six vehicle violations were filed against Paveletz.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on April 3 before District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

3/6/2013

Nanticoke teen in court today on "mooning" sentence

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

A Nanticoke teenager charged with sexually assaulting a young girl is scheduled for a bail revocation hearing today on a probation sentence for "mooning" a school bus filled with students.

Nicholas Molino, 19, of West Noble Street, was sentenced in Luzerne County Court in October to six months in the county's Accelerated Rehabilitation Program, a special probationary sentence.

A school bus driver transporting about 40 students at Greater Nanticoke Area spotted Molino exposing his buttocks while he was inside a pickup truck on East Main Street, Nanticoke, on Feb. 15, 2012, according to the criminal complaint.

The bus driver told police that "this activity alerted the passenger students and began causing a commotion at the rear portion of the bus, and that the students began moving to the passenger side of the bus and began looking out of the windows," the complaint says.

The bus driver had to stop the bus and instructed the passenger students to return to their seats. She claimed Molino was seated in the middle between the driver and another passenger of the pickup truck.

Molino was identified by other students, including his sister on the school bus, the complaint alleged.

Molino pleaded guilty to open lewdness and disorderly conduct. He was sentenced to six months in the county's ARD program.

A bail revocation petition was filed in court on Feb. 14 alleging Molino violated his sentence when he was charged with domestic violence and underage drinking on Feb. 7, according to court records.

Molino was charged by police on Monday on allegations he sexually molested a young girl in September. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$50,000 bail on two counts of indecent assault.

3/5/2013

Bar owner charged with DUI, fleeing police

Edward Lewis - Times Leader

City police charged the owner of the Prospect Street Cafe on evidence of drunken driving that involved a crash and a pursuit that began at his tavern early Sunday morning.

Paul Halliday, 38, of West Ridge Street, Nanticoke, allegedly drove away from his tavern at a high rate of speed, passed through stop signs and crashed into a vehicle before abandoning his wrecked vehicle and running away, according to charges filed.

Halliday told police he was he was "attempting to get away because he was threatened by two black males" in his tavern, the complaint says.

Police charged Halliday with four counts of reckless endangerment, two counts of fleeing or attempting to elude police and one count each of driving under the influence, accidents involving death or injury, speeding, reckless driving, careless driving, improper passing, following too closely and running a stop sign. He was arraigned by District Judge Diana Malast in Plains Township on Sunday and released after posting \$5,000 bail.

Court records say Halliday was free on bail on two unrelated assault cases that involved allegations he smashed a beer mug on another man's head outside his tavern on Sept. 3, and grabbing the arm of his niece in drunken rage on Oct. 20. According to the latest criminal complaint:

Police were leaving Prospect Street Cafe after investigating an incident just after midnight Sunday when Halliday was allegedly seen driving away at a high rate of speed and nearly colliding with a cruiser.

Halliday's vehicle fishtailed when he turned onto South Prospect Street and turned into oncoming traffic trying to pass a vehicle, the complaint says.

Police pursued Halliday, who tried to pass another vehicle and crashed into a utility pole on State Street. Halliday backed up and turned into Shea Street, continuing to drive at a high speed, passing through a stop sign at East Main Street, where he collided with a Ford Escort. The force of the impact caused the Ford to strike a Volkswagen Jetta, according to the complaint.

Halliday drove away with his vehicle's bumper dragging on the pavement. He turned into a parking lot on West Main Street, clipping a utility pole and then drove around a building and into a wooded area.

He abandoned the vehicle and ran away, and was found lying in shrubs in the area of Line Street, the complaint says.

Halliday allegedly told police he was fleeing because two black men threatened him inside his tavern.

Police said in the complaint Halliday displayed signs of intoxication and refused to submit to a blood test at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

Police said the length of the pursuit was 1.5 miles.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on March 13.

3/5/2013

Police: Nanticoke couple didn't stop rapes

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A Nanticoke couple is charged with endangering the welfare of a child after they discovered a 16-year-old boy was raping a 14-year-old girl - and then did nothing to stop it, according to police.

Nanticoke police on Thursday charged John E. Davis Jr., 43, with one felony count and his wife, Laurie Ann Davis, 35, both of 210 W. Noble St., with two felony counts.

Police say Luzerne County Children and Youth Services officials brought the alleged abuse to their attention Jan. 29 - about a year after Laurie Davis told investigators she first learned about the sexual assaults.

"(Laurie) Davis did nothing to stop the abuse from happening or to protect (the girl)," Nanticoke Police Chief William Shultz wrote in an affidavit filed in court. "Hence, the abuse continued well beyond Davis being informed."

Laurie Davis told police the boy admitted to her he was having sex with the girl and that she chided him for his conduct, saying he wasn't supposed to molest the girl, Shultz wrote.

"You did not even use a condom," Shultz quoted Laurie Davis as telling the boy. "What if you got her pregnant?"

During an interview with the victim Feb. 1, the girl reported that the Davises found out she was being raped about a year earlier and had merely counseled the boy about his conduct.

John Davis told the boy he didn't need to assault the girl and that if he needed to, he should "go into the bathroom with pornography," Shultz wrote.

The girl reported that she was most recently assaulted Jan. 27, according to the affidavit.

Laurie Davis is also accused of failing to take action after finding the girl being groped in an earlier instance in Plymouth Township, according to police.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the boy had been charged in the alleged sexual assaults.

Court records show John Davis was released on \$20,000 unsecured bail and Laurie Davis was booked at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility but has since posted \$25,000 bail.

3/5/2013

Woman sentenced to at least 20 years for raping son

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A 45-year-old woman must serve decades in state prison for raping her own son and making him live in squalor for years, a judge ruled Monday.

During a sentencing hearing, Luzerne County Judge Tina Polacheck Gartley deemed Carol Hann a “sexually violent predator” and ordered her to jail for up to 41½ years.

Hann was convicted in December of rape of a child, criminal conspiracy, incest, corruption of minors and three counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

Gartley ordered Hann to serve a separate sentence on each charge, not concurrent sentences that would allow her to serve one or more of the sentences at the same time. In all, Gartley ordered Hann imprisoned for 20 years, 9 months to 41 years, 6 months.

The boy, now 14, testified at trial about how his father, Robert Caravella, introduced him to pornography at age 7 and how, on his eighth birthday, led him upstairs and demanded he have intercourse with Hann, the first of many rapes. Caravella was convicted of conspiracy to commit rape of a child, corruption of minors, endangering the welfare of children and distributing explicit sexual material to minors. He is slated to be sentenced on March 11.

In addition to the sexual abuse, the teenager said he'd be given a bath about once a month, brushed his teeth “on occasion” and walked around without clothes on because he didn't know it was improper. Police say their home was strewn with trash, infested with fleas, and exhibited a “nauseating” stench of cat and human urine, along with fecal matter.

The abuse occurred at homes on North Chestnut Street in Nanticoke and Gould Street in Plymouth, police said.

As part of her sentence, Hann is forbidden from any contact with her son, Gartley ruled.

If Hann is ever released from prison, she is not to have unsupervised contact with anyone under the age of 18 and must register as a sex offender for life, per the conditions of the state police Megan's Law, the judge said.

3/2/2013

Collision leads to charges against Nanticoke motorist

Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man will face charges of drunken driving, leaving the scene of an accident and drug possession after he rear-ended a vehicle on state Route 29, according to police. James Hughes, 24, of State Street is accused of crashing his Ford Mustang into the back of a Toyota driven by Theresa Morgan, no age or address given, while the vehicles were on an exit ramp. Police say Hughes, who was wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff's Office on probation violations, fled the scene but was found a short time later with the help of a passer-by. He was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township for a blood-alcohol test, with charges pending the results, police said.

3/1/2013

Nanticoke man gets 3-6 years for 2012 crime spree

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A 23-year-old man will spend three to six years in state prison for three separate crimes last year at the Apollo Circle housing complex in Nanticoke, a judge ruled Thursday.

Benjamin Artache, of Nanticoke, previously pleaded guilty in connection with an armed home invasion robbery and beating in March 2012, trespassing in his ex-girlfriend's apartment in April, and then another home invasion later in April in which he held his former girlfriend and her three children at knife-point for an entire night, court records show. Luzerne County Judge Fred Pierantoni on Thursday ordered Artache to state prison for three to six years on a charge of possessing a firearm as a convicted felon in connection with the armed home invasion. He sentenced Artache on each of the other charges - robbery, trespassing, criminal mischief, unlawful restraint, intimidating a witness, and resisting arrest - but made the sentences concurrent, meaning he'll serve them at the same time as the gun rap.

As part of the sentence, Pierantoni barred Artache from entering the Apollo Circle property.

2/27/2013

Nanticoke man charged with making prank calls to fire department

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was charged today with making prank phone calls that sent firefighters scrambling to find nonexistent people in distress, according to state police.

Lee Anthony Beatty, 50, is charged with reporting false alarms to a public safety agency and reckless endangerment, according to police.

Beatty is accused of calling 911 three times to report false emergencies — in one case sending out boats and rescuers who searched the Susquehanna River for about 2 1/2 hours before realizing no one was in danger.

“It does get frustrating,” said Andy Novak, deputy chief of the Plymouth Township Fire-Rescue Tilbury Station in West Nanticoke, which was called out to the three false emergencies since December. “We’re not there for somebody’s amusement.”

According to state police, Beatty first called the department Dec. 31 at 8:46 p.m. to report a four- or five-car pileup had taken place between a diner and the Garden Drive-in.

Then on Jan. 11 at 7:31 p.m., Beatty again called to report a vehicle had gone off the road, possibly landing in the Susquehanna River.

On Feb. 7, Beatty phoned in a report of a truck fire in front of a diner, according to state police.

In each case, the calls came from a pay phone at a Sunoco gas station at state Routes 29 and 11 in Plymouth Township, police said.

Novak said firefighters wasted about 30 to 40 minutes each on the vehicle crash calls, but the report of a car in the river took about 2 1/2 hours because officials had to summon water-rescue equipment, including three boats, and search for a possibly submerged vehicle.

While firefighters weren’t put in a position to have to miss a real emergency as a result of the pranks, they were put at potential risk by having to navigate icy roads, Novak said.

“There’s no use sending us out on the road when we don’t have to be,” he said.

State police said they were alerted to the series of false reports Feb. 8, and investigators collected video surveillance footage from the area. Firefighters were able to recognize Beatty and his vehicle, police said.

Court officials say a summons to appear in court was mailed to Beatty today.

2/26/2013

Gun dealer claims wrongful imprisonment

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A Nanticoke man claims he was wrongly punished as an illegal arms dealer when, in fact, he was only helping a Russian sporting goods seller avoid foreign taxes.

Mark Komoroski, the owner of D&R Sports Center, filed a lawsuit in federal court Monday against numerous entities including the federal government, prosecutors and his Kingston-based lawyers, attorneys Philip Gelso and Frank Nocito. Komoroski states the prosecutors, from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, "knowingly framed an innocent man for a crime he did not commit" by withholding evidence and then trying to cover it up while his own attorneys provided ineffective counsel. He is seeking \$10 million to compensate for wrongful imprisonment and "extreme" emotional distress.

Gelso said he and Nocito have not seen the suit and could not comment.

Komoroski served more than two years in the Federal Correctional Institution at Fort Dix, N.J., for conspiring with Russian national Sergei Korznikov to illegally ship paramilitary equipment to Russia. Komoroski was released on Dec. 13, 2012, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Prosecutors said Komoroski and Korznikov smuggled defense material, including rifle scopes and riot shields, from the U.S. to Russia without approval from the U.S. State Department. Both men pleaded guilty. Korznikov was sentenced in July 2011 to six months in prison and two years of supervised release, but Komoroski was sentenced in July 2010 to 2 years, 8 months in prison, two years of supervised release and a \$10,000 fine.

In the suit, Komoroski states that he pleaded guilty to violating a generic federal conspiracy statute, which has a maximum penalty of one year, but "federal prosecutors knowingly presented false evidence" that he was guilty of exporting items without a required license, which has stiffer federal sentencing guidelines.

Komoroski says he did have a valid export license, and the only crime for which there was any evidence was the conspiracy to "deprive the government of Russia of more than \$120,000 and less than \$200,000 in tax revenue."

He also alleges prosecutors ruined his reputation and wrongfully imprisoned him by falsely trying to link him to a notorious Russian arms merchant, then withholding evidence that would have exonerated him.

2/23/2013

Mom charged with endangerment in baby's near-fatal cocaine overdose

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A mother from Nanticoke is facing felony charges after her infant son overdosed on cocaine last month and nearly died, city police say.

Nanticoke police arrested 19-year-old Amber Morgan late Friday afternoon, charging her with endangering the welfare of a child.

The allegations stem from an incident Jan. 8 when city paramedics were called to Morgan's mother's Church Street home for the report of the 1-year-old child having a seizure from an accidental prescription drug overdose. However, multiple toxicology screenings indicate the only drug in the baby's system was cocaine, police say.

"When a mother doesn't tell the truth to us to help her own child, that is very disturbing," Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said. "The child could have died."

Morgan was arraigned late Friday afternoon by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, who ordered Morgan to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$75,000 cash bail.

Shultz said the child nearly died from the ordeal, spending days in critical condition in the hospital. He noted Morgan initially tried to cover up the overdose, trying to induce the baby to vomit with a baking soda/apple juice cocktail for 30 minutes before calling 911.

"Those moments were very critical," Shultz said.

According to arrest papers:

Emergency crews were called to the 192 W. Church St. residence of Morgan's mother Mary Jo Ryder on Jan. 8 on reports a young child accidentally overdosed on prescription drugs. Morgan told officials she and the child were watching a movie on Ryder's bed when she went to make some food.

When she returned, the child was in bed "acting funny" and started having seizure-like symptoms. She told emergency crews she assumed the baby had ingested Ryder's nearby prescription pills, which included naproxen, seroquil, klonopin and benazepril.

She made no mention of cocaine, and no illegal drugs were found, police said.

Morgan then acknowledged she tried to make the baby throw up for 30 minutes prior to calling authorities.

An ambulance rushed the baby to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, where a toxicology screening indicated the only drug was cocaine. The baby was then airlifted to Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, where he was in critical condition for two days.

All toxicology tests performed on the baby indicated cocaine, arrest papers say.

Morgan still claims she doesn't know how the cocaine got in her baby's system, Shultz said.

The child is now living with his father. Police arrested Morgan at Luzerne County Children and Youth, where she was having a supervised visit with the child, Shultz said.

Even if the baby had overdosed on prescription drugs, Morgan would have been charged, but the grading would have been a misdemeanor, Shultz said. Her willful "course of conduct" to cover up the reason behind the overdose allowed police to charge her with a felony, he said.

"She continued to tell us, EMS personnel, paramedic, hospital personnel, that the only drugs in his system were the grandmother's prescriptions. None of those drugs were in his system. It came back as cocaine," Shultz said.

2/23/2013

Police: Toddler ate cocaine

Times Leader

City police on Friday charged Amber Morgan, 19, of 192 W. Church St., Nanticoke, with endangering the welfare of a child after an investigation revealed her toddler ingested cocaine, according to authorities.

Morgan initially told police she assumed her 2-year-old son accidentally ingested her mother's prescription medication. According to police, she said the child began acting funny and then seizing.

A toxicology exam revealed that the only drug in the child's system was cocaine, police said.

Morgan was jailed at Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$75,000 bail. Her preliminary hearing is set for

March 6.

2/22/2013

**Nanticoke bar contests ruling on LCB citation
Business accused of serving alcohol to underage woman blamed in slashing.**

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An attorney for the Prospect Street Café in Nanticoke has filed a counter-appeal of a state Liquor Control Board ruling that upheld a citation for serving an underage female who is accused of slashing another woman's face.

Attorney Michael Yelen argues there was insufficient evidence to support the citation that was issued to the bar for allegedly serving 20-year-old Melanie Figueroa alcohol on Jan. 1, 2012.

Figueroa was accused by Jennifer Mieczkowski in a civil lawsuit filed 13 months ago against the bar and its owner of slashing Mieczkowski in the establishment. Police investigated, but no charges have been filed in the case.

The State Police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement filed several citations against the bar in February 2012. Two of the citations were for serving a minor and for allowing a minor to frequent the establishment – both of which were related to Figueroa.

The LCB recently upheld the underage citation, but dismissed the citation for allowing a minor to frequent the bar. The state police filed an appeal of that ruling on Thursday in Luzerne County Court.

In a counter appeal filed last week, Yelen said the only evidence presented for the underage citation was Figueroa's testimony that she ordered a drink known as a "cherry bomb" and was served without being asked for identification.

Yelen said Figueroa testified she did not know what ingredients are in the drink, therefore the board erred in assuming it contained alcohol.

Yelen also argues the bar was denied its right to due process in challenging the citation because it was not permitted to question Figueroa at a hearing held on the matter due to the criminal investigation into the slashing that was going on at the time.

"Counsel never had the opportunity to fully attack the credibility of the testimony of the allege minor and was thus denied the right to properly confront the witness," Yelen wrote.

2/9/2013

Police Blotter

PITTSTON – Two Nanticoke men and a Blakeslee woman have been arrested in connection with the theft of copper.

City police were dispatched at 10:51 a.m. Friday to a residence on Tomkin Street for a report of two men stealing copper from the residence.

The men fled in a tan truck before police arrived; they were stopped by Kingston police, authorities said.

Kevin Atkinson, 44, and Michael Sczyrek, 25, were both charged with criminal trespass, theft, receiving stolen property and conspiracy. Elizabeth Lynch, 23, also was apprehended and charged with conspiracy.

The three were arraigned before District Judge Joseph Carmody in West Pittston. Carmody set bail at \$15,000 for Atkinson, \$7,500 for Sczyrek and \$7,500 for Lynch. Atkinson was jailed at Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of bail; Sczyrek and Lynch posted bail.

2/8/2013

Police Blotter

Police charge Sugar Notch man in 9 burglaries

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Police in Hanover Township and Nanticoke have charged a man accused of committing at least nine home burglaries in recent weeks.

Police say Gregory Richards, 24, of Sugar Notch, committed the crimes to support his 12-bag-a-day heroin habit.

According to arrest papers, Richards was caught in the act of a burglary on Feb. 5 in the Preston section of Hanover Township after a crossing guard saw him trespassing behind a home. Investigators then linked him with multiple other burglaries in Hanover Township, Nanticoke and Warrior Run. Police say Richards is likely linked to other break-ins.

Arrest papers say Richards mostly stole cash and jewelry.

The homes Richards targeted include:

5 Black St., Hanover Township

295 Bunker Drive, Hanover Township

80 Diamond Ave., Hanover Township

55 High St., Hanover Township

537 High St., Hanover Township

106 Regal St., Hanover Township

20 Tayna Drive, Hanover Township

131 Center St., Nanticoke

360 Slope St., Warrior Run

Richards has been jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 cash bail since his Feb. 5 arrest. Following an arraignment this morning, Magisterial District Judge Joseph Halsey jailed Richards on \$10,000 bail for each new case, for a total of \$130,000.

2/2/2013

Police: W-B barber followed home, bound and robbed

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police believe a man robbed at gunpoint Thursday night in the city was targeted by a group of people who followed him home from his Wilkes-Barre barber shop.

Police said the victim was confronted by a gunman around 9:40 p.m. shortly after pulling into his garage in the 400 block of East Church Street.

The man ordered the victim, who was not identified, to the ground and demanded he hand over his cellphone and wallet, which contained cash and credit cards. Authorities said the robber then tied the victim's hands behind his back and stole his keys.

Several accomplices then emerged from a gray sport utility vehicle and rummaged through the victim's vehicle before fleeing, police said.

The victim remained tied up in the garage for a half-hour before being found by a relative, Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said.

Shultz said the victim owns a barber shop on Parrish Street in Wilkes-Barre and was just arriving home from work.

"I do believe he was targeted. I do believe they followed him to his house," Shultz said.

A state police forensics unit was called to the scene to collect evidence, police said.

Anyone with information is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.

2/1/2013

Armed robbery in Nanticoke

Times Leader

Police are investigating an armed robbery in the 400 block of East Church Street Thursday night.

Police said a man returned home from work at about 9:40 p.m. and saw an unknown man exit the rear driver's side door of a gray SUV.

The suspect, described by police as a black male wearing a green puffy jacket, approached the man aiming a handgun at him.

The man surrendered his wallet, cell phone and various credit cards, police said.

Police said the man was ordered to the ground and was tied up. His keys were taken from him and his car, which was parked in a garage, was ransacked.

Police said the man heard at least two other men talking to the gunman.

Anyone with information about the armed robbery and assault is asked to call Nanticoke police at 735-2200.

State police Forensic Services Unit assisted in processing the scene.

1/31/2013

Police Blotter

Times Leader

Dirk Michael Esser, 53, of East Ridge Street, was arraigned Wednesday on charges he assaulted a woman inside his residence early Wednesday morning.

Esser was charged with simple assault and harassment. He was jailed at the county prison for lack of \$2,500 bail.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Feb. 6.

A Nanticoke man was arraigned Wednesday on charges he was driving a stolen vehicle.

Alonzo Eric McClinton, 30, of College Street, was charged with receiving stolen property, driving with a suspended license and speeding. He was jailed at the county prison for lack of \$1,000 bail.

Police said they stopped McClinton for driving 41 mph in a 25 mph zone on Courtdale Avenue on Tuesday night. The vehicle was reported as stolen to the Scranton Police Department, police said.

A passenger in the vehicle, Gerard Jenkins, was found to be wanted on drug charges, police said

1/31/2013

Man accused of shooting at troopers to stand trial

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A man accused of shooting at state police in April 2012 will go to trial on the charges, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke ordered Wednesday.

William Gronosky, 30, of Nanticoke sat in a preliminary hearing as a state police trooper described the April 14, 2012, incident that began outside a Plymouth Township strip club.

Trooper Stephen Polishan said he and other troopers had set up outside the Carousel Lounge after receiving a tip that a woman was dropping off a getaway car for Gronosky, who was Luzerne County's top fugitive at the time.

Gronosky was accused of robbing a disabled man inside his home at gunpoint, beating and robbing the owner of the Carousel Lounge and stealing cash, jewelry, electronics and a handgun from a state trooper's Laflin home before using it to fire a dozen shots at Wilkes-Barre police during a 20-mile chase that he ultimately escaped.

Polishan said police saw Gronosky enter the Tan Chevrolet Cruze and drive south on Route 11. As a line of police cars chased Gronosky, he fired two shots at the officers, the trooper testified. Polishan said the entire chase was caught on a dashboard camera.

"You can actually see the rounds traveling and hitting the pavement in front of the state police vehicle and ricocheting over the hood of the vehicle," Polishan said.

Gronosky evaded police again that night, but he was arrested April 15 outside a convenience store in Montgomery County.

Whittaker ordered Gronosky to stand trial on charges of assault on a police officer, aggravated assault, illegal possession of a firearm and fleeing police. He is being held in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$1.4 million.

He is also facing charges related to the other offenses that were part of his monthlong crime spree.

Gronosky smiled at reporters as he walked into the courtroom and said nothing during the hearing other than a few quiet words into the ear of his attorney. The hearing was a stark contrast from one on May 9, when he had to be removed from court when he exploded because police handcuffed his girlfriend.

1/31/2013

Nanticoke meth lab homeowner charged

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The owner of a Nanticoke home where police found a methamphetamine lab Tuesday now faces criminal conspiracy and drug possession charges.

Linda Buckley, 51, owner of the home at 232 E. Washington St., was arrested and arraigned Wednesday morning before Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast.

According to a criminal complaint, Buckley told police two other residents of the house, Kelly Parks, 36, and James Piacente, 35, were making meth in her basement. She said they stayed at her home for several days before police searched the home and she saw them making meth on numerous occasions.

Buckley also told police that she received meth from them in exchange for allowing them to stay at her home, which Nanticoke police Chief William A. Shultz described as a "hangout for the homeless, drunks and drug users."

Police seized several items in the home believed to be used to manufacture meth, including Coleman fuel, bottles, coffee filters, sodium and ammonium nitrate.

Buckley was jailed in Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$40,000. Her preliminary hearing is scheduled for Feb. 6 at 1 p.m. before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

According to the complaint, police first responded to the home just after 4:30 p.m. Tuesday on a report of a stabbing. Parks told police that Piacente, her boyfriend, and two other men, Michael Buckley and Joseph Selner, were stabbed by twin brothers Dessie Ronald Kinney and Jessie Donald Kinney, 36.

The Kinneys made news in October 2008 after Dessie Kinney attacked his brother because, police said, he was jealous his brother had been to prison and he had not.

Selner and Parks told police that the Kinneys entered the home looking for their sister, who was at Buckley's residence. They reported that Dessie Kinney had a knife and Jessie Kinney had a machete, according to the complaint. They alleged Dessie Kinney held a knife to Selner's face and cut him. They also cut Piacente and Buckley, who both fled, according to police.

Selner and Parks said one of the brothers held a knife to their sister's throat, forcing her to leave.

The Kinneys, however, told police they went to the home and were attacked by multiple people, including Piacente, who had a knife. They denied having any weapons or starting the fight and said they went to the home to get their sister, according to police.

Shultz, the police chief, said investigators have not found Piacente and could not confirm if he had been cut.

Luzerne County sheriff's deputies arrested Parks on a warrant for failure to appear in court on a burglary charge.

Also arrested were the Kinneys. Dessie Kinney was charged with simple assault with a deadly weapon and criminal trespass. Jessie Kinney was charged with criminal trespass. Both live at 230 State St., Nanticoke.

Shultz and John Soprano, regional director of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, said the investigation is continuing and there could be more arrests.

1/30/2013

Meth lab homeowner arraigned

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UPDATE: The owner of a Nanticoke home where police found a methamphetamine lab Tuesday faces criminal conspiracy and drug possession charges.

Linda Buckley, 51, owner of the home at 232 E. Washington St., was arraigned this morning before Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast.

According to the criminal complaint, Buckley told police Kelly Parks and James Piacente were manufacturing methamphetamine in the basement of her home. She said they stayed at her home for several days prior to the execution of a search and seizure warrant and she observed them making methamphetamine on numerous occasions.

Buckley also told police that she received methamphetamine in exchange from Parks and Piacente for allowing them to stay at her residence.

Police executed a search and seizure warrant at her home Tuesday as part of an ongoing investigation into methamphetamine manufacturing and distribution activity.

At the time of the warrant, police arrested several people, including Buckley. Police also seized several items believed to be used to manufacture methamphetamine, including Coleman fuel, "one pot" manufacturing vessels, coffee filters, sodium and ammonium nitrate.

Buckley was jailed in Luzerne County Correctional Facility after being unable to post \$40,000 in bail. Her preliminary hearing is scheduled for Feb. 6 at 1 p.m. before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

City police looking in a house for a stabbing victim say they found more than they bargained for on Tuesday: a methamphetamine lab in the basement.

Nanticoke police went to 232 E. Washington St. at 4:37 p.m. on a report of a fight with a possible stabbing, but the victims and attackers fled.

"We checked the house and found a working meth lab downstairs," Nanticoke police Chief William A. Shultz said during a press conference Tuesday night.

Emergency responders blocked off Washington Street between Walnut and Chestnut streets and evacuated four or five

homes as a precaution.

Nanticoke firefighters stood by to guard the scene until a search warrant arrived and state police specialists could get there to dismantle the lab.

John Soprano, regional director of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, said because of the chemicals involved in manufacturing methamphetamine, there was a potential for explosion.

As soon as the house was safe, people would be allowed to come back, he said. He didn't know how long that would be. Shultz said a person of interest is in custody, but police were still trying to assess who will be charged.

He identified the owner of 232 E. Washington St., a two-story single-family home, as Linda Susan Buckley, 51.

"This address is a place where a lot of homeless people hang out," Shultz said, adding that there were a lot of alcohol and drug-related problems there.

Tuesday's incident apparently began when two men forced their way into the house to get their older sister, he said. The brothers may both have had stab or slash wounds; Shultz was not sure what injuries were sustained, but said local hospitals were told to be on the lookout.

The house is half a block from the former L.S. Bowl-A-Rama, whose owner pleaded guilty to running a large-scale marijuana growing operation. Police seized 1,151 potted marijuana plants and three pounds of pot from the former bowling alley during a Nov. 20, 2009 raid.

Soprano said a few months ago the Attorney General's Office trained Nanticoke emergency responders on how to identify a potential meth lab. Three or four others have been found in different locations in the city over the past two years, including at 255 Apollo Circle and 5 Alden Road.

"It's terrible. They're popping up everywhere: the country, the city, the suburbs," Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty said. "It's a poison we're having a hard time fighting."

He compared drug dealers to coiled snakes, "ready to inject their venom into anybody," and suggested stiffer penalties and longer sentences.

"We're losing the war on drugs. We need to keep more of our country's resources here, instead of fighting in another country where they don't give a damn about us or our soldiers," Dougherty said.

1/30/2013

Nanticoke meth lab suspected

Police arrived at address on East Washington Street to check out a stabbing report.

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Police served a search warrant Tuesday night at an East Washington Street residence on suspicion that a methamphetamine lab has been operating there in the basement.

Police Chief William Shultz said police were dispatched at 4:36 p.m. to 232 E. Washington St. for a reported stabbing. When police arrived, they found that both the victims and suspects had fled. While searching the house for suspects, police found what they believed to be a working meth lab in the basement and contacted the state Office of Attorney General's Bureau of Narcotics Investigation to apply for a search warrant.

John Soprano, state regional director for the bureau, said serving a search warrant on a meth lab is a "very intensive process." He sent two agents to obtain a search warrant and activated hazardous materials units from Wilkes-Barre and Harrisburg.

A state police chemist was also called out to the scene, as well as the Nanticoke Fire Department in case of an explosion related to meth lab chemicals.

Residents of about six homes were evacuated for their safety.

Emergency responders were still on scene as of press time Tuesday night.

Police did take individuals into custody, including Linda Buckley, who resides at 232 E. Washington St., Shultz said. "This address is a place where a lot of homeless individuals hang out ... and we've had quite a bit of problems here in the past."

A man who was evacuated from his home but who declined to give his name said there has been "a lot of unusual activity over there for a year now – a lot of people coming and going, pull up, double-park, run in and run back out." Another neighbor who was evacuated and also wished to remain anonymous said there have been several fights inside and outside the house. She said her husband has called police to report activity, and the other neighbor who was evacuated said he has as well.

"The police have done a good job to try to contain it, and this is the end result," the man said.

Both neighbors pointed out that authorities found a major marijuana growing operation in a vacant building, once home

to a bowling alley, in the next block a few years ago.

George Ellis, 60, of Wapwallopen, the owner of the former L.S. Bowl-A-Rama at Washington and Prospect streets, pleaded guilty in May 2010 to possessing more than 1,100 marijuana plants and money laundering. The plants were discovered during a raid at the bowling alley in November 2009. He was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison. "I definitely think our community needs to come up with a better plan to deal with drugs in the city. It's getting out of hand. Something has to be done," the male neighbor said.

Mayor Joe Dougherty, who was on scene Tuesday, said the city saw a meth lab bust several years ago on West Green Street and another on Alden Road.

"I don't think people should determine that Nanticoke is a home of meth houses, because it happens everywhere. ... You don't know where they're going to show up. Like here, it's a quiet neighborhood, a regular home and here it is," Dougherty said. "It's a problem Nanticoke faces, it's a problem our county faces, a problem our state faces and a problem our country faces. Drugs are a huge problem."

Dougherty said residents who see anything questionable should call 911, local police, "or call me at my office. It's a part-time job, but I'm always available."

1/4/2013

Police charge Nanticoke man in stabbing

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Hanover Township police have filed charges against a man accused of stabbing another man Dec. 8 at the Slate Bar on the Sans Souci Parkway.

Edwin Cortez, 35, of Nanticoke, is charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, and recklessly endangering another person.

Police said the stabbing was the result of a fight that broke out at the bar involving numerous people. Authorities said Cortez stabbed Bruce Fine, 34, of Wapwallopen, in the abdomen during the brawl.

Fine was charged with simple assault and harassment for his role in the fight, police said.