

12/28/2017

Police: man held woman at gunpoint

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A New York man who pleaded guilty to aggravated assault charges after being accused of holding a woman hostage at gunpoint and barricading himself in a Nanticoke home was sentenced Wednesday to serve up to 42 months in prison. Daniel Dosette, 40, of Huntington Station, pleaded guilty last month to charges alleging he held his girlfriend, Kenyatta Myrick, hostage at gunpoint following a violent domestic dispute. Police said he refused to surrender after she called 911 and escaped, and that officers eventually had to storm the home.

Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas imposed the sentence Wednesday, ordering Dosette to serve 18 to 42 months in prison on the assault charges as well as on a cocaine trafficking charge in another case.

Dosette was ordered to pay \$239 in restitution and to forfeit \$202.

12/27/2017

Death of Lake Silkworth victim ruled accidental

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The Nanticoke man whose body was recovered from Lake Silkworth last week died of accidental causes, according to the Luzerne County Coroner's Office.

The body of Adam C. Lutz, 22, was recovered from the lake Friday, more than a month after he mysteriously vanished while driving around the Back Mountain with a friend.

An autopsy conducted Tuesday determined Lutz died of accidental causes, Coroner Bill Lisman said. The exact cause of death won't be known until toxicology testing is completed, but investigators have ruled out foul play, he said.

Around 10:45 p.m. Nov. 9, a friend reported that Lutz had "vanished into thin air" after driving around Harveys Lake and along state Route 29. The friend, who has not been identified, reported that they pulled over twice on the drive, the second time to pick up a cellphone that had fallen onto the road, police said.

When the friend returned to the idling vehicle, Lutz was gone, according to police.

Authorities searched the lake and surrounding area for days after the disappearance, finding some of his clothing along the shoreline. Lutz's body was finally discovered under the lake ice on Friday.

12/23/2017

Body recovered at Lake Silkworth ID'd as missing Nanticoke man

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The body recovered Friday at Lake Silkworth is that of Adam C. Lutz, 22, of Nanticoke, who had gone missing in the area in November.

An autopsy is scheduled for Tuesday, said Luzerne County Coroner Bill Lisman.

Lutz had been missing since the night of Nov. 9.

A friend reported around 10:45 p.m. that night that he had "vanished into thin air" after driving around Harveys Lake and along state Route 29. The friend, who has not been identified, reported that they pulled over twice on the drive, the second time to pick up a cellphone that had fallen onto the road, police said.

When the friend returned to the idling vehicle, Lutz was gone, the friend told police.

Police searched the water and the area around the lake in the days after the missing person report, and located some of Lutz's clothes, including a boot and a hat, along the shoreline.

But as days passed without more leads, the search turned into a recovery effort.

Authorities searched the lake extensively after the disappearance, at one point calling in dive teams from New Jersey.

For weeks, the search continued.

On Friday, it yielded results. A dive team broke a hole in the lake's ice to recover the missing body.

Now, the autopsy will give investigators more information about the circumstances around Lutz's death.

12/23/2017

Nanticoke woman facing theft charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke woman is facing retail theft charges after police say she stole 17 items from a Family Dollar store. Kyla Sepulveda, 28, of Hill Street, is facing a single misdemeanor count of retail theft after a manager at the store at 43 S. Main St. caught her shoplifting Thursday, police said. Prior to police arrival, the manager was able to recover some of the stolen items, according to police. When officers got on scene, Sepulveda removed four additional items from her coat and shirt, police said. Police arrested Sepulveda, who was also wanted on drug possession and prostitution charges out of Dunmore. She was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$10,000.

12/23/2017

Nanticoke homicide suspect would qualify for death penalty

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Anthony Spudis, 35, formerly of Nanticoke, was charged Thursday with the 2013 death of 97-year-old Gertrude Price. Police allege he stabbed her with a screwdriver after breaking into her Nanticoke home. A state inmate charged with stabbing a 97-year-old woman to death with a screwdriver more than four years ago could face the death penalty if Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis elects to pursue it. While the judicial clock for Luzerne County prosecutors began Thursday when they charged Anthony Joseph Spudis, 35, with an open count of criminal homicide, prosecutors have until the formal arraignment to notify the court if they intend to seek Spudis' death. But prosecutors must pass their first test at a preliminary hearing tentatively set for Jan. 15, where they must convince a district judge that enough evidence exists to send the case to trial. A formal arraignment is scheduled if the case advances out of district court. Spudis' case qualifies for the death penalty as he allegedly killed Gertrude Price during the commission of a felony — in this case, robbery and burglary — which is an aggravating circumstance. Spudis is also facing robbery and burglary charges in addition to the criminal homicide count. There are 18 separate aggravating circumstances in Pennsylvania for prosecutors to seek the death penalty if there is a conviction of first-degree murder. Salavantis could not be reached for comment Friday. Spudis is accused of killing neighbor Price inside the woman's petite residence on West Grand Street in Nanticoke on Nov. 28, 2013. State Police at Wyoming and Nanticoke police alleged Spudis used a screwdriver to force open a basement window at Price's residence, and proceeded to ransack the place. Investigators allege when Spudis was confronted by Price, he stabbed her in the face multiple times with the screwdriver. Spudis continued to ransack Price's home before leaving, only to return after confiding in his girlfriend, Tayrn Simms. Investigators say when Simms accompanied Spudis to Price's home, they found the elderly woman not breathing on a bed. Simms has not been charged in the case. Investigators previously believed the killer entered Price's home through a ground-level basement window sometime between 10:30 p.m. Nov. 28, 2013, and 9:35 a.m. the next day. State Police said neighbors reported lights were turned on at Price's home at about 11 p.m. Nov. 28, which they said was not normal. Reward funds Soon after the discovery of Price's body, separate reward funds were established. Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers, a non-profit organization, featured Price on its website Dec. 5, 2013, indicating a possible \$2,500 cash reward for information needed to solve the case. Former Nanticoke police officer Kevin Grevera set up a fund with \$1,000 from his own pocket, which quickly grew to more than \$10,000 due to donations and fundraisers, including a Zumbathon at Nanticoke Fitness Center and Tanning that raised more than \$1,100. Grevera's fund was managed by a committee with the Fraternal Order of Eagles and set up at PNC Bank. Grevera could not be reached for comment Friday to determine what will happen to the reward.

12/21/2017

Man charged in cold-case Nanticoke slaying

James Halpin - Citizens Voice



A former city man stabbed a 97-year-old woman with a screwdriver and fatally beat her during a burglary at her home on Thanksgiving night more than four years ago, according to charges filed in court Thursday.

Police charged Anthony Joseph Spudis, 35, with criminal homicide, burglary and robbery in the death of Gertrude Price, whose family found her brutally beaten body in her bed at 23 E. Grand St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 29, 2013.

During a press conference announcing the arrest, Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said Spudis broke into Price's home to burglarize it.

"While in the residence, he encountered Ms. Price and senselessly inflicted severe trauma, which led to her death," Salavantis said. "I would like to extend my thoughts and prayers to the family of Gertrude Price. I hope this (arrest) provides them some peace of mind that the person responsible for the loss of their mother or grandmother is now being held accountable for the heinous crime he had committed."

Price's daughter Carol Belmont and her husband, Richard, found Price dead the morning of Nov. 29, 2013, her battered body motionless in her bed, and her home ransacked.

The great-great-grandmother, an active and independent woman, endured such a pummeling, relatives say, that the right side of her face was crushed in. An autopsy determined she had been repeatedly stabbed in the head with a screwdriver and beaten about the face, resulting in a broken nose and jaw.

The cause of death was blunt-head trauma and the manner was ruled a homicide. Police have described the attack as a random act of violence.

According to a police affidavit, Spudis — who was living with his girlfriend at 2 W. Union St., 820 feet away from Price's home — went out to burglarize homes Thanksgiving night that year. Thinking no one was home, Spudis entered Price's residence by breaking a basement window frame and screen, according to the affidavit.

When he encountered Price, Spudis stabbed and beat her to death, and then continued robbing the home, police said. Afterward, he told his girlfriend, Taryn Simms, that he pushed Price and she fell down but was still alive, the affidavit says.

Spudis brought Simms back to the home, where she saw Price lying in her bed, not breathing, Simms told police. She said Spudis explained that he didn't mean to hurt Price and that they couldn't call the police, according to the affidavit. This summer, police executed a search warrant on the basement of the home at 2 W. Union St., finding numerous items belonging to Price including bills, mail, family photos and a white jewelry armoire, according to the affidavit.

They also found a pair of Timberland boots that matched shoe impressions collected in Price's basement, police said. According to the affidavit, police also found Spudis' DNA on the boots and a pair of rubber gloves, along with a kitchen knife found where the window was broken.

But they also found Simms' DNA on the knife — as well as on the basement window screen, the screwdriver and a white shelled necklace found next to Price's bed, according to the affidavit.

Court records indicate that Simms has not been charged in connection with the break-in or murder. Salavantis declined to comment on whether additional charges could be filed, saying Spudis is "right now, the only person who is being charged with the murder of Gertrude Price."

At the time of his arrest Thursday, Spudis was an inmate at State Correctional Institution Somerset. Court records show he is serving a 7.5 to 15-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to a series of burglary and theft cases in 2014. He will be held without bail on the murder charges.

12/21/2017

Man arrested in connection with 2013 Thanksgiving homicide in Nanticoke

Times Leader Staff Report

An arrest has been made in connection with a homicide that occurred over four years ago in Nanticoke.

Police are accusing Anthony Spudis, 35, of killing Gertrude Price in her home on Thanksgiving in 2013.

This announcement came at a press conference called by Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis at the

Pennsylvania State Police Wyoming barracks on Thursday.

Salavantis said shoe impressions found in the basement floor of Price's floor matched Timberland boots recovered in Spudis' residence, located at 2 W. Union St., Nanticoke.

Spudis allegedly went around burglarizing homes in the Nanticoke area.

He entered Price's home on Nov. 28, 2013, through the basement window, Salavantis said.

Spudis allegedly encountered Price, pushing her.

Salavantis said Spudis continued to burglarize the home, before returning to his residence, where he told his girlfriend, Taryn Simms, about the incident.

Simms told investigators she went with Spudis back to Price's home, where she said she saw Price lying on her bed, not breathing and with injuries to her face.

A relative found the 97-year-old woman dead in her ransacked home the next day after neighbors noticed strange lights in the home.

An autopsy performed by Luzerne County Coroner William Lisman led to the conclusion that Price had been murdered, dying from blunt head trauma.

Spudis is currently incarcerated at a state prison in connection with another charge. He is being transported to the State Police barracks for processing.

Price, a retired dressmaker and a great-great-grandmother, insisted on living at her East Grant Street home to maintain her independence.

Following her death, several reward funds were started, with one offered by former Nanticoke City police officer Kevin Grevera and a second started by the Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers.

It is currently unclear if these rewards are still being offered, or if they will be given to anyone following Spudis' arrest.

12/12/2017

Police: Intoxicated woman tried assaulting, bribing officer

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A woman who called 911 to report she had been abducted and sexually assaulted was arrested early Monday after kicking a police officer and offering him a bribe in exchange for her release, according to police.

Jessica Lynn Sensebach, 28, of Nanticoke, is accused of trying to pay an officer \$800 to avoid being arrested after she panicked while under the influence of drugs and alcohol, resulting in her making a false rape report, police said.

Officers were dispatched to South McLean Street shortly after 4 a.m. Monday to the report that a woman had been forced into a home and sexually assaulted. Police arrived to find Sensebach "visibly intoxicated" and asking to go home, according to a police affidavit.

Two people with Sensebach told police they had just met her at Lacey's Bar and Catering in Nanticoke and continued drinking at a friend's house in Wilkes-Barre, but that Sensebach had begun screaming and calling the police.

When officers asked Sensebach what happened, her eyes began darting around and she said, "This is fake," according to police. An officer shined a flashlight on his uniform and pointed out the marked patrol cars, but she wouldn't listen and grew irate, police said.

Sensebach kicked Officer Peter Cordaro in the leg several times before police arrested her — during which time Sensebach hit her head on a porch while struggling, police said.

Sensebach repeated that she just wanted to go home and maintained that she called police to bring her there, according to the complaint.

Police say they encountered a "very strong odor of marijuana" from a vehicle Sensebach had been sitting in, and that during a subsequent search they found a large bag of marijuana and a digital scale.

From the back of a police car, Sensebach began yelling and banging her body on the car door before an officer opened it and she offered the bribe, police said.

"I will give you \$800 right now!" the affidavit quotes Sensebach as saying, explaining that she wanted to be released in exchange for the cash.

Police shut the car door and Sensebach began thrashing around some more on the way to the police station, according to the affidavit.

Police charged Sensebach with aggravated assault, bribery, resisting arrest, making a false report, disorderly conduct, possessing marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, harassment and public intoxication.

Magisterial District Judge Thomas F. Malloy Sr. arraigned Sensebach on Monday morning and ordered her jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$15,000.

11/21/2017

Woman who attacked child in viral video gets jail time

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The Nanticoke woman accused of shoving a young girl for talking to her man appeared defiant in court Tuesday, offering a brief apology only after being prompted to do so.

Marlenea Ann Uravage was sentenced to serve four to 20 months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility during a contentious sentencing hearing Tuesday morning in which she requested a probationary sentence when asked to make a statement.

“Does the word ‘I’m sorry’ come to mind?” Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas asked.

“I’m sorry for pushing you,” Uravage offered in a terse response.

Urage, 30, previously pleaded guilty to a single misdemeanor assault charge for shoving the child to the ground after she began talking to a male companion of Uravage’s outside a convenience store in May. She was set to be sentenced Friday, but failed to appear in court and was subsequently arrested.

According to prosecutors, the attack happened while victim Presley Keeney was waiting for her father, who was buying some drinks inside the Quick Stop on Spring Street on May 28. A man who had been with Uravage outside the store approached Presley and asked if he could “get some of that,” an apparent reference to some food the girl was eating, according to prosecutors.

Thinking the man was homeless and hungry, Presley went to hand him a Slim Jim, prompting Uravage to run over and begin hitting the man, prosecutors said. The man turned to run, and Uravage turned toward Presley, saying “Are you (expletive) stupid?” according to prosecutors.

Urage violently shoved Presley in the chest, causing the girl to fall backwards hard, prosecutors said.

The attack was captured on video that went viral and help police identify Uravage as the assailant.

Assistant District Attorney Angela Sperrazza rejected Uravage’s request for a probationary sentence, noting she had to be prompted to apologize for the crime.

“This was a random act of violence against a child,” Sperrazza said.

The victim’s mother, Chere Fuller, told the judge that since the attack, Uravage has contacted her family on Facebook, describing her daughter as “looking like a whore” who was talking to her man.

“She doesn’t have any remorse,” Fuller said. “I don’t understand why she did what she did. There was no excuse.”

Later in the hearing, Lupas again noted Uravage’s lack of remorse and gave her another chance to make a statement.

“You keep seeming to want to get into confrontations with everyone,” the judge said.

Urage, who appeared in court wearing a yellow jumpsuit and a black eye, offered another tersely worded apology, shaking her head as she said, “I’m sorry for pushing you. I don’t know what...”

Noting that Uravage has displayed “absolutely zero remorse” for the crime, Lupas imposed more time on her than the 49 days she has already served for the crime. The judge sentenced her to four to 20 months in jail, ordering her to have no contact with the victim.

After the hearing, Fuller said she was pleased with the sentence.

“She still shows no remorse, so maybe going to jail and having to do some programs for anger management and mental health, she’ll eventually see that what she did was really wrong,” Fuller said.

11/20/2017

Police charge two men with robbing Nanticoke store

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice



.....Defrain.....Wicks

City police have arrested two men in connection with a robbery at the Cocoa Hut convenience store in Nanticoke early Sunday morning, and one of the men is a suspect in two other recent robberies, according to police. Scott Defrain, 31, and Bobby Wicks, 40, were arraigned on charges related to the robbery at the Cocoa Hut store on East Main Street at about 2 a.m. Sunday, police said. Defrain was charged with robbery and related offenses, while Wicks was charged with conspiring with Defrain to commit the robbery, according to police. Both men were sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$250,000 bail, police said. Wicks remains a suspect in the Nov. 13 armed robbery at Burger King and the Nov. 16 attempted robbery of a Curry Donuts shop, both in Nanticoke, according to police. Arrests in those cases are imminent, police said.



11/16/2017

Police ID Nanticoke Rite Aid robbery suspect; seek tips to locate him

Kulsoom Khan - Times Leader

Police have identified the man who they say attempted to rob a Rite Aid Pharmacy in the city Nov. 3.

Ryan Stanley Romanoskey, 25, formerly of Nanticoke, demanded money from the cashier's register along with two cartons of cigarettes, according to a police report. He ran from the store when the cashier screamed for help, officers report.

A warrant has been issued for Romanoskey's arrest. He is described as 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighing 175 pounds with brown hair and eyes.

Anyone with information on Romanoskey's whereabouts is asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police Department at 570-735-2200 or by dialing 911.

11/15/2017

Police probe report of LCCC student with gun on campus

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

City police are investigating a report that a Luzerne County Community College student pulled a gun on a classmate Monday on campus.

The college sent out an alert about the incident and notified police on Tuesday after the victim reported the incident to campus security. In Tuesday's alert, college officials notified students and staff about an incident a day earlier regarding "a student who was shown a gun by another individual in a campus parking lot."

The incident led to "heightened alert" on campus with increased patrols, though classes resumed as normal, the college said.

Nanticoke police Detective Capt. Robert Lehman said the incident happened on Monday around 2 p.m., but the victim didn't tell college officials until Tuesday around noon.

Lehman said he interviewed the victim late Tuesday afternoon. He said the victim and gunman had several altercations in the past.

"It wasn't a random act. It's not the first time they had contact with another," Lehman said.

The victim said the two exchanged words and the suspect pulled the gun, Lehman said.

“He showed him he had one,” he said.

Lehman said police on Tuesday night were trying to identify and locate the suspect.

No injuries were reported.

Charges have yet to be filed.

11/14/2017

Burger King hold-up under investigation

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A man who entered the Burger King on Monday night pulled a gun robbed the restaurant, according to police. Police say the robber approached the counter of the store at 1 W. Main St. shortly after 9:30 p.m. and passed a note demanding cash, claiming he had a gun. The robber then pulled what appeared to be a black handgun, police said. After getting the money, the robber ran out and headed south on South Market Street, according to police. Investigators described the robber as a black man between 30 and 35 years old who was a medium height and had a thin mustache. He was wearing a black and gray baseball cap with a gray sweatshirt and sweatpants, police said. Anyone with information about this crime is asked to call police at 570-735-2200 or by dialing 911.

11/13/2017

Man who was beaten last month and stuffed in his trunk dies

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The city man who police say was abducted, brutally beaten and stuffed into the trunk of his own car more than three weeks ago has died of his injuries, according to his family.

Charles Eget, 64, was critically injured Oct. 20 after being beaten with a tire iron and log by a man he offered to give a ride home, according to police.

His daughter told The Citizens' Voice that Eget passed away Sunday evening.

Eget's alleged assailant, identified by police as Bradley John Butler, 42, of 537 Linden St., Scranton, is already facing charges of attempted murder, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery and other offenses.

State police spokesman Trooper David Beohm said authorities plan to charge Butler with criminal homicide as a result of the death.

According to state police, Eget offered Butler a ride home the morning of Oct. 20 after encountering him outside a diner across from Mohegan Sun Pocono casino in Plains Twp.

But as the pair neared Butler's home, Butler saw a police car and got scared someone was looking for him because he was wanted on a parole violation, police said. Butler then directed Eget to drive to a secluded spot in Fairmount Twp., police said.

Troopers allege that when Eget stopped, Butler began punching him and took his cellphone, ordering him to get in the back seat. Butler took the wheel but eventually got into a hit-and-run crash with a white construction van, causing Eget to get upset and begin yelling about damage to the car, police said.

Feeling scared and agitated, Butler pulled into a private driveway in the area of state Route 118 west of state Route 487 and told Eget to get out, police said. According to police, Butler pulled a four-way lug wrench from the trunk of the car and hit Eget on the left side of the head.

Eget went unconscious, and Butler stomped his head while he was on the ground, police said. Butler then stuffed Eget into the trunk, bashing his head with a log several times in an effort to keep him from waking up, according to police. Afterward, Butler drove about 100 miles until the car broke down along Interstate 78, where he called for a tow, police said. Butler was arrested after he disclosed to the driver that there was what he thought was a dead body in the trunk. During police questioning, Butler said he was on methadone and panicked after getting into the crash, not knowing what to do.

Earlier this month, a magistrate in Lebanon County forwarded all 18 counts against Butler to the Court of Common Pleas for trial. Butler remains jailed at the Lebanon County Correctional Facility, where he is being held on \$1 million bail.

11/11/2017

Nanticoke man 'vanished' near Lake Silkworth

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A Nanticoke man “vanished” near Lake Silkworth in Lehman Twp., according to police.

A friend of Adam Christopher Lutz, 22, of Nanticoke, reported the man missing at 10:45 p.m. on Thursday and police have been searching for him ever since.

Lehman Twp. police Sgt. Mark Liparela said the department received a call Thursday night saying Lutz had “vanished into thin air” after driving around Harveys Lake and along state Route 29 with a friend.

Liparela said Lutz and his friend, who Liparela did not identify, pulled over twice during their drive. The second time, Lutz’s friend left the car to retrieve his cellphone, which had fallen out onto the road.

When Lutz’s friend returned, Lutz had disappeared, Liparela said.

“The car was still there, idling,” he said.

Liparela said Lutz was last seen on foot on Thursday night. He is 6 feet tall and weighs 145 pounds, Liparela said. Lutz also wears earrings in both ears and was last seen wearing a long-sleeved black shirt and jeans.

Liparela said anyone with information can contact the Lehman Twp. Police Department at 570-675-1483 or dial 911.

11/10/2017

N.Y. man pleads guilty to assault charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A New York man accused of holding a woman hostage at gunpoint and barricading himself in a Nanticoke home pleaded guilty Thursday to aggravated assault charges.

Daniel Dosette, 40, of Huntington Station, pleaded guilty to two felony aggravated assault charges in exchange for other charges being dismissed.

Prosecutors alleged Dosette held his girlfriend, Kenyatta Myrick, hostage at gunpoint following a violent domestic dispute, and that he refused to surrender to police who surrounded the home after she called 911 and escaped. Officers eventually stormed the home and took Dosette into custody.

In court Thursday, Dosette also pleaded guilty to possessing cocaine with the intent to distribute in a separate case.

Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas accepted the pleas and set sentencing for Dec. 28.

11/9/2017

Police: Fisticuffs suspect nearly ran down officers

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Shickshinny man fleeing the scene of a fight nearly ran down several police officers who tried to get him to stop, according to city police.

Mason Dana Hill, 18, of 264 Town Hill Road, is facing aggravated assault charges after police say they had to take “evasive maneuvers” to avoid being hit by his speeding car.

According to a police affidavit, officers were dispatched to the PNC Bank at 600 S. Market St. the afternoon of Oct. 4 to a report of a fight in progress.

Police say Hill had confronted another man, asking if he had a problem. Hill pushed the other man, who then punched Hill in the face, police said.

Hill’s girlfriend intervened and they began walking away, with Hill continuing to yell derogatory names at his opponent, police said.

When officers arrived on scene, they saw the argument ending as Hill got into a gray Mitsubishi Eclipse, according to the affidavit.

As police approached the vehicle, yelling for them to stop, Hill sped up toward officers who were standing in the entrance of the parking lot, police said. The officers had to get out of the way to avoid being hit, police said.

Officers got Hill’s license plate number as he fled the scene, but were unable to find him after a police vehicle arrived on the scene.

Police got a warrant for Hill’s arrest charging him with six counts of aggravated assault, six counts of simple assault, three counts of reckless endangerment, one count of disorderly conduct and numerous traffic violations.

Court records show Magisterial District Judge John E. Hasay arraigned Hill on Wednesday morning and released him on \$10,000 unsecured bail. A preliminary hearing was set for Nov. 22.

11/4/2017

Nanticoke Police searching for man who tried to rob Rite-Aid

Nanticoke Police are currently searching for a suspect involved in an attempted robbery at Rite-Aid Pharmacy at 5 E. Main St.

City Police are investigating an attempted robbery at the Rite Aid Pharmacy that occurred shortly after 7 p.m. Friday. Police say a male suspect approached the cashier's counter and demanded the money from the cash register along with two cartons of cigarettes. The suspect then proceeded to jump onto the counter. The cashier pushed the suspect off the counter and began to scream for help. The suspect then fled from the store.

The robber was described as white, around 30 years of age, medium height and with a thin build. He was wearing a red-hooded, long-sleeved shirt, black pants and red sneakers. He also may have been a passenger in a maroon or red Hyundai Sonata upon arriving at the store at 5 E. Main St.

Anyone with information about the suspect and/or his whereabouts is asked to **contact the Nanticoke City Police Department at 570-735-2200.**

11/3/2017

Suspect in abduction, beating will stand trial

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Scranton man accused of abducting and severely beating a Nanticoke resident who offered him a ride will stand trial on attempted-murder charges, a magistrate ordered Thursday.

Bradley John Butler, 42, of 537 Linden St., is facing charges of attempted murder, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery and other offenses after he allegedly attacked Charles Eget, 64, with a tire iron and stuffed him into the trunk of his own car.

Court records show Butler waived a preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge Kim R. Wolfe in Lebanon County on Thursday morning, resulting in all 18 counts against him being forwarded to the Court of Common Pleas for trial.

Eget was critically injured and his family says he has not improved in the two weeks since the attack.

"There's not a person he knows that has anything bad to say about him. He would give anyone the shirt off his back and the last penny he had," his daughter, Jennifer Eget, said Thursday. "He was hurt for thinking everyone had a heart like his."

According to state police, Charles Eget encountered Butler outside a diner across from Mohegan Sun Pocono in Plains Twp. the morning of Oct. 20 and offered him a ride home.

When they neared Butler's home, he saw a police car and got paranoid that someone was looking for him because he was wanted on a parole violation, police said. He told Eget to drive instead to a secluded spot in Fairmont Twp., police said.

Troopers allege that when Charles Eget stopped, Butler began punching him and told him to get in the back seat. Butler drove off and eventually got into a hit-and-run crash before stopping along state Route 118 west of state Route 487, where he attacked Charles Eget with a tire iron, police said.

When Charles Eget went unconscious, Butler stomped his head and then stuffed him in the trunk before hitting several times with a log to prevent him from waking up, according to police.

Butler then drove about 100 miles until the car broke down along Interstate 78, where he called for a tow, police said.

Butler was arrested after he disclosed to the driver that there was a body in the trunk.

During police questioning, Butler said he was on methadone and panicked after getting into the crash, not knowing what to do.

He remains jailed at the Lebanon County Correctional Facility, where he is being held on \$1 million bail.

10/28/2017

Officer-involved shooting ruled justified

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

A Fish and Boat Commission Officer was justified in fatally shooting a man who attacked him along the Susquehanna River in Plymouth Twp. earlier this week, the district attorney's office ruled.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis released the ruling on Friday afternoon. She said the officer shot

Sean Bohinski, 37, of Nanticoke three times on Tuesday after the man had attacked the officer and struck him repeatedly with a rock.

According to the release, the as yet unidentified officer was patrolling the river bank near the intersection of routes 11 and 29 just before 2 p.m. Tuesday when he detected an unusual smoke odor.

When the officer approached the smoke, he found Bohinski burning the insulation from copper wiring and using a machete to stir the fire.

Salavantis said the officer believed the wire was stolen and asked to frisk Bohinski for his safety. During the pat down, Salavantis said Bohinski turned and struck the officer in the face, breaking his glasses and leaving a cut on his face.

Bohinski then fled toward the river and the officer pursued him. Bohinski entered the river and realized the current was too strong for him to cross, so Salavantis said he turned and attacked the officer a second time with a rock.

The officer stopped Bohinski briefly, Salavantis said, then the Nanticoke man continued to attack with a rock from the river. She said the officer tried to defend himself with spray and his baton, but he was bleeding excessively, dizzy, exhausted and unable to reach his baton. She said he unholstered his sidearm and fired three times, striking Bohinski.

The officer's equipment suffered water damage that prevented him from calling for assistance from the river. He made it back to his patrol vehicle, Salavantis said, and radioed for advanced life support assistance.

Salavantis said Bohinski had outstanding warrants from the Dallas Twp. police department for fleeing and eluding, a history of fleeing from various departments and a methamphetamine habit.

She declined to release the officer's name on Friday but said he has been released from the hospital and is recovering from his injuries.

10/14/2017

Con-ui gets life without parole for brutal murder

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Already serving 25 years to life for murder, gang assassin Jessie Con-ui was sentenced Thursday to life in prison without parole for the vicious murder of a federal correctional officer at U.S. Penitentiary Canaan.

A jury in June convicted Con-ui, 40, of murdering correctional officer and Nanticoke native Eric Williams, 34, in a brutal attack on Feb. 25, 2013.

But the jury deadlocked on whether to put him to death for the crime, setting the stage for a mandatory life sentence and a sentencing hearing that was largely a formality.

Williams' family, who attended the trial daily, was absent from the courtroom Thursday.

They supported a death sentence and were outraged that the jury deadlocked, with father Don Williams saying at the time that the jury "did absolutely nothing."

Williams' co-workers at Canaan, who likewise attended the trial in force, also skipped the hearing, save for a nurse who was among those who worked to save Williams after the attack.

Con-ui — who appeared by video from U.S. Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colorado, where he is being held in isolation — appeared at ease prior to the hearing, smiling and joking about food as he slouched in his chair while wearing an orange jumpsuit.

He did not address the court, with his attorneys saying Con-ui would stand by a statement he made during trial.

"I'm sorry my actions caused so much heartache and pain," Con-ui said at the time. "I wish I could take back what I did. I wish I could take back what happened. I wish I could give you a better explanation on why I did this, but I can't."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Francis P. Sempa briefly addressed the court and expressed disappointment with the jury's verdict, noting that Con-ui, a member of the New Mexican Mafia who goes by "Chino," is already serving 25 years to life in prison for executing a gang member in Phoenix in 2002.

The Williams family, he said, continues to struggle with knowing that Con-ui has received little additional punishment for his crime.

"They're never going to believe that justice was done in this case," Sempa said. "Our words ring hollow."

Defense attorney James A. Swetz of Stroudsburg said the defense respects the jury's verdict but still feels for the Williams family.

"We have great sympathy for the Williams' loss," Swetz said.

At the time of the slaying, Con-ui was serving the tail end of an 11-year federal prison term for trafficking 33 pounds of cocaine.

Upon completion of the federal time, he would have been shipped to Arizona to serve out his murder sentence there.

But that changed in February 2013 after another officer searched his cell and removed some minor contraband,

including homemade speakers made from altered headphones and cardboard.

Feeling disrespected, Con-ui ambushed Williams, kicking him down a flight of stairs before laying into him with two shanks — stabbing and striking Williams more than 200 times, in addition to stomping and slamming the officer's head on the ground.

Despite delivering a quick guilty verdict for the crime, which was captured on a grim video played for jurors, the same jury deadlocked in July on whether he should die for the crime — with a lone holdout determining Con-ui would get a mandatory sentence of life without parole.

In imposing the sentence Thursday, U.S. District Judge A. Richard Caputo ordered Con-ui to serve life without the possibility of parole for Williams' murder.

Con-ui will also have to serve five years for possessing contraband in prison and to pay \$300 in court costs, the judge ordered.

9/28/2017

Police: Man sexually assaulted teen in Nanticoke

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

City police on Wednesday charged a Laurel Run man with the sexual assault of a 15-year-old girl.

Christopher Cornell, 21, faces felony counts of statutory sexual assault and corruption of a minor, and misdemeanor counts of indecent assault of a person less than 16 years old.

Cornell was 20 and the girl was 15 when they had sexual intercourse on multiple occasions in July at a home on East Noble Street in Nanticoke, according to police.

Cornell was arraigned Wednesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$500,000 bail, police said. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Oct. 4.

9/27/2017

Nanticoke convenience store robbed at gunpoint

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

A man wearing surgical gloves and carrying a gun robbed an East Main Street convenience store early Tuesday morning, police said.

Police said the man entered the Cocoa Hut Convenient Mart around 4:30 a.m. Tuesday and demanded cash while pointing a gun at the clerk and a customer. Police said he wore a grey hoodie, blue jogging pants, New Balance sneakers and blue surgical gloves and covered his face with a white towel.

[Anyone with information on the robbery can contact Nanticoke City Police at 570-735-2000.](#)

9/20/2017

Jailed man charged in Nanticoke robbery

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A man already in jail on unrelated charges has been charged with the armed robbery of a Nanticoke convenience store in July.

Charles Weitz, 21, of Pittston Twp., was arraigned Tuesday on charges of robbery, theft and criminal conspiracy. Police allege that he and a juvenile male robbed the Cocoa Hut on East Main Street at gunpoint on July 26.

Police identified Weitz as a suspect based on store surveillance footage, according to a criminal complaint.

On Sept. 7, Nanticoke police interviewed Weitz at Luzerne County Correctional Facility, where he was being held based on an unrelated case. Weitz admitted he committed the robbery, stating "it just happened," the complaint states. Weitz remains jailed in lieu of bail, pending a preliminary hearing scheduled for Sept. 27.

9/13/2017

Police: Nanticoke man hid crack in buttocks

A Nanticoke police officer pulled over a vehicle driven by city resident David Bienkowski at approximately 9:55 a.m. Tuesday, police said in a news release.

Officers took Bienkowski, 37, into custody based on an outstanding arrest warrant for alleged drug-related crimes on

July 7, police said.

Bienkowski acted nervously as he was escorted to a holding cell, and when officers searched him they found a plastic bag sticking out of his buttocks, according to police.

The bag contained several smaller baggies containing a white powdery substance, which Bienkowski told officers was crack cocaine, police said. The substance tested positive for cocaine, according to police.

Police charged Bienkowski with a felony count of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, and misdemeanor counts of possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia, based on Tuesday's events.

He faces multiple counts of the same charges, plus four felony counts of criminal use of a communication facility, based on the July 7 arrest warrant.

Bienkowski was arraigned Tuesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$250,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Sept. 27 before Whittaker.

9/9/2017

Technology helping police keep up with new state rule

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

FORTY FORT — The computer screen lit up in red and a beep sounded throughout the police interceptor sport utility vehicle.

Officer Anthony Smith of the Forty Fort police department knew he had just passed a vehicle with an expired registration.

“You can't take a ride through town without this thing going off,” Smith said Friday.

Smith pointed to a screen attached to the computer in the police SUV, on which photographs of vehicles popped up in quick succession. Cameras attached to the patrol vehicle took photos of license plates of almost every vehicle Smith drove past.

License plate recognition software, connected to state and national databases, did the rest.

Since PennDOT stopped issuing month/year stickers to place on license plates as of this year, local police departments have been forced to find other ways to determine if a vehicle's registration is current.

Forty Fort is one of three departments in Luzerne County, along with **Nanticoke** and West Hazleton, to settle on a camera-and-software solution, according to borough police Chief Daniel Hunsinger.

Forty Fort has two vehicles equipped with the system, according to Hunsinger, who said he learned about license plate recognition software at a police chiefs' convention in Erie.

The hardware and software combined cost about \$17,000, Hunsinger said. The first unit was paid for through a Local Share Account state gaming grant, while the police department's operating budget covered the cost of the second system, Hunsinger said.

The system provides useful information for officers on patrol, Smith said.

The old sticker-based system only indicated if a registration was expired, whereas the computer software lets an officer know if a registration is suspended or listed as belonging to a stolen vehicle, he said.

“It lets officers know what they are dealing with,” Smith said.

During a 15-minute ride on Friday, the camera took 271 photos of vehicles. The system registered 12 “hits,” with one suspended registration and 11 expired registrations.

Borough Mayor Andy Tuzinski credited state Rep. Aaron Kaufer and state Sen. Lisa Baker for supporting Forty Fort's efforts to obtain the state grant and get the system up and running.

8/9/2017

Man charged with firing shots at Nanticoke man after dispute

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Darnell Corley, 24, faces charges of conspiracy to commit aggravated assault, simple assault, reckless endangerment and discharge of a firearm into an occupied structure.

Police allege that Corley fired four shots at Marcus Bradley on July 22 at Bradley's Nanticoke home, after Bradley and his ex-lover Brittany Maciolek got into an argument and Maciolek threatened to have Bradley killed.

Maciolek left Bradley's home that day and returned hours later with Corley, police allege in a criminal complaint.

Bradley told police that Corley, whom he recognized, used a stun gun on him through an open bedroom window, then

fired shots at him from a handgun at close range, the complaint states. Bradley was not struck by the gunfire. Officers obtained video surveillance footage that showed Maciolek, Corley and others park near Bradley's house, then run back to their vehicles two minutes later, according to the complaint. Police obtained arrest warrants for Maciolek and Corley on July 24. Maciolek was arraigned Friday, while police took Corley into custody on Tuesday. He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail. Maciolek is also in county jail. A preliminary hearing for both defendants is scheduled for Aug. 30 before Whittaker.

8/5/2017

Nanticoke woman accused of shooting at ex's home

A city woman wanted in connection with a shooting at a Nanticoke home last month was arraigned and sent to county jail on Friday.

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Brittany Maciolek, 21, faces felony and misdemeanor conspiracy charges in connection with the July 22 incident at the West Field Street home of Marcus Bradley, described in a police affidavit as a former sexual partner of Maciolek's. Officers responded to a report of gunshots at the home, according to a criminal complaint filed by Nanticoke police. Bradley told police that Maciolek and another woman had been at his residence earlier, and Maciolek confronted him over sleeping with the other woman, the complaint states. The dispute grew physical and Maciolek punched Bradley in the arm several times. She told Bradley she was going to have him killed, then left the home, according to the complaint.

Bradley said he heard a knock at his door a few hours later, then heard a side bedroom window open. At the opened window, he saw Maciolek standing next to a man Bradley recognized as Darnell Corley, the complaint states. Bradley told police that Corley shot him with a stun gun through the open window, then fired four shots from a handgun at him, according to the complaint. Bradley was not struck by the gunfire.

Investigators obtained video surveillance footage that showed Maciolek, Corley and others park outside Bradley's home, then run back to their vehicles two minutes later, the complaint states.

Police obtained arrest warrants for Maciolek and Corley on July 24 and took Maciolek into custody Friday. Following her arraignment, Maciolek was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Aug. 9 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. Corley, 24, remains at large as of Friday night.

7/27/2017

Former Nanticoke mayor and teacher facing charges for allegedly luring teen boys

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A former teacher and Nanticoke mayor who served probation for his guilty plea to fondling a boy in 2003 faces a new set of charges for allegedly attempting to lure three teenagers into his car by offering them money, police said.

Edward J. Butkiewicz, 76, of Sandwedge Drive in Mountain Top, faces five counts each of corruption of minors and luring a child into a motor vehicle, as well as single counts of resisting arrest and disorderly conduct. He served as mayor in the mid-1980s and later on the City Council, and was a Greater Nanticoke Area teacher in the 90s.

In 2003, he was sentenced to two years of probation on a misdemeanor indecent assault charge for fondling a 13-year-old boy, who was a former student.

His sentence was handed down with a stern reprimand from then-Luzerne County Judge Mark Ciavarella: "It's a shame, Mr. Butkiewicz. In a short period of time you managed to ruin a reputation beyond reproach. Whatever problems you have, I hope you deal with them."

According to the affidavit in the latest case, a 13-year-old boy was in the parking lot of an apartment complex on Rock Street in Newport Township Sunday when Butkiewicz pulled up to him in a silver Cadillac asking the boy where he could get a drink nearby.

The conversation then quickly turned "more personal" when Butkiewicz asked the boy about his "private area," the affidavit says. Butkiewicz allegedly asked to see the boy's private area and added he would "do things" to the boy that the boy described as "weird."

Butkiewicz gave the boy \$3 and offered him more money to get in the car with him and go for a ride, but the boy

refused, the affidavit says. Butkiewicz left, but noted he'd be back. The boy then went home and told his mother, who called 911.

A search of the vehicle's registration led police to identify Butkiewicz.

More teens allegedly lured

Three days later, on Wednesday, Newport Township police received a report the same man was again attempting to lure children at the same apartment building.

A 16-year-old boy told the responding officer Butkiewicz tried to get him into his vehicle Sunday after asking the teen "if he was gay and he wanted to make money," the affidavit says. The teen said he was again approached by Butkiewicz on Wednesday. Another 16-year-old said Butkiewicz also asked if he wanted to "make money" that day, according to the affidavit.

The two teens brought Butkiewicz to their apartment where they quickly called 911. As Butkiewicz tried to leave, a juvenile girl blocked his truck by pretending her car was broke until police arrived, the affidavit says.

The officer asked Butkiewicz if he was in the area that past Sunday and gave money to children, and Butkiewicz acknowledged that he was and that he often gives money to children, the affidavit says. Butkiewicz allegedly told the officer he was at the apartments because one of the teens offered to give him a tattoo.

In the affidavit, the officer noted he observed money on the passenger seat and a protective seat cover over the backseat.

The affidavit further states the arresting officer was cut on his hand attempting to take a combative Butkiewicz into custody. Butkiewicz was committed to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, but was later released after posting \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Wednesday.

In the 2003 case, Butkiewicz also offered the victim a ride. As the two drove, Butkiewicz put his hand on the boy's shoulder and rubbed his back. After that, Butkiewicz unbuttoned the teenager's jeans and began to fondle him.

Butkiewicz told police the boy unbuttoned his own pants and that he grabbed the boy's genitals "on impulse."

The victim subsequently filed a lawsuit against Butkiewicz claiming he developed emotional problems that required counseling.

Court records show the parties settled for \$10,000.

Clashes with school district

Butkiewicz, who taught six grade, surrendered his teaching license in 2004.

Years earlier, his clash with the school district over his suspension drew significant attention when a school board member accused Butkiewicz of improper conduct in the classroom.

The controversy exploded in 1998 when then-School Board member Terry Ziolkowski announced that his niece, a student of Butkiewicz's, heard the teacher use a racial epithet in class. Ziolkowski also claimed Butkiewicz tugged on students' underwear and showed a movie featuring a topless woman in class.

Butkiewicz argued in a lawsuit against the district that he used the word in the context of a social studies lesson on slavery, and that the movie was a history movie with a PG-13 rating. An arbitrator ruled in 1999 that Butkiewicz should be reinstated and receive back pay and benefits for the nearly 15-month suspension.

A federal judge threw out the lawsuit in 2001, finding it had no merit.

7/27/2017

Police: Former Nanticoke mayor and teacher tried to lure children

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

Police arrested Edward Butkiewicz, 76, a former mayor and teacher at Nanticoke area schools, on Wednesday after children along Rock Street in Glen Lyon reported he had, on multiple occasions, tried to lure various children into his vehicle by offering them money.

A 13-year-old boy first reported Butkiewicz on July 23, according to police. The boy told police he was in the parking lot of an apartment complex when a silver car with a handicap registration tag drove up to him. The driver, an older male later identified as Butkiewicz, first asked the boy if there were any bars in the area.

The boy said Butkiewicz then asked about his "private area" and if he could see it and said he would do things to him that the boy called "weird," police said.

Butkiewicz offered the boy money to get in his car and go for a ride and \$3 to keep his secret, police said. When the boy refused, police said Butkiewicz left and told the boy he'd be back. The boy told his mother about the incident and she called 911, police said.

Police were called back to Rock Street on Wednesday for a report of the same man trying to lure children into his car, this time in a burgundy SUV.

A 16-year-old boy told officers Butkiewicz had also approached him on Sunday and Wednesday. The first time, Butkiewicz drove up to him at the intersection of Rock and East Main streets and asked if he was gay and wanted to make money. On Wednesday, the teen said Butkiewicz drove up at the intersection of West Main and Market streets in Glen Lyon and asked him and another 16-year-old male if they wanted to make money. The teens told police Butkiewicz followed them into the Rock Street apartment complex where they called 911 and told the 13-year-old boy and his sister. Butkiewicz started shouting for the 13-year-old, then grabbed one of the 16-year-olds by the arm, police said. Butkiewicz tried to leave the apartment complex but a juvenile female and a man pulled their car in front of his, pretending it had broken down to stall Butkiewicz until police arrived. Butkiewicz admitted to being in the neighborhood in a silver car on Sunday and admitted to giving the 13-year-old boy money. He denied trying to lure the boy into his car, police said. When police cuffed Butkiewicz, he resisted and pushed back against the arresting officer, cutting his hand. Butkiewicz was charged with attempted luring, corruption of minors, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest and sent to Luzerne County prison in lieu of \$100,000 bail. Butkiewicz, a retired elementary school teacher, served two years of probation after he was arrested for indecent assault and corruption of minors in 2003. In that case, a former student of Butkiewicz's told police he had pulled up to him in a white Jeep and asked him if he needed a ride. The boy accepted because he thought Butkiewicz was a "nice guy," police said. The boy told police Butkiewicz touched his genitals while they drove through Nanticoke and Hanover Twp. Butkiewicz pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of indecent assault in the 2003 case and was sentenced to two years probation. By that time, he had served 30 years as a teacher and served terms as a Nanticoke City councilman and mayor. Butkiewicz will appear for a preliminary hearing on his recent charges on Aug. 2 at 1 p.m. before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.



7/27/2017

Nanticoke convenience store robbed early Wednesday

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Two men robbed the Cocoa Hut convenience store on East Main Street early Wednesday morning, according to Nanticoke police. The men walked into the store shortly after 1:30 a.m., police said. One of them showed a gun and demanded money from a cashier. The men fled the store with about \$150 in cash and ran toward South Prospect Street, police said. The suspects are described as white males in their 20s. One is between 5 feet 8 inches and 5 feet 10 inches tall and "skinny." He wore a black hooded sweatshirt, gray jogging pants and white sneakers. The other suspect is between 5 feet 6 inches and 5 feet 9 inches tall, with a medium build. He wore a black "Yankees" baseball cap, a long-sleeve gray shirt with black sleeves, blue cargo shorts and brown/olive green sneakers.

Anyone with information is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.

7/25/2017

Police search for duo accused of weekend assault in Nanticoke

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice



MACIOLEK



CORLEY

A man and woman attacked another man at his Nanticoke home, shooting him with a stun gun before firing a gun through his window, according to police.

Nanticoke police are searching for two people suspected in the shooting at 27 W. Field St. on Saturday, July 22, at approximately 6:09 p.m. Police said Darnell Corley and Brittany Maciolek attacked resident Marcus Bradley after a fight at his home.

Bradley told police Maciolek — his former partner — and another woman were at his apartment when Maciolek confronted him about sleeping with the other woman. Bradley said Maciolek became combative and punched him in the arm multiple times. She left with the other woman and said she would have Bradley killed, police said.

A few hours later, Bradley heard a knock at his apartment door, police said. When he went to open the door, he heard a side bedroom window opening and investigated the sound. Bradley told police he saw Maciolek at the window with Corley next to her.

Maciolek fired at Bradley with a stun gun through the open window, police said. Bradley said Corley then raised a handgun towards him and fired four shots through the open window.

Bradley said Maciolek and Corley fled after firing the gun.

Police charged Maciolek and Corley with aggravated assault, simple assault, reckless endangerment and related counts; and have requested the public's assistance in locating the suspects.

Anyone with information can contact Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200 or call 911.

7/15/2017

Nanticoke man faces child porn charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A city man accused twice before of sexually abusing children was charged Friday with 20 felony counts related to possessing child pornography.

Jayson S. Montanez, 30, of 209 W. Church St., was charged after his mother found images on his cellphone of children as young 1 or 2 being sexually abused, according to Luzerne County detectives.

The charges come as Montanez is awaiting trial on charges alleging he sexually assaulted a 6-year-old girl repeatedly over a two-year period.

While he was in custody at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, Montanez gave his mother the pass code to unlock his cellphone so she could contact his friends and ask them to visit him.

While his mother was going through the phone, she came across images of naked girls as young as about 2 years old, according to a police affidavit filed in court. She told police she felt like she was betraying her son but that it was the right thing to do, police said.

A subsequent search of the phone turned up numerous images of girls who were in sexually suggestive positions, police said.

During questioning, Montanez insisted he knew nothing about the images, claiming he had been in jail for the past five months.

Magisterial District Judge Thomas F. Malloy Sr. arraigned Montanez on Friday afternoon and ordered him held on \$150,000 bail with a preliminary hearing set for July 26.

The bail is in addition to the \$150,000 bail Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough set in February when prosecutors alleged Montanez violated his conditions of release in the sex abuse case by coming into contact with children, according to court records.

In the sex abuse case, Montanez is awaiting trial on involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child and related charges following his arrest in November 2014. Court records indicate the trial has been on hold because of an appeal to the Superior Court challenging Vough's decision to allow the case to move forward based on hearsay testimony without corroborating evidence.

In a ruling in February, the judge wrote he based his decision on case law that establishes prosecutors are permitted to use hearsay evidence at a preliminary hearing.

In a separate case, U.S. Marshals arrested Montanez in Nanticoke in April 2015 on charges alleging he sexually abused a child in Alabama.

Police say Montanez later pleaded to charges related to that case, although details about his sentence were not immediately available.

7/14/2017

Nanticoke man already facing molestation charges accused of possessing child porn

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A city man accused twice before of sexually abusing children was charged Friday with 20 felony counts related to possessing child pornography.

Jayson S. Montanez, 30, is accused of possessing child pornography last September.

Magisterial District Judge Thomas F. Malloy Sr. is scheduled to arraign him Friday afternoon.

Court records show Montanez is still awaiting trial on involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child and related charges following his arrest in November 2014. In that case, he is accused of sexually assaulting a 6-year-old girl repeatedly over a two-year period.

He has been free on \$100,000 unsecured bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. Court records indicate the trial has been delayed because of an appeal to the Superior Court challenging Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough's decision to allow the case to move forward based on hearsay testimony without corroborating evidence.

In a ruling in February, the judge wrote he based his decision on case law that establishes prosecutors are permitted to use hearsay evidence at a preliminary hearing.

In a separate case, U.S. Marshals arrested Montanez in Nanticoke in April 2015 on charges alleging he sexually abused a child in Alabama. Montanez later pleaded to charges related to that case, although his sentence was not immediately available.

7/11/2017

Shock, anger after Nanticoke CO's killer gets life

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

As the judge read the verdict, gasps came from family and friends of slain Correctional Officer Eric Williams.

A fellow correctional officer standing in the gallery to hear the verdict collapsed into his seat, looking ahead in disbelief. Jessie Con-ui, the gang assassin who brutally murdered Williams, a 34-year-old Nanticoke native, will not be put to death for the crime.

The same jury that last month convicted the 40-year-old, two-time killer on Monday split on imposing the death penalty, resulting in a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole.

Afterward, the father of Williams expressed outrage at the verdict.

"It leaves me shocked," Don Williams said on the courthouse steps. "It leaves me angry. This man was already doing life. He committed a hideous murder on my son and they gave him life again. You know what they did to him for doing what he did to my boy? They did nothing. They did absolutely nothing."

In a message posted to Facebook later Monday night, Don Williams wrote that the vote was 11-1 in favor of the death penalty, with one woman saying she couldn't sentence someone to death despite her pledge to consider it as an option. "Perhaps she feels like she took the moral high road," Don Williams wrote. "The problem is that people don't consider the bigger picture. This was not just a painful day for the Williams family, it was a dark day indeed for the whole of the corrections world."

Federal prosecutors declined to comment after the verdict, saying they intended to issue a prepared statement today. The defense also had little to say, with Montclair, New Jersey-based attorney David A. Ruhnke saying the defense was "grateful" for the verdict, but that it speaks for itself.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the Williams family," said attorney Mark F. Fleming, of Encinitas, California. Con-ui was on trial for his life for brutally slashing and stomping Williams, 34, at U.S. Penitentiary Canaan on Feb. 25, 2013. Williams was stabbed more than 200 times with two shanks and had his skull fractured in an attack that left him unrecognizable because Con-ui felt disrespected over an earlier cell search, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutors argued the brutality of the attack, as well as Con-ui's violent past, warranted the death penalty. Con-ui, a member of the New Mexican Mafia, is already serving life in prison for executing a gang member in Phoenix in 2002. At the time of Williams' murder, he was also serving an 11-year sentence for trafficking 33 pounds of cocaine. During his time in prison, Con-ui has threatened correctional officers and attacked other inmates, according to prosecutors.

The defense countered that jurors should have mercy on Con-ui, parading a series of his family members — including his young sons — to show the impact his death would have on his loved ones.

Defense attorneys also argued Con-ui has already been punished for the crime. Since the murder, Con-ui has been held in isolation at a super-maximum security prison in Florence, Colorado, and can expect to have minimal contact with his family for the rest of his life, they argued.

The jury, which deliberated about five hours before deadlocking on Con-ui's penalty, also heard from Con-ui himself late last month. The killer, who was mostly impassive in the jury's presence, apologized for his conduct and said he couldn't give jurors a good explanation for his savage attack.

Don Williams said he didn't buy it.

"I don't believe one thing he has to say, period," he said. "Of course he knows why he did it. He's the most calculating individual you're going to run into."

Darrell Palmer, northeast regional vice president for the prison union, Council of Prison Locals C-33, said he was concerned that the jury's verdict would allow Con-ui to one day be removed from isolation and allow him to attack someone else.

"How could we allow this, for someone to take (those) actions against law enforcement and basically do nothing?"

Palmer said. "This is like they put a target on our back. It's OK to kill a federal correctional officer. It's OK to do anything possible, but when it comes to justice for us — for my brothers and sisters — nothing's being done."

Palmer and Don Williams both expressed an interest in continuing to improve correctional officer safety because of the murder. Already, the death has led to the Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act, allowing thousands of federal prison workers to be armed with pepper spray.

Other changes implemented since the stabbing include the addition of a second officer in housing units — Williams was working alone in a unit housing approximately 130 inmates when he was killed — and equipping employees with stab-resistant vests.

In a statement released in response to the verdict, Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Twp., described the murder as a "call to action."

"No matter what the jury decided today, it could not give Eric Williams back to his parents, Donald and Jean, or his entire family and friends," Yudichak said. "Eric's senseless murder will always be a call to action and a reminder that we must do everything possible to ensure that those who walk the toughest blocks in the criminal justice system are protected from obvious dangers inside of our prisons. We honor Eric's life and sacrifice by ensuring that this never happens again."

7/11/2017

Jury spares Jessie Con-ui's life for federal prison guard's murder

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The life of an inmate who brutally murdered a federal corrections officer was spared by a jury Monday in a decision that left the victim's father searching for answers and a prison official fearful the outcome would put other guards' lives at

risk.

Stunned sighs erupted from Eric Williams' loved ones after the jury reported it could not agree on whether Jessie Con-ui, 40, deserved to die for murdering Williams, 34, of Nanticoke, at Canaan federal prison in 2013. The verdict results in an automatic sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Upon learning he was destined to die behind prison walls for the crime, Con-ui did not appear to react.

Outside the courthouse, a visibly shaken Don Williams was critical of the jury who he said did "absolutely nothing" for his slain son.

"It leaves me shocked. It leaves me angry," Williams said of the decision. "This man was already doing life. He committed a hideous murder on my son, and they gave him life again.

He continued: "Do you know what they did for him for what he did to my boy? They did absolutely nothing."

More worrisome, one prison union official said, was the impact the sentence would have on the safety of other guards.

"This is like they put a target on our backs," said Darrell Palmer, Northeast Regional Vice President for the Council of Prison Locals. "It's OK to kill federal corrections officers. It's OK to do anything possible. But when it comes to justice for us, nothing is being done."

The jury of eight women and four men deliberated for more than five hours. Many approached after the verdict declined to comment.

Initially announced as unanimous, the jury's decision was later revealed to have been incorrectly read by U.S. District Judge A. Richard Caputo, who called the jury back to the courtroom about a half hour after the verdict to explain the error. He flatly denied prosecutors' request to poll the panel on their decision.

The jury, seated June 2 after a selection process that began in late April, heard weeks of testimony from dozens of witnesses in addition to impassioned arguments from attorneys pitching their cases for life and death.

But in the end, the eight women and four men who on June 7 found Con-ui guilty of the murder could not agree whether he deserved to die for it.

Con-ui's defense team said the verdict spoke for itself. They said they declined further comment out of respect for Williams' family.

Prosecutors, meanwhile, abruptly called off a news conference they had scheduled for after the verdict. A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Justice said there would be no comment Monday, and that a news release would be issued Tuesday.

Justified?

During trial, prosecutors argued the brutality of the crime and lasting impact it will have on Williams' loved ones — coupled with Con-ui's violent past — made a death sentence not only warranted, but justified.

Con-ui was sentenced to life in prison for a 2002 gang-related murder in Arizona. Before that, he received an 11-year sentence for a cocaine trafficking conspiracy. In the late 1990s, he served about five years for stealing cars, prosecutors said.

While behind bars, Con-ui continued to display a penchant for violence. He stabbed an inmate, beat another with a metal food tray, and threatened to kill a guard, according to prosecutors. Other acts of violence he planned were thwarted before he could carry them out, prosecutors said.

Con-ui's court-appointed defense team argued he was a product of poverty, domestic violence and a flawed prison system that left him ill-equipped to rejoin the population as a productive member of society.

They did not call any witnesses during the trial's guilt phase, in fact admitting in openings he was guilty of Williams' murder "beyond all doubt." But in the penalty phase, they focused largely on Con-ui's stepfather, who they said would sometimes lock Con-ui out of his home and force him to sleep in cars.

Con-ui, a native of the Philippines whose family immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1980s, once showed promise but turned to hard drugs, alcohol, and crime in his late teens and eventually landed in juvenile prison, his attorneys said. He served time for stealing cars and later became involved in a fatal shooting for the New Mexican Mafia gang in 2002. He was set to return to Arizona to begin serving a life sentence for the murder in September 2013, about seven months after he killed Williams.

Fight to continue

In a short statement from the defense table, Con-ui apologized for the suffering he caused Williams' loved ones. He said he wishes he could take back the murder — a killing he could not explain.

The statement contradicted Con-ui's own words from shortly after the murder in which he told Williams' coworkers he killed the guard because he felt disrespected.

A former Canaan inmate present during Williams' murder previously told the Times Leader he believes Con-ui killed the guard because he preferred the confines of federal prison to that of Arizona's state system, which is regarded as a

tougher place to do time.

Don Williams acknowledged his fight for justice for his son hit a roadblock, but he plans to endure.

“We’re going to continue our fight for justice and safety for corrections people, I think even now with more resolve,” he said.

6/8/2017

Con-ui quickly found guilty

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The courtroom doors opened and the family of slain Correctional Officer Eric Williams walked out, exchanging hugs and handshakes with a large contingent of his former co-workers.

After more than four years of waiting, his accused killer was accused no longer.

It took a federal jury just about a half-hour Wednesday morning to find Jessie Con-ui, 40, guilty of first-degree murder, murdering a correctional officer and possessing contraband in prison.

As the verdict was read in court, Con-ui — a New Mexican Mafia assassin already serving 25 years to life in prison for executing a gang member in Phoenix in 2002 — sat looking forward impassively.

U.S. District Judge A. Richard Caputo sent the jury home with instructions to return June 19 to begin hearing the evidence they will rely upon to determine whether Con-ui should live out his days in federal prison or die for the crime.

Attorneys on both sides declined to comment on the verdict, and the Williams family deferred discussing the case until after the jury’s final word comes down.

After less than two days of testimony, jurors unanimously agreed Con-ui was responsible for murdering Williams, a 34-year-old Nanticoke native who died during a brutal attack at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan on Feb. 25, 2013.

“It’s been four years since the defendant brutally and viciously murdered Correctional Officer Eric Williams,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Francis P. Sempa told jurors during closing arguments Wednesday morning. “Justice has been delayed. It must not be denied.”

The choice was easy for the jury: Con-ui’s defense explicitly told the jury he did it.

“Jessie Con-ui killed Eric Williams, a correctional officer just doing his job. He did so without excuse or justification,” Stroudsburg attorney James A. Swetz told jurors during the defense closing. “There is no doubt that Jessie Con-ui is guilty.”

Prosecutors alleged Con-ui felt disrespected because of a cell search earlier that night in which another officer removed some minor contraband, including homemade speakers made from altered headphones and cardboard. In response, Con-ui kicked Williams down a flight of stairs before laying into him with two shanks. He stabbed and hit Williams more than 200 times in addition to stomping and slamming the officer’s head on the ground.

According to prosecutors, about an hour and a half after the cell search, as Williams was preparing to lock down the cell block for the night, Con-ui stood waiting and watching at the top a staircase until the officer ascended.

As Williams came to the top of the stairs, Con-ui casually walked up and then delivered a surprise kick to the face, sending the officer tumbling backwards down the flight of stairs, according to video of the attack played in court.

Williams desperately ran to escape as Con-ui chased him down, continuing the attack long after his body went limp in a pool of blood.

During the attack, Con-ui cut his hand on one of the shanks and paused to wrap it in his shirt to continue the assault.

Later, he washed the wound in a shower before returning to the dying officer and resuming the attack.

When it was over, Con-ui sat at a game table, kicking a foot up and sipping a drink as he chewed gum he stole from the dying officer’s pocket.

When fellow officers realized what had happened, they tracked a trail of blood to Con-ui’s cell, where they found him holding a shank and saying he attacked Williams because of a “disrespect issue.”

The prosecution’s case lasted less than two days, hinging in large part on the video that caused jurors to wince and tear up, as well as on statements Con-ui allegedly made to a number of correctional officers admitting he was to blame. The parties stipulated that Con-ui’s clothing was covered in Williams’ blood and that Con-ui’s fingerprint was also found on Williams radio, which the killer threw at Williams’ head twice during the attack. Con-ui’s fingerprint was also on one of the shanks that was sharply bent during the attack.

Sempa noted that video of the 11-minute attack showed Con-ui raising his hand up to apply maximum force with the weapons.

“The force was so strong when it hit Eric Williams’ body, when it hit his bones, when it hit his skull, it bent,” Sempa said.

There is no doubt Con-ui intended to kill Williams, he told the jury. The video shows Con-ui lying in wait to spring the trap and throwing Williams' radio — his "lifeline" — to the side as he continually stomps, slams and stabs the officer, he said.

While his attorneys chose not to challenge Con-ui's guilt in the case, they are preparing to mount a defense aimed at preventing him from getting the death penalty. Swetz noted during his closing that there is "more to" the case than what jurors have already heard.

Con-ui's attorneys have previously alleged a pattern of mistreatment of prisoners by federal Bureau of Prisons officers. Con-ui, they maintain, was generally a well-behaved inmate who snapped because "outrageous" conduct by correctional officers, including officers shredding their property, leaving open cans of tuna fish to rot behind the walls and beating inmates out of view of security cameras.

Prosecutors counter that far from being a respectful prisoner, Con-ui has a history of dozens of disciplinary actions ranging from refusing orders to stabbing another inmate, beating another inmate with a metal food tray and threatening a correctional officer who had just searched his cell.

6/3/2017

Suspect in Nanticoke murder will stand trial

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The girlfriend of accused killer Antoine McNeal testified Friday that she drove him to the scene of the crime shortly before the slaying so he could buy marijuana.

Wakeelah Moore, 26, of Wilkes-Barre, said her on-again, off-again, married boyfriend, Antoine McNeal, had been texting someone as she drove him to West Church Street early on the morning of Jan. 18 so he could buy marijuana. After she parked along the side of the road, McNeal got out to meet someone while Moore waited in the car, she said. Within two or three minutes, McNeal came running back and jumped in the car, she said.

"He just said, 'They were shooting,'" said Moore, who denied hearing the shots or knowing to whom McNeal was referring.

Moore testified that she drove off, but that McNeal then discovered he dropped his cellphone. She circled back, but after a quick search they were unable to find it and left without it, she said.

McNeal, 33, of Wilkes-Barre, is awaiting trial on charges of criminal homicide, illegal possession of a gun, criminal use of a cellphone and tampering with evidence in the slaying of 20-year-old Brandon Smith, who was shot twice in the chest outside his family home on West Church Street.

Family members reported Smith had been texting someone on a flip phone around 1:40 a.m. that morning and that about 2 a.m., he had gone outside to meet someone, Trooper Edward Urban testified.

"He returned, running into the residence stating he had been shot," Urban testified.

Surveillance video taken from a nearby home showed a vehicle driving up and pulling over, followed by a person approaching the house, he said.

Someone else came out of the house and both people went to a van that was parked in front of the home, he said. "You don't see anything happen for a short period of time, and then you see a flash in the area of the van," Urban said, adding that Smith then ran back inside the house.

A search of the property revealed marijuana and blood inside the van as well as several cellphones, he said. After consulting Smith's family, investigators quickly discovered something didn't add up.

"We realized there was one extra phone inside the van," Urban said.

Police traced the phone to McNeal, and discovered text messages showing the men had been discussing McNeal buying a quarter pound of marijuana from Smith the day of the shooting, he said. Smith, however, said all he had at the time was two ounces but that he could get more the next day, he said.

They agreed to meet at Smith's place and the text exchanges ended shortly before the murder took place, he said.

One of McNeal's attorneys, John Donovan, argued the case should not move forward because prosecutors had not met their burden

"Mere presence is not enough in this case. He was not seen with a gun," Donovan said. "There are no eyewitnesses." Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker, however, bound all charges over for trial.

After the shooting, McNeal remained on the lam for several months. Police captured him in Wilkes-Barre in April, and he has been held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility without bail since his arrest.

Moore is also awaiting trial on a charge of hindering the prosecution for allegedly harboring McNeal while he was wanted on the murder charge. She is free on \$75,000 unsecured bail with a formal arraignment set for June 29.

6/2/2017

Nanticoke police secure grant for drug collection

Citizens Voice

With the help of a program offered by CVS Pharmacy, Nanticoke police will be able to provide a safe place to dispose of medication.

In a Thursday press release, state Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-119, Newport Twp., announced the Nanticoke Police Department received a grant for a drug collection unit through the CVS Health Medication Disposal for Safer Communities Program.

The unit will be located in the lobby of the Nanticoke municipal building and provide "a safe and environmentally responsible way to dispose of unwanted, unused or expired medication, including controlled substances ... with no questions asked," according to the release.

The site will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

5/18/2017

NY fugitive caught in Nanticoke

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

City police located a fugitive on the run from the New York Police Department in the attic of an East Church Street residence.

Police said Nanticoke officers and members of the NYPD fugitive task force found Amair Bland, 20, of New York City, in the attic of 365 E. Church St. around 7 a.m. on Wednesday.

Bland was a fugitive wanted on weapons and drug violations, police said.

He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Michael Dotzel and remanded to Luzerne County Correctional Facility pending extradition to New York.

5/17/2017

Nanticoke duo heading to county court on drug charges

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Despite their attorneys being critical of evidence in the case, a Nanticoke duo is heading to county court on charges stemming from the discovery of drugs and cash at their residence after one of them was shot in December.

Kenneth Powell, 30, and Courtney Padden, 27, appeared before District Judge Thomas Malloy for a hearing

Wednesday. Police refiled the charges against Powell and Padden in March after the initial cases were tossed out due to legal challenges.

Malloy ended up sending Powell and Padden's drug charges to higher court.

Members of the Luzerne County Drug Task Force, along with police from Nanticoke and Newport Township, executed a search warrant at Powell's East Spring Street residence at approximately 9:45 a.m. Dec. 9, according to a criminal complaint. Neither Powell nor girlfriend Padden were at the home when the search occurred.

The warrant was executed the day after a shooting on the street outside the residence. Powell was the victim of that shooting. More than five months later, a suspect has not been named in that incident.

During the search, multiple items of contraband were seized, including large bags of suspected marijuana "well beyond what would be held for personal use," authorities stated. Cannabis liquid, digital scales and a bag of THC candy was also taken from the residence. THC is the active ingredient found in marijuana. A total of \$12,950 in cash was recovered, which investigators believe is proceeds from drug sales.

Detective Joseph Guydosh testified that all of the suspected drugs were taken to the State Police crime lab for analysis. But Padden's attorney, Peter Moses, pointed out that no field testing was done at the scene.

Moses also argued that only a small amount of marijuana, and no paraphernalia, was found in his client's room.

"There is nothing to indicate in this case that Courtney Padden was selling drugs," he said.

Meanwhile, Powell's defense lawyer, Joseph Sklarosky, argued that Det. Guydosh failed to establish other evidence in his case.

Both Moses and Sklarosky were optimistic as the cases moved to the county level.

"We're very confident moving forward," Moses said. "I don't think we can back down on this case. I think it's pretty

clear that the commonwealth has really overstepped their grounds here.”

Powell and Padden are scheduled for formal arraignments at 10 a.m. Aug. 3 in the Luzerne County Courthouse. They are each free on their own recognizance.

5/15/2017

Nanticoke man charged after allegedly shooting at another man

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A man is facing charges after police say he shot at another man during an argument.

Police said officers were dispatched to a reported shooting on Scott Street at 2:31 a.m. Monday. Upon arrival, a 30-year-old man reported to officers that he was arguing with Jeremy Battle, 27, of Nanticoke.

During the argument, Battle shot at the man but missed, according to police. No injuries were reported.

Battle was taken into custody without incident, and he faces charges of aggravated assault and recklessly endangering another person.

5/13/2017

Nanticoke arms dealer contests latest charges involving Russia export violations

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A Nanticoke arms dealer previously imprisoned for conspiring to export military equipment to Russia contested Friday a new set of federal charges alleging he again tried to send two riflescopes to an individual in Russia last year.

Mark Komoroski, former manager of D&R Sports Center on 620 Fairchild St., pleaded not guilty to violating federal export laws and unlawfully possessing ammunition as a previously convicted felon at a hearing Thursday. He was released pending his next court appearance.

Komoroski, 54, tried to export two riflescopes to an individual in Russia in February and March 2016 without obtaining licenses required by federal law, the charges say. He was also allegedly in possession of more than 25,000 rounds of ammunition.

His store was raided weeks later by federal customs agents and state law enforcement personnel, many of whom carried out bags of ammunition and boxes marked “evidence.”

Komoroski challenged the latest charges Friday, saying D&R was authorized to store and sell ammunition following his release from federal prison in 2012 on similar charges. He said he was also permitted to sell riflescopes on eBay and other online sites, and noted the hundreds sold since his release shipped only within the U.S.

“How they got (to Russia), I don’t have any idea,” he said.

His attorney, Al Flora Jr., did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

The latest charges aren’t the first of their kind leveled against Komoroski.

In 2010, he was sentenced to 32 months in federal prison for conspiring to illegally smuggle military equipment to Russia, including firearm magazines and rifle scopes. He was released in December 2012.

The latest charges carry a maximum of 30 years in prison.

Komoroski formerly managed the Nanticoke location while his brother, Theodore Komoroski, oversaw a second location in Bloomsburg that has since closed. Records show ownership of the Nanticoke storefront was transferred from Komoroski’s father, Donald Komoroski, to Komoroski Realty in 2005.

Komoroski’s co-defendant, Russian national Sergey Korznikov, was sentenced to six months in prison for his role in the conspiracy. Korznikov was involved with Tactica Ltd., a Moscow-based company that sells rifle optics, binoculars, boots, backpacks and other hunting and paramilitary equipment.

A search warrant affidavit filed in 2006 said authorities believed Komoroski had illegally exported hundreds of thousands of dollars of military equipment over a several-year period.

According to court records, officials discovered a \$68,428 purchase order for thermal-imaging devices from a Moscow, Russia-based company that listed Korznikov as its president.

Wire transfers going into the business’ account were identified as coming from Rockman EOOD and Ibrahim Hajji, both deemed excluded parties by the Office of Foreign Assets Control, which enforces trade sanctions.

Rockman was owned by Sergey Bout, brother of Russian arms dealer and former KGB major Viktor Bout, who provided weapons to Liberian dictator Charles Taylor, rebel groups in Rwanda and the Taliban, according to court documents.

5/13/2017

Nanticoke weapons dealer hit with federal indictment

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

For the second time, a city resident is accused of breaking federal laws by shipping weapons equipment overseas. A federal grand jury indicted Mark Komoroski, 54, this week on charges that he violated federal export laws and illegally possessed ammunition as a convicted felon.

Federal prosecutors allege that in February and March of 2016, Komoroski tried to export two rifle scopes to someone in Russia without having the licenses required under federal law. Komoroski, who owns D&R Sports Center at 620 Fairchild St., is a convicted felon who was found to be in possession of more than 25,000 rounds of ammunition, prosecutors said.

If convicted, Komoroski faces up to 30 years in prison for both offenses.

During an arraignment before U.S. Magistrate Judge Karoline Mehalchick on Thursday, Komoroski pleaded not guilty to the crimes. The judge allowed him to be released pending trial.

The charges stem from a May 2016 raid in which federal agents descended on the business Komoroski owns along with his brother and father — a business that was previously implicated in the illegal sale of restricted weapons overseas to buyers with connections to drug trafficking, espionage and terrorism.

Ten years earlier, in November 2006, agents raided the business amid allegations that it illegally sold and shipped \$247,854 of restricted items — rifles and related devices such as optics — to Russia, Kuwait, Germany and Japan without required export licenses.

Court documents filed in that case alleged money transfers to D&R for some purchases linked the store with “companies and individuals that the United States government has determined pose an unacceptable risk of being involved with or providing ... support to international narcotics trafficking, crimes against humanity/war crimes and/or terrorism.”

Among them was Russian gun runner Viktor Bout, who helped provide weapons to Liberian dictator Charles Taylor, rebel groups in Rwanda, and the Taliban, according to court documents.

Komoroski was charged with conspiracy to defraud the federal government along with his business; and longtime customer Sergey Korznikov and his business, Tactica Ltd. — a Moscow-based business affiliated with an elite counterterrorism unit controlled by the Russian Federal Security Service, formerly known as the KGB.

The men pleaded guilty to the charge, with Komoroski being sentenced in July 2010 to 32 months in prison and Korznikov getting six months in prison. The charges against the businesses were dismissed.

Following that incident, D&R lost its firearms license, but remained open selling other items. The store remains open for business.

5/10/2017

Case moving forward after controversial plea nixed

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A city man who nearly walked away with a sentence of time served for choking his ex-girlfriend in front of her young son, lost an appeal Tuesday that sought to reinstate an unauthorized plea deal that cut him a big break.

Joseph Michael Noss, 38, faces charges of aggravated assault, resisting arrest, simple assault and harassment for allegedly attacking his ex-girlfriend at a home on Loomis Street the afternoon of July 15, 2015. Prosecutors allege Noss choked her by hand before wrapping the wire to a video game controller around her neck and threatening to kill her. When police arrived, Noss took off running and had to be pepper sprayed into submission, according to prosecutors. The ruling Tuesday allows the case to move forward nearly two years after it began.

"I'm glad we'll finally have an opportunity to prosecute a very serious case of domestic violence," Assistant District Attorney Cara Solimine said in response to the opinion.

According to court records, the case derailed after Noss and his attorney, Assistant Public Defender John Donovan, arrived early for a preliminary hearing on Sept. 2, 2015, and told Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker they had reached a deal calling for Noss to plead guilty to a misdemeanor count of disorderly conduct in exchange for a sentence of time served.

Whittaker asked an arresting officer if she agreed, and Officer Kara Kroll - who at the time had only been on the force about two months - indicated she did. There was no discussion about whether prosecutors had signed off on the deal before Whittaker accepted the agreement, according to the documents.

When Solimine arrived for the hearing at the scheduled start time about a half hour later, she was informed the case had been resolved. Prosecutors subsequently filed a petition to vacate the plea, which Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley granted.

Noss appealed that ruling, arguing Gartley improperly vacated his plea.

In their ruling Tuesday, a three-judge panel of the state Superior Court rejected Noss' claims, noting that magistrates can dispose of certain misdemeanor cases, but not in cases where the misdemeanor is the result of a reduced charge.

Prosecutors did not initially charge Noss with disorderly conduct, and because it was a reduced charge Whittaker did not have jurisdiction to accept the plea, the judges ruled.

The judges also rejected Noss' claim that Kroll was a "designee of the commonwealth," noting that Solimine had previously appeared in the case.

"Solimine was clearly the attorney for the commonwealth on this case, and there is no evidence that she authorized Officer Kroll to withdraw charges as her designee," the judges wrote. "Thus, Officer Kroll was not a designee of the commonwealth."

Court records show prosecutors refiled the charges against Noss in January 2016 - a case that has been on hold pending the result of his appeal.

In the meantime, Noss pleaded guilty in March 2016 to a count of simple assault after police alleged he pulled the hair of Tracy Ann Butka - identified in court documents as his "paramour" - as well as put a lit cigarette on her cheek and slapped her during an argument in May 2015.

Gartley sentenced him in that case to four to eight months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility followed by a year of probation.

Records show he has since been released from custody and remains free on \$50,000 bond he posted in September in the pending assault case.

4/28/2017

Woman accused of aiding suspect waives

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

A woman accused of hindering the apprehension of a homicide suspect waived a preliminary hearing on Thursday.

Wakeelah Moore, 26, of Wilkes-Barre, faces charges of hindering apprehension after police said she harbored her boyfriend, Antoine McNeal, while he had an active warrant for his arrest in the homicide of Brandon Smith.

McNeal is accused of shooting and killing the 20-year-old Smith outside Smith's family home on West Church Street in Nanticoke in January.

Police said Moore allowed McNeal to stay at her home at 320 E. Northampton St. for two days before police arrived to arrest him on April 19.

Police said Moore initially told police McNeal was not inside her house. She only allowed officers inside after they confirmed they had a warrant, according to a criminal complaint.

At a scheduled preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge Thomas Malloy, Moore waived a charge of hindering apprehension forward to county court. The prosecution withdrew several drug charges related to a police search of Moore's apartment during McNeal's arrest.

A formal arraignment was scheduled for June 29 at 10 a.m. at the Luzerne County Courthouse.

4/26/2017

Assault charges dismissed against man involved in fatal 2013 crash

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

Assault charges against a man involved in a fatal 2013 crash were dismissed on Wednesday after the alleged victim declined to testify.

Tyler Duda, 20, will no longer face charges alleging he threatened his ex-girlfriend, Kaylee Grodzicki, with a knife, cut her finger and slashed the tires of a vehicle belonging to Imarl Daron Lee Wimbush.

Grodzicki declined to testify at Duda's preliminary hearing Wednesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. The judge dismissed the charges against Duda.

Duda previously served time on juvenile vehicular homicide charges stemming from a fatal crash in July 2013. Duda, 16 at the time, admitted to taking his mother's car for a joyride and crashing into 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street, severing the man's legs and torso before crashing into a house 467 feet from where

Zurilla had been crossing the street.



4/21/2017

Police secure warrant for alleged school computer thief
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Nanticoke police have secured a warrant for Enrique Bacilio, 19, for allegedly stealing more than \$30,000 worth of computers from Greater Nanticoke Area High School in June 2016.

Nanticoke police have secured an arrest warrant for a 19-year-old man accused of stealing computers valued at \$33,174 from Greater Nanticoke Area High School in a June 2016 burglary, according to a police news release.

Enrique Bacilio, 19, is the suspect, and his last known address is 160 Midland Ct., Wilkes-Barre, police said. The burglary occurred between June 22 and June 23, 2016.

Bacilio is also wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff's Department for failing to appear in court relative to a May 2016 arrest in

Nanticoke for simple assault, police said.

In June 2016, police reported someone broke into two classrooms on the west side of the high school by breaking a classroom window and took 30 laptop computers from each classroom, as well as one desktop computer. The laptop computers were "HP Probook 440 G1 Notebook" units. Officers also recovered evidence left at the crime scene, including an article of clothing and a pair of copper pliers.

Bacilio has lived in Texas, New York and Pennsylvania and may be in the Wilkes-Barre area, police said. Anyone with information about Bacilio's whereabouts is asked to contact Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200 or the Luzerne County Sheriff's Department by dialing 911.



4/20/2017

Nanticoke homicide suspect from January found in W-B, arraigned
Man wanted for shooting in Nanticoke

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Police have charged a Wilkes-Barre man with what they believe was a drug-related murder in Nanticoke.

Antoine William McNeal, 32, was taken into custody at 320 E. Northampton St. about noon Wednesday.

Wakeelah Nimat Moore lived at the East Northampton address where McNeal was located. Moore was arrested herself for hindering apprehension and drug offenses.

McNeal is accused of shooting 20-year-old Brandon Smith outside of a residence at 185 W. Church St. in Nanticoke on Jan. 18.

Smith, who died of multiple gunshot wounds, is believed to have known McNeal. According to a criminal complaint:

Luzerne County 911 received a call around 2 a.m. Jan. 18 from Tina Letavish about the shooting. Smith was pronounced dead at 3 a.m. at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

Letavish, the victim's mother, told police Smith was texting on his flip phone on a couch near the front door when he went outside around 2 a.m. When he came back inside, he ran to the kitchen yelling "they shot me" before falling to the floor.

Investigators examining the phone found a text trail between Smith and an unknown number arranging what appeared to be a drug deal.

Police later met with Jacquelynn Moore, of South Hancock Street, Wilkes-Barre, who confirmed the unknown number belonged to her daughter, Wakeelah.

Wakeelah told police McNeal was her boyfriend and he was texting about receiving marijuana. She said she and McNeal drove to Nanticoke the night of the murder. Wakeelah, who was driving the car, parked on Fairchild Street.

About two to three minutes later, McNeal told her "we gotta get out of here, they are shooting." Wakeelah said she owned a .38-caliber revolver, but misplaced the firearm. Police determined Smith was actually shot inside Letavish's white Chrysler Town and Country van.

Pot plants

U.S. Marshals, State Police, and Wilkes-Barre City police were seen going in and out of the East Northampton residence before bringing McNeal and Moore out in handcuffs.

Here's what authorities said happened when they knocked on the door of Moore's apartment late Wednesday morning: Moore initially denied she knew where McNeal was.

But when officers told her there was an active warrant for him, she let them inside and they found McNeal hiding behind a bedroom door.

Officers also found six marijuana plants in the bedroom closet.

Moore later said McNeal called her Monday from a blocked number asking to come to her residence. He was there from 10 p.m. Monday until he was apprehended.

Moore also said the plants were hers but she was not selling marijuana.

Due to the homicide charge, McNeal was locked up with no bail at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

His preliminary hearing is set for 1 p.m. April 26.

Moore was sent to Luzerne's lockup for lack of \$75,000 bail. She has a preliminary hearing 9 a.m. April 27 in front of District Judge Thomas Malloy in Wilkes-Barre.

Court records show McNeal has a history of drug convictions.

In 2008, he was sentenced to 11 to 23 months for pleading guilty to a criminal conspiracy charge.

He received a 21- to 41-month state prison term in April 2015 on one count of delivery of heroin and two counts of providing false identification to law enforcement. He was paroled May 5, 2016, records show.

4/20/2017

Woman arrested with Antoine McNeal charged with hindering law enforcement

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A woman arrested Wednesday with Antoine McNeal has been charged with hindering police and drug offenses. Wakeelah Nimat Moore, of East Northampton Street, was arraigned in front of District Judge Donald Whittaker. McNeal, 32, was arraigned by video earlier Wednesday on charges of criminal homicide and related counts. He is accused of shooting 20-year-old Brandon Smith outside a residence at 185 W. Church St. in Nanticoke on Jan. 18. According to a criminal complaint:

Moore, 25, opened the door of her second-floor apartment at 11:25 a.m. Wednesday for State Police, U.S. Marshals and Wilkes-Barre City police. The officers were searching for McNeal.

When she was asked about McNeal's whereabouts, she told police "he is not here."

But when officers told her there was an active warrant for McNeal, she let them inside and they found McNeal hiding behind a bedroom door.

Officers also found six marijuana plants in the bedroom closet.

Both Moore and McNeal were taken to state police barracks in Wyoming, where Moore provided a statement.

She said McNeal called her Monday from a blocked number asking to come to her residence. He was there from 10 p.m. Monday until he was apprehended.

Moore also said the plants were hers but she was not selling marijuana.

Moore was sent to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$75,000 bail. She has a preliminary hearing 9 a.m. April 27 in front of District Judge Thomas Malloy in Wilkes-Barre.

4/19/2017

**Police arrest suspect in Nanticoke homicide from January
Breaking News, Local**

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Police have arrested a city man in connection with a fatal shooting that happened in Nanticoke in January.

Antoine William McNeal, 32, was taken into custody from 320 East Northampton St. shortly after noon Wednesday. He is accused of shooting 20-year-old Brandon Smith outside of a residence at 185 West Church St. in Nanticoke on Jan. 18.

U.S. Marshals, Pennsylvania State Police, and Wilkes-Barre City Police Department officials could be seen going in and out of the residence before bringing McNeal and a woman out in handcuffs.

Smith, who died of multiple gunshot wounds, is believed to have known McNeal prior to the shooting. Officials said they believe the homicide was drug-related.

Court records show McNeal has a history of drug convictions.

In 2008, he was sentenced to 11 to 23 months for pleading guilty to a criminal conspiracy charge.

He received a 21- to 41-month state prison sentence in April 2015 from Judge Fred A. Pierantoni III on one count of delivery of heroin and two counts of providing a false identification to a law enforcement officer. He was paroled May 5, 2016, records show.

McNeal is expected to be arraigned sometime today, Trooper Edward Urban said.

4/15/2017

Crash victim's family questions leniency

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Nearly four years after Tyler Duda ran down a Marine Corps veteran crossing the street, he made headlines again for another violent crime this week — and his first victim's family still can't believe the leniency he got last time.

"I said from day one he's either going to harm someone again or kill someone," said Nanticoke resident Diane Washik, the sister of 59-year-old victim Nickolas Zurilla. "They gave him a second chance, and he's not even grateful for it."

As a 16-year-old boy, Duda was charged as an adult with third-degree murder and faced up to 40 years in prison for plowing into Zurilla as he crossed a residential street in Nanticoke in July 2013. Duda, who had taken his mother's car for a joyride, was doing 72 mph and severed Zurilla's legs and torso before crashing into a house 467 feet away.

"This was a horrifying thing that happened to my brother," Washik said. "He was severed and everything, and there's no remorse from this kid. There's no remorse at all."

The possibility of Duda seeing significant prison time disappeared after Luzerne County Judge Lesa S. Gelb moved his case to juvenile court, saying Duda deserved a chance at rehabilitation and didn't belong in a "criminal setting."

Duda admitted guilt to vehicular homicide charges and Luzerne County Juvenile Court Judge William Amesbury sent him to the North Central Secure Treatment Unit, a juvenile detention center on the grounds of Danville State Hospital in Montour County.

During that time, Duda's science teacher, 47-year-old Melissa A. Brindisi, was accused of having sex with him twice in a basement storage room, according to a report in The Sunbury Daily Item. Court records show Brindisi was later acquitted at trial on the charges.

Less than a year after being sent to the facility, Duda had a home pass to check out a Williamsport college. Although supervisors described Duda as "passive-aggressive" and "doing whatever he could do to annoy staff," probation officers said during a March 2015 hearing they had no opposition to Duda getting "acclimated back into the community."

Juvenile court records are secret, but Washik said she thought Duda ended up serving about a year and a half for the crime.

Duda, now 20, faces charges for a violent crime yet again in his young life following an incident Wednesday when he allegedly pulled a knife, accusing Imarl Daron Lee Wimbush of sleeping with his ex-girlfriend, Kaylee Grodzicki. Duda cut Grodzicki's finger before slashing a tire on Wimbush's car and pouring a beer into the vehicle in the Luzerne County Community College parking lot, according to police.

After police filed assault and harassment charges, Duda was released from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on Thursday when his mother, Lori Ann Duda, posted \$2,000 bail.

Lori Ann Duda did not immediately return a message seeking comment Friday.

Washik said Friday she was upset to hear about Duda's new charges and that she feels "justice hasn't been served from day one." She questioned why Gelb was not more stern when dealing with Duda and said she thinks he should have gotten a much stiffer penalty.

"I don't understand how this whole system could work like this. ... I just don't understand how this kid is just walking around like this," Washik said, saying she fears the system will again show leniency to Duda. "God forbid, I just hope somebody doesn't get killed again."

Gelb said Friday court rules prohibit her from commenting on the case.

4/14/2017

Man involved in fatal crash facing assault charges

Police charged a man involved in a fatal 2013 crash with assault after he allegedly threatened a woman with a knife. Tyler Duda, 20, of Nanticoke faces charges of simple assault and harassment after a domestic dispute in the Luzerne County Community College parking lot on Wednesday, a criminal complaint states.

Duda previously served time on juvenile vehicular homicide charges stemming from a fatal crash in July 2013. Duda, 16 at the time, admitted to taking his mother's car for a joyride and crashing into 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla at 72 mph on a residential Nanticoke street, severing the man's legs and torso before crashing into a house 467 feet from where Zurilla had been crossing the street.

After pleading guilty to those charges, Duda spent time in a juvenile treatment facility in Danville.

Nanticoke police said Duda got into an argument with Imarl Daron Lee Wimbush and Kaylee Grodzicki, Duda's ex-girlfriend. Duda accused Grodzicki of sleeping with Wimbush, became "irate" and pulled out a knife, according to a criminal complaint.

Grodzicki told police she pushed Duda away and he pushed back, swinging the knife toward her. Duda's knife cut Grodzicki's left ring finger, police said.

The complaint states Duda then slashed the rear, driver's side tire of Wimbush's car and poured a beer into the vehicle. Wimbush and Grodzicki fled the area and called 911 from another location.

Police arrested Duda at his residence on Union Street. He was charged with simple assault, harassment and disorderly conduct and arraigned Thursday morning before Magisterial District Judge Joseph Halesey.

A preliminary hearing was scheduled for April 26 at 1 p.m. before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

4/14/2017

12 indicted on drug charges

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A federal grand jury indicted a dozen Luzerne County residents on drug trafficking charges last month, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

The indictments were issued in federal court in Scranton on March 28 and unsealed this week, after the defendants had been arrested, the Justice Department said in a news release.

The defendants face drug trafficking and firearms offenses, the news release states.

Defendants identified by the Justice Department include:

- **Edirso De Leon Frias, 25, of Nanticoke.**
- Nathaniel Murphy, 41, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Roy Seabrook, 43, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Ruth Reyes-Maldonado, 32, of Wilkes-Barre.
- **Joel Contreras, 25, of Nanticoke.**
- Alhagie Samba, 49, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Adrian Rivera, 40, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Jerrod Curtis, 33, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Nelson Soto, 42, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Juan Roman-Polanco, 31, of Avoca.
- Luis Enrique Martinez Ortiz, 25, of Wilkes-Barre.
- Jose Ramon De Leon-Pineda, 33, of West Hazleton.

The defendants are charged with conspiracy to distribute and possession with the intent to deliver cocaine and heroin, the news release states.

De Leon Frias is also charged with possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime, while Roman-Polanco is also charged with possessing a firearm as a convicted felon, according to the Justice Department. The indictments stemmed from a Justice Department initiative "to combat the nationwide epidemic regarding the use and distribution of heroin," the news release states.

Law enforcement agencies that participated in the investigation included state police, Wilkes-Barre police and the federal Drug Enforcement Agency.

4/7/2017

Man faces charges after drug bust in Nanticoke

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

Bomb squad members responded to a Nanticoke home on Wednesday after police discovered two explosives while searching the home for drugs.

Nanticoke police and other departments searched 347 Hanover St., Apt. 5, around 4:10 p.m. Wednesday. The resident, Brandon George Sirak, was arrested following the search.

Police found 150 bags of suspected heroin, drug paraphernalia and over \$500 in cash.

Sirak was charged with three counts of manufacturing, delivering or possession of a controlled substance, intentional possession of a controlled substance and use or possession of drug paraphernalia.

Officers also found two explosive devices and cordoned off the area for more than two hours while members of the Scranton Bomb Squad removed them. Nanticoke Police Chief Thomas Wall said responding officers found two cylindrical objects "about the size of an empty paper towel roll," with fuses protruding from the ends.

Sirak was arraigned on Thursday morning before Magisterial District Judge John Hasay. A preliminary hearing was scheduled for 1 p.m. on April 12 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

3/28/2017

Police: Investigation led to arrest of man wanted in Ohio

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What was initially a criminal mischief investigation resulted in police arresting a man wanted by authorities in Ohio. Police said officers were conducting the criminal mischief investigation at 6:55 p.m. Sunday at 27 Hill Street. Officers encountered Luis Miguel Torres-Rodriguez, 21, and learned he had a warrant for his arrest in Ohio for charges of kidnapping, felonious assault, aggravated menace, and burglary.

Torres-Rodriguez was taken into custody without incident. Police later discovered Torres-Rodriguez was allegedly using an alias.

Torres-Rodriguez was subsequently charged with false identification to law enforcement and being a fugitive from justice. He was remanded to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for overnight arraignment.

Officers from Wilkes-Barre City Police Department and the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department in Ohio assisted.

3/18/2017

West Nanticoke man gets up to 10 years for robbery

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A West Nanticoke man accused of robbing a man during a comic book sale was sentenced Friday to serve up to 10 years in prison.

Joshua Ruchinski, 27, was ordered to serve five to 10 years in prison for robbery, as well as for a count of theft in a separate case. Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough imposed the sentence, ordering Ruchinski to pay nearly \$1,500 in restitution. Prosecutors alleged Ruchinski pulled out a knife and demanded money as he sat with a Shickshinny man in a car parked in front of a Slope Street home where Ruchinski said the comic books were stored.

When the man resisted, Ruchinski pulled out a gun and again demanded money, prosecutors said. The man continued to resist, so Ruchinski grabbed the man's car keys and cellphone and ran off, according to prosecutors. Vough ordered Ruchinski sent to state prison as soon as possible.

3/9/2017

Nanticoke duo arraigned on drug charges

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The Nanticoke police have refiled the case against Kenneth Edward Powell and Courtney Claire Padden, attorneys say. Powell, 30, and Padden, 26, had a preliminary arraignment Wednesday on drug charges stemming from a search warrant following a shooting on Dec. 8, of which Powell was the victim.

The pair previously had a preliminary arrangement, but Padden's attorney, Peter Moses, said there were motions made because the police department didn't have a prima facie case.

"The commonwealth decided to refile," Moses admitted.

According to the criminal complaint:

Members of the Luzerne County Drug Task Force, along with police from Nanticoke and Newport Township, executed a search warrant for Powell's East Spring Street residence at approximately 9:45 a.m. on Dec. 9. Neither Powell nor his girlfriend, Padden, were at the home when the search occurred.

Investigators allege that during the search, multiple items of contraband were seized, including large bags of suspected marijuana "well beyond what would be held for personal use." Cannabis liquid, digital scales and a bag of THC candy was also taken from the resident. THC is the active ingredient found in marijuana. A total of \$12,950 in cash was recovered from the residence, which investigators believed was attained through drug sales.

Court papers indicated Powell and Padden were each arraigned before District Judge Donald Whittaker on charges of manufacture, delivery or possession with intent; conspiracy to manufacture; possession of a controlled substance; and use or possession of drug paraphernalia.

Moses said Padden was released on personal recognizance, and court papers indicate Powell was released under the same conditions.

The duo will have a preliminary hearing on at 1 p.m. March 29 at a district judge's office to be announced because Whittaker has already heard the case and has rescued himself.

Efforts to reach Powell's attorney, Joseph F. Sklarosky Sr., were unsuccessful Wednesday.

3/1/2017

Woman accused of Nanticoke stabbing waives charges to county court

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Javari Gantt-Brown is accused of stabbing a man during a dispute over property in December.

Gantt-Brown, however, claims the incident was a matter of self-defense.

Gantt-Brown, of Hanover Township, appeared for a preliminary hearing before District Judge Donald Whittaker on Wednesday. Gantt-Brown, who identifies as a woman, waived her charges of aggravated assault, simple assault, disorderly conduct and harassment.

Police were waved down around 8:30 p.m. on Dec. 29 by a group of individuals in the area of South Prospect and East Ridge street, near the city municipal building.

Police said an argument broke out between Brown and victim Jermail Stanley, who tried to intervene in a scuffle over property near the fire department on East Ridge Street. Brown allegedly charged at Stanley with a knife. Stanley retreated backward but Brown charged again, allegedly stabbing Stanley, causing an injury.

Gantt-Brown told a reporter at her hearing Wednesday that she had several disputes with four other people leading up to the incident. She claimed that at one point, she was confronted by four people with knives as she attempted to remove her property from a residence on West Ridge Street.

"I feared for my life," she said.

Gantt-Brown said the people continued to harass her as she worked to get the property out of the residence, and even had police officers at the nearby municipal building watch as she got the property.

Gantt-Brown said that's when four people — two men and two woman — charged after her, and she defended herself with a pocket knife.

Fred Heller, a friend of Gantt-Brown's, said he tried to pick her up that night. He said that she told him at the time that she was being threatened by people.

"She was so hysterical and scared," Heller said.

When police took Brown into custody, she began to struggle. Officers were able to secure Brown against the patrol car until they attempted to put handcuffs on her. Brown then fled down a ramp which lead into the police station. It was there that officers were able to take her into custody.

Gantt-Brown is scheduled for a formal arraignment in the Luzerne County Courthouse at 10 a.m. on June 1. After hearing a brief argument from Gantt-Brown's attorney Allyson Leigh Kacmarski, Whittaker reduced Gantt-Brown's bail to \$25,000 unsecured.

2/28/2017

Trio indicted on federal drug-trafficking charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Three Luzerne County residents have been indicted by a federal grand jury on drug-trafficking charges.

Edirso De Leon Frias, 25, of Nanticoke; Nathaniel Murphy, 41; and Roy Seabrook, 43, both of Wilkes-Barre, are

accused of conspiring to distribute heroin, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. Prosecutors say De Leon Frias distributed more than 100 grams of heroin, the equivalent of about 4,000 doses. If convicted, the defendants face up to 20 years in prison, according to prosecutors. The case, investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, was brought as part of an initiative to combat a nationwide heroin epidemic, prosecutors said.



2/23/2017

Police asking for help in identifying man allegedly using counterfeit bills
Police described the suspect as average height and weight with short hair, mustache and thin beard. The male wore a blue shirt with a Superman logo and blue jeans

Times Leader



Police are asking for the public's help in identifying a man who used counterfeit bills to purchase hair products.

According to police, around 5:40 p.m. Thursday, a man purchased \$29.75 worth of hair care products with a fake \$100 bill at the CVS Pharmacy on East Main Street.

The suspect is described as average height and weight with short hair, mustache and thin beard. The male wore a blue shirt with a Superman logo and blue jeans.

Police say he may have a tattoo that can be observed on his lower right forearm. Anyone with information is asked to contact city police at **570-735-2200, extension 206 or 216.**

2/17/2017

Death of 9-day-old infant still under investigation in Nanticoke

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An investigation into the November death of a 9-day-old girl is continuing, Nanticoke Police Chief Thomas Wall said Thursday.

In December, Wall told the Times Leader that officers were dispatched to an East Union Street residence Nov. 20 after a report of an unresponsive infant. First responders attempted CPR on the baby, and she was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley in Plains Township, where she was pronounced dead.

Wall said Thursday that officers are awaiting toxicology and other results on the infant, whose name has not been released. Wall declined to comment further, citing the active investigation.

Autopsies are routinely performed in infant deaths, according to officials at the Luzerne County Coroner's Office. No one has been charged in the 9-day-old's death.

The infant's mother, Sydney Simon, 26, declined to comment Thursday about her daughter's case, citing instructions from her attorney. That attorney, Timothy Thomas Vancosky, could not be reached for comment.

In an unrelated case, Simon was arraigned Dec. 29 on charges she had controlled substances in her possession while she was in the Luzerne County prison on a domestic violence charge stemming from a Dec. 18 incident. The domestic charge has since been dismissed.

According to a court docket, Simon pleaded guilty to a single charge of use or possession of drug paraphernalia in

connection with the possession case, in which prison officials said they found a bag hidden in her bra that contained controlled substances.

Police said that inside the bag was one empty capsule of Adderall, one Tramadol, 34 capsules of Klonopin and one Flexeril.

Court dockets indicate she was sentenced to one year of probation on Jan. 18.

2/15/2017

Court panel rejects jailed Nanticoke man's appeal

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A three-judge panel of the state Superior Court on Tuesday rejected the appeal of a Nanticoke man serving time in prison on vehicular homicide charges.

James Novis, 41, is serving seven to 14 years in state prison after pleading guilty in November 2015 to charges related to the crash that killed Cherri L. Hummel.

Prosecutors say Novis was driving drunk on May 4, 2013, when he ran off state Route 29 in Lehman Township, vaulted over an embankment and crashed into another embankment 45 feet away. Novis' blood-alcohol level was between .12 and .126 percent within two hours of the crash, and evidence showed he had been driving at 83 mph in a 50 mph zone before losing control of the car, according to prosecutors.

Novis appealed the sentence imposed by Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley on grounds she failed to consider his remorse.

The judges Tuesday found Novis' claims "lack merit" and that Gartley imposed an appropriate sentence.

2/9/2017

Alleged rapist charged with child porn possession

Citizens Voice

A city man already awaiting trial on a rape charge now faces child pornography charges as well.

Police on Wednesday charged Christopher Bates, 43, with possession of child pornography and criminal use of a communication facility, both felonies.

According to a police affidavit:

Officers seized Bates' Nokia cellphone during an investigation that led to rape charges being filed against him in November 2016. Bates consented to a search of the phone, according to police. Officers conducted a forensic analysis of the phone, which revealed two digital images of nude female juveniles that were saved to the phone from two separate websites in February 2015.

A preliminary hearing on the charges filed Wednesday is scheduled for Feb. 15 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

Bates is in Luzerne County Correctional Facility awaiting a formal arraignment March 10 on the rape charge in county court.

1/31/2017

Police: Man charged after attacking girlfriend in Nanticoke

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A city man is facing charges after police say he attacked his girlfriend.

Police responded at 10:01 p.m. Sunday to 78 W. Broad St., after a caller said she was pushed by her boyfriend, according to a criminal complaint.

The complaint said Michael Matthey met officers at the door, and told them Michael Gabriel, 62, pushed his mother, Laura Matthey, down to the floor, causing her head to hit the wall.

According to the complaint:

Once inside the residence, police found Laura in the bedroom holding her head and crying. Laura said she needed medication before going to bed and then knocked on Gabriel's door, but he refused to answer. Michael forced the bedroom door open to get her medication. Gabriel became angry and began to argue with Laura. During the argument, Gabriel grabbed Laura by the arms and threw her to the floor.

Officers observed a black and blue bruise on the side of Laura's forehead.

Gabriel told officers Michael was overreacting and that Laura punched him in the mouth. Police charged Gabriel with assault and harassment. After an arrangement with District Judge Donald Whittaker, Gabriel was lodged at Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 bail. He is scheduled for a preliminary hearing 10 a.m. Feb. 8 in front of Whittaker.

1/21/2017

Suspect in Nanticoke man's murder remains on the run

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The hunt continued Friday for the man accused of shooting another man dead earlier this week.

Antoine William McNeal, 32, of Wilkes-Barre, is wanted on murder charges alleging he shot and killed 20-year-old Brandon Smith outside Smith's home on West Church Street in Nanticoke about 2 a.m. Wednesday.

According to police, the men got into an argument that resulted in McNeal shooting Smith several times. Smith died about an hour later at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township.

McNeal remained on the lam Friday, with police saying he is considered "armed and dangerous."

"We are still actively search(ing) for McNeal," state police spokesman Trooper Tom Kelly said in a statement.

Court records show McNeal has a checkered past involving several drug cases.

Most recently, he served a 21 to 42 month prison sentence imposed by Luzerne County Judge Fred A. Pierantoni III in three separate cases.

In the summer of 2012, McNeal was hit with drug-trafficking charges after selling an undercover state troopers' informant heroin, court records show. A search of his home turned up 191 packets of heroin, 16 baggies of cocaine and some marijuana, police alleged.

Next, McNeal was arrested in April 2013 after Wilkes-Barre police pulled over a car with an expired registration and he lied about his name, according to court records.

Then in November 2014, McNeal was caught unloading trash from a vehicle into a dumpster at the Interfaith Heights Apartments. McNeal gave a fake name and "reeked of marijuana," police alleged. Officers found him in possession of a bag of marijuana, police said.

Court records show McNeal pleaded guilty to charges of dealing heroin and lying about his identity to police, with other counts being dismissed.

After being sentenced in April 2015 — getting credit for about a half-year time served — McNeal made parole May 3, according to the state Department of Corrections.

McNeal was previously sentenced to serve up to 23 months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility after pleading guilty to drug-trafficking conspiracy in a 2006 crack-distribution case.

Court records also show that ABC Bail Bonds won a \$1,342 civil judgment against McNeal and his wife last August. According to the complaint, the company agreed to post bond in one of McNeal's cases for a \$2,200 fee but he only paid \$1,000.

The charges state police filed against McNeal on Thursday include criminal homicide, illegal weapons possession, criminal use of a communication facility and evidence tampering.

Anyone with information about McNeal's whereabouts is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

1/20/2017

Suspect named in Nanticoke murder

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police have named a suspect in the murder of a Nanticoke man early Wednesday morning.

Antoine McNeal, 32, of Wilkes-Barre, shot and killed 20-year-old Brandon Smith outside Smith's home on West Church Street in Nanticoke at 2 a.m. Wednesday, police allege.

Police obtained an arrest warrant against McNeal on Thursday. He had not been located as of Thursday night and is considered armed and dangerous, police said. According to police, Smith and McNeal got into an altercation that resulted in McNeal shooting Smith several times.

An autopsy conducted Thursday morning determined that Smith died of multiple



gunshot wounds inflicted during a homicide, according to the Luzerne County Coroner's Office.

McNeal faces charges of homicide, illegal weapons possession, criminal use of a communication facility and evidence tampering, according to court records. Anyone with information about McNeal or his whereabouts is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

1/18/2017

One man killed in early-morning shooting in Nanticoke

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A 20-year-old man was killed in a shooting early Wednesday morning.

Sources said the shooting happened at approximately 2 a.m. in the area of 185 West Church St. The victim, identified as Brandon Smith, suffered multiple gunshot wounds, according to officials.

Smith was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

It is believed Smith knew the shooter. However, police have not made any arrests.

Officials said they believe the shooting was drug-related.

Officials from the Pennsylvania State Police in Wyoming, the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office, and the Nanticoke Police Department are investigating.

The shooting marks the second in Nanticoke in the past month, and the second homicide in Luzerne County in 2017.

In December, Kenneth Powell was shot when a physical altercation spilled into the street. Powell and his girlfriend, Courtney Padden, were subsequently charged after investigators allegedly found numerous drugs and drug paraphernalia inside his residence.

On Jan. 12, Keith Williams was charged with homicide after he allegedly shot a man in the chest with a shotgun after a dispute in Fairmount Township.

A troubled home?

Residents throughout West Church Street said the house where the homicide occurred has been known as a troubled spot.

Police were still on the scene at approximately 10:30 a.m. as tape surrounded the residence. At one point, a small dog could be seen peering out from a second-floor window of the residence before scurrying back inside.

A resident a few houses down from the scene, who declined to be identified, said the residence has been known for "riff-raff."

Resident Joe Damario also noted the house's troublesome history.

Damario, 36, was awakened by his dogs when police first arrived on the scene. The porch of his residence directly overlooks the residence at 185 West Church St.

Damario said verbal altercations are commonly heard outside of the residence, and a lot of people tend to come and go without staying long.

As he looked at the scene hours after the incident, he said he was happy his three children did not have to experience it on their way to school.

"I was thankful ... they didn't have to walk through that," he said.

Another longtime resident of the street speculated an ongoing drug issue in the city contributed to the shooting. Other

neighbors described West Church Street as a quiet street with few problems.

Damario said that beyond drugs, “absentee landlords” who rent residences to anybody without background checks contribute to the violent behavior.

Damario speculated there was more to the shooting.

“I think that had personal written all over it,” he said.

1/18/2017

Police seek suspect in Nanticoke robbery

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A man robbed the Cocoa Hut convenience store on East Main Street in Nanticoke early Tuesday morning, according to police.

The robbery happened at about 4 a.m., according to Nanticoke police Chief Thomas Wall.

A man walked into the store, told a cashier he had a gun and demanded money, Wall said. The clerk took the drawer out of the register and the man grabbed cash and left the store on foot. He was last seen on Prospect Street, Wall said.

The man did not display a weapon during the robbery, according to Wall.

Nanticoke police and state police responded.

Police released video surveillance footage of the alleged robber on Tuesday. He appears to be wearing pink sweatpants with the word “Luzerne” on the left leg.

Anyone with information about the suspect or this crime is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.