

12/24/2015

Man to serve up to 8 years in prison for teen sex assault

James Halpin - Citizens voice

A Costa Rican man who sexually assaulted a 15-year-old boy in Nanticoke was sentenced Wednesday to four to eight years in prison.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley ordered Olman Antonio Solano, 40, to register as a sex offender for life and to undergo sex offender treatment.

Solano was accused of assaulting the teen in a home in November 2014 while he was drinking.

Solano, who is also wanted on a detainer by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, was ordered to have no unsupervised contact with children.

An extradition date had not been immediately determined.

12/23/2015

Man charged with child sex abuse for online chat with girl, 13

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police have charged a Nanticoke man with sending sexually explicit messages and photos via the Internet to a 13-year-old girl.

Micca Heppding, 35, was arraigned Tuesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker on felony charges of disseminating obscene materials to minors, sexual abuse of children and criminal use of a communications facility, as well as a misdemeanor count of corruption of minors. He was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$250,000 bail.

According to a criminal complaint filed by Nanticoke police Officer Kara Kroll and Luzerne County Detective Charles Balogh:

On Dec. 7, Nanticoke police were dispatched to a city home on a report of a 13-year-old girl sending nude images of herself to a 35-year-old man identified as "Micca Lee" through his Facebook account. Officers were told that "Micca Lee" had sent a still image of his genitalia to the girl.

Nanticoke police requested assistance from the Luzerne County Detectives Division, which joined the investigation. Investigators obtained permission to access the girl's online accounts. They reviewed and captured screen shots of a chat conversation between the girl and "Micca Lee" that included pornographic images, and also used photos from the Micca Lee account to identify another Facebook account under the name Micca Heppding, where the same photos appeared.

A records check revealed that Heppding's driver's license photograph matched the profile picture of the Micca Lee Facebook account.

Police interviewed Heppding on Tuesday. He said he knew the girl through her parents and acknowledged that he knew she was younger than 18. He admitted that the Micca Lee Facebook account was his, and that he and the girl exchanged messages and explicit images via a messenger application. He asked the girl to send him nude pictures of her, he said. Heppding told investigators he never forwarded or shared the images the girl sent him, and denied that the images were for sexual purposes. He said he did something stupid and would "pay for (his) wrong," according to the criminal complaint.

As of press time, court records did not indicate when Heppding's preliminary hearing is scheduled.

12/18/2015

Man gets two to six years in prison for role in baby's death

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

If he could do it over, things would be different.

Standing in court to be sentenced for the death of his baby boy, Corey Eckrote apologized to his family and to his son Jaxon, who suffocated Feb. 14, 2014, when he got wedged in the cushion of a recliner after his mother, 42-year-old Tracey Ann Gonda, fell asleep with him in her arms.

Prosecutors blamed Eckrote, 50, of Nanticoke, for leaving 2½-month-old Jaxon with Gonda, whose addiction caused the child to be born addicted to cocaine. Eckrote on Friday said his son didn't deserve what happened as the result of his

own “irresponsible actions.”

“I wish it was me instead of Jaxon,” Eckrote said. “If I could relive this horrible nightmare, I would do everything different.”

Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas sentenced Eckrote, who a jury convicted of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment last month, to two to six years in state prison, saying he wanted Eckrote to rehabilitate himself and deter other parents from engaging in similar conduct.

During Eckrote’s trial, prosecutors placed the blame for the child’s death with him because he knew Gonda was an addict yet nevertheless bought Gonda two 24-ounce containers of malt liquor and left her with Jaxon while he went out for drinks at the Four Hundred Club of Nanticoke.

After he returned, Gonda — who was under court order not to be alone with the child — tried to give him the baby because she was tired, but Eckrote promptly returned the child, saying he had to be up for work in the morning, according to prosecutors. The child’s body was found wedged in the cushions of the recliner the next day. Police searching the home also found a pacifier in the cushions of the chair.

Gonda initially claimed she had placed the child safely into his bassinet, but was forced to come clean after her other son interrupted. The boy told police his baby brother, “was lying face down with his head between the cushion.”

Gonda pleaded guilty in September to endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors in exchange for a count of involuntary manslaughter being dismissed. Lupas sentenced her last month to 15 to 60 months in prison, which she is serving at State Correctional Institution Muncy.

During Eckrote’s hearing Friday, defense attorney Michael Butera noted 14 people had written letters of support for Eckrote, who had about a dozen family members watching in court.

One of them, ex-mother-in-law Regina Kravitz, addressed the court, asking Lupas to consider Eckrote’s remorse and sorrow at the loss of his son. Eckrote, she said, is a good father and law-abiding citizen.

“Everyone is devastated by the loss of Jaxon,” Kravitz said. “Now we’re devastated by the loss of Corey.”

Butera noted that Eckrote as an “absolutely spotless” criminal record and has raised two daughters who are honors students as well as a stepson. Even his ex-wife was in the courtroom and offered nothing but praise in a letter to the court, he said.

And although Eckrote disagreed about the legal consequences for the death of his son, he told the truth and cooperated with police during the investigation, he said.

“Corey showed remorse and accepted responsibility from day one,” Butera said.

Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts, however, noted that 119 people had signed a letter on behalf of Eckrote, who despite having an apparently extensive support network failed to ask any one of those people for help.

“Those 119 people could have watched that child,” Roberts said, seeking a stiff sentence. “Instead he allowed an addict to watch his infant and he provided the addict with alcohol.”

Imposing the sentence, Lupas noted Eckrote’s obvious remorse and his lack of criminal history. But still, what happened was more than a mere lapse in judgment, he said.

“The defendant made a terrible mistake, and while some may characterize it in that fashion, we’re not here because he made a mistake. We’re here because he committed a crime,” Lupas said.

“Unfortunately too many people put their needs and their wishes and their desires to go out and have a good time before the needs of the children they choose to bring into this world.”

The judge issued consecutive sentences of 15 to 48 months in prison for involuntary manslaughter and nine to 24 months for endangering the welfare of a child, giving him credit for 45 days time served and ordering him not to use drugs or alcohol.

After the hearing, Butera said Eckrote got much less than the maximum 17 years he faced in prison but that the case was tough for everybody.

“It was a tragic event. The results are tragic for everyone,” Butera said. “As the judge said, there are no winners in this case.”

Roberts said she was satisfied with the sentence, which she said reflected the seriousness of the crime. She hoped other parents would get the message.

“No matter what, your child needs to be your first priority,” Roberts said. “If you have resources like the defendant had — family support, support from friends — reach out to those resources if you can’t handle everything yourself.”

12/18/2015

Nanticoke woman accused in door-to-door doughnut scam pleads not guilty to criminal trespass, burglary charges

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A Nanticoke woman accused of pocketing cash in a door-to-door doughnut sale scheme pleaded not guilty Thursday to separate charges she broke into a woman's home and stole jewelry and pills to support a spiraling drug addiction. During a video arraignment in Luzerne County Court Thursday before Judge Tina Polachek Gartley, Kendra Marcy Howells, 40, pleaded not guilty to felony counts of burglary and criminal trespassing and misdemeanor counts of theft and receiving stolen property.

A trial is scheduled for March, according to court documents.

Police allege Howells, of Center Street, broke into a couple's Pine Street home in April and stole medication and over \$1,400 in jewelry, which she later pawned to support what she told police was an "out of control" drug addiction, according to a criminal complaint.

Howells in September was arrested on charges of theft and receiving stolen property related to a scheme in which police said she pocketed cash from a resident who had placed an order for doughnuts in August.

Howells was allegedly pretending to sell doughnuts to benefit the Nanticoke Junior Football Association, the complaint says. Police Chief William Shultz said in September residents had continued to come forward claiming they, too, were duped by Howells.

Howells is currently held at the State Correctional Institute at Muncy.

12/16/2015

Police: Serial retail thief hid from cops in own bathroom

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

City police on Sunday arrested a man who they say hid from them in his own bathroom after officers came to his home to investigate a retail theft.

Officers responded to a reported theft at the Rite Aid Pharmacy on East Main Street on Sunday, police said in a news release. A clerk told police that she saw a man apparently place items in his waistband, though when she confronted him he denied it. He then allegedly left the store and drove off in a silver Nissan Pathfinder. The clerk found evidence the man had stolen a drill set and a knife, she said.

A records check revealed the vehicle was registered to Michael Rentko, 31, of Park Street in Nanticoke, who had an active warrant lodged against him, according to police.

Officers went to Rentko's home to speak with him, but he refused to cooperate, tried to slam the front door shut, ran through his house and retreated to a bathroom behind a locked door, police said.

When Rentko refused to leave the bathroom voluntarily, officers kicked in the door, took him into custody and charged him with retail theft graded as a felony because he had five prior convictions for the same offense, police said.

Rentko was arraigned Sunday and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$15,000 bail.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Jan. 13.

12/6/2015

Nanticoke police chief: Armed home invasion an 'isolated incident'

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Police on Sunday continued to investigate a reported armed home invasion on Kosciuszko Street by four masked men, including one wearing a cartoon pig mask.

Nanticoke Police Chief William Shultz said there was nothing new to report.

"I do believe it's an isolated incident," he said.

A woman who lives in the residence in the 300 block of Kosciuszko Street told police the four suspects had their faces covered when they entered through an unlocked back door around 11:20 a.m. Saturday.

Based on information provided by the woman, police gave this account:

One of the suspects held his hand over the woman's mouth as she attempted to yell to her adult son, who was upstairs. The suspect told the woman, "We are not here to hurt you." Also at home at the time were the woman's two grandchildren and another woman.

Three of the suspects remained downstairs while the other one ran upstairs to where her son was. One of the suspects downstairs had a gun but did not point it at anyone. The suspect who went upstairs ran back down after a few seconds and all four fled the house out the back door.

The woman described the suspects as black males wearing black hooded sweat shirts, gloves and dark clothing. Three of the suspects wore ski masks along with the hooded sweatshirt tied around their faces. The other suspect was wearing a pig cartoon mask and a hooded sweatshirt tied around his face.

The woman could not provide police with either the direction the suspects fled or a vehicle description.

Anyone with any information about this crime is asked to call the Nanticoke City Police Department at 570-735-2200 or 911.

12/5/2015

Police search for Nanticoke home invasion suspects

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police are searching for four masked suspects they say broke into a Nanticoke home Saturday morning and terrorized a woman who lives there.

The incident happened at about 11:20 a.m. at a home in the 300 block of Kosciuszko Street, police said in a news release.

According to police:

A woman called 911 to report that four people wearing ski masks and black clothing had just broken into her home through a back door. When police arrived at the home, the woman told officers that she, her two grandchildren and another woman were in the living room of the home when the masked gang burst in through an unlocked back door. She said that after she screamed for her adult son, who was upstairs, one of the suspects put his hand over her mouth and told her "we are not here to hurt you."

Two of the suspects stayed downstairs while one of the group ran upstairs, toward the room where the woman's adult son was sleeping, the woman said. One of the men, who stood at the base of the staircase, had a gun but did not point it at anyone, she said.

The man who ran upstairs only stayed there a few seconds, then quickly ran back down the stairs, after which all four suspects ran out the back door of the home, the woman said.

She described the suspects as black males wearing black hooded sweatshirts, dark clothing and gloves. Three of them wore ski masks, while one wore what the victim called a "pig cartoon mask." All four had sweatshirts tied around their faces, she said.

The suspects fled in an unknown direction after running out of the house, police said. Officers searched the area but did not locate the alleged home invaders, according to police.

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

11/23/2015

Nanticoke police subdue alleged hostage-taker after standoff

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An armed hostage-taker barricaded himself inside a home and engaged police in a tense standoff Saturday before officers stormed the gunman, wrestled him to the ground and zapped him with a stun gun.

Police eventually subdued Daniel Dosette and charged him with a host of crimes, including three felony counts of aggravated assault on a police officer.

"It was intense," Nanticoke police Chief William Shultz said Sunday. "This guy was wild."

Three Nanticoke police officers suffered injuries while disarming the 38-year-old inside 117 Park St., the chief said. As for Dosette, he was jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. Magisterial District Judge Joseph Zola set bail at \$75,000 cash.

Arrest papers detail police being called to a volatile domestic dispute in which Dosette held his girlfriend hostage at gunpoint, threatening to shoot her, for more than a day. The woman, Kenyatta Myrick, managed to call 911 to summon help around 4:30 p.m. Saturday.

According to arrest papers:

Upon arrival, officers Chad Southern and Joseph Buchalski located the woman who managed to escape with the couple's son. She said Dosette was irate because she wanted to move back to New York.

The officers yelled to Dosette, who was in a second-floor room with the window open. They demanded he drop his weapon. He refused.

Southern and Buchalski summoned back up, drawing a response of officers from Newport Township, Hanover

Township, Sugar Notch, along with troopers from the Pennsylvania State Police.

Nanticoke police Capt. Robert Lehman, a trained crisis negotiator, arrived on scene and started to speak with Dosette for nearly an hour. Dosette told him the officers “need to leave.”

Lehman entered the apartment and came to a stairwell that leads to the second floor. He could see Dosette.

Dosette had a semi-automatic gun in one hand, a cell phone in the other. Police could hear him talking on the phone, asking the person to “bring a group of people over to his home with weapons” to help him escape.

The officers then attempted to take Dosette into custody. Dosette had his finger near the gun’s trigger, waving it as officers rushed him, police said.

Dosette fought off the officers until one of them shocked him with a stun gun, enabling police to seize the weapon and put Dosette in handcuffs.

Dosette is charged with three counts of aggravated assault on a police officer, two counts of simple assault, one count of resisting arrest, one count of terroristic threats, and two counts of recklessly endangering another person.

Court records show Dosette was arrested in July in Kingston for dealing drugs and in March for providing false identification to Nanticoke police.

11/23/2015

Woman gets up to five years for child’s death

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Her lawyers touted her charitable work, efforts to sober up and the “mental collapse” Tracey Ann Gonda suffered after she inadvertently suffocated her 2½-month-old son when she fell asleep on a recliner after having a few drinks.

During a brief statement in court Monday morning, Gonda, 42, of Nanticoke, personally apologized to her dead baby, Jaxon Eckrote, and to his surviving brother.

“I’d just like to say I’m so sorry for everything that’s happened,” Gonda said, using a tissue to wipe tears from her eyes. But even considering Gonda’s remorse and lack of a criminal history, Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas said anything less than prison time would be inadequate.

“This defendant put drugs and alcohol ahead of her own children, which led to very serious consequences,” Lupas said. The judge shipped Gonda off to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility to immediately begin serving a 15-60 month sentence. Gonda will also be required to repay more than \$10,000 in costs associated with her prosecution.

Gonda declined to comment as sheriff’s deputies led her from the courthouse in shackles.

Gonda pleaded guilty in September to endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors. Prosecutors withdrew a more serious count of involuntary manslaughter.

Prosecutors say the child suffocated after Gonda fell asleep with him in her arms after having a few beers. The child got wedged in a cushion of a recliner on Feb. 14, 2014.

Investigators said the boy’s father, 50-year-old Corey Eckrote, had been given custody of the baby because Gonda used drugs during her pregnancy, resulting in Jaxon being born addicted to cocaine.

A court order barred Gonda from being left alone with the child and made Eckrote responsible for ensuring that didn’t happen, according to prosecutors.

But the night before the child was found dead, Eckrote bought Gonda two 24-ounce containers of malt liquor. He then left her with the baby so he could go out for drinks at the Four Hundred Club of Nanticoke, prosecutors said. After he returned, Gonda tried to give him the baby because she was tired, but Eckrote promptly returned the child, saying he had to be up for work in the morning, according to prosecutors.

The child’s body was found wedged in the cushions of the recliner the next day. Police searching the home also found a pacifier in the cushions of the chair.

Gonda initially claimed she had placed the child safely into his bassinet, but was forced to come clean after her other son interrupted. The boy told police his baby brother, “was lying face down with his head between the cushion.”

Although Gonda physically caused the death, prosecutors argued Eckrote was responsible as well because he gave alcohol to Gonda, who he knew was an addict, and then left the child alone in her care. Earlier this month, a jury convicted Eckrote on charges of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment. He remains at the county jail awaiting sentencing on Dec. 18.

During Gonda’s hearing Monday morning, defense attorney Philip Gelso sought to shift the blame to Eckrote, who he said had a “different and more significant” role because he created the situation that caused Jaxon’s death. It was Eckrote who gave Gonda the alcohol and left her alone with the baby, he said. Eckrote gave Jaxon back to Gonda, even after she told him she was exhausted, he said.

Gelso also argued there were “significant mitigation” factors in the case, including Gonda’s mental state. She was devastated by the loss of her child and was at one point hospitalized on suicide watch, he said. Gonda has since undergone extensive counselling and has been sober since the spring, Gelso said. As she has worked to put her life back together, Gonda voluntarily testified against Eckrote during his trial, and has been working to put together “Jaxon bags” containing toys for children in need, he said. “Ms. Gonda has shown that she is committed to recovery,” Gelso said, advocating a probationary sentence. Lupas, however, said that while no sentence would bring Jaxon back, he felt he needed to impose a sentence that would hold Gonda accountable and send a message to others, despite Gonda’s good deeds since the death. After the hearing, Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts, who did not advocate for a particular sentence in court, said she thought Lupas sent a strong message. “I believe his sentence will send a message to people that, obviously in a case where there’s drug dependency involved when there’s a child death, we’re going to take it seriously,” Roberts said.

11/16/2015

Nanticoke woman gets prison time, rehab on meth charges

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A Nanticoke woman will spend time in county prison until space is available in a rehabilitation program. Cheryl Lee Kemper, 31, was sentenced Monday in Luzerne County Court to spend three to 23 months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility followed by two years probation on charges related to the manufacture of methamphetamine, according to court papers. She is to be paroled as soon as a bed is available in the county Restrictive Intermediate Punishment program, court papers show. Judge Michael T. Vough credited the woman for 47 days time served. Kemper was arrested in December after police say she called Luzerne County 911 and reported she had taken too much methamphetamine. She allegedly told a 911 dispatcher she had a chemical burn on her arm, could see a blood clot moving in her arm and her 13-year-old son was experiencing shortness of breath. Responding officers entered the woman’s Apollo Circle apartment to find a number of materials, chemicals and bi-products common in the production of methamphetamine. A state police Clandestine Laboratory Response Team removed the materials from the apartment. According to police, Kemper said she allowed her friend to cook meth in her apartment and also purchased some of the materials in exchange for quantities of the finished product. The woman said at least three other people as well as her two children were present while the drugs were being produced, police say. Officers arriving at the scene immediately noticed a chemical odor emanating from the residence and removed both Kemper and her son from the apartment, police say. Both Kemper and her son received medical treatment. Kemper pleaded guilty in September to one count each of possession of red phosphorus — a precursor chemical in the manufacture of methamphetamine — and criminal conspiracy to possess red phosphorus, as well as two felony counts of endangering the welfare of a child. Court papers say Kemper must pay \$40,000 for clean up costs and another \$7,000 to state police.

11/11/2015

Nanticoke man accused of sexually abusing girl

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Borough police have filed multiple felony charges against a Nanticoke man who they say sexually abused a 6-year-old girl on multiple occasions. Luis Ortiz, 21, was arraigned Tuesday before Magisterial District Judge Paul Roberts on two counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child, two counts of indecent assault of a person less than 13 years of age and one count of corruption of a minor, all felonies. He was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$75,000 bail. Edwardsville police gave the following account in a criminal complaint: Luzerne County Children and Youth Services in March received a report of a sexual assault involving a 6-year-old girl. The girl was interviewed by police and Children and Youth caseworkers. She said that Ortiz had abused her sexually

over the course of several years, including at a home in Edwardsville.

She said Ortiz told her not to tell anyone or she “would get into a lot of trouble.” She also said she wanted to tell her mother about the abuse but was afraid she would be placed into foster care.

The girl was interviewed again on Monday by police and a Luzerne County assistant district attorney. Her statements “remained consistent with her earlier recollections of the assaults that had taken place,” according to the criminal complaint.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Nov. 18 before Roberts.

11/11/2015

Driver who crashed into Nanticoke bar charged with DUI, careless driving

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Charges were filed against a Nanticoke man accused of driving drunk and crashing into the side of Tommyboy's Bar and Grill on Oct. 20.

A Nanticoke police officer said he heard a loud noise, which “sounded like an explosion,” while he was responding to a separate call at about 9:20 p.m.

Shortly after, officers were dispatched to 14 N. Market St. for a report of a motor vehicle that crashed into the building at that address.

Police said they discovered Thomas Hill Jr., 56, behind the wheel of a dark-colored Jeep. According to police, Hill smelled of alcohol and his eyes were bloodshot and glassy as he spoke with officers.

Hill told police that he was on his way from Antonio's Pizza on East Main Street, where he drank two beers and had some food. He said that while he was traveling down Market Street, his foot slipped off the brake of his vehicle, which hit a parked car, drove off the road and struck Tommyboy's, according to police.

The driver was transported to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital where he agreed to a blood-alcohol test.

On Nov. 5, police received the results of the blood test, which revealed Hill's blood alcohol content was .265 percent at the time of the crash, court documents show.

Hill faces charges of driving under the influence and careless driving.

11/6/2015

Jury finds Nanticoke man guilty in death of infant son

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Family members gasped and left the courtroom in tears Wednesday afternoon after a jury found a Nanticoke man guilty of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment in the death of his infant son — a more serious conviction than the mother received for physically causing the death.

Corey Eckrote, 50, was charged in the death of his 2½-month-old son Jaxon Eckrote, who got wedged in a recliner cushion and suffocated after the boy's mother, Tracey Gonda, fell asleep with him in her arms after having a few beers on Feb. 14, 2014.

The defense maintained that Gonda alone was to blame for the death, even if it was inadvertent. Prosecutors, however, argued Eckrote bought beer for Gonda, a drug addict, and left his children alone in her care even though she was not allowed by law to have unsupervised contact with them.

Gonda, 42, pleaded guilty in September to endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors and is set to be sentenced later this month.

The jury's verdict, delivered in less than a half hour Wednesday afternoon, sets the stage for Eckrote to face a maximum of 10 years in prison for the manslaughter count alone, Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts said.

“Although he wasn't directly responsible for the actual suffocation of the child, he was the direct cause because he put everything in motion that caused the death of the child,” Roberts said after the verdict.

Eckrote's attorney Michael Butera, who did not present any defense witnesses, said he was disappointed and shocked at the quick verdict because he did not think prosecutors made their case.

“I didn't think a crime was committed by Corey,” Butera said. “I've said from the beginning, if Corey is guilty of anything he's less culpable than her, and now he's been convicted of more serious crimes than her. I don't think that's right. He did not have an option for a plea deal as good as hers.”

Following the verdict, Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas ordered Eckrote immediately remanded to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, citing an increased flight risk and danger due to the conviction. Sentencing is set for Dec.

18.

Eckrote, who listened to the verdict without expression, declined to comment as sheriff's deputies escorted him from the courthouse in shackles.

The brief two-day trial got under way Tuesday and wrapped up with the prosecution's final witness, Nanticoke police detective Capt. Robert Lehman, on Wednesday morning.

He told jurors Eckrote told police he had worked the day before Jaxon was found dead as a maintenance worker at RP Management and bought Gonda two 24-ounce containers of malt liquor before going out for drinks at the Four Hundred Club of Nanticoke.

He came home and went to bed between 10:30 and 11 p.m., but around midnight Gonda confronted him with the baby, saying she needed sleep, Lehman said. She left the child on a pillow, but minutes later Eckrote returned the child to Gonda, saying he had to work in the morning and needed to get some sleep, he said.

The body was found the next day in the recliner. Lehman testified police found a pacifier wedged in the cushions of the chair and a bag of six 24-ounce malt liquor cans on the kitchen floor.

Gonda initially lied, insisting she had placed the child safely into his bassinet, but was forced to come clean after her 4-year-old son told police otherwise.

During closing arguments, Butera told the jury there wasn't much disagreement over the facts of the case, just about what they mean. Prosecutors paraded dramatic evidence, including a picture of four big beers, before the panel in an attempt to "dazzle you with smoke and mirrors," he said.

"They want you to believe Corey Eckrote committed these crimes while he was sleeping," Butera said.

The attorney attacked Gonda's testimony from a day earlier in which she claimed Eckrote had passed off the baby as she sat in the recliner, noting Gonda had repeatedly lied to investigators and only came clean after confronted by the evidence.

Testimony from a Luzerne County Children and Youth caseworker that she told Eckrote not to leave the children alone with Gonda, even while in the bathroom or sleeping, was not credible and amounted to a bureaucrat trying to "cover her own ass," Butera told the jury.

He also questioned why Eckrote was never charged with endangering the other child in his custody, a child caseworkers never sought to take away.

"How do you endanger the welfare of one child in your control and not the other, when you're doing the same thing?" Butera said.

Eckrote, he argued, was not the direct cause of Jaxon's death, nor did he act recklessly to bring it about. Eckrote never imagined that by giving the child to Gonda, who had only a couple beers, that the boy would be placed at a substantial risk of death, he said.

"That's a chain of events that was totally unforeseeable. It was a freak accident," Butera said, noting that such an accident could have happened to anyone and that Gonda was at fault, even if she didn't want the baby to die. "Who is more culpable than her?"

Roberts had an answer for the jury. In the 84 days Jaxon spent on Earth, his father routinely went out to bars, leaving a child in the care of a drug addict, she said.

"Allowing an addict to continue her addiction and then expecting her to care for a newborn infant — this was a foreseeable consequence," Roberts said.

Children and Youth saw the danger when Jaxon was born addicted to cocaine, Roberts said. Gonda was unfit to care for the child and was not legally permitted to be alone with him, she said.

But Eckrote, who had legal custody, nevertheless allowed her to care for the child even though he knew Gonda was an addict who was continuing to use and who had failed to get treatment, she said.

Not only that, but the day before Jaxon was found dead in the recliner, Eckrote bought Gonda two 24-ounce containers of malt liquor before leaving her with the child, she said.

"What is more grossly negligent or reckless than that?" Roberts asked. "He's feeding her addiction."

When Gonda came to him with the baby, she was saying she'd hit her limit, Roberts said. Instead of Eckrote being a good parent, he in turn gave the baby back to her, then walked upstairs and put a basket against the bedroom door so Gonda couldn't get back in, she said.

"This was not a crime committed while the defendant was sleeping," Roberts said. "This was a crime committed while the defendant was fully aware of what he was doing."

11/6/2015

Doughnut scam suspect takes plea deal

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Kendra Marcy Howells, who is accused of pocketing cash while pretending to sell doughnuts for the Nanticoke Junior Football Association, pleaded guilty to some of the charges Wednesday before a district judge. Howells, 39, initially faced 17 counts each of theft by deception and receiving stolen property when she appeared before District Judge Donald Whittaker for a preliminary hearing.

Per a plea agreement, Howells pleaded guilty to the 17 counts of theft by deception, while the 17 counts of receiving stolen property were withdrawn.

“We’re very happy with the outcome of today’s proceedings,” said Howells’ attorney Peter Moses. “We are happy to get her on the right track and start to move forward.”

Howells declined to comment.

Howells will have to pay a \$50 fine for each theft by deception charge — totaling \$850 — plus court fees.

In a separate matter, Howells was arraigned Sept. 30 on charges of theft, burglary, criminal trespassing and receiving stolen property, stemming from an incident in April where police say she broke into a home on Pine Street stole medication and over \$1,400 in jewelry. Howells allegedly told police she broke into the home to support a heroin and Xanax addiction that had spiraled “out of control.”

Moses said that case is currently in the Luzerne County court system. Court records indicate she is awaiting a formal arraignment on those charges, which is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Dec. 10 at the Luzerne County Courthouse.

10/23/2015

Nanticoke police investigate possible arrow assaults

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police are investigating two separate incidents this week involving a potential assault with an arrow.

The first incident took place at about 9 p.m. Tuesday, police said in a news release. Officers responded to a Coal Street home for a reported assault.

The victim told police that a white male, about 19 or 20 years old, came up to him, pointed a bow and arrow in his direction and asked “where the good drugs are at.”

The victim told the man he had no idea what he was talking about, after which the man struck him in the chest with a field arrow, police said. Officers searched the area but could not find the suspect.

At about 8:45 p.m. Wednesday, police responded to an East Grand Street home for a report that an arrow had been launched into a yard, almost striking a woman.

Officers spoke with five people who had been gathered around a campfire in the yard, who told them they noticed a man appear in an alley nearby, then suddenly an arrow landed near the group. The man then fled, possibly toward a nearby cemetery, they said. Officers searched for the man but did not find him. The arrow was most likely thrown by hand rather than launched by a bow, based on the distance it traveled, police said.

Witnesses described the man who possibly threw the arrow as a young man wearing all black clothing and a hood.

Officers took the arrow from the yard to police headquarters. It is described as black, with white and yellow tips.

Anyone who sees anyone or anything suspicious should call 911, police said.

10/23/2015

Nanticoke man faces charges following 2014 robbery

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According to court documents, Douglas Johnson had a specific set of instructions for bank tellers at the Wells Fargo on Wyoming Avenue.

On Oct. 21, 2014, Johnson, 53, allegedly gave the teller a note saying “place all the money on the counter, no dye packs, no trackers, no one gets hurt.”

That’s when the teller laughed, pressed the button for the bank’s silent alarm and caused Johnson to flee empty handed, according to a police affidavit.

On Wednesday, a year to the date of the robbery, Johnson appeared for a preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge Joseph Carmody. Court documents show that one felony charge each of robbery and conspiracy to commit robbery were waived to higher court.

According to the affidavit, Johnson was interviewed by Hazleton police in November in the Luzerne County

Correctional Facility regarding a stolen vehicle investigation. During the interview, Johnson allegedly admitted to attempting to rob the bank in Exeter, as well as stealing a vehicle from a dealership on Mundy Street.

Police said that prior to the robbery, Johnson was riding in a stolen Ford Expedition with Marshall Dyer III, 47, of Edwardsville, when Dyer got a call from a friend “who needed some make some money”.

Police said Johnson and Dyer initially drove to a credit union, but found it was closed. That’s when the pair decided to attempt to rob the Wells Fargo branch.

Johnson is facing a slew of other charges at the magistrate district court level and in county court:

- Oct. 21, 2014: On the same day of the alleged bank robbery, Johnson allegedly conspired with Dyer and Cale Lohmann, 34, of Plains Township, to rob Plains Meat Market on Hudson Street. Dyer is facing criminal conspiracy charges in county court.
- Oct. 24, 2014: Johnson is charged by Wyoming police with stealing a Ford Escape from City Auto, a used car lot on Wyoming Avenue. Johnson took the Ford for a test drive and failed to return the vehicle.
- Oct. 25, 2014: Ashley police charged Johnson with stealing a purse from an elderly woman in the 100 block of North Main Street, and fled the scene in the stolen Ford Escape.
- Nov. 7, 2014: Hanover Township police attempted to stop Johnson driving a Dodge Nitro. Johnson initiated a pursuit into Wilkes-Barre crashing into a Hyundai Elantra and a Toyota Corolla at River and Market streets. Two people in the Hyundai and Toyota were injured in the crash.

Johnson is being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility pending another hearing at 10 a.m. Jan. 15.

10/22/2015

Nanticoke man faces robbery charges after 2014 bank incident

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An alleged serial robber who demanded money from a Wells Fargo Bank teller in October 2014 was arraigned Wednesday on charges of robbery and criminal conspiracy to commit robbery.

Douglas Johnson, 53, of Nanticoke was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$25,000 bail.

His charges stemmed from an incident on Oct. 21, 2014, at the bank’s Wyoming Avenue branch.

A teller told officers that a male with an olive-colored jacket, sunglasses, a baseball cap and facial hair pulled out a piece of paper and slid it to her across the counter, according to an affidavit.

The paper allegedly read, “Place all the money on the counter, no dye packs, no trackers, no one gets hurt,” court documents show. Police said the teller told the man no and he fled on foot through the front door.

Johnson was interviewed in November by the Hazleton police department regarding a vehicle theft and allegedly admitted to the Exeter bank robbery, according to police.

In an affidavit, police said Johnson admitted to stealing a Ford Expedition from a dealership on Mundy Street near Jiffy Lube. He drove the stolen car for several days with Marshall Dyer, 48, of Edwardsville, police said.

A friend of Dyer, later identified as Cale Lohmann, 32, of Orange, allegedly called and said he needed to “make some money” and knew about a small credit union in Exeter. The three men arrived at the credit union in two cars, but a sign was posted on the door that said the business was closed due to an emergency.

Police said the three decided to rob the Wells Fargo Bank just up the street, which is when Johnson allegedly wrote the note he later handed to the teller.

According to a criminal complaint, Johnson fled the bank without any money, drove away in the stolen vehicle and parked it on a side street not too far from the bank. Dyer picked him up in another car and they left the area.

Lohmann and Dyer are co-defendants in the case and face charges of criminal conspiracy.

Johnson has several robbery charges against him in Luzerne County and had also been charged with running a vehicle chop shop and arson, court documents show.

Ashley police had issued an arrest warrant for Johnson following a daylight robbery on Oct. 25, 2014, in which he allegedly drove the getaway vehicle for another man who assaulted an elderly woman and stole her purse as she was getting into her car, police said.

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

In another set of arrest papers, police said Douglas was involved in an attempted armed robbery at the Plains Meat Market in Plains Township on Oct. 21, 2014.

Plains Township police responded to an attempted robbery call at the meat market at 4:50 p.m. The owner told police

that two men attempted to rob the store; one of the men held a box cutter against the store owner's side and demanded he open the cash register, police said.

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

Police arrested the other suspect, identified as Dyer. He told police Douglas was the robber and that he had met him that day, according to the affidavit.

Johnson currently has nine active cases in the Court of Common Pleas in Luzerne County. Many of the charges against him involve robbery, theft, receiving stolen property and criminal conspiracy.

A formal arraignment for the charges relating to the bank robbery is set for Jan. 15 in the Luzerne County Courthouse.

10/17/2015

Hanover Twp. man arrested on stalking charges

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A Hanover Township man was arrested on stalking charges Friday for showing up to his estranged wife's home twice in one hour to beat up a male friend of hers, police said.

Daniel Kratz Jr., 29, of 626 Wilkes-Barre St., went to the home of his soon-to-be divorced wife Felicia Kratz in Nanticoke late Sept. 25, and when she answered the door, he forced his way into the residence, police said.

According to arrest papers filed by Nanticoke police, Daniel Kratz got mad when he saw her friend's pack of cigarettes lying on the kitchen table. Police said he ran upstairs and stole his wife's cellphone and saw her friend Eddie Montoya, sparking a fight that spilled outside.

He punched Montoya several times in the face, police said, then went on to steal Montoya's cellphone as well.

Police said they spoke to Daniel Kratz over the phone shortly after the fight, and Kratz told them he was not in the area at that moment, but would return the stolen cellphones.

An hour after police had been dispatched to the first fight, Kratz showed up again and started another one with Montoya outside the residence, punching him several times in the face before fleeing.

Kratz was charged with stalking, theft, loitering and related offenses. He was released on \$25,000 unsecured bail set by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. His preliminary hearing is slated for 1:15 p.m. Oct. 28 before Whittaker.

10/15/2015

Teen who stole ambulance moves for transfer of charges to juvenile court

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A girl accused of hitting a man with a brick before stealing and crashing an ambulance wants to be tried in juvenile court.

Defense papers filed Thursday in Luzerne County Court say mental healthcare providers have diagnosed 17-year-old Destiny McNeil with serious mental health issues and determined she should not be held criminally liable for her actions.

The documents also say McNeil could receive necessary treatment and assistance available to her within the juvenile system and not the adult system.

McNeil's attorneys Cheryl A. Sobeski-Reedy and John Donovan allege further in the filings the girl has reported being "harrassed, taunted, made fun of and belittled" by correctional officers at Luzerne County Correctional Facility where she is currently lodged.

A motion requests a hearing for decertification of the charges against McNeil, their transfer to juvenile court and for a further reduction of bail. McNeil's bail currently is set at \$25,000 after Judge Richard Hughes on Wednesday reduced the amount from \$150,000, court records indicate.

McNeil, of Nanticoke, faces a long list of charges, including felony aggravated assault, theft and reckless endangerment. McNeil was charged as an adult because of the allegations of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Prosecutors say McNeil on Sept. 4 struck a man with a brick on East State Street, Nanticoke, before fleeing in an ambulance parked about a block away. The girl allegedly led police on a pursuit and eventually crashed the emergency vehicle, causing damage along the way.

10/10/2015

Nanticoke man admits to arson, says he was abused in home he torched

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man has been charged with arson in connection with a fire at an abandoned home in the city last month. Jeffrey Vitz confessed to the crime, but said he burned down the house because he had once been abused there, according to police.

Vitz, 49, is charged with felony counts of arson, reckless burning and criminal mischief. He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker on Friday.

Vitz lives on East State Street, the same street where the vacant home burned in the early morning hours of Sept. 12, police said, in a criminal complaint.

According to the complaint, filed by Nanticoke police:

Officers were dispatched to assist the Nanticoke Fire Department at a residential structure fire at 235 East State St. at about 2:55 a.m. on Sept. 12.

Firefighters told police that the fire, at a vacant and boarded-up home, appeared suspicious. Officers observed Vitz sitting on a porch of a vacant house in the rear of the structure that caught fire. When officers asked Vitz what he was doing at the scene, he did not respond. He said he was going home and left the scene on foot.

Police found that a neighbor of the home that burned had a security system with surveillance cameras. They viewed footage that showed a man who appeared to be Vitz walking next to the vacant house when it burst into flames.

A state police fire marshal determined the fire to be an arson.

Firefighters told police that they saw Vitz watching the fire as they fought to extinguish it.

Police went to Vitz's home and questioned him. Officers observed a Mason jar of clear liquid sitting on a porch. Vitz denied starting the fire.

Police returned to Vitz's home with a search warrant and interviewed him again. He said he was unemployed, severely depressed and suffering from sleep problems. He also said he consumed alcohol along with medication.

Vitz eventually told police that the Mason jar they saw contained "moonshine." He said he was walking along East State Street, carrying the jar of moonshine and smoking a cigarette, when he had a flashback to sexual and physical abuse he had suffered as a child at 235 E. State St., by a former resident of the home.

He told police that he threw the jar of moonshine at the side of the home, then dropped a lighted cigarette on the liquid to start the fire.

Vitz is free on \$50,000 unsecured bail, pending a preliminary hearing on Oct. 21 before Whittaker.

10/7/2015

Jury finds former Nanticoke bar, owner negligent in brutal slashing

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

For negligence in failing to prevent a vicious New Year's Day slashing that severely wounded a Nanticoke woman, a Luzerne County jury on Tuesday found the now-defunct Prospect Street Cafe and its owner should pay more than \$650,000.

After a little under two hours of deliberations, the jury found the notorious Nanticoke bar 80 percent responsible for the box-cutter slashing that mangled the face of 34-year-old Nanticoke resident Jennifer Mieczkowski in 2012. Owner Paul Halliday, who lost his lawyer Friday and did not even appear in court during the one-day trial, was found 20 percent responsible for the \$658,400 verdict.

Afterward, Mieczkowski said she hoped to find closure.

"I just need to put it behind me," Mieczkowski said. "It's still really hard. I wake up every day; it's still there."

Halliday lost the bar in March 2013, when it was sold at a sheriff's sale because of overdue mortgage payments, taxes and other bills.

Because the business no longer exists, there will be little hope for collecting the 80 percent portion of the verdict, said Mieczkowski's attorney, David J. Selingo. But Halliday will be on the hook for the 20 percent — \$131,680 — and the plaintiffs intended to file a motion seeking interest on that amount, he said.

"We're just happy that the jury found that there was a significant injury that Jen suffered, both physically and emotionally, and that it is (up to) a person who holds their place open to the public for monetary value to make sure that the place is safe," Selingo said. "This guy was given a lot of opportunities to make sure that his place was safe for others to come into, and he never took the opportunity to do that. It was only a matter of time before something like this happened."

The one-day trial before Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb began and ended Tuesday in the absence of any defense.

Halliday's defense attorney Michael D. Yelen withdrew from the case Friday, and Halliday, who had been subpoenaed to appear, nevertheless "chose not to show up," Selingo said.

Selingo presented his case to jurors uncontested, at one point reading prior deposition testimony from Halliday admitting he hired a bouncer without conducting a background check and that he never sought outside advice or training for security at the troubled bar.

Mieczkowski, 34, testified she had stopped at the bar the night of the attack to pick up some beer but stayed for a drink after running into a friend. At one point, a fight broke out and Mieczkowski found herself being charged by Melanie Figueroa, of Nanticoke, who at the time was 20 years old.

They fell to the ground as blows were exchanged, and Mieczkowski said she didn't even realize at first she was being cut with a box cutter. Covered in blood, Mieczkowski was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township to be treated for severe cuts to her face, head and shoulder — injuries that impaired her vision and left her with post-traumatic stress disorder, she said.

As a result of the attack, she lost her hair salon and her quality of life, she said.

"How do you make someone feel beautiful daily when you can't even look at yourself?" Mieczkowski told the jury. "I began to have nightmares. I was having a hard time sleeping in general. I was afraid to go to the grocery store."

Figueroa was later charged for her role in the fight, but not with committing the slashing. She pleaded guilty to simple assault and underage drinking and got six months of house arrest.

John Ruane, founder and director of Century Security Services in Wilkes-Barre, testified that an experienced bouncer would have stopped an underage person from entering a bar in the first place, and also would have known how to respond to an assault — how to get help while preserving the crime scene and detaining the suspect — to ensure a successful prosecution. As it was, everyone fled the bar and the police investigation "had to start from ground zero," he said.

Halliday, he said, was negligent for failing to ensure the bouncer was properly trained, wearing observable clothing and had access to a banned patrons list, as he had agreed to do for the state Liquor Control Board.

Before it was shut down, the bar had been the target of a number of liquor board citations and other incidents.

Halliday, 40, of 237 W. Ridge St., Nanticoke, also had a series of run-ins with the law after the slashing, with allegations ranging from fleeing police, assaulting his girlfriend, manufacturing drugs and possessing crack-cocaine.

10/6/2015

Nanticoke man accused of manufacturing meth

Charlotte L. Jacobon - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was arraigned Monday on charges alleging he manufactured and trafficked methamphetamine in the city, police said.

Maurice Johnson Jr., 35, is charged with possession with intent to manufacture or deliver, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Police discovered that Johnson, along with Travis Avery, were manufacturing meth through a confidential informant, who told officers in October 2014 that Avery purchased supplies to produce the drug.

On Oct. 24, 2014 the confidential informant was given \$150 in cash by police and instructed to purchase two grams worth of meth from Johnson, according to an affidavit.

Court documents show that the informant returned to police with a plastic bag sealed with a twist tie containing a white granular substance, that was said to have been purchased directly from Johnson.

Police said the bagged substance field tested positive for methamphetamine.

Johnson was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail. No charges have been filed against Avery at this time.

10/6/2015

Trial over bar slashing postponed after plaintiff misses court

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

First it was off, then it was back on.

The trial over a notorious New Year's Day box-cutter slashing in Nanticoke began Monday with a no-show by plaintiff Jennifer Mieczkowski, prompting Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb to dismiss the civil lawsuit alleging the now-defunct Prospect Street Cafe and its owner Paul Halliday were negligent in the gruesome slashing that severely injured

the 34-year-old Nanticoke resident in 2012.

Mieczkowski's Kingston-based attorney, David J. Selingo, said he was at a loss to explain the absence of his client, who previously testified against Halliday before the state Liquor Control Board and against a woman charged with assault in her case.

Later in the day, Selingo filed papers saying Mieczkowski had missed the trial's start because of a prescription drug she is taking, Mirapex.

"Side-effects of Mirapex include drowsiness and falling asleep without warning," Selingo wrote. "Conversely, another is the inability to sleep. On October 5, 2015, (Mieczkowski) suffered all of these side-effects when she suddenly fell asleep in the early morning hours, after having not been able to sleep all night."

A subsequent order by Gelb reopened the case, allowing jury selection to begin this morning.

The trial is expected to be short — Halliday's defense attorney Michael D. Yelen withdrew from the case Friday. Court records show Halliday consented to the departure and did not seek a delay in the trial despite the lack of counsel.

In her lawsuit, Mieczkowski alleges Halliday and the bar were negligent in maintaining the operation. The bar failed to properly train a bouncer and other employees in security techniques, the bouncer was dressed in plain clothes and was not easily identifiable and the bouncer didn't have access to a blacklist of problem patrons, she argued.

At the time the suit was filed, Halliday maintained his employees did everything they could to help Mieczkowski and suggested video surveillance from the bar showed she wasn't as innocent in the fight as she let on.

Halliday also said his bar was complying with an agreement with the LCB mandating that the bar train employees, have a security guard on site on Friday and Saturday between 10 p.m. and 30 minutes after closing and maintain a barred-patrons list.

In her lawsuit, Mieczkowski claims 24-year-old Nanticoke resident Melanie Figueroa and an unidentified man severely cut her that day. Police later charged Figueroa in the case, but not with committing the slashing.

Figueroa pleaded guilty to simple assault for her role in the fight and underage drinking and was sentenced in September 2014 to six months house arrest and two years probation.

Shortly after the slashing, Halliday found his establishment under intense scrutiny. A little over a month after the slashing, the state police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement hit the bar with six citations for violations over the previous year, including several related to the slashing.

Halliday, 40, of 237 W. Ridge St., Nanticoke, soon found himself facing criminal charges in five separate cases, with accusations including that he fled police, assaulted his girlfriend, manufactured drugs and possessed crack-cocaine.

Halliday was accused of nearly hitting a police car in March 2013 and then leading officers on a 1½-mile high-speed chase that included him hitting another car — which then struck a third vehicle — and two telephone poles before he jumped from his vehicle and hid in the woods.

In another incident, Halliday was accused of beating his girlfriend in a drunken rage and then nailing his office door shut as he threatened to shoot police. The assault charges in that case were dismissed because his girlfriend declined to testify.

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

Court records show Halliday pleaded guilty in the cases and was sentenced to 90 days in jail, a year in the Intermediate Punishment Program and three years of probation.

Halliday lost his bar in March 2013, when it was sold at a sheriff's sale because of overdue mortgage payments, taxes and other bills.



10/4/2015

Nanticoke police investigating armed robbery at Turkey Hill

Times Leader

A man armed with a knife robbed the Turkey Hill store on West Main Street early Saturday and left with cash and menthol cigarettes, city police said.

The robbery occurred at approximately 2:55 a.m., when a man approached a female clerk behind the counter and demanded money from the cash register, police said.

According to police: the suspect held a knife to the side of the clerk and threatened to kill her. After he received the money from her, he took a considerable amount of Rave menthol cigarettes before fleeing the store. He is believed to have entered a dark colored car parked across the street.

Police obtained surveillance footage of the suspect and described him as white, shorter in stature and in his 40s with dark, thinning hair. He was wearing a blue hooded sweatshirt with dark blue and white stripes on the sleeves and a logo on front.

Anyone having information about the suspect is asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police Department at 570-735-2200, ext. 206, or through Luzerne County 911.

10/1/2015

Nanticoke woman behind alleged doughnut scheme charged with theft, burglary

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Kendra Howells, alleged to have pocketed cash in a bogus doughnut-selling scheme, was charged separately Wednesday with breaking into a neighbor's home and stealing jewelry that she later pawned to support an "out-of-control" drug addiction.

Howells, 39, of 126 Center St., was arraigned Wednesday in Nanticoke by District Judge Donald Whittaker on charges of theft, burglary, criminal trespassing and receiving stolen property after police said she broke into a home on Pine Street in April and stole medication and over \$1,400 in jewelry.

After the victims reported the jewelry missing, police discovered the items, which included a 14-karat gold ring, three silver necklaces and two pairs of gold hoop earrings, were pawned by Howells for \$90. Howells told police she broke into the home to support a heroin and Xanax addiction that had spiraled "out of control."

Howells last week was arrested on charges of theft and receiving stolen property related to keeping cash from a resident in the Hanover Section of Nanticoke who had placed an order for doughnuts on Aug. 28.

Howells claimed the proceeds went toward the Nanticoke Junior Football Association, but Police Chief William Schultz alleged she was keeping the cash for herself. As recently as this week, people have come forward claiming Howells duped them into donating cash, Schultz said.

Howells, he said, knew how to take advantage of people's generosity.

"She was very brazen," Shultz said. "She knows what she's doing. I believe that she's got some issues."

According to the criminal complaint, Nanticoke Police Capt. Robert Lehman was investigating a burglary that occurred at 127 Pine St. between April 14-16. Cathy Wright and Rich Neyhard reported several items were missing, including a

gold diamond ring valued at over \$800 and Neyhard's Hydrocodone prescription.

Wright told investigators she saw Howells looking into the home through a rear window one morning a week or two prior. Startled, she asked Howells what she was doing outside the home, to which Howells told her: "You know me, I'm Kendra. I live behind you."

Howells, who lived across an alley from the home, claimed she needed an antibiotic for her daughter. Wright said she couldn't help her and asked her to leave.

Lehman conducted a search of the NEPA precious metal database and discovered Howells had sold six items of jewelry at King Tut's Gold Repair Hut in Wilkes-Barre on April 15. Howells received \$90 for the goods and signed an acknowledgement of ownership.

During an interview following her arrest on Sept. 24 on unrelated, outstanding warrants, Howells admitted to investigators she broke into the home when no one was there and stole the jewelry from a jewelry box and the medication from a shelf in a bedroom. She claimed she was heavily dependent on heroin and Xanax during the time of the burglary.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Oct. 7.

Also on Wednesday, Howells waived her right to a preliminary hearing on another set of theft charges. She will face those in county court.

Howells was remanded to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility following the proceedings.

9/26/2015

Alleged scam artist faces theft charges

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police have charged a city woman who they say stole a neighbor's gold ring while pretending to raise money for a youth football league.

Kendra Howells, 39, of Center Street, Nanticoke, was arraigned Friday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker on charges of theft by unlawful taking and receiving stolen property, both first-degree misdemeanors. She was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$75,000 bail.

According to a criminal complaint filed by Nanticoke police:

Police responded to a Bliss Street home on Aug. 29 for a reported theft. The resident, a 77-year-old woman, said that Howells, who lives nearby, came to her home and said she was selling doughnuts to raise money for the Nanticoke football program. Howells told the woman that she had gone to grade school with her daughter.

Once inside, Howells asked to use the bathroom and was upstairs alone for about 10 minutes. After Howells left the home, the resident discovered that her 10-karat gold claddagh ring, valued at \$400, was missing.

Police contacted Howells, who agreed to meet for an interview but did not appear at the scheduled time.

A records check revealed that Howells sold a gold ring at King Tut's Gold Repair Hut, in Wilkes-Barre, for \$27 on Aug. 29, hours after the ring was stolen in Nanticoke. She signed a form stating she was the legal owner of the ring and had the right to sell it.

Howells was taken into custody in the parking lot of CVS Pharmacy on East Main Street in Nanticoke on Thursday night. She was taken to police headquarters, where she cooperated with detectives who are investigating "various crimes in Nanticoke," police said, in a news release.

Before she was taken to jail, Howells was treated and released from Wilkes-Barre General Hospital due to a hand injury she suffered when she spent the night in the woods, according to police.

Additional charges will be filed against Howells in connection with "the doughnut, candle and candy scam," police said. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Wednesday before Whittaker.

9/25/2015

Nanticoke woman accused of pocketing cash while selling doughnuts captured

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A woman sought after by city police on allegations she pocketed cash while pretending to sell doughnuts for the Nanticoke Junior Football Association was arrested Thursday night.

Officer Kara Krull took Kendra Marcy Howells, 39, of Center Street, Nanticoke, into custody when she was located in the CVS Pharmacy parking lot on East Main Street at about 8:10 p.m.

Police said Howells injured her hand when she spent the night in the woods. She was treated and released from

Commonwealth Health Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

Howells was arraigned Friday by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke on charges of theft and receiving stolen property related to keeping cash from a resident in the Hanover Section of Nanticoke who had placed an order for doughnuts on Aug. 28, according to the criminal complaint.

Howells was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$75,000 bail, and on a probation violation from a retail theft conviction in 2013.

Police said Howells, after she was arrested, allegedly cooperated with city detectives with regards to the sale of doughnuts, candles and candy on behalf of the youth football association in Nanticoke.

Police Chief William Shultz said earlier this week numerous residents reported their suspicions to both the Greater Nanticoke School District and police when Howells approached them, asking them to place orders for the sweet treats she said would benefit the sports program.

Shultz noted when residents attempted to give Howells a check when placing orders, she allegedly claimed the district didn't accept checks.

Police said the investigation into the fundraising scam is continuing and additional charges may be filed against Howells.

9/25/2015

Woman faces charges after domestic dispute

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Police arrested a 41-year-old woman Tuesday evening who allegedly struck her husband in the head with a folding tray table during an argument.

Officers responded to the scene at about 11:20 p.m., where the victim, Michael Madara, told police he and his wife, Holly Madara, were both drinking and began to argue, according to police. During the argument, Holly Madara allegedly picked up the tray table and hit her husband with it, causing a deep laceration above his right eye. He claimed to have blurry vision and paramedics also noted a swollen red mark on the back of his head.

Michael Madara advised officers that Holly's two children, ages four and five, were inside the home with her, along with his "vicious" pit bull. Authorities removed the children from the home and made several attempts to contact Holly Madara. They discovered she was in the basement with the pit bull.

She was eventually taken into custody and charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, recklessly endangering another person, obstructing administration of law, harassment, disorderly conduct and endangering the welfare of children.

Officers contacted Luzerne County Children and Youth and the children were taken by a family member.

Holly Madara was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$5,000 bail awaiting a preliminary hearing set for Sept. 30.

9/21/2015

Nanticoke man faces assault and escape charges

Times Leader

Police said assault, escape and other charges were filed against John Chernowsky Jr., 30, of Nanticoke after he fought with his wife at their South Prospect Street residence on Wednesday.

Chernowsky was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker and committed to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

According to police: Chernowsky came home around 2 a.m. and woke up his wife. She found his wallet and identification cards on the bathroom floor, along with a white substance in a plastic bag she believed was an illegal drug. When she confronted him about where he had been all night, he became frantic, pushing her into the edge of the sink. He asked for the car keys and bent her left thumb, causing her to drop the keys. She told him that if he touched her again, she would call police and he responded he would kill her if she did. When she attempted to call 911, he pushed her in the hallway and ran out the front door, leaving in a car.

Police located the car at the intersection of East Green and South Walnut streets and took Chernowsky into custody without incident. He was charged with simple assault, harassment and terroristic threats.

As he was led from for his arraignment around noon, Chernowsky pulled away from officer Joseph Buchalski's grasp and led police on a brief chase. Buchalski apprehended Chernowsky who resisted and charged after the officer. While in

the holding cell, Chernowsky continued to act disorderly. Additional charges of escape, disorderly conduct and aggravated assault were filed against Chernowsky. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1:15 p.m. on Oct. 7 before Whittaker.

9/19/2015

Nanticoke woman pleads guilty to lesser charges in infant son's death

dallabaugh - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke mother charged in the death of her infant son reached a plea deal with prosecutors on Friday. The most serious charge against Tracey Ann Gonda was withdrawn in exchange for guilty pleas to charges of endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors.

Gonda, 41, had faced a felony count of involuntary manslaughter.

Gonda and the baby's father Corey Eckrote, 50, were both arrested in connection with the suffocation death of their 2½-month-old son, Jaxon Eckrote. Corey Eckrote is still awaiting trial. Both remain free on bail.

Luzerne County Judge David Lupas set Gonda's sentencing for Nov. 23 at 10:30 a.m. Gonda was ordered to pay \$7,533 to the state police crime lab, and \$2,250 to the Luzerne County coroner's office for the autopsy.

Authorities said the baby got wedged in a cushion of a recliner and suffocated after Gonda drank a couple beers and fell asleep with him in her arms on Feb. 14, 2014.

Investigators said Eckrote had been given custody of the baby after it was determined Gonda used "dangerous" drugs during her pregnancy. A court order barred Gonda from being left alone with the child and made Eckrote responsible for not leaving Gonda alone with him, arrest papers said.

But the night before the child was found dead, Eckrote gave her the child, saying he had to be up for work in the morning, police said.

Gonda's mother told investigators that Luzerne County Children and Youth had become "lax" with making sure Gonda was not left alone with the child and another son.

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

But her other son, a 4-year-old, told police otherwise. While police were questioning Gonda, the 4-year-old interrupted, saying his baby brother "was lying face down with his head between the cushion." Gonda tried to discredit what the boy had said, but eventually came clean.

Gonda's defense attorney Philip Gelso said he felt it was "inappropriate" to comment, but said he would make a presentation at the sentencing.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said she didn't want to comment prior to sentencing and because of a pending case against Eckrote.

9/18/2015

Police: Nanticoke man attacked cop following arraignment

Eric Mark Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man assaulted a police officer Wednesday following his arraignment on charges related to a domestic dispute, according to police.

John Chernowsky, 30, was arraigned on misdemeanor charges of simple assault and terroristic threats before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker at noon on Wednesday, according to Nanticoke police. The charges stem from a domestic dispute during which Chernowsky allegedly assaulted a woman and threatened to kill her if she called police.

As police led Chernowsky from his arraignment to the police station downstairs, Chernowsky broke free of an officer's grasp and resisted when the officer tried to restrain him following a brief chase, police said. Chernowsky charged at the officer before he was restrained and taken into custody, then continued to act aggressively after being placed in a holding cell, according to police.

Chernowsky, who faced only misdemeanor charges at his first arraignment of the day, was brought back to Whittaker's officer to be arraigned on felony counts of aggravated assault and escape, and a misdemeanor count of disorderly conduct.

He was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 bail.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Sept. 30.

9/11/2015

Nanticoke man facing child sex assault charges

elewis@timesleader.com

Two sisters testified Friday that Victor Oscar Reyes took their cell phone and promised to buy them a computer if they allowed him to perform a lewd sexual act on them.

They couldn't remember the exact dates when Reyes, 35, allegedly molested them inside houses in Nanticoke and Warrior Run from December 2013 to December 2014.

One sister testified she was molested during the school year and summer while the other sister claimed she was molested only during the summer.

They also testified they were afraid to tell anyone until they moved to New Jersey earlier this year.

After the girls testified at Reyes' preliminary hearing, District Judge Donald Whittaker determined Assistant District Attorney Cara Solimine established a case against him, sending four counts of indecent assault and two counts of corruption of minors to Luzerne County Court.

Reyes, of Nanticoke, remains free on \$25,000 unsecured bail.

The sisters alleged they were molested when they were both 13 years old.

In an attempt to have the case dismissed, Reyes' attorney, Charles Ross, said there was no evidence his client molested the girls and the girls could not recall the exact dates or how many times they were assaulted.

One girl testified Reyes took her cell phone away from her, and he would only give it back if she allowed him to perform a sexual act. The other girl testified Reyes promised to buy a computer if he could perform a lewd act on her.

9/9/2015

Series of break-ins, thefts reported in Nanticoke

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating several break-ins and thefts that occurred in the city over the past four days.

Police reported at least seven cars were broken into between Saturday and Sunday on New Pine, Lee Mine and West South streets and in the 1200 block of Maple Street.

A bicycle was stolen from a yard in the 10 block of West Noble Street on Monday. A garage in the 300 block of West Union Street was broken into Tuesday.

Officers advised residents to lock their vehicles and take all of their valuables into their homes.

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

9/6/2015

Alleged ambulance thief charged as adult

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

In a criminal complaint for Destiny McNeil, police described a sudden attack and a hasty getaway in an ambulance that ended after an officer stopped the vehicle on a hill miles from the start of a chase.

Police charged 17-year-old McNeil of Nanticoke as an adult. She was lodged in Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$150,000 bail with an option to post 10 percent.

According to a criminal complaint:

McNeil attacked a man around 3:40 p.m. Friday on the 100 block of East State Street in Nanticoke. The man was working in a garage when he was hit hard in the back of the head. He fell to the ground, and saw a woman standing near him. She threw a brick and ran from the garage. At the next block, she entered a Trans-Med ambulance while its attendants were away and drove out of Nanticoke.

Luzerne County 911 put out an alert for a stolen ambulance.

Police said McNeil drove onto Route 29 then Interstate 81 North, where she hit a vehicle before leaving the interstate onto Route 309 North. A Wilkes-Barre Township police officer tried to pull over the ambulance, but the driver sped onto East Northampton Street, heading up the steep hill toward Laurel Run.

The ambulance swerved from lane to lane as it went up the hill until an officer spun it off the road with his patrol car. Police said they identified the driver as McNeil, who provided a question while she was interviewed with her mother present.

Police charged McNeil with several felonies, including two counts of aggravated assault, theft, receiving stolen

property, criminal trespass and fleeing police. She was also charged with assault, reckless endangerment and several summary offenses.

McNeil will appear before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker for a hearing at 1:15 p.m. Wednesday.

9/5/2015

Stolen ambulance chase ends in crash

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A wild police chase that started when a young woman stole an ambulance in Nanticoke ended with the ambulance crashed in the foothills of Giants Despair in Laurel Run and the woman in custody on Friday afternoon.

"In 19 years, I have never had to stop an ambulance that was stolen," said Wilkes-Barre Township police Officer Robert Capparell as he compared notes with other officers and emergency responders at the scene, off East Northampton Street near the entrance to Laurel Run Estates.

Capparell said he utilized a "precision interception technique" to disable the Trans-Med ambulance and end the chase, after the woman struck his cruiser as she tried to flee from pursuing officers shortly before 4 p.m.

The woman was not injured, according to Capparell. She was taken into custody and transported to Wilkes-Barre Township police headquarters, he said. There were no patients and no one else in the ambulance apart from the suspect, he added.

The suspect appeared to be young, Capparell said.

Minor damage was evident on the right front side of Capparell's cruiser, parked on the side of the east travel lane of East Northampton Street. The disabled ambulance, which appeared to be badly damaged, sat just off the west travel lane, facing downhill.

Chuck Revitt, who lives off East Northampton Street near the site where the chase ended, said he saw "a parade of police heading east up the mountain" and went outside to see what happened.

"It was crazy," he said. "I thought there was some kind of disaster going on."

The incident started when the woman stole the ambulance in Nanticoke, then drove onto Route 29 to Interstate 81 North, where she struck a vehicle before exiting the interstate onto Route 309 North, according to Capparell.

The pursuit picked up when a Wilkes-Barre Township officer tried to pull over the ambulance on Route 309 near Watson Street, Capparell said. The driver refused to stop and sped off, turning right onto East Northampton Street and heading uphill toward Laurel Run and Giants Despair, with multiple police units chasing her.

The driver kept trying to elude officers as she drove east and approached the steep, curvy hill, Capparell said. However, after the ambulance spun out and came to a stop, the woman put up her hands and surrendered "once she realized (she) wasn't going anywhere," he said.

The ambulance was parked on East State Street in Nanticoke when it was stolen, said David Prohaska, director of community relations for Trans-Med Ambulance Inc., based in Luzerne. Its crew was on a non-emergency call assisting another crew with a patient when the woman drove off in the ambulance, which had been left unattended, Prohaska said. Trans-Med officials are conducting an internal investigation to determine if the company's protocols for unattended vehicles were violated, he said.

"We're grateful that no one was injured in the unfortunate incident that occurred today," Prohaska said. "We are reviewing incident reports from our staff to determine if policies were followed regarding unattended vehicles." There was no one in the ambulance when it was taken, Prohaska said, adding that the ambulance suffered serious damage in the accident that ended the police chase.

"It's unfortunate that even emergency vehicles are susceptible to this," he said. Trans-Med has never had a service vehicle stolen before, but another ambulance company had a vehicle stolen while on a call in Edwardsville a few years ago, he added.

Prohaska deferred further comment on the Nanticoke portion of the incident to that city's police department.

An operator who answered the phone at the Nanticoke police station Friday night said detectives were still investigating and were unavailable for comment.

State police are investigating the accident the woman driving the stolen ambulance apparently caused on Interstate 81, Capparell said.

Authorities had not officially released the suspect's name as of press time and there was no court record indicating she had been arraigned.

9/2/2015

Accused child molester's allegations ruled inadmissible

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

An accused child molester will not be allowed to tell jurors about what he termed "sexual activity" between his 5-year-old victim and her brother, a Luzerne County judge ruled this week.

William Charles Wunner, 29, of Nanticoke, is accused of sexually assaulting the girl multiple times between April and May 2014 at a Wilkes-Barre home. He faces charges including rape of a child, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child, aggravated indecent assault of a child and endangering the welfare of a child.

In a motion filed in June, Wunner sought to introduce at trial the previous "sexual activity" of the children to demonstrate their mother is targeting him for prosecution because he was living with another woman. He claims the mother is falsely accusing him of abuse out of jealousy.

Prosecutors argued that the allegations are inadmissible at trial because they are irrelevant to the case and any contact between the victim and a third party "in no way exonerates the defendant."

In a ruling Monday following an in-chambers meeting, Judge David W. Lupas found the child competent to testify during trial and ruled her sexual history could not be admitted. Wunner is free on \$30,000 bail pending trial.

9/1/2015

Nanticoke woman charged with DUI, endangerment of a child

Times Leader

A Nanticoke woman is facing multiple charges after driving her child to a Turkey Hill for candy while under the influence of marijuana and spice on Tuesday, according to city police.

Jennifer Laton, of Nanticoke, was charged with endangering the welfare of a child, DUI, five counts of possession of marijuana, five counts of possession of drug paraphernalia and public drunkenness.

According to the police report:

City police responded at about 11 a.m. on Tuesday to a Turkey Hill parking lot following a report of an unresponsive female behind the wheel of a blue Ford Focus. The report to Luzerne County 911 indicated that there was a 6-year-old child with the woman.

An employee of Turkey Hill told the responding officer that while the woman was inside the store, she was falling asleep and that after leaving the store, the child alerted them to his mother's condition.

Police said they observed the suspect as having dilated pupils, bloodshot eyes and slurred speech.

Police said Laton informed them she had driven her son to the store to buy candy. They said she admitted to smoking four to five blunts of marijuana and later also admitted to smoking spice. Police said they observed a multi-colored glass pipe with residue in the center console of the vehicle.

Police said the contents of the woman's purse included synthetic marijuana, another glass pipe with residue, a marijuana grinder, eight marijuana "roaches" and rolling papers.

The child was taken into protective custody and transported to police headquarters where Luzerne County Children & Youth Agency was contacted.

Laton was taken to police headquarters and transported to a medical facility for treatment.

8/29/2015

Police: Evicted men damaged property, stole items

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police arrested two men for stealing items and causing thousands of dollars in damage to a property after they were evicted for not paying rent.

Robert Taylor, 57, and Thomas Ascolese, 56, who now live on East Main Street in Glen Lyon, were charged with theft. The men were arraigned Thursday by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, who ordered them jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 cash bail.

According to arrest papers:

Taylor and Ascolese are accused of either stealing or damaging radiators, a ceiling fan, dead bolt locks, a stove, cable wires, rugs, carpets, walls, doors, a porch light, window blinds, rain gutters, copper pipes, a medicine cabinets, a washing machine, the hot water heater and the main electrical circuit breaker.

The landlord estimated the damages and thefts amount to nearly \$13,000.

8/27/2015

Warrant issued for woman tied to drug transaction

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police issued a warrant for 23-year-old Amaryllis Castillo for her alleged involvement in selling heroin to a confidential informant.

Police said the informant reported a couple who lived at 269 E. Green St., Apt. 2 was selling heroin. The informant contacted Castillo on June 3 and she agreed to sell the informant heroin when she returned to her apartment.

Around 5 p.m., the informant made plans with Castillo to meet in the parking lot of Weis, police said. Police gave the informant \$60 in previously recorded cash and dropped the informant off on Arch Street, adjacent to Weis.

A silver colored Honda with New Jersey registration pulled up to the informant and an exchange was made inside the vehicle around 5:50 p.m. Police said the Honda was driven by a white female, a black male was seated in the passenger seat and Castillo was seated behind the driver.

Four yellow-colored bags containing a brown-colored powder were given to detectives and a sample yielded positive for heroin.

Castillo is charged with two counts of possession with intent to deliver, one count of possession of a controlled substance and one count of drug paraphernalia.

8/27/2015

Police: Man beat woman, boy during argument

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police charged a city man with assault for allegedly beating a woman and a child during a domestic dispute on Sunday.

According to police:

Officers responded to a reported physical domestic argument at a Loomis Street home on Sunday afternoon. Jermal Mobley, 39, a resident of the home, was highly agitated and upset and yelled at officers — telling them he had just spent eight months in jail and was not afraid to go back — before they placed him in handcuffs.

A woman told officers that Mobley assaulted her and a 14-year-old boy after an argument over missing alcohol turned violent. Mobley punched, slapped and attempted to strangle her, then punched and slapped the boy when he tried to intervene, the woman told police. Officers observed fresh scratch marks on the woman and the boy.

Mobley was charged with simple assault and harassment. He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$75,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Sept. 2 before Whittaker.

8/26/2015

Nanticoke fugitive nabbed after struggle

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man charged a city police officer during one of several attempts to escape law enforcement last week, according to police.

The incident started at noon on Aug. 18 when David Rausch, 21, saw officers in the 300 block of West Main Street and tried to conceal himself behind a vehicle in his yard, police said in a news release. According to police:

A records check revealed that Rausch was wanted. He fled and officers pursued him on foot, through his mother's property and into a wooded area where officers lost sight of him.

Police got a tip later that day that Rausch was at his mother's home. Officers found him there, surrounded the home and called out to Rausch, who said he would not try to run away again. However, as officers approached, Rausch attempted to flee, charged at an officer who blocked his path, then struggled with and resisted officers before they took him into custody.

Rausch continued to resist and briefly escaped the grasp of an officer before police caught him in the roadway of West Main Street. He then threatened a nurse at a hospital where he was taken for a medical evaluation, and made one last attempt to flee as he was examined.

Rausch was charged with felony counts of escape and flight to avoid apprehension, as well as misdemeanor counts of resisting arrest, terroristic threats and false alarm to an agency of public safety. He is in Luzerne County Correctional

Facility, in lieu of \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Sept. 2 before Magisterial District Judge Daniel Whittaker.

8/26/2015

Trial set for man accused of manslaughter in son's death

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The manslaughter trial against Nanticoke resident Corey Eckrote will move forward in November. Eckrote, 50, and Tracey Ann Gonda, 41, are facing involuntary manslaughter charges in the death of their 2½-month-old son, Jaxon Eckrote, who authorities say suffocated after Gonda fell asleep with him in her arms and he got wedged in a cushion of a recliner on Feb. 14, 2014.

During a pretrial hearing Tuesday, lawyers told Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas that the defense has received witness and exhibit lists and that they will be ready to move forward with the trial Nov. 2.

There have been no pre-trial motions in the case, and Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts said the parties will agree to facts from some witness testimony during the trial.

"I don't think there's any argument over the facts in this case," defense attorney Michael Butera said. "I think there's an argument over what the facts become."

Gonda, meanwhile, is seeking to have the case against her thrown out, arguing Jaxon's asphyxiation death was not her fault. Although she had a few drinks that night, there was no evidence she had been under the influence or that she acted in a reckless manner when she accidentally fell asleep with her child, her attorneys argue.

Her case is set for a hearing next month.

Both parents are free on \$50,000 bail pending trial.

8/23/2015

Nanticoke woman injured in shooting

Geri Gibbons - ggibbons@timesleader.com

A drive-by shooting resulted in injury to a 39-year-old female late Friday night, necessitating treatment at Geisinger Medical Center, Plains after which she was released.

The woman was reportedly struck in the area of her hip as she was making her way upstairs to bed.

Upon responding to the incident at about 11 p.m. at a residence in the area of Slope near Coal streets, police determined that six rounds from a handgun had been fired in to the south side of the home.

The residence is home to a family of four who had just moved in this month.

Initially, it was thought that another round had struck a 74-year-old man, but upon further investigation it was determined that he was struck by a piece of paneling where the round entered the home.

Investigators from the city police department and the Pennsylvania State Police Forensic Unit recovered six spent cartridges on Slope Street, near the targeted house.

The Nanticoke Police Department was assisted by Newport Township Police Department, Pennsylvania State Police Forensic Unit and Nanticoke Fire/EMS.

Police Chief William Shultz said as of Saturday evening, not charges had been filed and requested that anyone having information about the incident call 570-735-2200 ext. 206 or 911.

8/7/2015

Jailed Nanticoke man charged with third violent crime

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man jailed for allegedly shooting a prostitute in Wilkes-Barre was charged Friday in a third violent case — the second in which he allegedly kidnapped his victim and raped her at knife point in a cemetery.

Michael Angelo Foschini Jr., 25, of 328 W. Main St., allegedly lured a woman into his car Nov. 16, 2012, on Academy Street in Wilkes-Barre near Crown Fried Chicken by offering to "smoke a bowl" with her after she turned down his offer to pay her "a lot of money" for sex, according to arrest papers.

Police said the woman got into Foschini's car and he immediately locked the doors. The woman asked him to pull over at a store so she should get a drink, but he refused, arrest papers said.

He told the woman they were going to his house to smoke, but instead drove to Ebert Cemetery in Plymouth Township

where police said he held a knife to the woman while raping her and threatened to slice her throat. After Foschini raped the woman, he drove off, leaving her in the cemetery, according to police. She used her cellphone to call 911 before walking to the first house she could find with lights on, police said.

Foschini was denied bail during a brief arraignment July 24 after Assistant District Attorney Nancy Violi argued the community is unsafe with him on the streets because his alleged crimes have escalated. In the shooting case against him, she noted, Foschini is accused of shooting a woman in the head and leaving her for dead.

Foschini was arrested in July on charges he allegedly kidnapped another woman on Dec. 13, 2011, and raped her at a different Plymouth Township cemetery.

According to an affidavit filed by state police, the woman told investigators she had been abducted from Carey Avenue in Wilkes-Barre and taken to Exaltation of the Holy Cross and St. Joseph's Cemetery.

During an interview at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, the woman — wearing dirt- and grass-stained clothes — said she had been walking near a tire store when she saw her attacker, a stranger, pumping gas at a Sunoco station. The man whistled and yelled to her, asking if she wanted to party, the complaint said.

When the woman declined, Foschini began saying, "How can a brother get a play from a sister?" according to the affidavit.

The woman continued down Carey Avenue to Susquehanna Avenue, where the man pulled up alongside her, got out and grabbed her by the back of the jacket, shouting, "Do you think you are too good for me?" police said.

Foschini pulled a buck knife and put it to the woman's back as he held her hair and neck, threatening to stab her as he forced her into the passenger side of his vehicle, police said.

As Foschini drove to the cemetery, he repeatedly clicked the knife open, saying "all you (expletives) are alike," the affidavit said. Foschini took the woman's cellphone and medications and put them on the roof, then threw the phone into the rows of tombstones when it began making a beeping sound he thought indicated she was getting messages, police said.

Foschini forced the woman to perform oral sex before having intercourse with her, police said. When it was over, Foschini threatened that he knew where the woman lived and told her not to tell the police, the affidavit said.

As Foschini drove off, the woman ran to the first house she saw, but no one was home. She used the phone at another house and saw Foschini drive by as she did so, police said.

The case didn't have a major break until this year, when Wilkes-Barre police began investigating the shooting of a prostitute.

Foschini is facing aggravated assault charges in the alleged Dec. 12 shooting. The victim in that case showed up at Geisinger's urgent care facility in Wilkes-Barre with wounds to her head and hand.

The woman said a man she later identified as Foschini picked her up at Academy Street and Carey Avenue. They drove to an abandoned building on Willow Street, where an argument about money ensued. During the fight, Foschini kicked her out of his car and shot her, she told police.

Foschini's attorney in that case, Joseph Sklarosky Sr., maintains that the woman brought Foschini to the location in an attempt to mug him and that Foschini was acting in self-defense during a struggle for his gun.

Sklarosky said he had not been made aware of the new charges Friday and would have to discuss the case with him before commenting.

"I can only tell you that the case I'm representing him on, we do have a very viable defense," Sklarosky said Friday. "I don't know any details about this new case."

After Foschini's arrest in the shooting case, police collected a DNA sample from him that matched the three sexual assault cases, prosecutors said.

In the latest case, Foschini is charged with kidnapping, rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, making terroristic threats and unlawful restraint — the same charges from his arrest in July.

Foschini, who was already jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on \$250,000 bail in the shooting case, was ordered by Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer to continue to be held without bail on the new charges.

7/28/2015

Vehicular homicide suspect may claim he wasn't driving

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke vehicular homicide suspect James Novis on Monday filed notice that he may claim at trial that someone else was behind the wheel when Cherri L. Hummel was killed.

Novis, 40, of 1212 S. Prospect St., is charged with homicide by vehicle while driving under the influence and other

offenses in the May 4, 2013, crash on state Route 29 in Lehman Township.

According to court documents, Novis told police in an interview the night of the incident that Hummel was driving at the time of the crash. However, police say surveillance footage shows him driving and that his injuries were consistent with him being in the driver's seat.

The filing by defense attorney Matthew P. Kelly seeks the names of all witnesses the commonwealth would use to disprove Novis' alibi claim.

7/25/2015

Nanticoke man charged in rape, suspected in two unsolved cases

James Halpin- Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man jailed for allegedly shooting a prostitute in Wilkes-Barre was hit Friday with charges of rape and kidnapping for allegedly assaulting another woman — and prosecutors alleged in court his DNA has come back as a match in two other unsolved rape cases.

Michael Angelo Foschini Jr., 25, of 328 W. Main St., was denied bail during a brief arraignment Friday morning after Assistant District Attorney Nancy Violi argued there is no way the community can be safe with him on the streets because his alleged crimes have escalated. In the shooting case, she noted, Foschini is accused of shooting a woman in the head and leaving her for dead.

"I do feel that he's a threat to the community," she said after the hearing. "We have this complaint that we filed, and his DNA also came back as a hit in two other previously unsolved rapes, so those are currently open investigations at this time."

Foschini declined to comment as investigators led him from the courtroom.

The new charges allege Foschini kidnapped and raped a woman on Dec. 13, 2011, about four years before the shooting he was charged with in December.

According to an affidavit filed by state police, the victim told investigators she had been abducted from Carey Avenue in Wilkes-Barre and taken to Exaltation of the Holy Cross and St. Joseph's Cemetery in Plymouth Township.

During an interview at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, the victim — wearing dirt- and grass-stained clothes — said she had been walking near a tire store when she saw her attacker, a stranger, pumping gas at a Sunoco station. The man whistled and yelled to her, asking if she wanted to party, the complaint says.

When the woman declined, Foschini began saying, "How can a brother get a play from a sister?" according to the affidavit.

The woman continued down Carey Avenue to Susquehanna Avenue, where the man pulled up along side her, got out and grabbed her by the back of the jacket, shouting, "Do you think you are too good for me?" police said.

Foschini pulled a buck knife and put it to the woman's back as he held her hair and neck, threatening to stab her as he forced her into the passenger side of his vehicle, police said.

As Foschini drove to the cemetery, he repeatedly clicked the knife open, saying "all you (expletives) are alike," the affidavit says. Foschini took the woman's cellphone and medications and put them on the roof, then threw the phone into the rows of tombstones when it began making a beeping sound he thought indicated she was getting messages, police said.

"He grabbed her out of the passenger seat and said she was going to do whatever he wanted her to do," Trooper Lisa Brogan wrote in the affidavit. "Then he flipped the knife open."

Foschini forced the woman to perform oral sex before having intercourse with her, police said. When it was over, Foschini threatened that he knew where the woman lived and told her not to tell the police, the affidavit says.

As Foschini drove off, the woman ran to the first house she saw, but no one was home. She used the phone at another house and saw Foschini drive by as she did so, police said.

Investigators at the hospital interviewed the victim and took samples her attacker left behind. The case didn't have a major break until this year, when Wilkes-Barre police began investigating the shooting of a prostitute.

Foschini is facing aggravated assault charges in the Dec. 12 shooting. The victim in that case showed up at Geisinger's urgent care facility in Wilkes-Barre with wounds to the head and hand.

The woman said a man she later identified as Foschini picked her up at Academy Street and Carey Avenue. They drove to an abandoned building on Willow Street, where an argument about money ensued. During the fight, Foschini kicked her out of his car and shot her, she told police.

Foschini's attorney in that case, Joseph Sklarosky Sr., maintains that the woman brought Foschini to the location in an attempt to mug him and that Foschini was acting in self-defense during a struggle for his gun.

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After Foschini's arrest in the shooting case, police collected a DNA sample from him that matched the three sexual assault cases, prosecutors said.

In the latest case, Foschini is charged with kidnapping, rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, making terroristic threats and unlawful restraint.

Foschini, who was already jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on \$250,000 bail in the shooting case, was ordered by Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer to be held without bail on the new charges after Violi argued his crimes are getting more severe with time.

"This is a forcible rape at knife-point involving kidnapping," Violi said, noting he later went on to allegedly shoot another victim. "He has escalated."

A preliminary hearing was set for 9 a.m. Aug. 7.

7/24/2015

Attempted break-in reported in Nanticoke

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A man who tried to break into a Nanticoke home Thursday morning told the homeowner he was there to cut the grass, according to police.

Officers responded to a report of an attempted break-in at an East Grand Street home at 8:17 a.m. Thursday, according to Nanticoke police. A woman who lives in the home told police she had heard someone at the rear door of the house, went to investigate and saw a man attempting to pick the lock of the door with some type of device.

The woman told officers that she then opened the door, whereupon the man told her he was there to cut her grass and asked her if she wanted her grass cut.

The woman then called 911 and the man ran off, police said.

Police spoke with neighbors, who reported they had seen the same man in the neighborhood several times. An incident similar to Thursday's attempted break-in had taken place at another home in the block, but the homeowner did not report it, residents told police.

The suspect is described as a white male, wearing a white shirt and lime green shorts, with reddish hair and a beard. Anyone who observes suspicious activity should call 911 immediately, police said.

7/18/2015

Police: Man ran over girlfriend with his Harley-Davidson motorcycle

smocarsky@timesleader.com

Police say a man ran over his girlfriend with a motorcycle when she was trying to get her cell phone back from him. City police Officers Joseph Buchalski and Bryan Kata were dispatched to East Ridge Street for a domestic dispute in which a third-party caller reported that his neighbor asked him to call 911 after her boyfriend, Robert Kamowski, smashed her cell phone and tried to run her over with his motorcycle.

While en route, the officers stopped Kamowski, who was operating a blue 2002 Harley-Davidson in between the 100 and 200 blocks of East Church Street. A records check of Kamowski's driver's license showed up as suspended and expired as of June 25, 2010, police said.

Buchalski stayed with Kamowski while Kata proceeded to the victim's residence.

Upon arrival, Kata initially spoke with the caller, who advised him that he had seen Kamowski pull up on his motorcycle, get off and approach the victim, who was sitting in her vehicle. The witness said Kamowski was yelling at and threatening the victim when he saw him take her cell phone and smash it off of the roadway, police said.

The neighbor told police he had last seen Kamowski pushing and shoving the woman before entering his residence to call 911.

Kata then spoke with the victim, who told him that Kamowski began following her, pulled alongside of her vehicle and asked if she would speak with him. She said she told him no and asked Kamowski to leave her alone. She then drove away and proceeded to her residence, but Kamowski continued to follow her, police said.

When the woman arrived outside her home and parked, Kamowski pulled up across the street and approached her vehicle. She again asked Kamowski to leave, but he refused and then asked her for a key which he had left in her vehicle. When she told him she couldn't find it, he reached inside and ripped her cellphone out of her hands and smashed it by throwing it off the roadway, police said.

The woman told police she got out of her vehicle, picked up the pieces of her phone and told Kamowski that he could look inside the vehicle for his key and tools, but to leave after he had found them. Kamowski then grabbed the shattered cell phone from the woman's hands and began walking toward his motorcycle. She told police she tried to get the phone back, but he began shoving and pushing her, police said.

The woman said that while she was standing near the front of the motorcycle still trying to get her phone back, Kamowski started the bike and began to drive away, and she was struck by the bike and knocked to the ground. Kata observed her left front pants leg had an imprint of the motorcycle's tire and her left ankle was brush-burned. Her phone was recovered from Kamowski's back pants pocket, police said.

Kamowski, 46, was taken into custody and charged with one count each of robbery, simple assault, theft by unlawful taking or disposition, receiving stolen property, recklessly endangering another person, criminal mischief, harassment and driving while operating privilege is suspended or revoked.

He was arraigned before District Judge James Dixon and, unable to post \$10,000 bail, was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility to await a preliminary hearing scheduled for July 29.

7/17/2015

Police: Nanticoke man tried to strangle ex-girlfriend

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man tried to strangle his ex-girlfriend in front of her young son during an argument Wednesday afternoon, according to police.

Joseph Noss, 36, also fled from and resisted officers as they attempted to arrest him, according to police.

Nanticoke police gave the following account, in a criminal complaint against Noss:

Officers responded to a Loomis Street home at 12:27 p.m. Wednesday for a report of a woman who could not breathe because she had been strangled by her ex-boyfriend, later identified as Noss.

When police arrived, the woman had a hard time catching her breath. She told officers that Noss had jumped on top of her for no reason and placed both of his hands around her neck to the point she could not get any oxygen. The woman had marks on her neck and face consistent with having been strangled and scratches on her cheek, officers observed.

The woman told police that Noss held her throat for about 10 seconds before he let go. He then grabbed a control wire from a gaming system in the room, wrapped the wire around her neck and said he would kill her, the woman said.

Officers observed markings on the victim's neck consistent with a wire having been used.

Noss stopped the wire assault, then said he did not want to live and planned to overdose on Xanax, the woman told police. The woman's 4-year-old son was present when the altercation took place, and Noss grabbed him by the hair and pulled him out of the way, the woman said.

When officers went to Noss' home and identified themselves as police, Noss ran off, leading to a foot pursuit through his yard, a neighbor's property, then down Loomis Street toward a drop-off point above railroad tracks. Officers tried to take Noss into custody on the railroad tracks, but he resisted and police had to use pepper spray to subdue him.

Noss was taken to Nanticoke police headquarters for processing. He was charged with aggravated assault graded as a first-degree felony, as well as misdemeanor counts of resisting arrest and simple assault, and a summary count of harassment.

He was arraigned Wednesday before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Wednesday before Whittaker.

The woman, who declined medical treatment, was given information on how to apply for a Protection from Abuse order, according to police.

7/15/2015

Nanticoke man accused of breaking into home, stealing jewelry

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was arrested Monday after police allege he broke into a residence, stole jewelry and stashed it in the

woods.

Police were tipped off Sunday evening that William Fisher, 44, was at a residence on Center Street in Nanticoke asking about where someone lived, according to the report. A day earlier Fisher had been seen by an off-duty officer after a purse was stolen from a resident's car while parked in the cemetery on Prospect Street, police said.

The victims asked their neighbor to watch their home while they went out for groceries, but returned home to find that the back door was smashed out, according to a police report.

Investigating officers discovered drops of blood on the back porch next to the broken glass window. Police said the front door was no longer locked.

Neighbors told police they saw a thin white male approximately 5 feet 6 inches tall, wearing a red shirt and possibly black shorts and a black baseball cap carrying bags heading into the woods from the direction of the victims' home. Just before 10 p.m., officers went to Fisher's residence on West South Street. Fisher agreed to speak with police and told them he dumped the stolen items into the woods, police said.

Officers were led to the wooded tree line at the back of Middle Road on the Luzerne County Community College property and they retrieved several stolen pieces of jewelry.

Fisher admitted to stealing a purse out of a parked car in the cemetery on Saturday, police said. Fisher also admitted to waiting for the victims to leave their Center Street residence in order to break into the home and steal items of value, according to police.

He was charged with one count each of burglary, criminal trespass, theft, receiving stolen property and criminal mischief and jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$25,000 bail.

A preliminary hearing has been scheduled for July 22 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

7/14/2015

Nanticoke man charged after slamming wife to the floor

Times Leader

At about 8:30 p.m. on July 6, Nanticoke police were dispatched to a residence on State Street regarding a domestic dispute. Police said the victim relayed that she has been assaulted by her husband, Daniel Bogdanovich, who had been drinking all day.

She said that after an argument, she had packed some clothes and took her iPad and went next door to her in-laws. Her husband followed, taking her iPad and returning home. When she went to retrieve her iPad, he allegedly slammed her to the floor, police said.

Bogdanovich was taken into custody and transported to the Nanticoke Police Station, processed and charged with simple assault and harassment.

He was taken to Luzerne County Correctional Facility for overnight arraignment.

7/14/2015

Police: Nanticoke man assaulted wife after she woke him from nap

Times Leader

Police allege that a Nanticoke man assaulted his wife after she woke him up from a backyard nap.

City police were dispatched on Saturday to an Oak Street residence after a 911 call from the home was disconnected. Upon arrival, officers observed a female in the yard, later identified as the victim, visibly upset and crying, with her bottom lip bleeding.

Officers said the woman stated that her husband, George Beck, had fallen asleep in a chair in the back yard and, when she attempted to wake him up, he became violent.

The victim alleged that he got out of a chair, threw her to the ground and then punched her in the face several times. The suspect was taken into custody, transported back to police headquarters and charged with simple assault and harassment.

Beck was then transported to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for overnight arraignment.

7/12/2015

Police: Nanticoke man assaulted sleeping woman

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police charged a city man with assault after he allegedly kned a woman in the face after jumping on her when she was asleep last week.

Joseph Skladzien, 40, was charged with simple assault and harassment following the July 6 incident, police said. Officers responded to a reported domestic dispute at a West Union Street home at 3:05 a.m. Monday, according to police. A woman told police that she was asleep in her bedroom when Skladzien kicked open the door, jumped on top of her, grabbed her by the hair and struck her in the head and face with his knee. Skladzien then left the home and the woman locked herself in a bathroom and called 911, she said.

Officers observed that the woman's right eye was red and swollen, police said.

Officers eventually located Skladzien in a wooded area near the home and took him into custody, according to police.

He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer and released on \$2,500 unsecured bail.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Aug. 19, according to court records.

7/11/2015

Nanticoke man accused of stealing from neighbor

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police charged a city man with theft and robbery after he allegedly stole money from a neighbor at knifepoint.

Joshua Kittle, 20, grabbed cash from a man on the back porch of the man's South Hanover Street home on July 2, according to police.

Kittle, who knew the alleged victim and was visiting with him and his family, reached for a knife he had attached to a necklace, but found he could not free the knife so he pushed the man, grabbed the man's cash and fled, police said in a news release.

The man told police where Kittle lived, and officers were familiar with Kittle from past dealings, police said. Officers located Kittle at his West Broad Street apartment and took him into custody, according to police. Kittle eventually admitted to the robbery and showed officers where he stashed the cash, police said.

Kittle was charged with robbery, theft by unlawful taking and criminal trespass.

He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Joseph Zola and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$35,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Wednesday.

7/8/2015

Nanticoke man charged with passing fake prescriptions

elewis@timesleader.com

Since 2009, Marc J. Zawadzki of Nanticoke has been charged 17 times by multiple law enforcement agencies for passing bogus prescriptions or falsely identifying himself as a physician to obtain painkillers from area pharmacies. Add one more to Zawadzki's criminal record.

Zawadzki, 41, was arraigned Tuesday by District Judge Michael Dotzel on a criminal complaint filed by Wilkes-Barre Township police charging him with submitting three fraudulent prescriptions at a pharmacy inside Price Chopper in an attempt to obtain 120 tablets of Vicodin and 210 tablets of Percocet on Sept. 15, 2014.

A pharmacist at Price Chopper suspected the prescriptions Zawadzki submitted were fraudulent, according to the criminal complaint.

Zawadzki allegedly admitted he used his computer to create the prescriptions to help a person known to him battle a heroin addiction, the complaint says.

Zawadzki allegedly submitted the bogus prescriptions with two female names two months before he was sentenced by Luzerne County Judge Joseph Sklarosky Jr. to two to five years in state prison on multiple counts of acquiring painkillers by false representation.

Court records indicate Zawadzki has been charged by 12 law enforcement agencies since 2009 for passing bogus prescriptions or falsely calling pharmacies and identifying himself as a physician.

Here is a list of Zawadzki's offenses, according to court records:

Feb. 26, 2014: CVS Pharmacy, Pittston, 90 tablets of Vicodin.

Jan. 6, 2014: Zawadzki used a stolen a physician's notepad to write "excuses" to be excused from his job in Nescopeck.

Feb. 3, 2014: Zawadzki submitted six fraudulent prescriptions at Advanced Pharmacy Services, Plains Township.

Dec. 18, 2013: Albert's Pharmacy, Pittston, 90 tablets of Vicodin.

Sept. 28, 2012: Submitted a forged prescription at CVS Pharmacy in Exeter.
Aug. 8, 2012: Submitted a forged prescription at Weis Pharmacy, Wright Township.
March 18, 2012: Called Cook's Pharmacy, Kingston Township, ordered 60 tablets of Vicodin.
March 19, 2012: Zawadzki submitted a fake prescription with a forged physician's signature at CVS Pharmacy in Shickshinny.
Feb. 12, 2012: Called Fino's Pharmacy, Dallas, ordered 60 tablets of Vicodin.
Oct. 7, 2011: CVS Pharmacy, Wyoming, for 120 tablets of Vicodin.
Oct. 7, 2011: Called Walgreen's Pharmacy, Kingston, ordered Vicodin tablets.
Sept. 10, 2011: Kmart Pharmacy, Wilkes-Barre Township, 90 tablets of Vicodin.
Sept. 10, 2011: Called Wegman's Pharmacy, Wilkes-Barre Township, ordered 90 tablets of Vicodin.
May 31, 2011: Gerrity's Pharmacy, Hanover Township, 60 tablets of Vicodin.
March 12, 2010: Gerrity's Pharmacy, Hanover Township, 60 tablets of Vicodin.
Feb. 23, 2010: Spontanski's Pharmacy, Nanticoke, ordered Vicodin tablets.
Dec. 20, 2009: Kmart Pharmacy, Wilkes-Barre Township, 90 tablets of Vicodin.

7/8/2015

Prosecutors ask judge to rule accused child molester's allegations inadmissible

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

An accused child molester wants jurors to hear about alleged "sexual activity" between his 8-year-old victim and her brother to demonstrate their mother is targeting him for prosecution because he was living with another woman. Prosecutors filed a brief Tuesday urging a judge to rule the allegations inadmissible at trial because they are irrelevant to the case and any contact between the victim and a third party "in no way exonerates the defendant."

William Charles Wunner, 29, of Nanticoke, is accused of sexually assaulting the child multiple times between April and May 2014 at a Wilkes-Barre home. He is facing charges including rape of a child, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child, aggravated indecent assault of a child and endangering the welfare of a child.

In June, Wunner filed a motion seeking to admit the victim's "sexual conduct with (a) third party," alleging she engaged in sexual activity with her younger brother while in a bath together. The children's mother knew the conduct happened on two occasions, but "did nothing about it," Wunner alleged.

Only after the mother found out he was living with another woman did she falsely accuse him of abuse, he contends. In a response filed Tuesday, Assistant District Attorney Nancy Violi counters that the argument lacks merit because the allegations are not admissible under the state Rape Shield Law. She also notes that the child first reported Wunner to her paternal grandmother, who in turn told the mother.

"The 'sexual conduct' (Wunner) seeks to introduce in no way exonerates (him)," Violi wrote, adding that any trouble he had with the mother does not translate to the victim herself. "There is no connection between that jealousy, assuming it even existed, and the victim herself."

The case is before Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas, who did not immediately rule on the issue. Wunner is free on \$30,000 bail pending trial.

7/7/2015

Nanticoke man arrested after punching wife

Times Leader

City police arrested Joseph Michael Skladzien, 40, of West Union Street, on charges he assaulted his wife inside their residence on Monday.

Skladzien was charged with simple assault and harassment. He was released on \$2,500 unsecured bail.

7/6/2015

60-year-old Nanticoke man found naked in basement charged with sexually assaulting boy

elewis@timesleader.com

A naked 60-year-old man was found hiding in the basement of a boy's residence on East Enterprise Street where township police alleged he sexually assaulted the child on Sunday.

Richard Anthony Perugino, of Hanover Street, Nanticoke, told police he went to the house to hang out with the boy he

met on an app that allows bisexual people to interact with one another, according to charges filed. A family member of the boy allegedly found Perugino naked hiding in the basement of the boy's home. Township police said the boy claimed Perugino performed a lewd sexual act on him, charging documents say. Perugino was arraigned Monday by District Judge Rick Cronauer in Wilkes-Barre on a single count of unlawful contact with a minor. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$25,000 bail. According to the criminal complaint: Police responded to the residence at about 11 p.m. and found Perugino in the basement sitting in a chair being detained by another person. A woman was screaming at Perugino. Police learned family members became concerned about the boy when a young girl became frightened by something she saw in the basement. The family searched the basement where the boy has his bedroom. Perugino was allegedly found wearing no clothes hiding in another basement room, the complaint says. Perugino allegedly told police he met the boy on the app and went to the house "to hang out with him," insisting nothing happened, according to the complaint. Perugino claimed he was aware of the boy's age before he went to the residence. He allegedly shook his head "yes" when asked by police if anything sexual had taken place with the boy, the complaint says. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on July 15 before District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

7/1/2015

Police: Same man may have robbed 2 shops at gunpoint

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police are searching for this man who they say robbed the Cocoa Hut store on North Market Street in Nanticoke on Monday night. Nanticoke police are searching for a man who they say robbed a city convenience store at gunpoint Monday night. The same man might have robbed a doughnut shop in Plymouth the same night, according to police. The Nanticoke robbery happened at the Cocoa Hut store on North Market Street at about 10 p.m. Monday, police said. A store clerk told police that a man walked into the store, holding a handgun, approached her and said, "I don't want to hurt you, honey, just give me all the cash." The man took cash from the register drawer and fled the store, the clerk told police. The suspect is described as a white male, about 5 feet 8 inches tall, with a stocky, muscular build. He wore a black long-sleeved shirt, black and gray basketball shorts with red side stripes, and white sneakers with red and black borders. He had a white bandana over his head and a black bandana over his lower face. He carried a black or gray handgun, according to police. Police in Nanticoke and Plymouth are working together to identify the suspected robber, who fits the description of a man who robbed the Dunkin' Donuts shop in Plymouth about a half-hour before the Nanticoke Cocoa Hut was robbed. Anyone with any information is asked to call Nanticoke police detectives at 570-735-2200, ext. 206, or dial 911.7/1/2015

Woman gets 46 months in prison for role in crime wave

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Hanover Township woman has been sentenced to just under four years in prison for her role in an 18-day crime wave. Cindy Conden, 29, was sentenced to 46 months in federal prison for charges of interfering with commerce by threats or violence, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. U.S. District Senior Judge Richard P. Conaboy imposed the sentence. Last week, Conaboy sentenced Conden's father, Charles R. Conden Jr., 48, to seven years in prison for the same crime. Prosecutors say the Condens and James Hughes, 26, of Nanticoke, helped Kingston resident Jeffrey Townsley, 43, during a robbery spree that targeted two branches of the First National Community Bank and seven other businesses. Hughes has pleaded guilty in the case and is awaiting sentencing, set for Aug. 12.

6/27/2015

CVS employee accused of stealing medication

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

An employee at CVS Pharmacy in Nanticoke is accused of stealing medication from customers' prescription orders, police said.

Heather Conway, 36, of Wapwallopen, was charged Friday with theft, receiving stolen property and two counts of possession of a controlled substance.

Nanticoke police said on June 6 officers responded to CVS Pharmacy on East Main Street for a report of an employee theft. The officers spoke with the CVS regional division manager who informed police that Conway, a pharmacy employee, had been stealing medication from customers' prescriptions, police said.

The manager said she took a statement from Conway, who admitted she took varying amounts of pills from the prescription bottles of customers she tended to at the drive-through window, police said.

Conway told police she stole hydrocodone and oxycodone for about four weeks, taking seven to 14 tablets from the bottles, according to police. She claimed the pills were for personal use; she needed them to control pain in her foot that was caused by surgery, police said.

6/26/2015

Nanticoke man gets up to 7 years for brutal assault

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man convicted of aggravated assault for severely beating his girlfriend has been sentenced to 3½ to seven years in prison.

Michael Zagora, 43, of 60 W. Green St., was convicted following a jury trial in April of beating the woman for days, leaving her bed-ridden and unable to move. The woman told police Zagora had repeatedly kicked and punched her in the head and ribs.

Zagora had been charged with aggravated indecent assault without consent but was acquitted on that count.

At sentencing Thursday, Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough ordered Zagora to pay the costs of prosecution and gave him credit for 309 days served.

Zagora was housed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

6/25/2015

Money reported stolen in alleged home invasion

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are investigating a home invasion in which two women walked into an elderly woman's home, held her down and stole money from the residence.

According to police, around 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, a 75-year-old resident of East Ridge Street reported a home invasion. She told police that while she was sitting in her living room, she heard the unlocked rear kitchen door open. A female appeared in front of her and held her down, police said. Another female entered the living room and spoke to the first woman in a foreign language.

As she was held down by the first woman, the second woman checked the other rooms and allegedly stole money from the home. The suspects left the home and walked West on East Ridge Street toward College Street.

The first suspect was described as a woman in her 20s, medium build with heavier arms and legs, dark hair and darker skin, wearing light blue pants and a white T-shirt. The second suspect was described as a woman in her 20s, medium to heavy build with dark hair and darker skin, wearing a tan safari-style hat and a short-sleeved blouse with a collar.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Nanticoke Police Department at 570-735-2200.

6/11/2015

Police: Plants, gardening equipment stolen

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police are investigating a recent theft of plants and gardening tools and equipment from the Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden.

The theft from the community garden on Lower Broadway Street was reported at 11 a.m. Tuesday, according to an incident report filed by Nanticoke police. The theft took place sometime between Saturday and Tuesday morning, the report indicates. Items taken include 12 tomato plants; six pepper plants; two plastic flats of cucumbers, watermelons and squash; a red wheelbarrow and a metal rake with a green bottom, according to the report.

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

6/10/2015

Vandals hit former Nanticoke nursing home

Times Leader

On June 4, 2015 the Nanticoke City Police Department was dispatched to 39 W. Church Street, the former Personally Yours Nursing Home. Officers arrived on scene and spoke to property owner Margaret Bart who indicated entry was made through a rear door of the building using some type of pry bar.

Once inside the suspects went from room to room causing destruction throughout the building. At one point they discharged all the fire extinguishers throughout the building and wrote the following names in the powder substance. KATELYN, BAIYLIE, KRISTAN, DESTINY, ETHAN and KELSAY.

This establishment was slated to be used as an office and housing for staff members for a movie which was to be filmed in Nanticoke.

Anyone with information regarding this incident is asked to call Nanticoke City Police at 570-735-2200 or 911.

6/10/2015

Nanticoke man who tussled with store guard gets prison

Peter Cameron - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who tussled with a female department store security guard in front of his mother is going to prison for theft.

On Tuesday, Lackawanna County Judge Michael Barrasse sentenced Matthew Difebo, 37, of 145 Old Newport St., Apt. 3, to one to two years in state prison and two years of probation.

Difebo was captured on security cameras entering a changing room at the JCPenney department store in the Viewmont Mall carrying clothing, then exiting without anything in his hands.

After she determined the items were not left in the stall, loss prevention officer Charlotte Rukstalis confronted Difebo at his vehicle in the parking lot.

The defendant ran back toward the food court before doubling back, according to the police report, telling the security guard that he needed something from his car.

At that point, his mother arrived at his vehicle, a Toyota. Difebo then started the car.

While struggling with the defendant, Rukstalis — who called herself a 30-year veteran of the retail industry — tried to shut off the ignition.

Eventually, Difebo managed to jam the Toyota into gear and peeled out with his mother inside. He clipped Rukstalis' arm with the car door as he passed, she said.

"I've had guns and mace pulled on me, but never anything like this," Rukstalis told the judge before the sentencing. "It was a frightening experience."

State police pulled over Difebo traveling on Interstate 81 and arrested him. He was found with more than \$500 worth of merchandise, including shirts, pants and shorts.

The judge told the defendant he was lucky not to have faced a more serious aggravated assault charge.

He gave Difebo a sentence above the standard range due to his prior convictions and the circumstance of the offense, his attorney Michael J. O'Brien said.

They will be filing a motion asking for a reconsideration of the sentence, the attorney said.

5/12/2015

Nanticoke man pleads guilty for role in crime wave

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man pleaded guilty Monday to a federal charge of interfering with commerce by threats or violence for his role in an 18-day crime wave that included two bank robberies and hold-ups at seven local businesses.

James Hughes, 26, is facing up to 20 years in prison at his sentencing, which will be held at a later date.

Hughes was accused of helping Kingston resident Jeffrey Townsley, 43, during a robbery spree that targeted two branches of the First National Community Bank and seven other businesses. Townsley, who previously pleaded guilty in the case, was sentenced last month to 12½ years in federal prison.

Two other co-defendants, Charles R. Conden Jr., 48, and his daughter Cindy Conden, 29, both of Hanover Township, previously pleaded guilty to charges of interfering with commerce by threats or violence. They are awaiting sentencing.

5/6/2015

Man who spit on, threatened officer sentenced to jail time

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who drunkenly spit on a jailer and threatened to make her “watch and beg” while he murdered her entire family was sentenced Tuesday to serve up to a year and a half in jail.

Jacob R. Cartwright, 25, of 14 W. Kirmar Parkway, pleaded guilty to counts of aggravated assault by a prisoner and making terroristic threats before Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas. The judge immediately sentenced him to nine to 18 months in jail, giving him credit for 117 days behind bars and making him work-release eligible.

Wilkes-Barre police arrested Cartwright on public drunkenness charges in November 2013 and he was in a holding cell when he began screaming and jumping on a steel bed. Police tried to move him to another cell for his safety, and Cartwright spit on Officer Erika Oswald and toward Sgt. Joseph Mangan, police said.

Once in the new cell, Cartwright tied his T-shirt around his neck and the cell door, and police decided to take him to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for an evaluation. When police brought him out of the cell, Cartwright again spit on Oswald before unleashing a flurry of threats and curses, police said.

Cartwright told Oswald he intended to “rape your family in front of you before I slit your throat” and also threatened to put a pistol in her mouth and “blow your (expletive) head off,” according to police.

Court records show Cartwright was previously convicted of the alcohol offense and was ordered to pay a \$478 fine. He remains jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

5/6/2015

Nanticoke man faces drug charges

Times Leader

City police captured James Ward, 47, of Nanticoke, on drug trafficking charges filed by Kingston police. Ward was captured when city police spotted him driving a vehicle in the area of Kidder Street and Conyngham Avenue on Monday.

Ward was one of 18 people charged by the state Office of Attorney General and police in Kingston and Edwardsville last week. Ward was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$60,000 total bail.

City police allege several heroin pockets were in Ward’s pockets when he was captured on Monday.

4/18/2015

Police accuse man of sexually assaulting teenager

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A former Costa Rica man is accused of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old boy in Nanticoke, according to an affidavit. Olman Antonio Solano, 39, was charged Friday with two counts of indecent sexual intercourse with a person under age 16, two counts indecent assault and corruption of a minor.

Police said the encounter happened inside a residence in November while Solano had been drinking.

Solano was jailed Friday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, unable to post \$75,000 straight cash bail set by Magisterial District Judge Joseph Halesey.

His preliminary hearing is slated for 1 p.m. April 29 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

4/18/2015

Kingston man sentenced for crime spree

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Kingston man has been sentenced to 12½ years in federal prison for an 18-day crime wave that included two bank robberies and hold-ups at seven local businesses.

Jeffrey Townsley, 43, previously pleaded guilty to robbery charges for the spree that targeted nine businesses from Dec. 24, 2013, to Jan. 10, 2014. According to prosecutors, he used a black pellet gun that looked like a 9mm pistol during the

robberies that earned a total of \$7,527 in cash.

The robberies included two branches of the First National Community Bank and seven other businesses.

He has been jailed at the Lackawanna County Prison since his capture on Jan. 13, 2014.

U.S. District Court Judge Richard P. Conaboy imposed the sentence Wednesday.

Townsley's accomplices, Charles R. Conden Jr., 48, and his daughter Cindy Conden, 29, both of Hanover Township, previously pleaded guilty to charges of interfering with commerce by threats or violence. They are awaiting sentencing.

Another co-defendant, James Hughes, 26, of Nanticoke, is charged with interfering with commerce by threats or violence and is set to plead guilty in the case May 11.

4/18/2015

Alabama child-rape suspect captured in Nanticoke

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A suspected child rapist has been arrested in Nanticoke and will be extradited to Alabama to face the charges, U.S. Marshal Martin Pane announced Friday.

Jayson Montanez, 28, stands accused of rape and other related offenses.

According to Pane's office, authorities in Lauderdale County, Alabama on April 3 obtained an arrest warrant charging Montanez with rape first degree and sex abuse of child.

The U.S. Marshals Service Gulf Coast Regional Fugitive Task Force learned Montanez may have fled to Luzerne County, and alerted marshals in Scranton.

On Friday, members of the Scranton-based USMS Fugitive Task Force arrested Montanez in the 200 block of West Church Street in Nanticoke.

Montanez was turned over to local authorities pending extradition to Alabama.

Cooperating with USMS were Pennsylvania State Police, the Scranton Police Department, Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole and the Nanticoke Police Department.

4/16/2015

Nanticoke man convicted on aggravated assault charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A jury has convicted a Nanticoke man accused of severely beating his girlfriend of a count of aggravated assault but acquitted him of aggravated indecent assault without consent.

Michael Zagora, 43, of 60 W. Green St., faced trial by jury in an Aug. 21 assault that left the woman bed-ridden and unable to move.

According to police, the woman's daughter reported her mother called saying Zagora had been beating her for days — then the line went dead. Officers arriving on the scene found the woman lying in bed with a swollen face, bloody nose, and a severely bruised left ear.

She told police Zagora had repeatedly kicked and punched her in the head and ribs, rendering her immobile.

Following a one-day trial prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Angela Sperrazza, a jury rendered its verdict in less than a half hour Tuesday afternoon. Defense attorney Michael Charles Kostelaba represented Zagora.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough immediately revoked Zagora's bail, sending him to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

Sentencing was set for June 3.

4/15/2015

Police: Nanticoke man threatened to shoot taxi driver

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man allegedly threatened to shoot a taxi driver Tuesday evening after the driver refused to fight him, police said.

Christopher Caruso Jr., 21, approached a Burgit Cab Company driver near South Franklin and Academy streets in Wilkes-Barre, demanding that the driver get out of the vehicle to fight him, according to a police report.

Police said the taxi drove away and Caruso followed him to the cab company headquarters on South Main Street.

When Caruso approached the driver again asking to fight, he allegedly threatened to shoot the driver, according to an

affidavit.

The victim told police he had previously seen Caruso with a firearm, police said.

Police arrived on scene to take Caruso into custody, but he was combative and attempted to resist the officer's attempt to restrain him.

Caruso was eventually taken into custody and charged with terroristic threats, harassment, resisting arrest and criminal trespassing.

He is being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$15,000 bail, awaiting a preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer on April 28.

4/13/2015

Nanticoke man flees stolen car in Wilkes-Barre

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A Nanticoke man paroled in January for his role in a 2011 deadly home invasion was arrested by city police after he ran from a stolen car.

Police said David Rausch, 21, of West Main Street, was in possession of a stolen vehicle on Old River Road at about 9 a.m. Sunday.

Rausch ran from the stolen car and was captured after a several block chase, police said.

Rausch was arraigned on charges of flight to avoid apprehension, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, public drunkenness and receiving stolen property. He remained jailed Monday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$30,000 bail.

Court records say county Judge Michael Vough on Jan. 23 granted a request by Rausch for early parole on charges of burglary and reckless endangerment in connection to a deadly shooting inside a house trailer on Old Tavern Road in Hunlock Township on Feb. 8, 2011.

State police at Wyoming said Rausch took part in the burglary with Theresa Daniels, 26, and Robert Muntz, 44.

A masked Muntz, armed with a stolen .22-caliber handgun, stormed into a trailer and confronted a sleeping Jeff Laton about money owed to him. During a scuffle in a bedroom, Laton's girlfriend, Amanda Bowman, fired two shots, striking Muntz once in the head, instantly killing him.

Bowman was cleared of the deadly shooting as former District Attorney Jacqueline Musto Caroll called it justifiable homicide.

State police said methamphetamines were being manufactured in the trailer on Old Tavern Road.

Rausch and Daniels each pleaded guilty to burglary and reckless endangerment and were both sentenced to two years in the county's Intermediate Punishment Program on Oct. 12, 2012.

Rausch violated the program several times, including cutting off an ankle bracelet used for electronic monitoring while on house arrest, court records say.

Judge Fred Pierantoni III re-sentenced Rausch on Sept. 12, 2014, to 10 months to 23 months in the county correctional facility.

Rausch requested early parole on the re-sentence at which Vough granted on Jan. 23, according to court records.

In an unrelated case, court records say Rausch was sentenced by county Judge David Lupas on March 9 to 72 hours to six months on a charge of driving under the influence of a controlled substance, and one year probation on charges of possession of heroin and possession of drug paraphernalia. Rausch also had his driver's license suspended for one year. Those charges relate to a traffic stop by city police at East Market Street and North Pennsylvania Avenue on July 14, 2014, when a witness claimed she had followed Rausch driving erratically and nearly struck several vehicles and passed through red traffic signals, according to court records.

Police said Rausch admitted he had taken Xanax prior to driving the vehicle.

A heroin packet and syringes were found inside the vehicle, police said.

4/6/2015

Philadelphia teen shot in Nanticoke

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

A shooting in Nanticoke left an 18-year-old male injured Sunday afternoon, police said.

Mark Brown-Mathis of Philadelphia was found walking down an alleyway between Orchard and West Broad Streets by two residents around 1:30 p.m., police said.

Brown-Mathis allegedly told the residents not to call police prior to them reporting the incident to 911. When police arrived on scene they discovered Brown-Mathis had a gunshot wound to his right upper arm, according to the Nanticoke police department. According to police, the victim was refusing to cooperate by telling officers multiple fictitious names and refusing to elaborate on the incident. Brown-Mathis finally told police that he was walking down Locust Street when a white Jeep Grand Cherokee pulled up next to him and shot him in the arm, according to a press release. Police said the suspects in the car were the driver, who was wearing a mask, a white male in the passenger seat and a black male in the rear seat. Brown-Mathis was transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center to be treated for his injuries. The investigation is ongoing. According to court documents, Brown-Mathis is wanted out of Philadelphia on weapons charges and failure to appear in court.

3/27/2015

Nanticoke woman sentenced to participate in 2-year drug treatment program on meth, heroin charges

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A Nanticoke woman will spend two years in the state reintegration program on a number of drug charges. Under the State Intermediate Punishment program, Nancy Spelman, 31, will spend a minimum of seven months in prison, at least two months in a community-based therapeutic community and at least six months in outpatient treatment. Luzerne County Judge Joseph F. Sklarosky Jr. sentenced the woman Monday to participate in the 24-month program, followed by two years of special probation. She must also complete 15 hours of community service. Spelman pleaded guilty in November to a number of charges related to the possession and manufacture of methamphetamine, as well as the possession of heroin and other drug paraphernalia. The eight counts — two felonies and six misdemeanors — stemmed from six separate cases spanning 2012 to 2014. Times Leader archives indicate Spelman was among a group of four people arrested in November 2013 in connection with a meth lab investigators located inside a home on Parrish Street, Dallas. Among the contents of the home were 50 pounds of red phosphorous — valued at \$120,000, according to the state Attorney General's Office. The flammable substance is used in matches, flares and fireworks, as well as the manufacture of methamphetamine. Agents involved with the search also seized plastic tubing, funnels, glassware, pseudoephedrine, iodine and other materials used to make meth, according to an affidavit. According to the state Department of Corrections, both the prosecutor and judge must recommend an offender be admitted into the SIP program. The DOC then assesses the individual's suitability for the program before the offender is allowed to participate. The program is designed for defendants whose crimes were motivated by addiction to drugs or alcohol, the DOC says. Defendants convicted of violent or sex offenses are excluded from the program. Treatment plans are tailored to suit the needs of each participant, the DOC says. An offender who fails the program, whether due to misconduct or lack of progress, faces resentencing under traditional sentencing guidelines. The DOC says the program has just a 20 percent failure rate, with only 849 out of more than 4,000 participants being removed from the program in nine years.

3/26/2015

Nanticoke man who reported robbery charged with making false report

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who called police claiming to have been robbed is facing charges after investigators determined he had gotten ripped off during a drug buy at Sherman Hills Apartments, according to Wilkes-Barre police. Joshua Pampus, 28, was charged with filing a false report and possessing drug paraphernalia after the incident Sunday afternoon. Police were dispatched to Coal Street about 12:20 p.m. and arrived to find Pampus claiming he was robbed at gunpoint.

His story, however, was inconsistent, and police say they learned he had in fact gone to the complex to buy marijuana. Pampus gave \$100 to two men who went to get the drugs and never returned, police said. He was arrested and transported to police headquarters for processing. He was issued a summons to appear before Magisterial District Judge Martin Kane on April 23 at 9 a.m.

3/25/2015

Nanticoke bar cited for allowing gambling

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke bar has been cited for allowing gambling on its premises in violation of state liquor laws, according to the state Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement.

Lacey's Bar & Grill, on East Main Street, "possessed or operated gambling devices or paraphernalia or permitted gambling or lotteries" on its premises on Feb. 23, according to Pennsylvania State Police.

The citation was issued on March 18, police said, in a news release.

The charge will be brought before an administrative law judge, who has the authority to impose penalties of up to \$1,000 for minor offenses and up to \$5,000 for more serious offenses, according to police.

3/23/2015

Dog abandoned in Hanover Twp., then killed by vehicle

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Police are investigating a report of an abandoned dog in Hanover Township who was later killed by a passing vehicle Saturday afternoon.

John Polascik of Nanticoke told police that he was driving north on Hanover Street around 3:45 p.m. when he struck a light grey Siberian Husky-looking dog that was standing in the roadway, according to the report.

The dog had no collar or identification, police said.

According to police, around 6:20 p.m. Saturday, Linda Kotch of Nanticoke reported to police that her friend witnessed a Siberian Husky being thrown out of a blue vehicle on Hanover Street. The witness followed the blue vehicle and obtained a license plate, police said.

This incident is still under investigation by Hanover Township police. A humane officer from the Luzerne County SPCA was given information about the incident from Hanover Township police Sunday afternoon and will follow up on the investigation.

3/18/2015

Father, daughter enter pleas after 18-day crime spree

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A father and daughter involved in an 18-day crime wave in Luzerne County has pleaded guilty to charges of interfering with commerce by threats or violence, according to court records.

Charles R. Conden Jr., 48, and Cindy Conden, 29, both of Hanover Township, entered their pleas in federal court in Scranton this week and are awaiting sentencing in a crime spree that included two bank robberies and hold-ups at seven local businesses.

In November, they were indicted along with **James Hughes, 26, of Nanticoke**, with aiding and abetting Jeffrey Townsley, 43, of Kingston, as he waged the crime spree from Dec. 24, 2013, to Jan. 10, 2014, that earned a total of \$7,527 in cash.

Prosecutors say the Condens and Hughes helped Townsley rob the Aldi grocery store in Kingston of \$500 on Jan. 7, 2014. The next day, Charles Conden and Hughes helped Townsley rob \$300 from Thomas Food Mart in Larksville, followed by another robbery two days later of the Family Dollar in Ashley in which they netted \$2,400.

At the time of the robberies, Charles Conden was free on bail in a high-profile break-in during which an elderly Bear Creek couple was bound and blindfolded in April 2012. Conden was convicted of burglary and sentenced to 40 to 80 months in prison in that case.

Under the terms of their plea agreements, Charles Conden is facing another 60 years in prison and Cindy Conden is facing 20 years.

Townsley pleaded guilty to two counts of bank robbery and seven counts of interfering with commerce by threats or

violence. He is currently awaiting sentencing and is facing a maximum of 190 years in prison. Court records show Hughes is still awaiting trial on a count of interfering with commerce by threats or violence.

3/15/2015

Two facing charges for meth lab explosion in Nanticoke

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Two people charged with causing an explosion while manufacturing methamphetamine inside a Nanticoke apartment will face charges in Luzerne County Court.

Case records for Adam Longenberger, 27, were filed Friday in county court indicating he will face charges of causing a catastrophe and manufacturing methamphetamine.

Authorities withdrew three counts of criminal conspiracy, two counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance and one count each of possession of a controlled substance and possessing chemicals with intent to manufacture a controlled substance against Longenberger at the preliminary hearing last month.

Jessica Collett, 28, faces four counts of criminal conspiracy, and one count each of causing a catastrophe, possession with intent to manufacture a controlled substance, possessing chemicals with intent to manufacture a controlled substance and possession of a controlled substance in county court.

According to court papers, police and fire crews were dispatched for an explosion at an apartment on Lee Mine Street on Oct. 25. Police observed that a door was blown off its hinges and smoke was coming from inside.

Police went inside and found materials consistent with a methamphetamine lab, evidence of an explosion and no one inside. An officer suffered burning eyes due to a strong kerosene type odor inside the apartment, according to the criminal complaint.

Nearby residences were evacuated as a precaution.

State agents recovered ammonia nitrate, sodium, lithium, plastic tubing, funnels, a digital scale, baggies, gas generators, liquids and methamphetamine from the apartment.

Authorities said two children resided in the apartment with Longenberger and Collett.

The explosion occurred when no one was in the apartment.

3/10/2015

Teen driver in fatal crash being 'acclimated'

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Less than a year after being shipped off to a secure juvenile detention center for running a man down in the street, Tyler Duda will be getting a home pass to check out a Williamsport college this month as officials work toward getting him "acclimated" into the community, authorities said during a hearing Monday.

Duda, now 18, admitted his guilt as a juvenile in May to charges including homicide by vehicle and involuntary manslaughter. 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.

Duda — who faced a maximum of three and a half years in a juvenile facility for driving the out-of-control speeding car that dismembered and killed 59-year-old Nickolas Zurilla in Nanticoke on July 5, 2013 — was ordered to appear for a status review every six months to see if he has been rehabilitated.

During one such hearing Monday, his supervisors at the facility said he has been improving despite some "slippage" in January. Duda got in trouble for trading pictures with another resident and subsequently stopped taking his medication, said Kory Bunce with the Secure Treatment Unit.

"He was real passive aggressive, doing whatever he could do to annoy staff," Bunce said, adding that Duda has since resumed taking his medicine and discussed anxiety he was feeling. "He was scared about how people in the community would look at him."

Duda's behavior since has been good, and he is working toward getting high school credit with the intention of getting his diploma and walking at the Dallas High School graduation, said his attorney, Cheryl A. Sobeski-Reedy.

Duda sought a home pass for March 27-29 so he can attend an open house at the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, where he wants to study computer science, she said. The school is also near Duda's older brother, who is a Pennsylvania state trooper, she said.

"So he will have extra family support," Sobeski-Reedy said.

Thomas Lavan, a juvenile probation officer, said he had no objection to the pass, noting that there have been talks about

getting Duda “acclimated back into the community.”

Noting Duda’s “marked improvement” as well as good grades and conduct, Amesbury approved the request.

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

Duda was originally charged with third-degree murder in adult court and faced a maximum of 20 to 40 years in state prison, but Luzerne County Judge Lesa Gelb moved his case to juvenile court, saying Duda deserves a chance at rehabilitation and doesn’t belong in a “criminal setting.”

At Duda’s sentencing in May, Zurilla’s daughter accused Luzerne County judges of being overly lenient and caring more about a reckless, remorseless teenage driver than the man who died.

On Monday, Amesbury set another review hearing for 11:30 a.m. April 20.

3/10/2015

Cops: Nanticoke woman slashed in fight

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A woman’s chin and forehead were slashed with a knife while she was trying to break up a fight Sunday night, police said.

Nanticoke police responded to the home of Amanda Oshinski, of 10 W. Ridge St., Nanticoke, at about 11 p.m. Sunday and summoned Newport Township police there after Oshinski told them she was attacked by Nicole Allison James in James’ residence at 152 Sharpe St., Newport Township.

Oshinski told police her boyfriend was being attacked by his roommate and his roommate’s brother when James allegedly joined the fight and started hitting Oshinski’s boyfriend.

Oshinski said she pushed James off her boyfriend and James grabbed her hair and pulled her into a hallway. “She had a hold of my hair. I didn’t feel the slash until she did it,” Oshinski told police.

James, 20, was arraigned Monday before District Judge Donald Whittaker on charges of aggravated assault, simple assault, recklessly endangering another person, disorderly conduct and harassment. She was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$75,000 bail. Her preliminary hearing is set for 1:15 p.m. March 18.

3/10/2015

Nanticoke man will stand trial on vehicular homicide charges

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Nearly two years after a one-car crash left a Plymouth woman dead, the man allegedly responsible will face all charges in county court.

James Novis, 39, of Nanticoke, was charged in January with felony counts of homicide by vehicle, homicide by vehicle while under the influence and accident involving death while not properly licensed, as well as misdemeanor DUI charges and summary offenses related to reckless driving.

During a preliminary hearing Monday, Michael Romanoskey, 26, of Wilkes-Barre, testified that Novis had been traveling upwards of 100 mph moments before the car went off the road into an embankment.

Romanoskey’s cousin, Cherri Hummel, 39, of Nanticoke, died from injuries related to the crash, according to the coroner.

Assistant District Attorneys Michelle Hardik and Tom Hogans called Romanoskey to the stand as their first witness and only eyewitness to the incident.

Romanoskey’s testimony took approximately an hour, as he explained he and Novis began drinking around 6 p.m. May 3, 2013, continued to drink with Hummel at a rock show and were consistently drinking through the night. Romanoskey said they were invited to someone’s house in Harveys Lake to continue drinking, where they remained until sunrise.

Romanoskey testified that he, Hummel and Novis left the residence to buy cigarettes and snacks at the Pump-N-Pantry on state Route 118 in Lake Township in a white two-door Chevy Caprice.

They left the convenient store and after traveling for about a mile at high speeds, Romanoskey said they went around a right curve, drove off the road onto the grass and into an embankment.

The state police crash investigation unit was able to determine that the car was traveling between 71 and 83 mph, on a road with a posted speed limit of 50 mph.

According to Romanoskey, he woke up on the ground outside of the car and noticed Hummel near him. He said he and Novis were crying and saying “she’s dead” to one another.

When defense attorney, Matthew Paul Kelly, asked how they knew she was deceased, Romanoskey stared at him. "We repeatedly shook her dead body and she didn't respond," Romanoskey said.

Officials said Hummel died instantly.

The vehicle was a 1979 model so there were no air bags in it. According to investigators none of the passengers appeared to be wearing seat belts at the time of the accident.

Charles Musial, patrolman for the Lehman Township police department, testified that he smelled a strong odor of alcohol on both Novis and Romanoskey when he arrived on scene.

The two men were taken by ambulance to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center. Novis' blood alcohol content was determined to be .153 shortly after the accident.

Kelly's main defense for Novis was that there was conflicting information as to who was driving the car at the time of the accident.

Musial said there was a lot of blood on the driver's side of the vehicle, consistent with the major laceration that Novis sustained to his left arm.

While in the hospital, Novis told Sgt. Mark Liparela of Lehman Township that Hummel had been upset with his driving after they left the Pump-N-Pantry, so he pulled over on state Route 29 and allowed her to drive, claiming that Hummel was operating the vehicle at the time of the crash, Liparela said.

Surveillance video retrieved from the Pump-N-Pantry showed the female getting into the back of the white car and a male with a bandana on his head get into the driver's seat before pulling away.

Novis also had his driver's license suspended in 2011 for a DUI and never had his license reinstated.

Kelly requested for Novis to be released from jail and placed into the custody of Luzerne County Probation, but prosecutors claimed he is currently a flight risk.

Magisterial District Judge James Tupper cut Novis' bail in half to \$50,000, but he is still being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. A formal arraignment will be scheduled at the Luzerne County Courthouse.

3/7/2015

Defense attorney for Nanticoke man says prostitute who was shot attempted to mug his client

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A Luzerne County judge revoked probation Friday for a Nanticoke man accused of shooting a woman in the head late last year.

Michael Angelo Foschini Jr., 25, will serve four to eight months at Luzerne County Correctional Facility after being arrested in December and failing to notify probation officials.

Wilkes-Barre City police said at the time of his arrest that Foschini shot a 19-year-old woman in the head with a .22-caliber rifle after an argument over money. The woman survived her injuries.

But the man's defense attorney Joseph F. Sklarosky Sr. told Judge Lesa Gelb Friday that the woman — who he said his client had hired as a prostitute — attempted to rob him. Sklarosky said the gun discharged accidentally as the two struggled for control of the weapon.

The attorney asked that Gelb revoke and reinstate Foschini's probation, but the judge granted only the former request.

A district judge on Dec. 18 arraigned Foschini on two counts each of aggravated assault and simple assault, and one count each of possession of marijuana and reckless endangerment.

According to a criminal complaint, the woman told police Foschini picked her up in the area of Academy Street and Carey Avenue in Wilkes-Barre, and drove her to the end of Willow Street, parking near an abandoned building.

She said they began arguing about money she felt Foschini owed her, police say. He then allegedly told the woman to exit the vehicle and grew angry when she took too long to comply.

Foschini then left the vehicle and went to the trunk area of his car where he retrieved a long black gun, the complaint says.

Police say the woman said she was standing outside the car and Foschini claimed he wasn't going to hurt her when he shot her in the head and drove away.

The woman made her way to a residence on Academy Street, and later underwent surgery at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

2/22/2015

Two charged in meth lab bust

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Two people have been arrested following an investigation into an alleged methamphetamine lab in Shickshinny. Gregg Zagata, 36, of Shickshinny and Denna Meikrantz, 33, of Nanticoke, were arraigned Friday before Magisterial District Judge John E. Hasay on charges related to the manufacture and sale of methamphetamines. An ongoing investigation into methamphetamine manufacturing and distribution identified Zagata and Meikrantz as the residents of 1249 Bethel Hill Road, in Shickshinny, according to a criminal complaint. Authorities learned that Zagata and Meikrantz were manufacturing the drug at that residence, the complaint continues. On Thursday, police took Meikrantz into custody on an outstanding arrest warrant at the home. They found drugs, drug paraphernalia and materials commonly used in the manufacture of methamphetamine at the residence, according to the criminal complaint. Zagata told police that he and Meikrantz allowed people to cook meth at the home in exchange for getting a free supply of the drug, according to the criminal complaint. Both suspects were charged with felony counts of possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver, and related offenses. Following their arraignment, they were sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of bail. Preliminary hearings are scheduled for March 4.

2/17/2015

Police search for owner of dog that bit Nanticoke man

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

City police are looking for a dog that bit the hand of a 79 year-old man on Sunday. The victim, Donald Cox of South Hanover Street, was on his front porch when he encountered a white, brown and black pit bull, police said, describing the hand bite as a serious injury. The dog's presumed owner told Cox he would return with information about his dog's shot history but never returned, police said. The presumed owner was white and was wearing black knit cap and was last seen with the dog walking down Enterprise Street, police said. City police are working on the investigation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's dog warden. Anyone with information is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200 or by dialing 911.

2/13/2015

Burglaries reported in Nanticoke

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

One or more burglars have gained entrance to homes by throwing a large rock through a first-floor window, then entering the homes where they stole items, city police said. A burglary with that modus operandi was reported at a home on South Hanover Street on Saturday, and at least one other recent burglary followed the same pattern, according to Nanticoke police. Money and jewelry were reported stolen in Saturday's incident, police said. Police caution residents to stay alert and ask the public's help to catch the criminal or criminals involved. Anyone with information about these crimes or who witnesses suspicious people or vehicles in their neighborhood is asked to call 911 and report the information, police said.

2/10/2015

Nanticoke man accused of stealing items, acting disorderly

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man faces multiple charges after he allegedly stole items from a parked truck, then resisted arrest while intoxicated Sunday night. John Britton, 26, of 226 Honey Pot St. was arraigned Monday before Magisterial District Judge Michael Dotzel on charges of theft by unlawful taking, theft from a motor vehicle, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct and public drunkenness. He was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility, in lieu of bail. Nanticoke police responded to a call for an intoxicated male harassing customers at the Cocoa Hut on North Market Street at about 6:50 p.m., according to the criminal complaint against Britton. Customers pointed out a man later identified as Britton to police, but Britton refused to answer questions or provide his identity, and shouted obscenities, according to the complaint.

Officers took Britton to police headquarters, where he eventually gave his name. A records check revealed outstanding warrants from Nanticoke and North Carolina, according to police.

Police then investigated a reported theft from a vehicle at Tommyboys Bar and Grill. Surveillance footage from the bar showed a man who looked like Britton enter an unlocked truck and remove items, according to the criminal complaint. The theft took place less than an hour before Britton was arrested at the nearby convenience store, police said. Britton then admitted to taking items from the truck, but said his memory was blurry after that due to alcohol consumption, according to police.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Feb. 25 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

2/7/2015

Shoplifting charge leads to drug bust in W-B

Citizens Voice

A Glen Lyon man was charged with retail theft and drug possession after he was allegedly caught shoplifting at a Wilkes-Barre drugstore Thursday.

Wilkes-Barre police responded to the Rite Aid Pharmacy, 155 E. Northampton St., at about 2:10 p.m. on Thursday for a reported retail theft.

Mark Draper, the suspect, had been observed stealing items valued at a total of \$40.75, police said.

Officers arrested Draper and searched him, finding 14 packets of heroin on his person, according to police. Draper reportedly told police the drugs were to be used for an undercover buy on behalf of Nanticoke police to set up a drug dealer.

Nanticoke police on Friday confirmed Draper is not a confidential informant for them.

Police determined that Draper was on probation and obtained a detainer to send him to Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

2/6/2015

Liquor Control enforcement officer charged with DUI after crash in Hanover Twp.

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A state Liquor Control enforcement officer who tested more than three times above the limit for driving drunk after a crash last month waived his charges to Luzerne County Court.

Michael Rutkowski, 34, of Espy Street, Nanticoke, has been placed on restricted duty following the Jan. 9 crash on Front Street, a state spokeswoman said Friday.

Rutkowski waived his preliminary hearing scheduled for Jan. 30 before District Judge Joseph Halesey. Rutkowski, who is charged with driving under the influence and careless driving, is free on his own recognizance.

Blood-alcohol content (BAC) results registered 0.278 percent for Rutkowski, according to the affidavit of probable cause to support the charges. An adult driver 20 years and older in Pennsylvania is considered intoxicated with a BAC of 0.08 percent.

According to the affidavit:

Sgt. Robert Orzechowski responded to a report of a crash and saw a Honda CRV with heavy front-end damage up against a tree along the roadway around 1:21 a.m. The Honda first hit a utility pole, severing it, before striking the tree. Another officer from Nanticoke directed Orzechowski to Rutkowski, who was sitting in the Nanticoke officer's vehicle. Orzechowski said Rutkowski was bleeding heavily from his head and while escorting him to a nearby ambulance, noticed he was unsteady and walking with a staggered walk.

They got into the ambulance where Orzechowski said he detected a strong odor of an intoxicating beverage on Rutkowski's breath while speaking with him.

He also noticed Rutkowski had slurred speech and glassy eyes. Rutkowski told the officer that his Honda left the roadway and struck the utility pole. In response to the officer's question about what caused the vehicle to leave the roadway, Rutkowski said, "It is what it is."

When pressed further for an explanation, Rutkowski said, "To (sic) much to drink." The officer inquired where Rutkowski was coming from and he said, "The bar."

Rutkowski was taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center for treatment of his injuries. While there he consented to the officer's request to submit to a blood-alcohol test.

2/2/2015

Nanticoke man charged with threatening to kill his mother and her boyfriend

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City police arrested a man they say threatened to kill his mother and her boyfriend during a fight about missing money. Edward Ryan Nork, 40, of West Main Street, was charged with two counts each of aggravated assault, simple assault, terroristic threats and recklessly endangering another person. He was arraigned by District Judge David Barilla in Swoyersville on Sunday and remained jailed Monday for lack of \$75,000 bail.

According to the criminal complaint:

Police said Nork and his mother, Susan Nork, argued about \$16 missing from her purse. Nork grabbed his mother around the neck and pinned her against a wall inside their house.

Susan Nork's boyfriend, Gary Moffitt, grabbed Nork to prevent him from punching her, the complaint says.

Nork punched Moffitt several times causing Moffitt to fall the the floor.

Moffitt allegedly told police Nork yelled, "You're all (expletive) dead" and ran upstairs where he retrieved Moffitt's handgun. Nork returned to the first floor holding the handgun in one hand and a magazine in his other hand, the complaint says.

Moffitt claimed Nork went to a cabinet where ammunition is stored. Moffitt struggled with Nork and was able to remove the handgun from him, according to the complaint.

Nork ran out of the house but returned Saturday night when he was arrested.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled on Feb. 11 before District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke.

1/30/2015

Police probe theft from Nanticoke high school

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Nanticoke police are investigating how an unspecified amount of cash, a laptop and a projector were stolen from a classroom at Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

School employees discovered Monday morning a broken window to the classroom and the theft of cash and a laptop, Detective Bob Lehman said. The cash was left in the classroom for a school trip, Lehman said, declining to say where the cash was stored.

School employees discovered Tuesday the same classroom window was broken into again and a projector was stolen from the classroom, Lehman said. The state police forensic unit came to the classroom both days and collected "a lot of evidence," Lehman said, declining to say what that evidence was.

Police are reviewing security video to find an image of a suspect, Lehman said. The classroom was on the first floor of the west side of the building.

Greater Nanticoke Area School District Superintendent Ronald Grevera confirmed a thief smashed "an exterior window and ransacked a room looking for cash." He said anyone who noticed unusual activity in the area of the high school should report the information to the Nanticoke Police Department.

1/17/2015

Suspects sought in computer theft at LCCC

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are searching for three men who they say stole two computers from Luzerne County Community College on Friday.

Police released surveillance camera images of the suspects and seek the public's help in catching them.

The three men walked into the health and sciences building at the community college, off East Main Street, at about 1 p.m. Friday, police said. They stole two Dell computers, outfitted with accessories, from a student concession area, then left the building, according to police.

Anyone with information about this crime or the suspects shown in the surveillance footage is asked to call Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.

1/17/2015

Homeless man wanted for theft in Pittston charged by Nanticoke with prowling at nighttime

There was a reason why Steven Fasulka allegedly gave police a bogus name early Friday morning.

Fasulka, 25, was wanted on charges he had stolen items from vehicles in Pittston.

An off-duty police officers spotted Fasulka trying door handles and entering unlocked cars in the area of the 400 Club on South Prospect Street just before 1 a.m., according to charges filed.

Once Fasulka's true identity became known, police learned he was wanted by Pittston police on similar charges.

Fasulka, who police listed as homeless, was arraigned by District Judge David Barilla in Swoyersville on the two arrest warrants.

- Nanticoke police charged him with two counts each of tampering with evidence and unsworn falsification to authorities, and one count each of loitering and prowling at night and possession of a controlled substance.

- Pittston police charged Fasulka with nine counts of possession of a controlled substance, seven counts of criminal attempt to commit theft and a single count of possession of drug paraphernalia.

Fasulka was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$2,000 bail.

Off-duty officer Bryan Kata allegedly spotted Fasulka pulling car handles in the area of South Prospect and East South streets. Fasulka was found with lottery tickets, four different types of cigarette packs, jewelry, several prescription bottles with pills, coins and sobriety coins, which are tokens given to Alcoholics Anonymous members that represents the amount of time that person has remained sober.

Police said Fasulka had \$16.56 in coins in his pockets, according to the criminal complaint.

Fasulka used another name to identify himself to police, the complaint says.

Pittston police allege Fasulka was entering cars along Kennedy Street and Tomato Festival Drive stealing items on Oct. 2. When he was arrested, police said Fasulka dropped a bag containing nine pills identified as Chonazepam, the complaint says.

Court records say Fasulka is facing charges of criminal trespass and criminal mischief in county court when Edwardsville police allege he had stolen copper pipes from a residence on Lawrence Street on Oct. 14.

1/10/2015

Nanticoke man charged in 2014 stabbing

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police have charged a Nanticoke man in connection with a stabbing early last year.

Kyle Avery, 28, was arraigned Friday morning before Magisterial District Judge Diana Malast on charges of aggravated assault and simple assault, then sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of bail. The charges stem from a fight at a home in Nanticoke on March 16, 2014, according to the criminal complaint against Avery. Nanticoke police gave the following account, in the criminal complaint.

Officers responded to a reported disturbance at a West Church Street home and found a man standing in front of the home, bleeding from the face. The man said he went to Avery's home and banged on the side door when he heard sounds of a commotion, to check on Avery's girlfriend, as he suspected Avery might have assaulted her. The man told police that he and Avery argued and Avery spat at him and then "cut" him.

Avery told police that he was asleep when the man banged on his door, and that the man barged into the home despite his attempts to slam the door shut. Avery told police that he felt threatened, so he grabbed a box cutter and sliced the man in the face. Police did not indicate why it took more than nine months to file charges against Avery.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Jan. 21 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

1/8/2015

Berwick man charged in 2011 burglary in Nanticoke

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police have charged a Berwick man with a burglary from nearly four years ago in Nanticoke.

Dakota Whitmore, 22, was arraigned Tuesday on charges of burglary, criminal trespass and theft by unlawful taking.

The charges stem from a burglary at the home of an elderly woman in Nanticoke on Jan. 26, 2011.

The victim, 89 at the time, told police that a television and her wallet were stolen from her Maple Street home, according to the criminal complaint against Whitmore. She said three teenagers came to her home the previous day and offered to shovel snow, and that she opened the kitchen door and moved her car so they could shovel her parking space.

In May 2011, police interviewed a man who said he saw Whitmore with the victim's wallet and a roll of cash the morning after the burglary, according to the criminal complaint.

On Dec. 19, 2013, the victim's wallet was found on the roof of L.S. Bowl-A-Rama, police said. On Oct. 22, 2014, police interviewed Whitmore, who confessed to the crime, according to the criminal complaint. He said he gave the television set to his girlfriend and kept the cash, police said.

A preliminary hearing for Whitmore before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker is scheduled for Jan. 21.

1/5/2015

Nanticoke man charged with vehicular homicide for 2013 crash

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was charged Monday with homicide by vehicle for a crash that killed Cherri L. Hummel in the spring of 2013 in Lehman Township.

James T. Novis, 39, was charged with homicide by vehicle while driving under the influence, homicide by vehicle, DUI, reckless driving, careless driving, accident involving death and other traffic violations.

Authorities responded May 4, 2013 about 7:30 a.m. to Route 29 and Trojan Road for a one-vehicle crash. They found a wrecked Chevrolet Caprice with its three occupants outside the car, police said.

State police said Hummel, 39, of Nanticoke, was pronounced dead at the scene. Novis and Michael Romanoskey, 24, of Wilkes-Barre, were taken to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township.

Authorities said excessive speed contributed to the crash.

Novis is set to be arraigned Monday morning before Magisterial District Judge James Tupper.