

12/24/2019

### **Nanticoke man arraigned on strangulation charges**

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A Nanticoke man was arrested for choking a woman until she passed out during a domestic dispute Friday night. Police said John Burton Derhammer, 45, has been charged with strangulation. According to the complaint, the woman said Derhammer took her phone away and threatened her and her dog with death if she did not give him money, and when she said she had no money to give he began punching and kicking her in her face and head. Derhammer then allegedly wrapped a towel around her neck and began strangling her. Police said Derhammer told her he did not care if she told anyone and he would kill and torture her and would lock her in the closet. According to the complaint, Derhammer then screwed the apartment door shut so she couldn't leave. Police said the woman stated she passed out. According to the complaint, the woman woke up to the smell of smoke, noise from the smoke alarms and flames as Derhammer had caught a deep-fryer on fire. Police said while Derhammer used the screw gun to exit the apartment, she was able to leave the apartment and call 911. The woman told firefighters she had been assaulted and sustained injuries and that she was taking her own transportation to the hospital for treatment, police said. According to the complaint, the woman had a facial fracture and a broken nose as well as bruising on her arms and legs. Derhammer is being held in Luzerne County Prison on \$75,000 bail. His preliminary arraignment took place Sunday and his preliminary hearing is set for on Jan. 8 in front of Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker.



12/21/2019

### **Nanticoke Police ID suspected bank robber**

Times Leader

Nanticoke Police Friday issued an arrest warrant for Duwan Antonio Raymond for allegedly robbing the Citizens Bank on Market Street earlier this week. Nanticoke Police Friday issued an arrest warrant for Duwan Antonio Raymond for allegedly robbing the Citizens Bank on Market Street earlier this week. - Police on Friday identified the suspect in a robbery earlier this week of the Citizens Bank on 75 N. Market St.

An arrest warrant was issued for Duwan Antonio Raymond. Anyone with information about his whereabouts is asked to call 911 to speak to an officer. Police alleged Raymond entered the bank on Dec. 18 and told a teller he was armed. Raymond allegedly fled on foot across Market Street, behind the post office and up Coal Street.

12/19/2019

### **Police search for bank robber**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice



Police are searching for a man who robbed Citizens Bank in Nanticoke on Wednesday afternoon.

Police said a man entered the bank at 75 N. Market St. around 12:30 p.m. saying he was armed and demanding cash. The robber then ran off across North Market Street, making his way behind the post office and up Coal Street, police said. Investigators released photos of a man in a Philadelphia Phillies hoodie with a goatee. Anyone with information about the identity of the robber is asked to call 911.

12/18/2019

**Police: Nanticoke contractor took money, didn't complete roofing work**

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A Nanticoke contractor was arraigned Tuesday on charges alleging he took payment for a roofing job that he failed to complete.

Michael T. Wisneski, 61, of 200 W. Church St., is accused of accepting a \$2,500 payment and then disappearing for months while the homeowner tried to reach him.

According to the complaint, Plymouth Borough resident Linda Malecki contacted troopers in October to report she had given Wisneski a check on July 10 to do the roofing work.

In the following weeks, Wisneski failed to show up for the job and his voicemail was often full when Malecki tried to call, police said.

Around Labor Day, Malecki got a worker to pick up and the person claimed work would begin that week, but Wisneski again failed to show, according to the complaint.

At one point Malecki was able to reach Wisneski, who claimed to be "tied up" in New Jersey and promised to show up the following Monday, the charges said. Wisneski hadn't been heard from since, according to police.

When Troopers contacted Wisneski, he claimed he had every intention to do the job but said he had a number of health issues, including heart troubles and bleeding ulcers, the complaint said.

Troopers advised Wisneski not to contact the victims and that they would handle the matter.

Troopers charged Wisneski with felony counts of deceptive business practices and theft by deception. Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned Wisneski on the charges Tuesday morning and released him on \$25,000 unsecured bail.

A preliminary hearing was set for Jan. 8.

12/17/2019

**Super: School officials working with Nanticoke police on alleged bullying video**

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Greater Nanticoke Area High School administration officials are working together with Nanticoke Police Department to investigate a bullying incident that occurred in a boys' bathroom at the high school, according to Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Dr. Ronald Grevera.

A video circulating on Facebook shows a fight that occurred in the bathroom in which a boy strikes another boy while others watch. When the boy tries to defend himself, he is struck again.

"We will not tolerate the level of violence evident in that post," Grevera said. "With that said, pending the outcome of an investigation, I can see both charges being filed by the police department and severe consequences forthcoming by the district for their actions."

Grevera said they also will investigate the bystanders "who instead of helping break up the fight are actually encouraging the fight."

"I also expect consequences to be forthcoming for the bystanders as well," Grevera said.

Nanticoke police Chief Robert Lehman said a video of the incident circulating on Facebook is "very concerning."

"In this day and age, there should be zero tolerance for this," he said.

12/17/2019

**Police: Nanticoke man caused pair of crashes**

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A Nanticoke man is charged with causing two back-to-back crashes over the weekend, briefly dragging another motorist who tried to take away his keys.

Jesus Javett Soto, 18, of 242 Enterprise St., is accused of being under the influence of marijuana and Xanax when the Honda Odyssey he was driving struck two other vehicles on Saturday.

The first victim, Christine Loveless, reported Soto struck her vehicle while it was occupied by her mother and three children, according to the complaint.

Police said Soto fled the scene of that crash and then hit a Chevrolet Trailblazer in the area of 350 E. Poplar St., Plymouth Twp.

Loveless showed up at the scene of that crash and told the truck's driver, James Lewis, that Soto had been in another crash and not to let him leave, the complaint said.

Lewis grabbed Soto's steering wheel and tried to get the keys, but Soto threw the van in reverse and began backing away, dragging Lewis a short distance, police said.

Lewis then let go and Soto drove off, eventually ditching the van on West Poplar Street, police said.

Troopers found Soto along with another man and a woman walking toward the Susquehanna River. Soto initially claimed to be coming from a friend's house, but then admitted being the driver of the Odyssey, police said.

Soto, who had bloodshot eyes and trouble keeping his balance, was determined to be under the influence of marijuana and Xanax, troopers said. He also did not have a driver's license or permission to use his aunt's van, the complaint says.

Police charged Soto with aggravated assault by vehicle while driving under the influence, fleeing the scene of a crash, driving under the influence, possessing drug paraphernalia, reckless endangerment, simple assault, unauthorized use of a vehicle, harassment, speeding, careless driving and reckless driving.

Magisterial District Judge James M. Dixon arraigned Soto on the charges Saturday afternoon and ordered him jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$20,000.

A preliminary hearing was set for Dec. 26.

12/16/2019

### **Woman who shoved girl pleads guilty to spitting at nurses**

pkernan@timesleader.com

A Nanticoke woman who first made headlines after shoving a 12-year-old girl in 2017 has pleaded guilty to a charge stemming from accusations she spat at nurses and a security officer at a local hospital.

Marlenea Ann Uravage, 32, entered a guilty plea on a summary count of harassment Monday morning before Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr., court records show.

Several other charges, including three misdemeanor counts of simple assault, were withdrawn.

Urage was arrested earlier this year after Plains Township Police accused her of spitting at a registered nurse, an emergency room technician and a security officer on Aug. 22 while she was in the emergency room.

The original filing does not state why Uravage was in the emergency room. She was accused of yelling and cursing at staff when she spat at the hospital employees, striking the nurse in the face with saliva and a technician on the head an arm.

Records show Uravage's guilty plea comes with associated court costs of slightly more than \$160, but also show there are no further payments due, suggesting they've been paid in full.

Urage previously grabbed local attention after shoving a 12-year-old girl outside a Quick Stop mart in Wilkes-Barre on May 28, 2017.

The assault was captured on surveillance cameras, and the footage went viral locally. Uravage pleaded guilty to simple assault and was sentenced by Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas to spend between four and 20 months in the county lockup.

Lupas noted at the time of sentencing that Uravage was unremorseful.

Urage was paroled after serving a bit more than six months of her sentence. She appealed her sentence, which was upheld by the state Superior Court before her release, calling her a "present danger to the community."

12/15/2019

### **Nanticoke police investigating alleged bullying incident at high school**

Denise Allabaugh - Times Leader

Nanticoke police are investigating a bullying incident that allegedly occurred in a boys' bathroom at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School, according to Nanticoke police Chief Robert Lehman.

A video circulating on Facebook shows a fight that occurred in the bathroom in which a boy strikes another boy while others watch. When the boy tries to defend himself, he is struck again.

Lehman said due to the "very concerning" nature of the video, the police department and the school will be involved in the investigation. He said police are still trying to properly identify everyone in the video and detectives are looking into it.

"In this day and age, there should be zero tolerance for this," he said.

Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Dr. Ronald Grevera did not immediately return a message seeking comment

Saturday.

12/14/2019

## **DA: PSP justified in kidnapper's shooting death**

Roger DuPuis - rdupuis@timesleader.com

The shooting death of a Nanticoke man by state police earlier this month following a manhunt in a kidnapping case was justified, Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said in a statement released Friday afternoon.

Jordan Oliver, 20, “continuously indicated he had a firearm, positioned his concealed hand against her neck, and threatened to shoot the victim,” 15-year-old Samara Derwin, Salavantis said in announcing that investigation into the Dec. 1 incident has been completed.

Oliver was shot by members of the Pennsylvania State Police Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) on the night of Dec. 1. Derwin escaped unharmed.

No firearm was found on Oliver, the statement indicates.

“The victim additionally advised that she believed Oliver had a firearm. As a result, the victim appeared to be in immediate danger of death and the use of deadly force by the SERT members has been ruled justified,” the DA added.

In a previous interview with the Times Leader, Derwin — who is not identified by name in the DA’s report — told a reporter she did not think Oliver “had a gun on him,” but “he was acting as if he did.”

Police have said Oliver kidnapped Derwin at knifepoint from the Greater Nanticoke High School parking lot earlier that afternoon in a stolen Nanticoke Police SUV after spraying officers with mace. An hours-long manhunt followed, with an Amber Alert issued for Derwin later in the day.

### **Kidnapping described**

According to Salavantis:

A witness called Luzerne County 911 at about 3:30 p.m. reporting that her friend, a 15-year-old female, had been taken at knifepoint. When police arrived, they encountered Oliver holding a knife to the minor female’s throat.

Two Nanticoke officers arrived on scene and initially were able to deescalate the situation, allowing the female to get free and into the police car.

“When officers attempted to take Oliver into custody, he fought, sprayed them with mace he had concealed on him, and fled into the nearby, fully marked police SUV,” the DA’s statement indicates.

Previously filed court documents state that Oliver resisted the officers even after a Taser was used on him.

“At that time, it appeared that the female had not entered the vehicle as Oliver could be seen driving and the passenger seat was vacant,” it continues.

Oliver drove the vehicle directly at one officer who discharged his weapon and narrowly escaped around the front to the passenger side, the statement adds. One of the three rounds fired is believed to have ricocheted off the center console and grazed Oliver’s leg, the statement adds.

That use of force also was ruled justified, as the officer was “at immediate risk of death or serious bodily injury,” Salavantis stated.

In her interview with the Times Leader following the incident, Derwin told a reporter that Oliver made her bandage him up and later drive the car.

“He was complaining that he’d been shot, and that he had pepper spray in his eyes,” she said.

As the search got underway, police learned that Oliver had three violations of a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order obtained by his ex-girlfriend and six violations of a PFA order obtained by Derwin earlier this year, the DA’s statement indicates.

Derwin said she had been in an on-again, off-again relationship with Oliver for more than a year but were not together at the time of the Dec. 1 incident.

Derwin’s mother, Kathleen Minsavage, who sought the PFA on her daughter’s behalf in May, told the Times Leader that Oliver had attempted to call the girl the previous day, but she hung up.

On or about Nov. 27, 2019, Oliver had been released from prison after being arrested for assaulting his father, the DA added.

### **Shooting in Warrior Run**

The DA’s statement continued:

At approximately 10 p.m. Dec. 1, SERT located Oliver and the teen on foot in a wooded area of Warrior Run.

SERT yelled to Oliver to stop. He grabbed Derwin with one arm around her neck and his other hand tucked underneath his arm, indicating he had a firearm. He took her to the ground, shielding his body with hers.

Oliver threatened to shoot if police did not leave. According to the members of SERT, the female also told police Oliver had a firearm, the statement indicates.

“The negotiator repeatedly attempted to persuade Oliver to show his hands, release the victim and surrender. He refused and continued to threaten to kill the victim,” Salavantis said.

“Supervisors authorized deadly force unless Oliver began to surrender. The decision was made based on the victim being held hostage, his continued failure to respond to negotiations, and information from both Oliver and the victim that he possessed a firearm,” the DA added. “Oliver’s position and threats appeared to place the hostage in danger of immediate death.”

No firearm found

“Oliver did not respond to negotiator requests and kept his hand under his arm against the victim’s neck,” the statement indicates. “A countdown to fire began and multiple SERT members coordinated simultaneous deadly force.”

As previously reported, an autopsy on Oliver’s body died from multiple gunshot wounds, according to Luzerne County Coroner Frank Hacken.

“Despite Oliver’s threats and the information from the victim, a firearm was not found,” the DA stated.

In an interview after the incident, Oliver’s father, Sean Oliver, said he felt his son’s shooting “was 100% unjustifiable.” No one appeared to be home when the Times Leader returned to the Oliver home on Friday after the DA’s statement was released.

Derwin described Oliver’s last moments for a reporter when visited earlier this month.

“He [Oliver] told the troopers that if they came any closer, he would shoot me,” Derwin said. “I don’t even think he had a gun on him, but he was acting as if he did.”

Derwin said she told Oliver to let him go or else he would die, to which Oliver allegedly replied, “I want to die.”

Oliver and a trooper then got into an argument, Derwin added, at which time he was shot and killed. She was unharmed, but Derwin — who had a protection from abuse order against Oliver — said he coerced her into sex during the kidnapping, threatening to kill her if she didn’t comply.

“The victim related to investigators that Oliver also assaulted her in the woods after fleeing the Nanticoke High School, that she was in fear during the incident and never felt she could escape safely,” the DA stated.

In their earlier interview, Derwin and her mother stated they had earlier hoped Oliver would receive treatment after they obtained the PFA.

“He was mentally ill, he needed help,” Derwin said. “I didn’t want him to die.”

12/15/2019

**DA: Police justified in shooting kidnapper**

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State police were justified in killing a Nanticoke kidnapping suspect earlier this month as he held a teenage girl hostage, threatened to shoot the cops and refused all demands to surrender — including a final countdown before they opened fire, Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis announced Friday.

Salavantis said Jordan Oliver gave members of the state police Special Emergency Response Team no other choice when they confronted him in a wooded area of Warrior Run around 10 p.m. on Dec. 1, hours after he pepper sprayed Nanticoke police officers and stole a marked police vehicle with the girl inside.

“The negotiator repeatedly attempted to persuade Oliver to show his hands, release the victim and surrender. He refused and continued to threaten to kill the victim. Supervisors authorized deadly force unless Oliver began to surrender,”

Salavantis wrote. “The decision was made based on the victim being held hostage, his continued failure to respond to negotiations, and information from both Oliver and the victim that he possessed a firearm.”

Investigators say as troopers approached Oliver he put one arm around Samara Derwin’s neck, announced he had a gun and fell to the ground, shielding his body from the troopers with Derwin’s body.

“Oliver threatened to shoot if police did not leave. According to the members of SERT, the female also told police Oliver had a firearm,” Salavantis wrote. “The negotiator repeatedly attempted to persuade Oliver to show his hands, release the victim and surrender. He refused and continued to threaten to kill the victim.”

Police felt Derwin — the daughter of a Nanticoke police officer — was in immediate danger and troopers gave Oliver a final ultimatum.

“A countdown to fire began and multiple SERT members coordinated simultaneous deadly force,” Salavantis said.

Derwin was rescued unharmed.

An autopsy determined Oliver died from multiple gunshot wounds.

His family has questioned whether deadly force was necessary, but Salavantis said it was the only option given the circumstances.

In her press release, the district attorney noted Oliver was a longtime menace to the victim — his former girlfriend. Derwin had obtained three protection from abuse orders against Oliver and he had a total of six violations. Just days before he kidnapped the girl, Oliver was released from prison after being arrested for assaulting his father — who was the chief defender of his son following the shooting.

The incident unfolded around 3:30 p.m. on Dec. 1 behind the Greater Nanticoke Area High School when one of Derwin's friends called 911 to report that Oliver was holding Derwin hostage at knifepoint.

Police arrived to see Oliver holding a knife to Derwin's throat, police said.

Two officers were able to convince Oliver to leave the girl go and she was directed to go into the police sport utility vehicle.

As officers tried to take Oliver into custody, he assaulted them and sprayed them with pepper spray that he was in possession of, police said.

Oliver then jumped in the police cruiser and drove it at one of the officers, Salavantis said.

One officer fired three shots in self defense, Salavantis said. One shot ricocheted off the center console and struck Oliver in the leg. Salavantis ruled that shooting was justified as well.

Salavantis' ruling ends several weeks of speculation about what happened in the wooded area of Warrior Run after police tracked down Oliver and his hostage.

"In the encounter with SERT, the investigation disclosed that Oliver refused at all times to relent, release the victim or show his hands. He continuously indicated he had a firearm, positioned his concealed hand against her neck, and threatened to shoot the victim. The victim additionally advised that she believed Oliver had a firearm," Salavantis said. "As a result, the victim appeared to be in immediate danger of death and the use of deadly force by the SERT members has been ruled justified."

12/10/2019

**Nanticoke homicide trial continued again, as defense team seeks more time**

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Once more, the trial for Anthony Spudis has been pushed back, with the defense team saying it needs more time to prepare in light of other trials.

The accused killer appeared before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley for a motions hearing, with his court-appointed attorney, Robert Saurman, saying he is attached to homicide trials in both February and May.

Spudis' trial was originally set to begin in early January, but Saurman petitioned for more time due to his total trial load, and to give expert witnesses more time to prepare.

Spudis, 37, is facing an open count of criminal homicide, after he allegedly broke into the Nanticoke home of Gertrude Price on Nov. 28, 2013. Prosecutors say he stabbed Price, 97, several times in the head in what has been characterized as a burglary turned violent, and they are pursuing the death penalty in the case.

Spudis also faces burglary and robbery charges.

Assistant District Attorney Daniel Zola indicated in court on Monday that prosecutors would have no issue with the trial being continued once again, but he did say that his team would be ready to proceed at the previously scheduled trial date.

Gartley granted the defense team's motion for continuance, rescheduling the trial to begin the week of Sept. 8, 2020.

Gartley blocked out a total of four weeks for the trial, expecting it to take longer to pick a jury as, if they chose to convict Spudis, the jury will then need to determine whether or not he deserves the death penalty.

Spudis was arrested in late December 2017, after two inmates at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility reported he talked about killing a woman in Nanticoke on Thanksgiving a few years previously.

Prosecutors say police found items at the home of Spudis' former girlfriend, Taryn Simms, that implicate him, including a screwdriver that is believed to have been the weapon used to kill Price. Other items from Price's home also were found hidden in the rafters of Simms' home, prosecutors say.

12/6/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department

**PRESS RELEASE**

**December 6, 2019**

**Offense Type: Narcotics Trafficking**  
**Location 147 Phillips Street Nanticoke City**

Subject: Dwayne Abramson (a.k.a. Dwayne Abramson)  
43 yrs., of Phillips St., Nanticoke, Pa

**Incident Details:**

A joint narcotics operation with the Luzerne County District Attorney's Drug Task Force, Hanover Township and Nanticoke City Police Narcotic Units led to the arrest of Dwayne Abramson, 43, on December 4, 2019. Narcotics operations in Hanover Township led to the purchasing of Crack Cocaine from the subject, Abramson, on four (4) separate occasions.

Upon serving a search warrant at his home located at 147 Phillips St. Nanticoke City, on December 4, 2019 at 7:15 am hours, Abramson was taken into custody when he attempted to flee out the back door/yard of the property.

The subject was transported to District Magistrate Donald Whittaker and bail was set at "no bail amount" due to the Subject being on Federal Probation for Firearms violations. Federal Probation, Scranton, Pa put a Federal Detainer on the subject and he was transported to the Luzerne County Prison.

**Charges:**  
Delivery of a Sch II Controlled Substance, Crack Cocaine (4 counts) Possess with the Intent to Deliver a Sch II Controlled Substance, Crack Cocaine (4 counts) Possession of a Sch II Controlled Substance, Crack Cocaine (4 counts)  
A preliminary hearing was scheduled for December 11, 2019 at Luzerne County Central Court  
Nanticoke City Code Enforcement assisted at the location as the property possessed code violations.

12/4/2019

**Alleged kidnapper died of multiple gunshot wounds**

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The Nanticoke man killed by police after stealing a squad car and kidnapping a policeman's daughter died of multiple gunshot wounds, the Luzerne County Coroner's Office announced Tuesday.

An autopsy determined 20-year-old Jordan Patrick Oliver was shot multiple times during a confrontation with the Pennsylvania State Police Special Emergency Response Team in a wooded area near Hanover Twp. overnight Sunday, the coroner's office said.

The manner of Oliver's death was still pending the results of an investigation, Coroner Frank Hacken said in a statement. The Luzerne County District Attorney's Office is investigating the use of force and has not yet made a ruling on whether it was justified.

According to kidnapping and aggravated assault charges state police filed against Oliver before he was killed, police were dispatched to Greater Nanticoke Area High School around 3:30 p.m. Sunday to a report of a man holding a girl at knifepoint.

Police said they found Oliver standing in the parking lot while holding 15-year-old Samara Derwin — his ex-girlfriend and the daughter of Nanticoke police officer Michael Derwin — by her neck with a knife up against her throat.

The officers tried to negotiate with Oliver, who said he didn't want to go to jail and that he would not hurt Derwin if officers stayed back, according to the complaint.

At one point when Derwin got separated from Oliver, officers told her to go sit in a waiting Nanticoke police SUV. The officers tried to arrest Oliver, who began struggling and broke loose after spraying them with pepper spray, according to the charges.

He then jumped into the police SUV and sped off with Derwin inside, police said. An officer on the scene fired as Oliver drove toward him, but the vehicle continued on and left the area.

Police issued an Amber alert for Derwin and began an hours-long manhunt for Oliver that ended with the deadly confrontation in the woods of Hanover Twp.

State police described finding Oliver "holding (Derwin) hostage" and then being killed after "deadly force was used." Troopers have refused to provide more detail on the shooting.

Oliver's father, Sean Oliver, has questioned the need for police to use lethal force, saying his son deserved to go to jail but didn't warrant a death sentence.

12/3/2019

## Teenage kidnapping victim describes relationship, abuse

kcarroll@timesleader.com

Samara Derwin, the teenage girl who was taken hostage by ex-boyfriend Jordan Oliver on Sunday, spoke out about the ordeal that ended with Oliver being shot to death by a state trooper.

“I want to say something, because people are making up all these stories,” Derwin said in an interview with the Times Leader.

Samara, 15, spoke with a reporter in the presence of her parents, Kathleen Minsavage and Michael Derwin, who is a Nanticoke police officer.

The Times Leader’s policy is normally not to identify victims of sexual assaults. We are publishing the details of Samara’s account, including allegations that Oliver, 20, coerced her into sex during the kidnapping, because Samara and her parents spoke freely, and because she has openly been identified by police as the individual kidnapped by Oliver.

All three family members said that contrary to what has been alleged on social media, Michael Derwin was not on duty or involved in a professional capacity with Sunday’s incident.

Samara said she had been in an on-again, off-again relationship with Oliver for more than a year. They were not together at the time of Sunday’s incident, she and her mother said, but Oliver had attempted to contact Samara on Saturday.

“Just the other day, Samara received a call and it was him. She hung up and he called again,” Minsavage said.

Details about the kidnapping, chase and shooting are reported elsewhere in today’s Times Leader, which also includes an interview with Oliver’s father, Sean.

Acting Nanticoke Police Chief Robert Lehman did not return calls from a reporter on Monday and was not in the office when the Times Leader visited.

State Police, meanwhile, referred questions about the case to Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis, who responded only that no media statement was forthcoming on Monday.

PFA, abusive behavior

Samara said she and her mother had taken out a restraining order against Oliver — who had previous orders taken out against him by other women — and that he violated the order multiple times. Those cases are also reported on elsewhere in today’s edition.

“When I got the PFA (protection from abuse order), he would call me, tell me that he was going to kill me and kill my family,” Samara said.

Court records show the PFA was filed on Samara’s behalf in May by Minsavage.

“He had begun to get obsessive and abusive,” Minsavage said. “She finally let me intervene. He was supposed to go and get mental health treatments and stay away from her for three years.

“We were okay with as long as he got the treatment, he wouldn’t have to do the full time,” Minsavage added.

The PFA alleges that Oliver struck Samara in the head several times in an argument on May 6. It also alleges that he threatened to kill Samara if she sought a PFA against him.

Incident at high school

Samara said that Oliver had tracked her down at Greater Nanticoke High School on Sunday afternoon via a friend. He got into a car with her and her friends, at which point he pulled the knife and held it to her throat.

“When the police showed up, he put the knife to my throat and said that if they got any closer, he would kill me,” Samara said.

Oliver walked Samara down to the football field at knifepoint, she said, where the officers attempted to take him into custody. She said they placing her in the back of a Nanticoke Police SUV while officers patted Oliver down.

But Oliver became violent, Samara said, and pepper sprayed an officer in a struggle.

According to court documents an officer’s Taser was deployed, but it had no effect on Oliver, who kept struggling.

Oliver was able to break free and get into the open door of a police vehicle where Samara was being held.

He drove off in the SUV with Derwin inside at about 3:20 p.m.

During his escape from custody, Oliver was shot in the leg by police. Samara said he made her bandage him up.

“He was complaining that he’d been shot, and that he had pepper spray in his eyes,” Samara said. “He made me drive the car.”

Sexual assault alleged

As time wore on, Oliver threatened Samara and coerced her into having sex with him, under the threat of death, she said.

“He wasn’t being mean until I didn’t want to have sex with him or I didn’t want to kiss him, then he said ‘I guess you

want to die,” she said.

“Then he had sex with me, but I didn’t want to have sex with him.”

According to Samara, they had stopped in the woods and were waiting for a friend to come pick them up. The friend was supposed to hide Oliver away while the police were looking for him.

“I asked him if I could go home, but he said that I was coming with him,” Samara said. “I couldn’t run, because he would’ve gotten me.”

Police issued a BOLO, or be-on-the-lookout order for Oliver and the SUV. Later Sunday night they also issued an Amber Alert for Samara.

Troopers tracked them to a wooded area of Hanover Township near Warrior Run, and eventually converged on the scene.

“He [Oliver] told the troopers that if they came any closer, he would shoot me,” Samara said. “I don’t even think he had a gun on him, but he was acting as if he did.”

Samara says she told Oliver to let him go or else he would die, to which Oliver allegedly replied, “I want to die.” Oliver and a trooper then got into an argument, Samara said, at which time he was shot and killed. She was freed unharmed.

“He was mentally ill, he needed help,” she said. “I didn’t want him to die.”

12/3/2019

### **Abductor was focus of PFAs, had troubled past**

Ed Lewis - [elewis@timesleader.com](mailto:elewis@timesleader.com)

A Nanticoke man killed by state troopers after he allegedly kidnapped a 15-year-old girl had a history of violating a court-imposed restraining order barring him from having any contact with the teen.

Court records say Jordan Oliver, 20, of Center Street, violated the Protection From Abuse order six times by repeatedly contacting Samara Derwin multiple times, including one instance in which he threatened to shoot himself in front of her.

Oliver was the subject of an hours-long manhunt Sunday shortly after he was confronted by two Nanticoke police officers while holding a knife to Derwin’s throat in a parking lot of the Greater Nanticoke Area High School around 3:20 p.m., according to court records.

Oliver held Derwin as he walked toward a baseball field, telling officers he would harm the girl if they got any closer. Derwin managed to escape Oliver’s grasps and was instructed by an officer to sit inside a police cruiser.

An officer deployed a Taser, but that had no impact on Oliver, records state.

Oliver sprayed mace in the officers’ faces and jumped into the police cruiser with Derwin, driving toward one of the officers, who discharged a round from his service revolver, court records say.

Authorities searched for Oliver and Derwin in the Nanticoke area, including the secluded Concrete City, for hours before issuing an Amber Alert at about 9:30 p.m.

One hour after the Amber Alert, Oliver and Derwin were spotted by troopers with the Special Emergency Response Team in a wooded area along Tomko Avenue in Hanover Township, near Warrior Run.

During an exchange with SERT troopers, Oliver was killed and Derwin was freed unharmed, state police said.

Authorities did not say whether the 2014 Ford Interceptor cruiser was recovered, and it was not clear Monday whether Oliver had been armed when he was killed.

Oliver was not inside the cruiser when he was killed, a law enforcement source said.

Nanticoke Acting Police Chief Robert Lehman could not be reached for comment Monday.

State police referred calls to Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis, who responded to a message she would not be briefing the media “at this time.”

An autopsy on Oliver’s body is scheduled for today.

PFA obtained

Prior to the use of deadly force, state police obtained an arrest warrant signed by District Judge Joseph Halsey in Hanover Township charging Oliver with four counts of aggravated assault and one count each of kidnapping for ransom, theft and unlawful restraint.

Derwin is the daughter of Nanticoke police Officer Michael Derwin, who had an encounter with Oliver during a preliminary arraignment on Aug. 25, 2017, court records say.

Derwin, through mother Kathleen Minsavage, filed an application for a protection from abuse order on May 7, alleging Oliver struck her head during an argument and threatened to kill her. A county judge imposed a permanent PFA order prohibiting Oliver from contacting Derwin until June 18, 2022.

Oliver violated the PFA order six times from May 7 to May 20 — two times within two hours on May 20, according to court records.

In all of the violations, Derwin alleged Oliver repeatedly sent her text messages and called her, disguising his phone number several times.

Oliver on May 19 told Derwin he was going to show up at her house and shoot himself in front of her, asking her why she causes him pain and why she won't talk to him. Oliver also sent messages to Derwin's mother asking for permission to talk to her daughter to say goodbye, pledging he would leave her family alone, court records say.

A court hearing on the alleged PFA violations, which was continued several times, was scheduled to take place Dec. 17. Previous incidents

A former girlfriend of Oliver's obtained a PFA against him in August 2017, alleging he threw a cell phone at her, causing an injury, and harassed her multiple times at her place of employment in Nanticoke.

Oliver was arrested for violating the PFA on Aug. 25, 2017. He was taken to a district judge in Nanticoke to be arraigned by Nanticoke officers Bryan Kata and Michael Derwin.

Court records show that when Oliver found out he was going to jail, he had an outburst in the courtroom and refused commands by Kata to place his hands behind his back to be handcuffed.

A struggle ensued with Kata and Officer Derwin as Oliver's father, Sean Oliver, told the officers his son was having a panic attack. Oliver continued to struggle by kicking the walls and the judge's bench in the courtroom, according to court records.

Oliver pleaded guilty to a single count of resisting arrest and was sentenced Sept. 7, 2018, to one year probation.

In an unrelated case, Oliver, then 18, was charged by state police with drunken driving after he fled the scene of a crash on Interstate 81 in Jenkins Township on Oct. 29, 2017. Oliver had an alcohol level of .118 percent in his blood stream, court records say.

Oliver was sentenced on the drunken driving crash to six months probation on Sept. 10, 2018.

12/3/2019

**Alleged kidnapper's family questions use of lethal force**

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The Nanticoke man accused of pepper-spraying officers and stealing a police car while kidnapping his 15-year-old ex-girlfriend was killed when police converged on a wooded area near Warrior Run Sunday.

State police have released few details about the standoff that ended in the death of 20-year-old Jordan Oliver, but his family is questioning whether deadly force was necessary.

"My son didn't need to be killed," Sean Oliver said Monday afternoon. "I'm not making excuses up for him. I'm not saying he should have gotten away with anything at all. He should have done jail time for what he did. But he didn't deserve to die."

In a prepared statement, Pennsylvania State Police said Jordan Oliver was holding Nanticoke resident Samara Derwin — his former girlfriend and the daughter of Nanticoke police Officer Michael Derwin — as a "hostage" when they confronted him. The Special Emergency Response Team contacted Jordan Oliver and "deadly force was used" before Derwin was freed unharmed, according to the statement.

A state police spokeswoman did not immediately return a message seeking additional details on what prompted police to use deadly force.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said her office would investigate the incident.

While Sean Oliver acknowledged he didn't know much about what happened in the moments before his son's death, he did challenge the police description of Derwin as a hostage.

"They were both willingly together," Sean Oliver said, noting Derwin was freely communicating on her phone during her alleged abduction. "There was no kidnapping. ... As a matter of fact, I kind of think he was set up, to be honest with you, because of her father being a Nanticoke police officer."

According to kidnapping and aggravated assault charges state police filed against Jordan Oliver before he was killed, police were dispatched to Greater Nanticoke Area High School around 3:30 p.m. Sunday to a report of a man holding a girl at knife point.

Officers arrived to find Oliver standing in the parking lot while holding Derwin around the neck with a knife to her throat, the complaint says.

Police tried to negotiate with Oliver, who said he didn't want to go to jail and that he would not hurt Derwin if officers stayed back, according to the complaint.

Officers continued negotiating as Oliver walked Derwin toward a baseball field, police said. At some point during the negotiation, Derwin got separated from Oliver and police told her to go wait in a marked Nanticoke city police SUV, the complaint says.

The charges allege that when police tried to arrest Oliver for assault, he grew combative and began to struggle, police said. Officers deployed Tasers, but the shock failed to subdue him.

At that point, Oliver pulled out a can of pepper spray and sprayed the officers with it before breaking free, according to the charges. Oliver jumped into the police car where Derwin was sitting and drove off, nearly hitting another uniformed officer who was in the area, police said.

That officer, who was not identified, fired his service weapon at Oliver as the vehicle came toward him, the complaint says. The vehicle continued on, however, until police lost sight of it.

What followed was an Amber alert for Derwin and a massive manhunt for Jordan Oliver, during which time his father said he sent frequent text messages to his son urging him to surrender.

“Turn yourself in. I don’t want to see yourself get hurt anymore,” Sean Oliver wrote, according to a text exchange he provided to The Citizens’ Voice.

“I’d rather die than go back to jail and deal with more PTSD,” Jordan Oliver wrote back.

Court records show Jordan Oliver had a number of brushes with the law in recent years, including an August 2017 protection-from-abuse order obtained on behalf of an ex-girlfriend who alleged he hit her on the neck and became emotionally and physically abusive.

Within weeks, Jordan Oliver was accused of violating the order by trying to make contact with the girlfriend. When he was being arraigned on the violation charge, Jordan Oliver refused to comply with police commands and began smashing his head on a metal door and kicking the walls and the judge’s bench, according to the complaint.

An officer eventually used a Taser to subdue Jordan Oliver, who was charged with resisting arrest.

Over the years, Jordan Oliver was also charged with driving under the influence and with a number of non-criminal summary offenses, court records show.

Then in May, Derwin’s mother filed for a restraining order on allegations that Jordan Oliver hit her daughter on the back and side of the head. Jordan Oliver pushed the girl into a chair and pulled her hair, then threatened to kill her if she got a restraining order against him, according to the petition.

The filing alleges Jordan Oliver continued to bother Derwin in school via Facebook and showed up at the family home despite being told he was not welcome.

Derwin left the home with her father and the police were called, but Jordan Oliver continued sending messages saying he was walking around the house armed with a knife, the petition says.

Court records show that Jordan Oliver violated the protection-from-abuse order within weeks when he messaged Derwin’s mother asking her to permit him “five minutes to say goodbye” and then he would no longer bother the family.

Sean Oliver, however, maintained Monday that Derwin’s parents were the driving force behind the restraining order, which was to remain in effect until June 18, 2022.

“These two have been back and forth,” Sean Oliver said. “They’ve never stopped seeing each other, even from the PFA.”

In contrast to the police account that Jordan Oliver abducted Derwin, Sean Oliver said his son told him he was “talking to Samara” when the police showed up looking to arrest him for violating the PFA.

Following an hours-long manhunt, police eventually found Jordan Oliver “holding (Derwin) hostage” in a wooded area near Warrior Run, according to the state police statement.

Derwin was recovered unscathed, but police killed Jordan Oliver, according to the statement.

Sean Oliver questioned why police couldn’t have used nonlethal means such as tear gas or rubber bullets to subdue his son, rather than resorting to lethal means.

“He didn’t deserve to lose his life at only 20 years old,” Sean Oliver said. “There had to be 90 cops up there. You’re going to tell me that you guys were fearing that kid, even if he had a knife in his hand? I mean, there was something else they could have done other than use deadly force on him — just my opinion. These guys are trained for situations like this.”

12/2/2019

**Suspect dead, girl safe after Nanticoke abduction**

Eric Mark and Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A 15-year-old girl is safe and the man who police say abducted her and stole a police vehicle in Nanticoke on Sunday is dead.

Jordan Oliver, 20, was killed by police late Sunday night as he held the girl hostage in a wooded area of Warrior Run borough, state police said in a news release.

The girl was not harmed, police said. Police had earlier identified her in an Amber Alert as Samara Derwin. That alert has been canceled.

The incident began when police responded to a report of a man holding a female at knifepoint near Nanticoke High School at 3:18 p.m. Sunday, according to Nanticoke acting police Chief Robert Lehman.

After the girl was secured in a police SUV, Oliver started a fight with an officer, Lehman said.

Oliver was in possession of knives and axes, and possibly a gun, the chief said.

When a police officer tried to take him into custody, Oliver blinded him with pepper spray and jumped in the Nanticoke police SUV, according to Lehman. The officer fired shots at Oliver, Lehman said.

Officers from multiple departments searched for Oliver and the stolen SUV.

Late Sunday afternoon, police issued an alert advising all emergency personnel in the region to be on the lookout for the stolen SUV and Oliver, who was described as armed and dangerous.

Derwin was considered a hostage, police said.

An investigation indicated that Oliver was likely to be in the Warrior Run section of Hanover Twp., according to police.

A state police special response team located Oliver in Warrior Run, where he was holding Derwin hostage, police said.

“Deadly force was used against Oliver,” while Derwin was freed unharmed, the state police news release states.

12/2/2019

### **Alleged kidnapper killed by deadly force in Warrior Run**

elewis@timesleader.com

A man who allegedly abducted a teenage girl and stole a Nanticoke City police cruiser that resulted in an hours long search Sunday is dead, state police at Wyoming said.

Jordan Oliver, 20, was killed by deadly force in a wooded area of Warrior Run.

Samara Derwin, 15, was unharmed during the exchange.

An amber alert was issued by state police at about 9:30 p.m. Sunday, about six hours after Oliver allegedly kidnapped Derwin. The amber alert was cancelled about one hour later when Oliver and Derwin were located in Warrior Run.

According to a news release from state police:

A Nanticoke police officer responded to the Greater Nanticoke Area high school finding Oliver holding a knife to Derwin’s throat.

The officer attempted to negotiate with Oliver and as a result, Derwin became separated from him.

Oliver initiated a struggle and sprayed mace in the officer’s face, forcing Derwin into the police cruiser he stole.

State police and multiple law enforcement agencies canvassed the Nanticoke area for hours, including the secluded Concrete City located in the Hanover Section of Nanticoke.

An amber alert was issued for Derwin that included a warning Oliver was armed and dangerous.

State police said Oliver and Derwin were located in a wooded area of Warrior Run by troopers with the Special Emergency Response Team.

SERT troopers initiated contact with Oliver who was holding Derwin hostage. She was freed unharmed after deadly force was used, the news release says.

12/2/2019

### **Dorrance Twp. home destroyed in fire**

kcarroll@timesleader.com

Police have made an arrest in a suspected arson after a home went up in flames late Saturday night.

Randy Joseph Yost, 32 of Nanticoke has been charged with arson, reckless endangerment and criminal trespass after police say that he intentionally set the fire that destroyed the home of Curtis and Diana Rollar.

Engines from Nuangola, Slocum, Mountain Top, Dorrance and Berwick responded to reports of a residential structure fire around 7 p.m. at 328 Sunset Drive in Dorrance Township, Mountain Top.

The home was completely engulfed in flames and appears to be a total loss. The Rollars were not home at the time of the blaze but were alerted to the fire by a security camera notification sent to their phone.

The video surveillance showed Yost setting the fire and taking pictures of it, also using leaves and yard debris in an attempt to stoke the flames, according to police.

The arson is currently being investigated by the Pennsylvania State Police Hazleton Criminal Investigation Unit and the Troop N Fire.

12/2/2019

### **Nanticoke man facing arson charges**

Kelly Monitz - Citizens Voice

A fire that tore through a Dorrance Twp. home Saturday night was arson, state police at Hazleton said.

Firefighters responded to the home at 327 Sunset Drive just after 7 p.m. Flames were quickly through the roof of the home, which was a total loss. Firefighters from at least seven departments responded.

The home is owned by Curtis and Diana Rollar of Wapwallopen.

Randy Yost, 32, of Nanticoke, was charged with setting the fire, police said. Video surveillance showed Yost lighting the fire and taking pictures of the fire, police said. Witnesses saw Yost putting leaves and yard debris on the fire, police said.

Yost is charged with arson and related offenses, reckless endangerment and criminal trespass, police said.

The arson is being investigated by state police Hazleton's Criminal Investigation Unit and the Troop N fire marshal.

Anyone with information should call state police at Hazleton at 570-459-3890.

11/9/2019

### **Police: Nanticoke man assaulted estranged wife, slashed her tires**

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A Nanticoke man was denied bail after being arrested on accusations he assaulted his estranged wife twice within six hours Tuesday at her Glen Lyon apartment and slashed the tires on her car.

Newport Twp. police filed two criminal complaints against the alleged attacker, Ryan David Casey.

Casey, 31, of River Street, Nanticoke, is charged with strangulation, burglary, simple assault, trespassing, harassment, endangering the welfare of children, and criminal mischief.

Following Casey's arraignment on Tuesday afternoon, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker ordered Casey jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

Whittaker denied Casey bail.

According to arrest papers:

Casey showed up at the East Main Street, Glen Lyon, apartment of his ex-wife, Sammi, around 6:50 a.m. after she blocked him from messaging or calling her. As she opened the door, Casey barged in and started choking her to the point she couldn't breathe and nearly passed out, she said.

Casey only stopped when her children demanded he stop, arrest papers say.

After Casey fled, the woman noticed all four tires on her car were slashed.

The woman called police to report the incident around 7:06 a.m., but denied medical attention, police said.

Police say they were called back to the woman's apartment around 12:47 p.m. after Casey returned and broke into the home by kicking open the front door.

The woman said she hid in a closet, but Casey found her and dragged her out.

Police said Casey kicked and punched the woman, bloodying her nose. The couple's 11-year-old son tried to intervene, but Casey pushed him out of the way and continued the attack, police said.

In the meantime, the couple's 9-year-old daughter fled to a neighbor's house to call 911. Casey eventually stopped the attack and fled, police said.

Police said they apprehended Casey upon arrival at his home in Nanticoke.

11/5/2019

### **Woman pleads guilty to child endangerment**

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The wife of a Nanticoke man convicted of repeatedly raping a girl starting when she was 8 years old pleaded guilty Monday to charges alleging she knew about the abuse but failed to stop it.

Evalynn Buchanan, 37, pleaded guilty to two felony counts of endangering the welfare of a child before Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough, who set sentencing for Dec. 16.

Prosecutors alleged Buchanan knew about the abuse but failed to protect the girl, who reported the attacks in December 2017, when she was 15.

Last week, a jury convicted Jason Buchanan, 38, on charges of rape of a child, statutory sexual assault, sexual assault, aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault on a child, unlawful contact with a minor and corruption of a minor.

The girl told authorities that Jason Buchanan would come into her bedroom and perform sex acts, and told the girl that “we have to” when she questioned if he had to do it, according to prosecutors.

Jason Buchanan also told the girl she is beautiful and warned her not to tell anyone because he “could get in so much trouble,” prosecutors said.

Jason Buchanan is being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility pending sentencing, which is set for Feb. 6.

11/2/2019

### **Man convicted on child rape charges**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke man accused of repeatedly raping a girl starting when she was 8 years old was convicted at trial Friday on rape charges.

After a little more than three hours of deliberations, a jury found Jason Buchanan, 38, guilty on charges of rape of a child, statutory sexual assault, sexual assault, aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault on a child, unlawful contact with a minor and corruption of a minor.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough set sentencing for Feb. 6.

According to prosecutors, the victim reported in December 2017, when she was 15, that Buchanan had been molesting her since she was 8.

Buchanan would come into the girl’s bedroom and perform sex acts, and told the girl that “we have to” when she questioned if he had to do it, according to the charges.

Buchanan also told the girl she is beautiful and warned her not to tell anyone because he “could get in so much trouble,” according to prosecutors.

As a result of the verdict, Vough revoked Buchanan’s bail and ordered him jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility to await sentencing.

Buchanan’s wife, Evalynn Buchanan, 37, is scheduled to stand trial next week on felony child endangerment charges alleging she knew about the abuse but failed to protect the girl.

11/1/2019

### **Cops: Infamous shoving suspect spits on hospital staff**

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The Nanticoke woman convicted of shoving a 12-year-old girl to the ground in an attack caught on video that went viral was arraigned Thursday on new charges accusing her of spitting on medical personnel at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

Marlenea Ann Uravage, 32, was being treated in the emergency department for an undisclosed ailment the afternoon of Aug. 22 when she began yelling and cursing at staff members, according to the complaint.

Police said Uravage spat in a registered nurse’s face and also spat on the head and arm of an emergency room technician. A security officer called to the scene because of Uravage’s conduct reported that Uravage appeared as though she was going to cooperate and then proceeded to spit on his arm as well, according to the complaint.

Police charged Uravage with three counts each of simple assault and harassment, as well as with one count of disorderly conduct.

Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned her on the charges Thursday morning and ordered her jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$10,000.

A preliminary hearing was set for Nov. 13.

Uragev previously made headlines when she shoved the 12-year-old girl to the ground outside the Quick Stop on Spring Street in May 2017.

Prosecutors said the assault took place after a man who was with Uravage approached the girl and asked if he could “get some of that,” an apparent reference to some food the girl was eating.

When the girl went to hand him a Slim Jim, Uravage rushed over, hit the man and said, “Are you (expletive) stupid?” to the girl, according to prosecutors.

She then violently shoved the girl in the chest, causing her to fall down backwards.

Urage pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of assault in that case and was sentenced to serve four to 20 months in the county jail, with Luzerne County Judge David W. Lupas noting she displayed “absolutely zero remorse” for her actions.

10/18/2019

### **Wilkes-Barre man pleads guilty to aggravated assault**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Wilkes-Barre man accused of firing a gunshot during an argument between families about their children dating each other pleaded guilty Thursday to a felony count of aggravated assault.

Joey Concepcion, 27, of 56 Maxwell St., entered his plea before Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough, who set sentencing for Dec. 20.

Prosecutors alleges Concepcion was involved in a dispute with Steven Kocher Jr. about two youths dating and that he fired a shot past the ear of Steven Kocher Sr. when he entered the confrontation in Nanticoke on June 11. No injuries were reported.

Concepcion was allowed to apply for the Intermediate Punishment Program and remains free on \$75,000 unsecured bail pending sentencing.

10/11/2019

### **Nanticoke City Police Department**

PRESS RELEASE

October 11, 2019

#### **Incident: Criminal Mischief / Theft**

Location: NANTICOKE CITY

Day/Time of Incident: October 7, 8, 2019

The Nanticoke City Police are investigating a series of copper related thefts.

On October 7, 2019 it was reported that copper tubing was cut away from an air-conditioning unit to the exterior of the Nanticoke Fitness Center, 440 West Main St. Nanticoke City.

On October 8, 2019 it was reported that copper tubing was forced from the exterior air-conditioning unit at Giuseppe’s Restaurant, 14 N. Market St. Nanticoke City.

At the nearby Pennsylvania Coin LLC warehouse, located at 39 North Market St. the warehouse was broken into, and copper tubing was taken from various locations within.

In addition to a black duffel bag, the thieves left various tools such as vice grips and wire cutters behind at the Pennsylvania Coin LLC location.

Forensic examinations were performed and the evidence collected suggests at least two males were involved. A photo of the duffel bag as well as the damage caused at the Nanticoke Fitness Center and Giuseppe’s Restaurant are attached to this press release for public review.

**Anyone with information about these crimes are asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police Department at 570-735-2200 at extension 212. All information will be kept confidential.**

**Please see [Nanticoke City Police facebook page for pictures above](#) and more information.**

9/19/2019

### **Police arrest woman who allegedly stole from dead person**

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

Police on Wednesday arrested a Nanticoke woman, who had been hiding in her home, on charges alleging she stole \$500 from the belongings of a deceased person at Highland Park Senior Living in Wilkes-Barre Twp.

Nanticoke police arrested Marlina Rejniak, 49, and turned her over to Wilkes-Barre Twp. police, according to a

Facebook post from Nanticoke police.

Rejniak worked at the Kingston Manor Personal Care Center at 700 Third Ave. from 2016 to 2018 and at Highland Park Senior Living from earlier this year until Friday, when she was informed she had been caught, police said. Rejniak and several acquaintances have pawned an “exorbitant amount of jewelry and items” over the past three years, police said.

9/17/2019

**Cops: Nanticoke woman stole from deceased person**

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A Nanticoke woman stole cash from a dead person at a personal care home, and police said she may be linked to numerous other thefts.

Marlena Rejniak, 49, is wanted on theft charges alleging she stole \$500 from the belongings of a deceased person at Highland Park Senior Living at 874 Schechter Drive.

Rejniak, whose last known address is 407 W. Main St., Nanticoke, is wanted for theft by unlawful taking and is suspected of stealing from other residents, police said.

Investigators said Rejniak has used several names in the past and may change her identity in an effort to evade capture.

According to police, Rejniak worked at the Kingston Manor Personal Care Center at 700 Third Ave. from 2016 to 2018 and at Highland Park Senior Living from earlier this year until Friday, when she was informed she had been caught.

Police said Rejniak and several acquaintances have pawned an “exorbitant amount of jewelry and items” over the past three years.

Investigators are now seeking to hear from relatives of residents of the facilities who had jewelry, cash or other valuables go missing.

Anyone with information about property missing from the homes or on Rejniak’s whereabouts is asked to call 911 or 570-606-4791.

9/11/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department

PRESS RELEASE

**Incident: Warrant / Drug Act Violation.**

Location: 218 West Ridge St. Nanticoke City

Date/Time: September 10, 2019 at 8:53pm

City Police arrested Jessica L GRIFFITHS, 35, of Nanticoke City upon serving her with three (3) arrest warrants issued from the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas. During the course of the arrest, Investigators found that GRIFFITHS possessed a schedule IV Controlled substance (pills) on her person. GRIFFITHS was additionally charged with possession of a controlled substance, misbranding a controlled substance and possession of a misbranded a controlled substance.

GRIFFITHS was arraigned by Magisterial District Court Judge, Joseph D. Spagnuolo, and provided \$1,000.00 unsecure bail, however will be held pending the outcome of the Common Pleas warrants. A preliminary hearing was scheduled on September 25, 2019 at 11am at Luzerne County Central Court.

9/11/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department

PRESS RELEASE

**Incident: Retail Theft**

Location: Weis Supermarket, 1 Weis Plaza Nanticoke City

Date/Time: September 10, 2019 at 11:45am

The Nanticoke City Police responded to the report of a female shoplifter detained by a Weis Market Loss Prevention Officer. The female was accused of leaving the store without paying for food items that totaled \$48.26. The female was identified as April LEMMIE, 41, of Nanticoke City. LEMMIE was arrested for shoplifting and later released after being issued a summons.

9/10/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department  
PRESS RELEASE

**Incident: Felony Retail Theft**

Location: Weis Supermarket, 1 Weis Plaza Nanticoke City

Date/Time: September 9, 2019 at 5:18pm

The Nanticoke City Police responded to the report of a male shoplifter absconding from a Weis Market Loss Prevention Officer following having stolen \$57.52 worth of food items. City Police located the male subject walking on Hill St. and whom was in possession of the stolen items. Due to his previous record, Terry A. HILL, 33, of Binghamton New York, was arrested for Felony retail theft.

HILL was lodged at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for overnight arraignment, and arraigned this morning by Magisterial District Court Judge, James Haggarty. A preliminary hearing was scheduled for Wednesday September 18, 2019 at 10am. HILL was remanded for failing to post \$2,500.00 bail.

9/9/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department  
PRESS RELEASE

**Incident: Felony Retail Theft**

Location: Turkey Hill Minit Mart, 460 West Main St. Nanticoke City

Day/Time of Incident: September 8, 2019. 11:45am

Nanticoke City Police investigated the report of a retail theft that occurred at the Turkey Hill Minit Mart, 460 West Main St. Nanticoke City, on Sunday September 8, 2019 at 11:45am.

The investigation disclosed that a Candice TAYLOR, 38, of West Ridge St. Nanticoke City was observed leaving the store with \$4.47 worth of Banana cakes. TAYLOR was found nearby and arrested.

TAYLOR is also facing felony retail theft charges relative to a September 4, 2019 report by Weis Markets, Nanticoke City, that TAYLOR stole \$169.78 worth of feminine and intimate products.

TAYLOR was arraigned by Magisterial District Court Judge Donald Whittaker on the September 8, 2019 offense and lodged at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility after failing to post \$25,000.00 bail. A preliminary hearing was scheduled for September 18, 2019 at Luzerne County Central Court.

9/6/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department  
PRESS RELEASE

**Incident: TRESPASS COMPLAINT / ARREST WARRANT**

Location: 400 Block East Ridge St.

Date/Time: September 6, 2019 at 6:12pm

The Nanticoke City Police responded to the report of trespassers within the 400 block of East Ridge St. While conducting their investigation, one of the involved subjects was recognized as being a suspect in multiple retail thefts at the Turkey Hill Minit Mart, West Main St. Nanticoke City, recently. Bobby Maurice WICKS, 42, of Scranton was detained after it was disclosed he had escaped from a halfway house in Lackawanna County, and an active arrest warrant by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole existed. WICKS was charged with multiple counts of retail theft and released to the custody of State Parole.

9/6/2019

**Man confesses he had crack cocaine in anus**

elewis@timesleader.com

A Nanticoke man admitted to township police he had a bag of crack cocaine hidden in a body cavity, according to court records.

Police said they stopped Daniyel J. Heyward, 40, of East Poplar Street, Nanticoke, while traveling on Sans Souci Parkway when a license plate inquiry revealed he was wanted by Nanticoke police.

Heyward stopped in a parking lot near Kings Road where police recovered a marijuana cigarette from his vehicle, court

records say.

Police handcuffed and transported Heyward to Nanticoke who obtained an arrest warrant on Aug. 15 charging him with trafficking crack cocaine.

During a custody exchange with Nanticoke police, Heyward confessed he had a drugs “in his a—,” court records say. Police said they recovered a plastic bag containing 24 packaged bags of suspected crack cocaine from Heyward’s anus. Nanticoke police charged Heyward with delivering crack cocaine on West Grand Street in May.

Heyward was arraigned Thursday by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Luzerne County Central Court on five total counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, three total counts of possession of a controlled substance, two counts of criminal use of communication facility and a single count of possession of drug paraphernalia. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$125,000 total bail.

9/6/2019

Nanticoke City Police Department

PRESS RELEASE

**Incident: NARCOTICS OPERATION / ARREST WARRANT**

The Nanticoke City Police and Luzerne County Drug Task Force concluded a joint narcotics operation into the distribution and sales of crack cocaine within Nanticoke City by obtaining an arrest for Daniyel HEYWARD, 40, of Plymouth Township.

HEYWARD was charged with Felony counts of Delivery of a controlled substance, Possession with the intent to deliver a controlled substance, and Criminal use of a communication facility.

On September 5, 2019, HEYWARD was arraigned in front of Magisterial District Court Judge, Donald Whittaker and lodged in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000.00 bail. A preliminary hearing was scheduled for September 18, 2019 at Luzerne County Central Court.

8/31/2019

**Nanticoke man accused of selling heroin, possessing marijuana**

Staff report - Citizens Voice

A 58-year-old man was arrested Friday for alleged heroin sales, police state in a news release.

Nanticoke police executed a search warrant at 625 S. Walnut St. following an investigation into heroin sales within the city.

Tyrone Anthony Davis was arrested for felony counts of delivery of a controlled substance, possession with the intent to deliver a controlled substance, criminal use of a communication facility, possession of drug paraphernalia and possession of marijuana.

Davis was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker, Nanticoke, and lodged at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing was scheduled at Luzerne County Central Court for Sept. 11.

8/27/2019

**Police: Man jumps from Nanticoke roof to avoid domestic arrest**

elewis@timesleader.com

City police investigating allegations of domestic assault at a residence on East State Street arrested a man they say jumped from a second floor roof to avoid being arrested on Friday.

Officers were at the home of Fawn Lee Workman, 23, when a child went to a neighbor’s house saying he was assaulting his mother.

After officers spoke with the woman and were about to enter the house, Workman allegedly jumped from a roof to avoid being arrested.

Police said there was no food in the refrigerator and the house was filled with garbage, damaged furniture, smashed televisions and broken glass.

The city’s code enforcement office condemned the house due to unsanitary conditions.

According to the criminal complaint:

A child went to a neighbor’s house saying Workman was beating his mother in the basement of the home.

Officers heard yelling and screaming coming from inside the house and were met at the front door by the woman.

When she opened the door, officers noticed the deplorable conditions inside.

Police said the woman initially denied there was any abuse but the child interrupted, telling officers she had bruises on her arms, shoulders and back.

As officers approached the front door to enter the house to locate Workman, he jumped from the roof and attempted to run away.

Officers caught up with Workman, who was arrested after a struggle. An officer suffered a hand injury during the struggle with Workman, the complaint says.

Officers searched the basement where they allegedly found illicit drugs and paraphernalia on a table.

Police said the child was taken into protective custody due to conditions of the house and the woman was treated at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

Workman was arraigned by District Judge James Haggerty in Kingston on two counts each of terroristic threats and reckless endangerment, and one count each of simple assault, stalking, harassment, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia.

He remained jailed Monday at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$15,000 bail.

8/23/2019

**Nanticoke won't challenge ruling on police chief**

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The City of Nanticoke will not challenge a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling that former police Chief Thomas Wall was hired illegally under state law.

On Tuesday, the court upheld a Luzerne County judge's decision that the 2016 hiring violated state regulations regarding internal hiring for a police chief.

Mayor Nicole Colatosti-Mackiewicz said she won't further challenge the decision. The city could have asked the state Supreme Court to reconsider or appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Capt. Robert Lehman will serve as the officer in charge of the department until she determines a permanent replacement. Colatosti-Mackiewicz said she will seek candidates from the department.

"I am sincerely thankful for Chief Wall," she said. "He did a great service to the city in all aspects of his job. I will be saddened to see him not be there tomorrow morning."

Previous mayor Richard Wiaterowski appointed Wall chief in September 2016, citing 25 years state police experience with the state police, leadership ability and a record of community service as reasons for the hire.

After Wall was appointed chief, the City of Nanticoke Police Officers Association filed a lawsuit alleging an internal candidate was improperly passed over to fill a vacancy created by former Chief William Shultz's death. The suit also alleged Wall had conflicts of interest because he was a member of the city's police civil service commission and he is married to Nanticoke interim city Manager Donna Wall.

In a ruling filed last August, Luzerne County Judge William H. Amesbury found Wiaterowski and the city appointed Wall as police chief without seeking applications or interviewing anyone within the police department, even though Lt. Michael Roke had expressed interest in the job.

The city said that its home-rule charter allowed someone from outside the department to be appointed chief, but Amesbury agreed with the union that state law prohibits the city from making such a change to regulations that affect employee rights.

"While the Mayor feels that Chief Wall has held and still validity holds the position of Chief of Police of the City of Nanticoke, in order to move the City and Police Department forward without the distraction of further litigation, the City of Nanticoke will comply with the most recent Court Order," Colatosti-Mackiewicz wrote in a press release. Wall compared the situation to going into a hospital to get surgery, but being told you need to pick from a shorter list of surgeons instead of getting the best surgeons in the hospital.

"If I own a company, I would go out looking for best people I could get to have in a position. I think makes the company better; in this case, the department," he said.

He recalled his tenure as marked by an adversarial relationship with the union from the beginning.

"Before I had a chance to prove myself, the lawsuit was filed. I was told by a union member, 'Don't take it personally. If it had been someone else, their name would have been on the lawsuit.' I took affront to that," he said. "Give me a chance. If you don't feel I'm doing a good job or you feel you're being slighted, then go ahead. There are other communities that have chiefs from outside the department, and those chiefs are doing a fantastic job."

He pointed to various modernization improvements, such as installing a computer system in each patrol car that can

print tickets, SUVs with built-in storage and newer vehicles, as evidence of efforts to move the department forward and make sure officers were well-equipped.

“I tried to overlook it and to carry on and do things,” Wall said.

He called the chance to serve as chief “an honor and a pleasure.”

“It’s something that’s in my blood. It carries over from my days with the state police,” he said. “It wasn’t an effort to get up and go to work every day.”

8/19/2019

### **Police: W-B man charged in Nanticoke shooting incident**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Police on Monday released details of a shooting incident in Nanticoke on Saturday night.

Tazelle Curtis, 33, of Wilkes-Barre, fired a handgun and made threats during an argument at a Welles Street home just before 9:30 p.m. Saturday, according to Nanticoke police.

Officers located Curtis a short time later and detained him, police said in a news release.

Police recovered the gun Curtis allegedly fired nearby. A records check revealed the gun had been reported as stolen in Hanover Twp. in April, police said.

Curtis was wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff’s Department for failure to appear at a hearing last month, according to police.

Police charged Curtis with felony counts of aggravated assault, receiving stolen property and illegal possession of a firearm, as well as misdemeanor counts of terroristic threats and reckless endangerment.

He was arraigned Monday and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Aug. 28 at Luzerne County Central Court.

8/19/2019

### **Nanticoke shooting over reported marital affair**

elewis@timesleader.com

A convicted felon was arraigned Monday on charges he discharged a firearm next to a man he blamed for having a sexual relationship with a married woman.

City police arrested Tazelle Frederick Curtis, 33, of East Ridge Street, in the area of 109 Espy St. in the Hanover Section of Nanticoke shortly after he allegedly fired at least two rounds from a handgun inside 109 Welles St., rear.

David Buckley told police Curtis fired rounds while holding a handgun next to his head, court records say.

Court records say witnesses told police Curtis was angry with Buckley for being involved in a sexual relationship with a married woman close to Curtis.

After Curtis was arrested, he denied any involvement in the shooting and told police marriage is sacred and doesn’t believe in abortion and divorce.

No injuries were reported.

According to the criminal complaint:

Luzerne County 911 received several phone calls at about 9:30 p.m. Saturday about gunfire from the Welles Street residence.

Officers arrived and spoke with Buckley.

Buckley claimed Curtis put a gun to his head and threatened him before firing two rounds next to him.

After the gunshots, Buckley said Curtis demanded his car keys.

A person inside the house identified in the complaint as Witness 2 told police Curtis held a gun to Buckley’s head.

Buckley knelt on the floor as Curtis stood over him and fired two or three rounds next to Buckley, the complaint says.

Curtis left the residence with Jamie Donsky both carrying duffel bags and walking in opposite directions. Donsky walked toward a Chevrolet Cavalier and put the car keys in the door but returned to the residence knowing officers wanted to speak with her.

Police said they found a Springfield XD-9 semi-automatic handgun inside a duffel bag Donsky left outside the Chevrolet. The handgun was loaded with 12 rounds with one round in the chamber, the complaint says.

A loaded magazine was also found inside the duffel bag.

Police said the handgun was reported stolen on April 27 to Hanover Township police.

Court records say Curtis is prohibited from owning, carrying and possessing a firearm due to a 2006 drug trafficking

conviction in Luzerne County.

Curtis was arraigned by District Judge Richard Cronauer in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of aggravated assault, reckless endangerment, terroristic threats, receiving stolen property and illegal possession of a firearm. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

8/18/2019

**Nanticoke City Police Department - via. Facebook**

Nature of Incident: Shots Fired

Location: Rear 109 Welles St., Hanover Section Nanticoke

Nanticoke PD was dispatched at 9:31 P.M. for a report of shots fired at the aforementioned address arriving at approximately 9:32 P.M.

A resident at this address reported that an argument occurred and a male subject who was a guest at the residence brandished a pistol and began firing it. The suspect then ran from the residence and was located at approximately 9:40 P.M. at Ruby's Pizza, Espy St. A search of the area was conducted and a loaded pistol was located on Welles St.

Name of suspect is withheld at this time pending the filing of charges.

8/13/2019

**Nanticoke arms dealer case centers on national security question**

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Whether a Nanticoke arms dealer evaded national security controls by shipping two rifle scopes bound for Russia will have a major impact on the sentence he receives.

Mark Komoroski pleaded guilty in January 2018 to a count of attempting to evade export controls after he was accused of shipping two rifle scopes with a total value of less than \$2,500 to undercover agents.

The charges alleged Komoroski knew the scopes were to be exported to Russia but that he failed to obtain the required export license.

But while there is no dispute Komoroski shipped the scopes, the parties are now debating whether his conduct amounted to an attempt to evade national security controls.

If it did, Komoroski could be facing more than five years behind bars; otherwise he faces a guideline range of 12 to 18 months.

The U.S. Attorney's Office argues it is a national security matter because the purpose of the export regulations "is premised on national security."

"The Government agrees with Komoroski that the (Export Control Classification Number) associated with the two scopes at issue indicates that the reason for control is crime control," Assistant U.S. Attorney Carlo D. Marchioli wrote in a sentencing memorandum. "But it does not follow that the applicable control is not a national security control."

The filing cites a number of similar cases where the courts found prohibitions on exporting items to places such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea were based on national security concerns.

But defense attorney Al Flora Jr. noted most of those cases involve countries for which a trade embargo is in place. Flora maintains Komoroski's conduct violated foreign policy controls rather than national security controls, and he therefore should face the lesser punishment.

"Under the government's overbroad analysis, the export of horses by sea without a license would be the evasion of a national security control and subject to (the increased penalty)," Flora wrote in his sentencing memorandum.

Flora also cited a California case involving the illegal exportation of holographic rifle sights to the Philippines.

In that case, the U.S. Attorney's Office agreed that the defendant's conduct related to the scopes violated crime controls and therefore was subject to the lesser punishment.

Marchioli characterized that agreement, as well as another in a similar case, as "outliers" that are inconsistent with the Justice Department's stance on the matter.

"The position taken here is consistent with the Department of Justice's position on this issue as well as the multiple cases cited above that applied (national security controls) in circumstances similar to those present here," Marchioli wrote.

Komoroski was set to be sentenced today, but U.S. District Court Judge Malachy E. Mannion instead directed the parties to appear for oral arguments over the applicable sentencing guidelines.

Komoroski, the owner of D&R Sports Center at 620 Fairchild St., was previously convicted of conspiracy to defraud the

federal government after being accused of illegally selling and shipping \$247,854 worth of restricted items — rifles and related devices such as optics — to Russia, Kuwait, Germany and Japan without required export licenses. In that case, Komoroski was sentenced to 32 months in prison.

8/12/2019

**Police: Man shot at Wilkes-Barre home, then killed self**

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A man shot and killed himself in his car in Nanticoke after shooting at a Wilkes-Barre home in a domestic altercation early Sunday morning, according to police.

It was among three incidents involving gunfire in Wilkes-Barre on Sunday, two of which happened within minutes of each other.

Luzerne County Coroner Dan Hughes and Nanticoke police Chief Thomas Wall identified the dead man as Leon Bailey, 31, of Nanticoke.

Bailey got into a dispute with the mother of his children at her home on Oak Street in Wilkes-Barre early Sunday, and apparently fired shots at the house, according to police.

Officers responded to a report of shots fired at 3:46 a.m., police said in a news release. Officers spoke with the residents, confirmed no one was injured and collected evidence, police said.

The officers got a description of Bailey and his vehicle, a white Chevrolet Impala, and issued a bulletin to surrounding police departments, according to Wall.

Police located the vehicle in a field near the intersection of East Slate and South Prospect streets in Nanticoke. Officers attempted to communicate with Bailey, instructing him to lower the car window and show his hands, Wall said.

Bailey told officers he was not going to go to jail, and a short time later police heard a muffled sound from inside the car, according to Wall.

Officers approached the car, looked inside and found that Bailey had shot and killed himself, Wall said.

Bailey had no criminal history in Pennsylvania apart from traffic tickets, according to court records.

He worked as a corrections officer at State Correctional Institution-Dallas, according to Wall.

Bailey posted to his Facebook page several times shortly before he died, pleading for understanding and claiming that his ex was to blame for the problems between them.

Bailey's friends and co-workers mourned him in social media posts, describing him as a good, kind-hearted man who let his problems get the best of him.

Violent day

The Oak Street incident was not connected to a drive-by shooting that happened minutes earlier in Wilkes-Barre, according to city police Chief Joseph Coffay.

In that case, officers encountered two men in the area of South Pennsylvania Avenue and East Northampton Street at 3:39 a.m., city police said in a news release.

One of the men, a 41-year-old Wilkes-Barre resident, had been wounded in a drive-by shooting at the intersection of Hazle and Blackman streets, according to police.

"Neither the complainant nor his associate could provide a description of the suspect or vehicle nor could they provide a motive for the shooting," the news release states.

The shooting victim suffered non-life-threatening wounds, according to Coffay.

Police responded to another reported shooting at a home on Madison Street in Wilkes-Barre at about 1 p.m. Sunday.

Police had not released information about that incident as of Sunday night, but on Sunday afternoon it appeared that officers were investigating possible shots fired at a home in the 300 block of Madison Street.

Anyone with information about the latter two incidents is asked to contact Wilkes-Barre police at 570-208-4200, or dial 911.

8/1/2019

**Police: Man burns underwear during lovers' quarrel**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A city man set fire to his partner's underwear because he thought the man was cheating on him, according to police.

Tyler Warren Cook, 27, of 26 Keech St., is charged with risking catastrophe and other offenses after the fire broke out at his home early Wednesday.

According to the complaint, police were dispatched to the home around 2:15 a.m. to a report of a fire. Cook's partner Daniel Guevarez told investigators that they had been arguing because Cook accused him of cheating with another man, the complaint says.

They agreed that Cook would go stay at a friend's house for the night, but after he went upstairs to get his clothes and medicine their roommate began smelling something burning, police said.

The roommate realized the fire was in the bedroom and ran to get Guevarez, who went upstairs and discovered Cook had lit a pair of his underwear on fire, the complaint says.

Guevarez doused the flames with a wet towel, which he threw outside to prevent the fire from spreading, according to police.

Cook initially claimed the underwear caught fire because of a candle burning in the area, but police say there was no candle in the area of the charred night stand.

"OK, so I used a penis lighter that has a big flame on it to catch them on fire," the complaint quotes Cook as saying. "I thought I would burn his underwear after catching him cheating on me."

Police charged Cook with a felony count of risking catastrophe, a misdemeanor count of disorderly conduct, and summary counts of criminal mischief and dangerous burning.

Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr. arraigned Cook on the charges Wednesday morning and set his bail at \$15,000.

A preliminary hearing was set for Aug. 14.

7/25/2019

### **Homeless man charged with stealing vehicle, using stolen credit cards**

Ed Lewis - elewis@timesleader.com

A homeless man arrested by Nanticoke police was arraigned Wednesday on charges he stole a vehicle from a friend's residence last month.

Harold K. East, 20, was captured at a house in the 500 block of East Main Street, Nanticoke, on Tuesday.

City police said East was wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff's Office and by Kingston police.

Kingston police allege East stole a Kia Spectra from a Rutter Avenue residence and used stolen credit cards to purchase items at a Mountain Top pharmacy, court records say.

According to the criminal complaint:

A woman told Kingston police on June 14 her Kia was stolen and suspected East and a juvenile, who were hanging out with her daughter. She also noticed her purse was taken from her home.

Police said a surveillance camera from a nearby residence recorded East and the juvenile leaving the Rutter Avenue residence and standing in the shadows. It appeared the juvenile was acting as a "lookout."

The camera recorded East and the juvenile entering and driving away in the Kia.

Police said the woman's daughter received messages on social media that East showed up at a friend's residence in Wright Township claiming he purchased the vehicle.

Wright Township police recovered the vehicle in Mountain Top, the complaint says.

East allegedly sent messages to the woman apologizing for taking her vehicle and noting where she can find the keys. He also requested a backpack be returned he left in the woman's vehicle.

Police said the woman reported her credit card was used in Mountain Top on June 13 to purchase make-up and cigarettes.

East was arraigned by District Judge Daniel O'Donnell in Luzerne County Central Court on two counts of theft and criminal conspiracy and a single count of access device fraud. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$5,000 bail.

7/24/2019

### **Police seize heroin during raid in Nanticoke**

Steve Mocarsky - Citizens Voice

Local police and members of a drug task force team carried out the raid at 1226 S. Market St. at about 6:30 a.m. and arrested resident Kashon Ellis, Nanticoke police said.

Narcotics operations in Hanover Twp. and Nanticoke led to officers serving a search warrant at the South Market Street address.

The raid was a result of a joint narcotics operation conducted with the state Office of Attorney General Bureau of Narcotics Investigation Region 8 office, Luzerne County District Attorney's Drug Task Force, Hanover Twp. Narcotics Unit and the Nanticoke City Narcotics Unit.

Narcotics officers seized 340 packets of heroin, U.S. currency, one revolver, a digital scale and cellphones. Ellis, 25, was charged with a felony count of possession with the intent to deliver a controlled substance, and misdemeanor counts of possession of a controlled substance and possession of a small amount of marijuana for personal use.

He was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Joseph Halsey in Hanover Twp. and, unable to post \$125,000 bail, was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility to await arraignment, which is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. July 31. Police said they anticipate making additional arrests in connection with this investigation.

7/24/2019

### **Man waives hearing on vehicular homicide charges**

jhalpin@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke man will stand trial on vehicular homicide charges alleging he caused a deadly crash while driving under the influence.

Jose Mariano Crespo Mendez, 21, on Tuesday waived his right to a preliminary hearing on charges of vehicular homicide while DUI, reckless endangerment and fleeing police. In exchange for the waiver, prosecutors dropped dozens of additional charges against Crespo Mendez.

Crespo Mendez is accused of killing Gerald Mosley, 72, while fleeing police trying to pull him over for traffic violations on May 24.

According to police, the high-speed chase began on Interstate 81 north near Exit 165 in Ashley and continued until the crash on East Main Street in Wilkes-Barre. Mosley died at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center on June 1. Crespo Mendez continues to be held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$50,000.

7/22/2019

### **Nanticoke man charged with sexting girl, 11**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is facing child pornography charges after police say he swapped sexually explicit photos with an 11-year-old girl on Facebook.

Thomas Wydra, 33, of 243 E. Green St., was caught after the girl's parents discovered their text exchanges in her Facebook Messenger application, police said.

According to the complaint, the text exchanges took place between Nov. 21, 2018, and Jan. 1, growing more sexually explicit over time.

Wydra eventually requested the girl to take photos of her genitals and send them to him, the complaint says. The girl sent Wydra five sexually explicit photos, and he in turn sent her five pictures depicting himself exposed, according to the complaint.

Police say Wydra knew the girl was only 11 because she explicitly told him her age at one point during the exchange. During questioning, Wydra admitted exchanging nude photos with the girl, saying "she told me she was attracted to me," the complaint says. Wydra also claimed to have deleted the photos as soon as the girl sent them.

"I was still talking to her when I knew I was not allowed [sic] to be talking to her because she was underage and I was wrong for doing that," Wydra allegedly wrote in a statement to police.

Police charged Wydra with multiple felony counts of photographing child sex acts, unlawful contact with a minor, possessing child pornography, corruption of a minor and disseminating sexually explicit materials involving a minor. Magisterial District Judge Alexandra Kokura Kravitz arraigned Wydra on the charges Saturday morning and set bail at \$50,000.

Wydra was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for July 30.

7/20/2019

### **Three men arrested in drug sweeps in Nanticoke, Hanover Township**

Timesleader Local, News, Police Blotter

Three men were arrested in separate drug sweeps in Nanticoke and Hanover Township resulting in the seizure of a large amount of heroin and crack cocaine.

Police in **Nanticoke** and Hanover Township along with the Luzerne County Drug Task Force served a search warrant at a residence on **South Market Street** arresting Kashon Ellis on Friday.

Authorities said they seized 340 heroin packets, cash, a revolver, a digital scale and cellphones from Ellis' residence. Ellis, 26, was arraigned by District Judge Joseph Halsey in Hanover Township on charges of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and possession of a small amount of marijuana. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$125,000 bail.

Authorities said they arrested Bernard Brightman, 31, of Center Street, Plains Township, and Nassir Morrison, 18, of Philadelphia, after an alleged sale of crack cocaine on July 13. Brightman and Morrison were arrested on High Street in Hanover Township.

Brightman was charged with two counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance and one count each of possession of a controlled substance, criminal conspiracy and criminal use of communication facility. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$150,000 bail.

Morrison was charged with criminal conspiracy but has not been arraigned.

Authorities said Morrison was free on bail related to drug trafficking charges filed by Wilkes-Barre police on June 15.

7/1/2019

### **Judge denies suppression motion in capital case**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A county judge has denied a motion to suppress a search warrant that produced evidence against capital murder suspect Anthony Spudis.

Spudis, 36, is charged with criminal homicide, burglary and robbery in the death of 97-year-old Gertrude Price, whose family found her body in her bed at 23 E. Grand St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 29, 2013. He is accused of brutally beating and stabbing the elderly woman with a screwdriver during a break-in at her home.

During a hearing in April, defense attorney Robert Saurman argued for suppression of a search warrant for a property at 2 W. Union St. Spudis lived at the address with his girlfriend at the time of the murder. The warrant application indicated that Price's Access and Medicare cards, as well as some of her family photos, were found at 2 E. Union St. State Trooper Edward J. Urban said the incorrect address was a "typographical error" and noted that the other supporting documents indicated the property in question was in fact 2 W. Union St.

In an order issued Friday, Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley denied the motion, allowing the evidence seized from Spudis' former residence to be presented to a jury.

Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty for Spudis, who is set to stand trial starting Jan. 6.

7/1/2019

### **Judge refuses to suppress warrant, statements in Nanticoke homicide case**

rdupuis@timesleader.com

A judge has denied a defense motion to suppress the findings of a search warrant and two statements made by the defendant in a capital murder case over the slaying of an elderly Nanticoke woman five years ago.

Anthony Spudis, 36, is facing an open count of criminal homicide along with counts of burglary and robbery after he allegedly broke into the Nanticoke home of Gertrude Price, 97, on Nov. 28, 2013. Prosecutors say he stabbed Price several times in the head in what has been characterized as a burglary turned violent, and they are pursuing the death penalty in the case.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley on Friday issued an order denying suppression motions filed by the defense regarding:

- A search warrant that was conducted on the home Spudis lived in at the time of the robbery. The search in question was conducted in 2017, years after he moved out.
- Statements made by Spudis to investigators on two occasions in 2017.

In the ceiling boards of the home's basement, police say they found a bag containing items that belonged to Price, including numerous pieces of mail with her name and family photographs.

During a suppression hearing held in April of this year, Pennsylvania State Trooper Edward Urban testified that while the bag was missed during a search in 2014, photos from that search show it poking out of the ceiling.

At the hearing, defense attorney Robert Saurman focused on inconsistencies in the filing of the search warrant, namely that the search warrant states it was for a home located at 2 E. Union St., Nanticoke, when the search was actually conducted at 2 W. Union St. Urban characterized this as a typographical error.

#### Search warrant

Regarding the search warrant, the defense contended that the underlying affidavit gave no indication “that the items from the crime would likely have been stored at the defendant’s former home or that they would still be there four years after the defendant left the residence,” the judge wrote.

In response, Gartley noted that investigators observed the bag, later found to contain Price’s belongings, after meeting with confidential witnesses at the West Union Street residence on Aug. 7, 2017, and that they compared it with photos from 2014 showing it partially hanging between the ceiling boards.

Even if the search warrant was deemed defective, the judge continued, Nanticoke police obtained a consent to search the building from the property owner as well as the tenants living in the property at the time of the search.

She further referred to the issue of East Union Street vs. West Union Street to be “meritless.”

#### Defendant’s statements

Spudis was charged Dec. 20, 2017 — more than four years after Price was killed — after investigators received information from inmates housed with him.

Spudis was then serving seven-and-a-half to 15 years in state prison on multiple burglaries and thefts in the Nanticoke area in 2013 and 2014, according to court records.

His attorney sought to have statements the incarcerated Spudis made to investigators on July 11, 2017 and Aug. 10, 2017 suppressed.

According to Gartley, Spudis had been given Miranda warnings, but the question was whether it was clear to him that he had the right to refuse the interviews.

Gartley wrote that “there is no evidence that the defendant was anything but alert and coherent when he made his statements and his mental faculties and ability to answer questions were unimpaired.”

The judge noted that the Miranda warnings given to Spudis on both dates were read from a standard state police form, which he signed in the presence of two troopers, and that both interviews were audio-recorded.

Further, the judge noted, Spudis “was clearly aware that he was being questioned first regarding the unsolved burglaries and then about the homicide of Ms. Price.”

“The argument ... regarding the defendant believing that the interviews were being conducted for a possible parole issue is disingenuous,” Gartley wrote. “The defendant never inquired about anything related to parole.”

At the April hearing Gartley agreed to push Spudis’s trial back from May of this year to Jan. 6, 2020 at the request of Saurman, who said the defense team needed more time to prepare.

6/27/2019

### **Hearing waived in gunfire case**

James Halpin / Published: June 27, 2019

A Wilkes-Barre man accused of firing a gunshot during an argument between families about their children dating each other waived his right to a preliminary hearing Wednesday.

Joey Concepcion, 26, of 56 Maxwell St., will face a county judge on a felony count of aggravated assault. In exchange for the waiver, prosecutors dropped other counts against him.

Prosecutors allege Concepcion was involved in a dispute with Steven Kocher Jr. about two youths dating and that he fired a shot past the ear of Steven Kocher Sr. when he entered the confrontation in Nanticoke on June 11. No injuries were reported.

After waiving the hearing, Concepcion’s bail was reduced to \$75,000 unsecured.

He will face a county judge Aug. 22.

6/22/2019

### **Nanticoke City Police Department**

PRESS RELEASE

June 21, 2019

Incident: Wanted Person Apprehended

Location: 600 Blk. Prospect St. Nanticoke City.

Day/Time of Incident: June 21, 2019.

Nanticoke City Police responded to the report of a wanted person between East Grand and East Washington Sts. Tyler WILLIAMS, 22, of Nanticoke City had been wanted by the Luzerne County Sheriff's Office and Luzerne County Adult Probation since April 2019. Police encountered WILLIAMS who then fled. Kingston Police, Newport Township Police and the Pennsylvania State Police aided City officers in apprehending WILLIAMS a few hours later near the City's Municipal building. WILLIAMS will be charged with Flight to avoid apprehension and will face similar charges for the June 12, 2019 incident when he avoided apprehension by fleeing from a motor vehicle on Lower Broadway St. Nanticoke.

6/15/2019

### **Five charged in Nanticoke drug investigation**

rdupuis@timesleader.com

Five people are in custody following a drug investigation that culminated in execution of a search warrant at a city apartment on Thursday and the seizure of more than \$10,000 in heroin, cash and a stolen handgun, Nanticoke City Police said.

Talideen Chambers, 21, Justice Chambers, 19, Draya Knighton, 20, and Antwan Smith, 19, were arrested for felony drug-related offenses in connection with the investigation at 3 West Union St., Apartment 3-B, according to a post on the police department's Facebook page.

A 10-month-old child found in the apartment was taken into protective custody, police said.

Knighton and Talideen Chambers also were charged with child endangerment, while Smith was found to be a fugitive from justice from New Jersey.

The four were arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker and each received \$500,000 cash bail. Smith was denied bail on a fugitive from justice charge. They are scheduled to appear Wednesday in Luzerne County Central Court.

On Friday city police and members of the Luzerne County Drug Task Force arrested a fifth person in connection with the investigation, taking Eleazor Bryant, 40, of South Prospect Street into custody.

Bryant faces charges of felony criminal conspiracy to deliver a controlled substance and criminal use of a communication facility, police said. He was taken to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for overnight arraignment

6/12/2019

### **2 facing charges after police raid in Nanticoke**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Two city residents are facing charges after police raided a home Monday.

Officers descended on 365 E. Church St. and seized a "substantial amount" of heroin along with other drugs, cash and a handgun.

One of the occupants, Ramel Lenell Parker, 32, was free on \$25,000 unsecured bail after being charged with drug trafficking in April, according to police.

Police charged Parker with drug trafficking, drug possession, possessing drug paraphernalia, marijuana possession and child endangerment. Another occupant, Shanae Theresa Coleman, 28, was charged with child endangerment.

Magisterial District Judge Rick Cronauer arraigned the pair Monday evening and ordered Parker jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$50,000. Coleman was released on \$10,000 unsecured bail.

6/12/2019

### **Police: Children inside house with heroin, methamphetamine**

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Three children were residing inside a residence where city police and the Luzerne County Drug Task Force allegedly discovered a large amount of heroin and methamphetamine on Monday.

Authorities served a search warrant at 365 E. Church St. finding heroin and methamphetamine in various rooms including a table and kitchen drawers, according to court records.

A handgun and several cellphones were also found, authorities said.

Three children, ages 13, 5 and 4, were inside the residence with their parents, Shanae Theresa Coleman, 28, and Ramel Parker, 32.

Authorities said in court records the illegal narcotics were exposed from packages creating dangerous conditions. In an unrelated case, court records say Parker was free on \$25,000 bail on drug trafficking charges filed by the state Office of Attorney General in April.

Parker and Coleman were arraigned by District Judge Richard Cronauer in Wilkes-Barre.

Parker and Coleman were each charged with three counts of endangering the welfare of children. Parker was further charged with two counts each of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance and possession of a controlled substance, and one count each of possession of drug paraphernalia and possession of marijuana.

Parker was jailed at Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$50,000 bail, and Coleman was released on \$10,000 unsecured bail.

6/12/2019

### **Youthful romance leads to violent family feud**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A dispute between families about their children dating each other escalated into a heated argument with a gunshot being fired Tuesday evening, according to police.

Joey Concepcion, 26, of 56 Maxwell St., Wilkes-Barre, is facing aggravated assault charges after police say he fired a shot past the ear of another man during the confrontation.

According to the complaint, the incident began with Concepcion and Yahaira Santiago exchanging Facebook messages with the Kocher family of 588 E. Main St., Nanticoke, about their children dating each other.

Santiago told police that around 5:15 p.m. Tuesday, she and Concepcion pulled up at the Kocher residence to have a "conversation" about Angel DeJesus dating September Myers.

The discussion between Concepcion and Steven Kocher Jr. soon grew heated and the men came close to blows, according to police. At that point, Steven Kocher Sr. jumped off the front porch — where Daniel and Tammy Myers were watching along with the Kochers — and ran toward the commotion, according to the complaint.

According to the Kocher clan, Kocher Sr. was trying to stop the fight. Concepcion, however, claimed Kocher Sr. ran up behind him and made him feel like he was about to be attacked.

Once Kocher Sr. was in the fray, Concepcion pulled a Ruger 9mm pistol from his pocket and fired a shot, the charges allege. Kocher Sr. told investigators the gun had been against his left ear when it fired, and police say his ear showed severe redness.

The bullet went toward a grassy area and did not strike anyone, police said.

After the shot was fired, Concepcion continued arguing with the Kochers and put the gun back inside the vehicle he arrived in, the complaint says. Kocher Jr. threw a trash can at the vehicle prior to police arrival, according to the charges.

A search of Santiago's Lincoln Navigator turned up the pistol, \$120 in counterfeit cash and a marijuana blunt, police said.

Police charged Concepcion with a felony count of aggravated assault and misdemeanor counts of reckless endangerment, possession of marijuana and possessing drug paraphernalia.

Magisterial District Judge Brian James Tupper arraigned him on the charges Wednesday morning and set bail at \$75,000. Concepcion was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for June 26.

6/12/2019

### **Dispute about youths' relationship behind Nanticoke shooting**

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Two families involved in a dispute about two young people dating each other led to a shooting outside an East Main Street residence on Tuesday, according to court records.

City police allege Joey Concepcion, 26, of Maxwell Street, Wilkes-Barre, fired a round from a 9mm handgun during a fight with Steven Kocher Jr. in front of 588 E. Main St. at about 5:20 p.m.

The round nearly struck Steven Kocher Sr., who suffered an ear and head injury, police said.

Concepcion allegedly told police he received messages on social media taunting him to fight the Kocher family in a

dispute about their children dating each other.

Police recovered the firearm inside Concepcion's vehicle in addition to marijuana and \$120 in counterfeit cash, court records say.

According to the criminal complaint:

Officers responded to the gunfire and observed Steven Kocher Sr. and others screaming on the front porch. Kocher Sr. yelled, "He almost (expletive) killed me."

Concepcion was detained when he attempted to enter his Lincoln Navigator that was parked in front of the residence. Police learned Concepcion and his girlfriend, Yahaira Santiago, arrived at the residence and began arguing about a relationship between their children.

During the argument, Kocher Jr. and Concepcion were about to fight when Kocher Sr. jumped off the front porch. Kocher Sr. told police he attempted to separate the two men when Concepcion brandished a firearm and discharged a round, nearly striking him in the head, the complaint says.

Concepcion told police he was about to engage in a fight with Kocher Jr. when he believed Kocher Sr. was going to attack him from behind causing him to pull the weapon. Concepcion claimed Kocher Sr. pulled his arm down causing the firearm to discharge.

Concepcion claimed the incident began over messages on Facebook Messenger between the Kochers and Santiago about their children dating. He also alleged the Kochers taunted him to fight them, the complaint says.

Santiago told police they drove to the Kocher residence intending to speak with them when Kocher Jr. started cursing and saying, "Fight me (expletive)."

Concepcion was arraigned Wednesday by District Judge Brian James Tupper in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of aggravated assault, recklessly endangering another person, possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$75,000 bail.

6/3/2019

### **Man dies after being struck by driver fleeing police**

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Bear Creek Twp. man died Saturday from injuries he suffered when a man fleeing from police crashed into his car last month, according to Luzerne County Coroner Daniel Hughes.

Gerald Mosley, 72, died Saturday of multiple traumatic injuries from a motor vehicle accident, Hughes said.

On May 24, Mosley's vehicle was struck by a vehicle driven by Jose Crespo Mendez, who was fleeing from police after officers attempted to pull him over for traffic violations, according to state police.

A police report does not state where the accident happened. The chase began on Interstate 81 north near Exit 165 in Ashley, according to the report.

Following the crash, Mosley was taken to a local hospital for treatment, according to police.

Crespo Mendez, 21, of Nanticoke, was charged with aggravated assault by vehicle while DUI, accidents involving death or personal injury, fleeing or attempting to elude police, simple assault, DUI and reckless endangerment.

Those charges were filed before Mosley died.

Crespo Mendez is in Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Wednesday in Luzerne County Central Court.

Authorities continue to investigate, Hughes said.

5/26/2019

### **Jose Mendez, 21 of Nanticoke, is locked up after troopers say he led them on a chase near Wilkes-Barre.**

Channel 16 WNEP TV

Two people were hurt in the crash that ended the chase.

NewsWatch 16 spoke to a witness of the chase who says he's surprised more people were not hurt.

Viewer photos sent to NewsWatch 16 showed mangled cars and state police cruisers on East Main Street in Wilkes-Barre

State police say this was the scene early Friday afternoon after the driver of the gray colored Acura, Jose Mendez, led troopers on a chase that started on Interstate 81 near Ashley.

A witness says they saw Mendez speeding away from police on the shoulder on 81 northbound before he got off the interstate near the Bear Creek exit.

"If he moved seven inches to the left he would have taken out about 20 cars. I mean he was coming up the exit ramp fast," said John Piazza.

Piazza says he first saw the chase in his rearview mirror, then moved over to give the cars room.

"I'm glad that all those people that were on that highway yesterday made it through safe because it was a bad situation, it could have been a lot worse ugly," said Piazza.

Piazza says he didn't realize until later, when he saw pictures like this on Facebook, that it did get ugly.

Police say the chase ended after Mendez crashed into a red Toyota.

This car was being driven by Gerald Mosley, 72 of bear creek township. At last check, officials at Geisinger Wyoming Valley says he is listed in serious condition.

"That's bad. You're just out minding your own business and something like that happens," Piazza said. "It's terrible. I mean people this day in age they're not worried about nothing. It's a bad time. Somebody like that, taking somebody else's life in jeopardy."

Troopers say the chase started when they tried to pull Mendez over for traffic and equipment violations.

Mendez is locked up on \$50,000 bail.

He is facing charges including fleeing, aggravated assault, recklessly endangering another person and DUI in Luzerne County.

4/25/2019

### **Standoff ends after man surrenders in Nanticoke**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Facing a massive presence of police in tactical gear ready to swarm, a Nanticoke man who threatened to shoot anyone who approached his home surrendered Wednesday afternoon following a standoff that lasted several hours.

"He gave himself up without incident," Nanticoke police Chief Tom Wall said. "I guess when he looked outside and saw everything happening, he decided to give himself up."

Police said the man, Andrew Blake, 31, was taken for an involuntary mental health commitment after he walked out of his 217 W. Green St. home.

More than 50 members of the Pennsylvania State Police Special Emergency Response Team were assembled near the man's house ready to make forcible entry if necessary. A state police armored vehicle, known as The Rook, was on hand.

Nanticoke police said the standoff began Wednesday morning after city police obtained an involuntary mental health commitment against Blake after getting complaints about his alleged bizarre behavior.

After police tried to make contact, Blake left his home and shot out a neighbor's surveillance cameras with a pellet gun, police said.

Police said Blake then returned to his house and did not respond to subsequent attempts to contact him.

"He had signs posted that if anyone tried to enter his house, he would shoot them," Wall said.

Wall said Blake was known to possess a crossbow and neighbors have complained about him shooting the weapon in his yard. It is believed the man used the crossbow to have killed a groundhog and a neighbor's cat, Wall said.

During the standoff, West Main Street was shut down between Fairchild Street and Alden Road.

City police said charges are pending against Blake.

4/24/2019

### **Former Nanticoke firefighter sentenced to prison for sexually abusing girl**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A former Nanticoke volunteer firefighter will spend at least six years in state prison for sexually abusing an 8-year-old girl.

Michael L. Sansone, 31, was convicted in October of having illegal contact with a minor.

Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough on Tuesday sentenced Sansone to serve 72 to 144 months in state prison.

Sansone was accused of sexually assaulting the girl several times leading up to his arrest in May 2016. He was immediately removed as a volunteer firefighter after being arrested.

At trial, Sansone was also convicted of corruption of minors and endangering the welfare of children. He was acquitted of rape.

4/18/2019

### **Pounds of marijuana seized from house**

Police Blotter - Times Leader

State police and city police arrested Oscar Alfredo Diaz-Flores, 26, and Elizabeth Collazo Perez, 25, on drug trafficking charges when a large amount of marijuana was allegedly found inside their residence on Monday.

Authorities served a search warrant at 94 Front St. where three packages weighing approximately 17 pounds, drug paraphernalia and packaging materials were found, according to the criminal complaint.

It was not known what led authorities to serve the search warrant.

Diaz-Flores and Perez were each charged with possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance, possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.

District Judge Matthew C. Christopher in Luzerne County Central Court arraigned the duo and jailed them at the county correctional facility for lack of \$75,000 bail each.

4/15/2019

### **Edwardsville man accused of robbing Nanticoke pharmacy**

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A man wanted on attempted robbery and assault charges alleging he tried to hold up a drug store and pistol-whipped a man who intervened was arraigned Thursday.

Ryan Stanley Romanoskey, 25, last known to reside in Edwardsville, was arraigned Thursday morning and jailed as he awaits trial on charges alleging he tried to rob the Rite Aid Pharmacy at 5 E. Main St. the evening of Nov. 3.

According to the charges, Romanoskey entered the store and went to the counter pretending to buy candy. When the clerk, Cristen O'Brien, went to complete the transaction, Romanoskey put a black object to her chest and said, "Give me all the money and two cartons of cigarettes," the complaint says.

Romanoskey jumped onto the counter, but O'Brien pushed him off and yelled for help, prompting customers to come to her aid, police said.

Romanoskey then ran out of the store past witness Stephen Kocher Jr., who called for Romanoskey to stop, according to the complaint. Kocher gave chase but Romanoskey swung a black handgun and hit him in the face, causing a cut to Kocher's left eyebrow, according to police.

Police put out a press release and a surveillance photo of the robber, and a family who knows Romanoskey recognized him on the news, police said.

According to the complaint, Lori Beth Thomas told investigators that a few hours before the robbery, Romanoskey had come to her house and was under the influence of something. Romanoskey had a crack pipe that he showed to Thomas' children and was trying to call someone to buy crack, police said.

After about a half hour, Romanoskey left and the family went to a football game, the complaint says. When they returned, the children saw a report about the robbery on the news and recognized the robber as Romanoskey, according to police.

When they told her, Thomas recognized Romanoskey as well, police said.

Police charged Romanoskey on Nov. 14 with two counts each of attempted robbery, simple assault and harassment.

Court records show he was also wanted on a felony escape charge out of Wilkes-Barre that was filed last October.

Magisterial District Judge Alexandra Kokura Kravitz arraigned him on the escape charge Wednesday evening and set bail at \$25,000 in that case. Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr. arraigned him in the attempted robbery case on Thursday morning and set bail at \$50,000 on those charges.

Romanoskey was booked into the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for later this month.

4/13/2019

### **Nanticoke man stabbed in robbery**

A Nanticoke man was stabbed in the shoulder during a reported robbery Thursday afternoon, according to police.

Officers were dispatched to 224 Coal St. around 3:20 p.m. to a report that a 34-year-old man had been stabbed. They found the victim bleeding profusely, having been stabbed in the upper shoulder, police said.

The man, whom police did not name, was taken to a local hospital for treatment.

He initially told investigators he was robbed at one location but then changed the location during subsequent questioning, police said.

The man then told police he no longer wanted to speak to investigators and he would not pursue charges if his attacker were captured, according to police.

4/11/2019

### **Man to stand trial for allegedly fleeing scene of crash**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man accused of fleeing the scene of a crash that seriously injured a 72-year-old man waived his right to a preliminary hearing on Wednesday.

John Charles Gajewski, 64, of 65 Hill St., will stand trial on a felony charge of fleeing the scene of an injury accident. In exchange for the waiver, prosecutors dropped additional summary counts against Gajewski, including failing to render aid and careless driving.

Police said Gajewski spent the day drinking at a bar before hitting Harold Rinehimer and fleeing the scene in a panic the night of Jan. 20.

Rinehimer was hit as he crossed East Broad and Market streets, and officers said they found him lying in the northbound lane of South Market Street saying he had been hit by a car that "came out of nowhere."

Rinehimer sustained broken bones, abrasions and contusions in the crash and was treated and released from Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

Gajewski remains free on \$100,000 unsecured bail.

4/11/2019

### **Nanticoke man waives hearing on hit-run charges**

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Still recovering from being struck by a vehicle that fled the scene nearly three months ago, 78-year-old Harold Rinehimer was smiling as he positioned himself behind the alleged driver, John Charles Gajewski, on Wednesday.

Gajewski, 64, of Hill Street, Nanticoke, was charged by Nanticoke police with driving away after striking Rinehimer in the 100 block of South Market Street on Jan. 20.

Gajewski appeared in Luzerne County Central Court, where he waived a single count of accidents involving personal injury to county court.

Rinehimer suffered head and facial injuries, and serious injuries to his legs, spine and ribs, police said, while a large laceration on his scalp continues to heal.

Police said surveillance cameras showed Rinehimer being thrown into the air and Gajewski swerving his vehicle into oncoming traffic, indicating he was aware he struck a pedestrian.

Gajewski initially denied he was involved but later admitted he struck Rinehimer, court records say.

Police said they located a 2016 Malibu with passenger-side damage parked near Gajewski's residence several days after the incident.

Gajewski claimed his vehicle was struck by another vehicle weeks earlier in the parking lot of a food market in Wilkes-Barre but later recanted, telling police he was at Larry's Pizza consuming eight to 10 cans of beer during his stay, court records say.

Gajewski allegedly told police he left Larry's and drove on South Market Street on his way home.

Police in court records say they found Rinehimer's bodily fluids on Gajewski's vehicle.

Prosecutors withdrew four traffic summary offenses against Gajewski.

During the brief proceeding before District Judge Joseph Halesy, Rinehimer - using a walker

- stood behind Gajewski. Needing to move closer to his attorney, Nanda Palissery, Gajewski with a grim face looked and nodded his head at Rinehimer.

Gajewski remains free on \$100,000 unsecured bail.

4/11/2019

### **Trial in Nanticoke woman's murder pushed back to 2020**

jhalpin - citizensvoice.com

The trial against capital murder suspect Anthony Spudis is on hold until next year as attorneys work to track down dozens of witnesses and a judge contemplates a host of pre-trial motions.

Spudis, 36, is charged with criminal homicide, burglary and robbery in the death of 97-year-old Gertrude Price, whose family found her bloodied body in her bed at 23 E. Grand St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 29, 2013. He is accused of brutally beating and stabbing the elderly woman with a screwdriver during a break-in at her home.

During a hearing Wednesday, the defense said it is working to track down more than four dozen potential witnesses for the three-week trial that was set to begin next month, and requested a continuance.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley continued the trial until Jan. 6 at the defense's request.

That will give her more time to rule on a number of pending motions that were also addressed during the hearing, including a motion to suppress a search warrant for a property at 2 W. Union St. Spudis lived at the address with his girlfriend at the time of the murder.

In court Wednesday, defense attorney Robert Saurman noted that the warrant application said Price's Access and Medicare cards, as well as some of her family photos, were found at 2 E. Union St.

State Trooper Edward J. Urban said it was a "typographical error" and noted that the other supporting documents indicated the property was in fact 2 W. Union St.

"It's an error that we missed," Urban said.

Gartley will rule on that and the other motions at a later date.

4/11/2019

### **Trial for alleged killer Spudis pushed back to 2020**

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At a motions hearing on Wednesday, the trial of a man accused of stabbing a 97-year-old woman to death during a Thanksgiving break-in five years ago was once again postponed at the behest of the defense.

Anthony Spudis, 36, was in court on Wednesday before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley, who heard a series of motions in relation to his case.

Spudis is facing an open count of criminal homicide along with counts of burglary and robbery after he allegedly broke into the Nanticoke home of Gertrude Price on Nov. 28, 2013. Prosecutors say he stabbed Price several times in the head in what has been characterized as a burglary turned violent, and they are pursuing the death penalty in the case.

Spudis' attorney, Robert Saurman, made a motion to have the trial continued from its scheduled date in late May, saying the defense team needed more time to prepare.

Gartley re-scheduled Spudis' trial for Jan. 6, 2020, blocking out a full week for jury selection and setting aside two more weeks for the trial.

This is the second continuance in the case; Spudis was originally set to go to trial last November.

Warrant motion

The court also heard arguments related to other motions, including a motion to suppress the findings of a search warrant that was conducted on the home Spudis lived in at the time of the robbery. The search in question was conducted in 2017, years after he moved out.

In the ceiling boards of the home's basement, police say they found a bag containing items that belonged to Price and bore her name. Pennsylvania State Trooper Edward Urban testified that, while the bag was missed during a search in 2014, photos from that search show it poking out of the ceiling.

Saurman focused on inconsistencies in the filing of the search warrant, namely that the search warrant states it was for a home located at 2 E. Union St., Nanticoke, when the search was actually conducted at 2 W. Union St. Urban characterized this as a typographical error.

Gartley's ruling on the motion will come at a later date.

4/4/2019

### **Nanticoke man allegedly beat woman at house party in Edwardsville**

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A Nanticoke man was arraigned Wednesday for allegedly beating up a woman at a house party.

Nashim T. Coleman, also known as "Smooove," 24, of 120 E. Green St., is accused of punching and kicking a woman after the two got into an argument.

According to a criminal complaint:

Officers from Edwardsville responded to apartments at 9 Beech St. just before 3 p.m. Dec. 15.

When they arrived, they were met by a female victim, who had a swollen left eye, scratch on her neck, swollen left knee and a small bruise on her left calf.

She told police she was kicked in the face by a black man, later identified as Coleman. The officer went into the apartment to speak to other people at the party.

The partygoers said they were smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol with no issue until Coleman started to make fun of the victim's height.

After starting off as a joke, the victim began to get upset and engaged in a verbal altercation with Coleman when he walked into the kitchen out of sight.

The victim pushed Coleman into a table. That was followed by a loud crash, and Coleman and the victim were seen "rolling around" on the living room floor.

Coleman then smashed the victim's head off the ground several times and kicked her in the face. The victim was able to get up and call 9-1-1.

She was later transported to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

Coleman is charged with simple assault, harassment and disorderly conduct. He was released on \$10,000 unsecured bail.

3/29/2019

### **Court records: DNA of murder suspect's girlfriend found at scene**

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Taryn Simms' DNA was discovered at the home of 97-year-old Gertrude Price, who was found dead inside her Nanticoke residence in 2013, according to a recent court filing.

Simms' ex-boyfriend, Anthony Spudis, 36, was charged with killing Price during a burglary on East Grand Street on Nov. 28, 2013 - the day after Thanksgiving.

Spudis is facing the death penalty if convicted of first-degree murder. His trial is set to begin May 28 before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley.

Simms' alleged connection to Price's death remains questionable as she apparently gave different accounts. She has not been charged.

Simms told investigators she went with Spudis to Price's house only after he confided to her that he may have killed a woman during a burglary, court papers say.

When Simms testified against Spudis at a preliminary hearing in April 2018, she opted not to answer any questions about being inside Price's house.

Investigators allege Spudis entered Price's home through a basement window with intentions to steal items but killed the elderly woman when confronted. Spudis left Price's house and returned to a residence he shared with Simms at 2 W. Union St., Nanticoke, where he confided he may have killed a woman.

It was then, arrest papers say, Simms accompanied Spudis to Price's address.

During Spudis' preliminary hearing, attorney John Pike suggested evidence tested at the state police crime lab showed Simms' DNA in various places: on a broken necklace next to a bed where Price's body was found; on a flathead screwdriver believed to be the murder weapon; on a serrated knife; and on the busted basement window.

Pike was permitted by court order to cease representing Spudis due to a conflict of interest.

Spudis is now represented by attorneys Robert A. Saurman and Brian S. Gaglione, both of Stroudsburg.

In a recently filed pre-trial motion by Spudis' attorneys, they again pointed to Simms' DNA being found at the scene and on items inside Price's house.

In response, assistant district attorneys Michelle A. Hardik and Daniel Zola acknowledged Simms' DNA was "present, in addition to that of Anthony Spudis."

Simms' attorney, Nanda Palissery, could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Judge Polachek Gartley imposed a gag order prohibiting attorneys involved in Spudis' case from publicly discussing details.

Defense attorneys are seeking to have Spudis' statements to investigators thrown out, including evidence allegedly found in the basement of his West Union Street home.

A pre-trial hearing is set for April 10.

3/26/2019

## **Police: Nanticoke man caused damage to house, believed people in walls 'spying'**

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A Nanticoke man may have been under the influence of bath salts when he ripped apart a house believing people in walls were "spying" on him, according to court records.

Damion Michael Sweeney, 39, of Maple Street, was arraigned Monday on charges of burglary and possession of a controlled substance in connection to the incident at a house on state Route 29 in Lake Township on Oct. 19.

According to the criminal complaint:

State police responded to the house and spoke with the owner's parents, who were checking on the residence since their son was away.

The parents told a trooper they noticed a Chevrolet TrailBlazer in the driveway and Sweeney exiting the house. They also noticed extensive damage inside the residence.

Sweeney allegedly told the parents about "people," "things inside the walls spying on him," and "trying to get the people and things in the walls," the complaint says.

The homeowner told police he knows Sweeney and allowed him to stay at the house for two or three days in July 2018. Sweeney did not have permission to be at the house in October.

State police said drywall was ripped away exposing wood studs in the kitchen, living room, family room, bedrooms, a stairwell, a bathroom and ceiling. There was also damage to rain gutters on the porch and a UGI electrical utility meter had a tag removed, the complaint says.

Several days after the burglary and vandalism, state police said the homeowner found a bag containing a controlled substance that tested positive for bath salts.

The homeowner's insurance company, Allstate, estimated damage at \$54,433, the complaint says.

Sweeney was arraigned by District Judge Matthew C. Christopher in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of burglary, criminal trespass, criminal mischief and possession of a controlled substance. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$50,000 bail.

2/26/2019

## **McNeal gets decades in prison for 2017 Nanticoke homicide**

pkernan@timesleader.com

Convicted killer Antoine McNeal, 34, won't be eligible for parole until he's almost 66 under a sentence handed down Monday.

A jury in January found McNeal, of Wilkes-Barre, guilty on counts of third-degree murder, criminal use of a communications facility, robbery and tampering with evidence.

He was convicted of fatally shooting 20-year-old Brandon Smith in a van outside of Smith's Nanticoke home in the early morning hours of Jan. 18, 2017.

At trial, prosecutors painted the attack as a robbery gone wrong, accusing him of going to Smith's home to buy \$500 worth of marijuana. Upon arrival, they said McNeal shot Smith twice and stole a handful of Percocet pills Smith had in his possession.

McNeal appeared in court on Monday before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley for sentencing. The judge allowed members of Smith's family to address the court first.

Smith's sister, Destiny Crooks, had harsh words for McNeal.

"I don't believe he's sorry for what he did," Crooks said. "I pray for him, I pray someday he's remorseful for what he did."

Briefly addressing the court himself, McNeal didn't express any remorse, instead, maintaining he had nothing to do with the shooting.

"Condolences to the family but I had no part of what happened to your son," he said. "I'm sorry."

McNeal said nothing else.

A large part of McNeal's defense throughout his week-long trial was that he was not involved with the crime, claiming that prosecutors did not have enough physical evidence to convict him. However, a cell phone that was eventually found to belong to McNeal was retrieved from the van Smith was shot in.

Before issuing her sentence, Gartley expressed condolences to Smith's family.

"At the sentencing stage, there isn't much to say," she said. "Nothing will bring your son back."

Gartley ordered McNeal to spend an aggregate 31 to 63 years in prison. McNeal was granted 678 days credit for time

served.

He will be required to pay nearly \$20,000 in restitution. The bulk of that money will go to the Pennsylvania State Police to cover for lab work done during investigation.

An additional charge of possession of a firearm by a felon, which had been severed from the trial, was withdrawn by prosecutors.

McNeal was remanded back to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility after sentencing pending transfer to a state prison.

2/26/2019

### **Convicted killer Antoine McNeal was sentenced Monday to serve up to 63 years in state prison.**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A jury convicted McNeal, 34, of third-degree murder, criminal use of a communications device, tampering with evidence and robbery following a trial in January.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley imposed the sentence Monday, ordering McNeal to serve roughly 31½ to 63 years in state prison. The judge gave McNeal credit for 678 days time served and ordered him to pay more than \$18,100 in restitution.

Prosecutors alleged McNeal set up a drug deal to buy \$500 worth of marijuana from 20-year-old Brandon Smith early the morning of Jan. 18, 2017. After arriving at Smith's West Church Street home in Nanticoke, McNeal shot him twice in the chest and robbed him of Percocet pills Smith had in his pocket, prosecutors said.

The defense maintained that although McNeal set up the drug deal, he arrived at Smith's home to find Smith with another, unidentified person. As McNeal was walking, gunshots rang out and he ran back to his girlfriend's car saying, "We got to get out of here. They're shooting," according to the girlfriend's testimony.

2/19/2019

### **Man, 64, charged in Nanticoke hit-run crash**

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man was charged Tuesday with fleeing the scene of a crash that seriously injured a 72-year-old man last month.

Police say John Charles Gajewski, 64, of 65 Hill St., spent the day drinking at a bar before hitting Harold Rinehimer and fleeing the scene in a panic the night of Jan. 20.

Rinehimer was hit as he crossed East Broad and Market streets around 10:25 p.m. Jan. 20. Officers say they found him lying in the northbound lane of South Market Street saying he had been hit by a car that "came out of nowhere."

Rinehimer was seriously injured in the crash — sustaining broken bones, abrasions and contusions — but was released from Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Twp., on Jan. 25.

According to the complaint, police got video from the area and identified a burgundy Chevrolet Malibu as the suspect's vehicle. Video from an ATM showed Rinehimer going airborne after being hit and the car then swerving into the opposing lane — indicating the driver knew what had happened, police said.

On Jan. 29, police found a burgundy 2016 Chevrolet Malibu with fresh front-end damage parked outside of Gajewski's home, police said.

Gajewski initially claimed a car had backed into his parked car at a supermarket, although he never reported such an accident, according to the complaint.

He went on to admit being at Larry's Pizza at 400 E. Church St. from about 3 p.m. until 11 p.m. the day of the crash, police said. Gajewski told police he drank between eight and 10 cans of Miller Lite while watching football at the establishment, according to the complaint.

He claimed he had then driven home along Market Street, which police say would not have been possible because by that time the road was already closed due to the accident. Police say the surveillance videos also did not support Gajewski's version of events.

Gajewski stood by his account, so police conducted further testing, according to the complaint.

An examination showed his car had damage "consistent with striking a person" in the form of dents and cracked paint — damage that was not observed during a vehicle inspection Gajewski had done on Jan. 16, police said.

Investigators also found what appeared to be human tissue on the vehicle's grill, police said.

Confronted with the additional information, Gajewski admitted he had lied and that he was responsible for the crash,

according to the complaint. He told police he panicked after hitting Rinehimer and was sorry for what happened, police said.

Police charged Gajewski with a felony count of fleeing the scene of an injury accident as well as summary counts of failing to stop and render aid, failing to report an accident, giving false information and careless driving.

Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned Gajewski on the charges Tuesday morning and released him on \$100,000 unsecured bail.

A preliminary hearing was set for 9 a.m. March 13.

2/9/2019

### **Search warrant: Suspect stole from club to fund gambling habit**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The suspect in the massive theft from a city social club admitted to embezzling funds to support his lifestyle and a secret casino gambling habit, according to a search warrant obtained by Nanticoke police.

Search warrant documents identify the suspect as Daniel Wozniak, who was treasurer the past five years at the Honey Pot Club in the city's Honey Pot section.

Investigators say tens of thousands of dollars are missing from the club's coffers.

The theft came to light recently after utilities were shut off to the club's building at 13 Honey Pot St. The utility shut off forced the Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Department out of service. The fire company is an affiliated, but separate, organization which shares the building with the club.

City police said they recently were approached by board member Julianna Kobylarz, who reported the utilities were shut off due to months of unpaid bills. She and other members then discovered the club's three bank accounts were "depleted," police said.

The next day, Wozniak's wife, Jennifer, also a board member, came to police headquarters to report Wozniak was "missing" for several days, according to the search warrant. She said he had sent her an email admitting to stealing from the club.

Police say Wozniak surrendered on Thursday and admitted to stealing from the club for several years.

Wozniak, the club's treasurer since 2014, said he initially wrote himself several checks, but mainly stole money each night from cash deposits, the search warrant says.

When there wasn't enough money to pay bills, he would transfer cash from the club's savings account to its checking account until the point there was no money left, police said.

Wozniak said he used the cash for personal purposes and to "fund his closeted casino gambling habit," the search warrant says.

Police say charges are pending the completion of the investigation and an analysis of the club's financial records. Efforts to reach Wozniak on Friday were not immediately successful.

2/8/2019

### **Fire volunteers out of service due to theft**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Department is out of service as city police investigate a massive theft from its affiliated social club that led to its utilities being shut off.

Nanticoke police Chief Tom Wall confirmed his department is investigating the theft of tens of thousands of dollars from the Honey Pot Club social hall and a suspect turned himself in to confess.

The hall and fire department, which are affiliated but are two separate organizations, share the same building at 13 Honey Pot St.

Wall said the thief came to light when the utilities were shut off recently due to unpaid bills.

"That was one of the things that gave it away. He was supposed to be doing that," Wall said.

Wall said the suspect turned over a computer and told police how he had been skimming from the organization's finances for several years. Charges are pending the completion of the investigation and analysis of financial records, the chief said.

The volunteer fire company announced on Facebook on Wednesday it was out of service for most calls because utilities were shut off to its building.

"We feel the community should be well aware of the issue at hand and the fire company is not the one being

investigated, as we have two organizations in the building," the fire company wrote on Facebook. The fire company said residents still would be in great hands because of the "amazing fire department here in the City of Nanticoke."

The volunteer department in the city's Honey Pot section is one of several that supplement Nanticoke's full-time department.

When contacted, a representative of the fire department declined further comment.

Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton said fire and rescue service will not be harmed while Honey Pot is out of service.

"They are an independent agency. We cover Honey Pot, so it will not affect service one bit," Hazleton said.

Meanwhile, a post on the Honey Pot Club's Facebook page says there will be an "emergency meeting" for members of the private club at 6 p.m. Friday at the West Side Park clubhouse on West Grand Street.

"We will only be able to issue a basic statement due to the active investigation and be open to help/thoughts to try to get things moving forward," the post said.

2/1/2019

**Police: Suspect identified in hit and run**

[Read here.](#)

1/24/2019

**Nanticoke police seek U-Haul truck driver in hit-run**

[Read here.](#)

1/19/2019

**Man, 72, seriously hurt in Nanticoke hit-run .. Black sedan with damage to front bumper.**

[Click for info.](#)

1/12/2019

**McNeal found guilty of murder**

James Halpin and Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

After nearly six hours of deliberations, a jury on Friday night found Antoine McNeal guilty of third-degree murder. McNeal, 34, was accused of setting up a drug deal to buy \$500 worth of marijuana from 20-year-old Brandon Smith early the morning of Jan. 18, 2017.

Prosecutors alleged that after arriving at Smith's West Church Street home in Nanticoke, McNeal shot him twice in the chest and robbed him of Percocet pills Smith had in his pocket.

McNeal was also found guilty of criminal use of a communications device, tampering with evidence and robbery.

The jury found him not guilty of first- and second-degree homicide.

Prosecutors struggled to understand how the jury found McNeal guilty of robbery, but not guilty of second-degree murder, which is a killing during the commission of a felony, such as robbery. A second-degree murder conviction would have carried a penalty of mandatory life in prison, while the third-degree conviction carries a maximum penalty of 20 to 40 years in prison.

Still, prosecutors were satisfied with the verdict.

"We were confident from the beginning Mr. McNeal pulled the trigger," said Assistant District Attorney William Finnegan.

Sentencing was set for Feb. 25 at 1 p.m.

The defense maintained that although McNeal set up the drug deal, he arrived at Smith's home to find Smith with another, unidentified person. As McNeal was walking, gunshots rang out and he ran back to his girlfriend's car saying, "We got to get out of here. They're shooting," according to the girlfriend's testimony.

"Mr. McNeal is disappointed. He maintained his innocence and expected a not guilty verdict," defense attorney Demetrius Fannick said.

During his closing argument, Fannick focused on testimony by Smith's own mother, who testified her son was a drug dealer who had made enemies in the Tunkhannock area because of ripping people off. When Smith was bleeding out on his living room floor, he was shouting, "They shot me!" according to her testimony.

Fannick noted that Smith and McNeal worked together and knew each other well.

"This was a very close encounter, and if it was a close encounter with someone he knew he would have told his parents

who it was,” Fannick said. “He doesn’t know who shot him. He says, ‘They shot me.’ ... That’s reasonable doubt right there.”

But Fannick also noted that the bullets recovered from the crime scene were a different type than the unspent rounds recovered from McNeal’s girlfriend’s house. While girlfriend Wakeelah Moore’s .38 Special revolver — which she claims had been previously stolen — was the same caliber of the murder weapon, Fannick noted that a prosecution gun expert testified that millions of similar guns could have fired the bullets that killed Smith.

He also blasted police for a “crap” investigation, alleging they failed to even bother testing evidence including a cigarette butt and a soda can recovered from outside the van where Smith was fatally shot.

“Forensically, there’s nothing in this case,” Fannick said, noting that police only recovered one partial fingerprint from the vehicle. “How is that possible? That’s mind-blowing, if you think about it.”

During the prosecution closing, Assistant District Attorney Thomas Hogans reminded the jury that Moore admitted in court that she drove McNeal to meet Smith moments before the shooting.

“A few minutes later, Brandon is running into his house to his mother, Tina, screaming, ‘They shot me!’” Hogans said. The prosecutor downplayed the significance of Smith’s use of the word “they,” noting that in earlier text exchanges McNeal had informed him he was coming with Moore.

“Most importantly, there is zero evidence that anybody else was coming to see Brandon that night,” Hogans said, noting Smith’s phone contained no text messages indicating anyone else planned to meet him.

He also noted that Smith’s mother said he had been “frantic and scared” as he laid on the floor screaming that he couldn’t breathe and that he didn’t want to die.

“His world’s already closing in on him,” Hogans said. “He was breathing his last breaths. Brandon was not worried about who shot him.”

Hogans urged the jury to focus on what the evidence shows: That Smith was killed by a single shooter using a single revolver during a drug robbery. The defense, he alleged, was trying to confuse the fact that the evidence conclusively puts McNeal inside the van.

“He doesn’t want you to think about the fact that the defendant’s phone was on the passenger seat of the van — with Brandon’s blood on it,” Hogans said.

1/9/2019

### **Woman accused of smashing her way into borough office**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A woman smashed her way into the borough's municipal building early Monday, seeking to steal documents from the police station about an investigation targeting her, police said.

Police said Ashley Keister, 27, of Nanticoke, used a large cigarette butt receptacle to smash glass doors to the building and gain entry around 12:45 a.m. Once inside, she started rummaging through filing cabinets, police said.

West Wyoming police Chief Curtis Nocera said Keister had been under investigation for harassing a borough cop who arrested her last year.

"She wanted to have a relationship with him," Nocera said.

He said no one was in the building at the time Keister entered, as police were out on patrol.

Prior to breaking in, Keister called 911 and asked for an officer to meet her at the station in 10 minutes, police said.

Investigators said Keister first bashed the cigarette receptacle off the police department door, causing damage, before using it to break into the borough building.

She never gained access to the police station, Nocera said.

After Keister exited the building, police said she picked up the cigarette receptacle again and smashed out more of the glass door.

Police said Keister then retreated to her vehicle and waited for police to arrive. When an officer arrived, Keister charged at him and swung at his head, police said.

She was then taken into custody.

The incident was caught on surveillance footage, police said. Police released footage from the department's video doorbell that they said depicts Keister smashing the cigarette container off the door.

Investigators said Keister admitted to breaking into the borough building to try to remove documents involving a police investigation targeting her.

Keister was charged with aggravated assault on a police officer, burglary, institutional vandalism, loitering and prowling at night time, criminal mischief, and harassment.

She was arraigned by Magisterial District Judge Joseph Carmody. Carmody ordered her jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 bail.

1/4/2019

### **Trial set to begin in drug robbery killing**

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Attorneys on Friday picked a jury and opening statements are set for Monday in the case of a Wilkes-Barre man accused of killing a man during a drug robbery in Nanticoke.

Antoine McNeal, 34, is accused of murdering Brandon Smith, 20, who was shot dead outside his West Church Street, Nanticoke, home on Jan. 18, 2017. Prosecutors allege McNeal killed Smith after meeting him to buy marijuana. The prosecution recently succeeded in adding a robbery charge against McNeal based on recorded jailhouse phone calls in which McNeal referenced Smith having 30-milligram oxycodone pills in his pocket at the time of the shooting. "The (expletive) had other drugs in his pocket so evidently someone else was coming to see him besides me," prosecutors have quoted McNeal as saying.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley granted the prosecution request over the objections of the defense, which maintained the additional charge would severely alter the case. However, the judge pushed back the trial date of Dec. 3 to give the defense time to adapt.

Opening statements are now scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. Monday.

1/5/2019

### **Judge allows Nanticoke man to withdraw guilty plea in alleged sex assault**

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A Nanticoke man will take his chances with a jury now that a Luzerne County judge permitted him to withdraw his guilty plea on a sexual assault charge.

Dylan Charles Monelli, 22, of South Hanover Street, was charged by Nanticoke police with having sexual encounters with a 15-year-old girl from June 2017 until December 2017. Monelli claimed the encounters were consensual and the relationship ended when the minor's parents found out, court records say.

Despite the claim of a consensual relationship, Monelli was charged with a felony statutory sex assault charge due to the age difference involving a minor.

Monelli on Oct. 15 pleaded guilty to the felony charge while prosecutors withdrew a misdemeanor count of corruption of minors.

But when Monelli appeared in court to be sentenced Dec. 10, his lawyer, Joseph Sklarosky Sr., advised Judge Michael T. Vough that Monelli wanted to withdraw his plea.

Sklarosky confirmed again Friday that Monelli wanted to take back the plea, which Vough allowed.

"He maintains it was a consensual relationship, clearly it was consensual," Sklarosky told the judge. "If a jury hears the case, they would acquit him."

Vough scheduled Monelli's trial for March.

In an unrelated case, Monelli was sentenced last month to one year on probation and 50 hours of community service for conspiring to steal items from the Turkey Hill store on West Main Street in Nanticoke on May 4.

1/3/2019

### **Jury selection to begin Friday for 2017 Nanticoke homicide**

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Jury selection is set to begin in a 2017 homicide case.

Antoine McNeal, 34, will appear before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley on Friday morning. McNeal is accused of fatally shooting Brandon Smith, 20, while Smith sat in a van outside a Nanticoke home Jan. 18, 2017.

McNeal is facing a total of five charges, including an open count of criminal homicide, prohibited possession of a firearm, criminal use of a communication facility and tampering with evidence.

Smith was shot and killed in the early morning hours. Previous testimony suggested the homicide was a result of a drug deal gone wrong. Smith's mother, Tina Letavish, said Smith was on the couch of their Nanticoke home texting someone before heading outside around 2 a.m.

He ran back inside shortly later, shouting “they shot me” before falling to the floor.

Investigators said they later found a texting trail between Smith and a number that belonged to McNeal. The text messages were aimed at setting up a drug deal, authorities report.

Court records show McNeal’s trial is scheduled to last all of next week. He’s been locked up without bail in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility since his arrest in April 2017.