



Standard-Speaker Local

HAVE A GOOD DAY
Fillmore Williams
Drums
Our Subscriber of the Day

A4

TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2019

Man jailed for selling drugs

A Hazleton man caught selling heroin/fentanyl and methamphetamine in the area was taken to jail, Pennsylvania State Police said.

Troopers were told Ramon A. Gonzalez Veras, 32, of 545 Lincoln St., was moving a lot of methamphetamine in the area and after catching him selling once this summer, they arrested him, court papers state.

He faces manufacture, delivery or possession with intent to deliver, dealing in proceeds of unlawful activity and criminal use of a communication facility, felonies, by a trooper assigned to the Drug Law Enforcement Division, Northeast Strike Force.

He was also charged with misdemeanors for possession of a controlled substance and use or possession of drug paraphernalia and denied bail after his Friday afternoon arraignment before Magisterial District Judge James Dixon, Hazle Twp.

A note on his court docket states he was denied bail because he is a flight risk and a danger to the community.

Troopers said they mounted their case against him after seeing him selling methamphetamine and heroin/fentanyl in June on the northeast side of Hazleton.

— AMANDA CHRISTMAN



JILL WHALEN / STAFF PHOTO

Chestnut trees grow in an American Chestnut Foundation grove at Tuscarora State Park, Barnesville. The foundation is looking for volunteers to maintain the grove.

POLICE

RUSH TWP.

Woman charged in retail theft

A Bloomsburg woman is accused in an April 19 theft in Schuylkill County.

Rush Twp. police charged Sheryl J. Raab, 58, with retail theft and conspiracy, filing the case against her on July 9. She was released on her own recognizance on July 10 by Magisterial District Judge Stephen Bayer, Tamaqua.

Arrest papers state she participated in the theft of \$159.10 in merchandise at Walmart, Hometown.

Duo charged after fight

Two men face charges after a May 2 fight in Rush Twp.

Michael W. Romig, 45, Tamaqua, was charged with simple assault and harassment by township police who filed the case against him on May 20. He was released on his own recognizance on July 9 by Magisterial District Judge Stephen Bayer, Tamaqua.

Ralph P. Bolletino, 57, Tamaqua, was cited by township police for harassment that day too and was found guilty on July 18.

The incident happened at 133 Claremont Ave., and Bolletino said Romig became upset during a conversation over parking and hit him a few times, arrest papers state. Romig however, told police Bolletino was the aggressor and raised his fist to him so he punched Bolletino and knocked him to the ground, police wrote.

The fight continued until bystanders broke them up.

Bolletino had injuries on his face, head, arms and hands while Romig sustained a swollen hand and scrapes to his arm and leg.

TAMAQUA

Borough police probe incidents

Tamaqua police released information on the following incidents:

■ Charges are pending against Tori Kessler, 32, Tamaqua, after police responded to 71 Bowe St. on June 30 at 10:18 a.m. for a woman who overdosed. They initially couldn't find the woman but located Kessler in a third floor bedroom. Though she claimed to have used methamphetamine, she refused medical treatment. Kessler was wanted by Reading police at the time and claimed ownership of a bent metal spoon and 14 partial wax bags with residue in them found on the second floor.

■ William H. Huegel, 57, Tamaqua, faces a harassment citation after attempting to cash a check at Wells Fargo Bank, 17 W. Broad St. He became angry with the teller and ripping the check from her hand, bent her finger back and tore her fingernail.

■ Calvin Breiner, 38, Tamaqua, faces a citation for fireworks prohibited. An officer advised him not to set off fireworks in the road after responding to a July 4 fireworks complaint at Bowe and High streets after 9 p.m. Then 15 minutes later police were dispatched back the neighborhood, finding Breiner setting off more fireworks in the middle of the road, blocking traffic.

■ Debra Vargas, 26, faces a retail theft citation after police said she was caught filling an empty container of laundry detergent with soap from a full container at Family Dollar, 125 Center St., on July 6 at 4:45 p.m. The store assistant manager said this incident and two others were caught on store video surveillance.

■ Tyler M. Strawdinger, Coaldale, was found making violent twitching motions while wandering around a private lot and staring at the sky in the 200 block of Mauch Chunk Street. He was unable to stand still and sweating profusely. Police found him there while responding to a report of two erratic men on Schuylkill Avenue on July 8 at 3:15 p.m.

He told police he used methamphetamine with a friend he wouldn't identify earlier in the day and was wanted for a parole violation. He also had a small amount of marijuana and was charged with possession of marijuana, public drunkenness and possession of drug paraphernalia.

■ Faylyne Harrison, 34, Tamaqua, faces possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia after officers found her at the little league field, 240 N. Columbia St., on July 3 at 6:20 p.m.

She was wanted by probation officials and had a small bag of methamphetamine in her possession, along with 28 empty bags and two needles.

■ Joseph J. Carroll III, 27, Tamaqua, was charged with two counts each criminal mischief and tampering with evidence after his ex-girlfriend reported on July 5 around 10 a.m., that he damaged her car stereo and her rear door and disconnected her surveillance cameras at 333 Hazle St.

■ Kimberly K. Leary, 53, Tamaqua, faces burglary, criminal trespass, theft and public drunkenness. Her bail was set at 10% of \$25,000 on July 5 by Magisterial District Judge David Plachko. She got inside an unlocked home at 497 Boyle Ave., helping herself to orange juice in the refrigerator. Police found her appearing to be under the influence and without shoes on, on the front porch after the 17-year-old inside the home heard noises from the intrusion. She didn't know why she was there or where she came from.

Saving the chestnut

Volunteers sought to maintain local grove

BY JILL WHALEN
STAFF WRITER

BARNESVILLE — Near the end of a seldom-traveled dirt road at Tuscarora State Park, Sara Fern Fitzsimmons took a path that hooked to the right.

A few hundred feet in, the forest surrounding her gave way to a grassy meadow.

"Ah, there it is," she announces. "That's the big tree."

Planted 25 years ago, a product of some of the best American chestnut stock available, the tree is one of about 30 chestnuts on the property.

Had this been 100 years ago, a swath of chestnuts like the one in front of Fitzsimmons would be a common sight. The species dominated the eastern forests, reaching heights of 100 feet and dropping nuts to feed a variety of wildlife.

Eventually, the trees themselves began to drop, brought down by a deadly fungus known as the chestnut blight. It was brought here accidentally from Japan in the late 1890s and claimed an estimated 4 billion trees.

"You see that orange right there?" Fitzsimmons asked, pointing to a gnarled patch of off-colored tree bark. "This is blight. And all of this callousing is blight — but the tree is resisting it."

Fitzsimmons is a director of restoration for the American Chestnut Foundation and frequently checks on chestnut groves around the state. The foundation's goal is to restore the tree to native forests, and to do that, researchers are working to develop a blight resistant tree that retains as many American chestnut traits as possible.

The foundation looks to volunteers to report chestnut trees they've seen in a forest, to plant trees and to help maintain nurseries.

The grove at Tuscarora was the foundation's first in the commonwealth. The "big tree," as Fitzsimmons called



Sara Fern Fitzsimmons of the American Chestnut Foundation checks the leaves on a chestnut tree at a grove at Tuscarora State Park, Barnesville.

it, was grown from a nut planted in 1994 by the late Eugene Dougherty, of Delano.

Dougherty maintained the nursery until he passed away in 2015. Another volunteer, Joe Lankalis of Tamaqua, stepped up, but has also since passed away.

Since Fitzsimmons is based almost three hours away at Penn State University's main campus, it's difficult for her to frequently check the grove. She's hoping someone will volunteer to maintain the property and check on trees.

"There is quite a history here," Fitzsimmons said as she looked at markers attached to the trees by Dougherty and Lankalis.

"Chamberlain. F1. Delano," she said, reading the pedigree and origin on one marker.

She explained that the trees here were bred with blight-resistant genes from the Chinese chestnut.

"What the Chinese chestnut does is push the blight away so that it can't eat the cambium layer and kill the tree," she said. "The more Chinese you have in a tree, the more resistant it is and the more it can persist."

A few of the trees in the grove are showing an "above average" resistance response, she said.

While cross-breeding with Chinese genes was initially thought to be the answer, researchers have since found that using a gene from wheat is very effective at protecting the trees from the blight.

According to Fitzsimmons, the blight started to take hold of American

chestnuts in the early part of the 20th century. At that time, one of every four trees in Pennsylvania was an American chestnut.

While American chestnuts can still grow in their native range, they rarely reach over 20 feet. And they'll eventually fall to the fungus.

"Nothing is certain but death, taxes and chestnut blight," she said.

Joking aside, Fitzsimmons said she's often asked why it's important to restore the tree.

"I think a lot of people know that the American chestnut has been out of the consciousness for over 100 years, right? They ask, 'Do we need it? Do we need it in our forests?'" she said. "I would say, 'Yes.' I mean, we are doing fine but our forests would be much healthier. We'd be in a much better place."

For example, caterpillars and insects depend on native species — and the more variety, the better.

"But we're losing them — our trees. We're losing ash, we're losing hemlock. Chestnut was really the first to go. Elm left shortly after that. Now we're losing our hemlock, our ash, our beech are under attack, our walnut," she said.

If blight-resistant chestnuts are developed, similar methods could be used to preserve and reintroduce other native species, she said.

Anyone who is interested in tending to the nursery at Tuscarora should contact the American Chestnut Foundation at www.acf.org.

Another way to help is by downloading the TreeSnap app to a smartphone, Fitzsimmons said. Those who find American chestnuts are encouraged to snap a photo of the tree, report its location and send leaf and twig samples.

Contact the writer: jwhalen@standardspeaker.com; 570-501-3592

Changes ahead for area churches

St. Patrick's Parish in White Haven will become the seventh parish in the Diocese of Scranton to implement the "parish life coordinator" model of parish leadership on Aug. 1.

The Rev. Michael J. Kloton, who is the pastor of both St. Patrick Parish and Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Freeland, will become the pastor of Good Shepherd Parish in Drums in

a new linkage between Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and Good Shepherd.

This change is needed because of the retirement of The Rev. Connell A. McHugh, who will become pastor emeritus of Good Shepherd.

Mary Ann Malone has been appointed by Bishop Joseph C. Bambera as the parish life coordinator in White Haven, and the Rev. Peter J. O'Rourke will serve

as sacramental minister. O'Rourke retired June 24 as pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish at Transfiguration Church in West Hazleton, where the Rev. Brian J.W. Clarke took over as pastor, while remaining pastor at Holy Rosary Church in Hazleton.

These changes, necessitated by a declining number of priests, were the subject of town-hall-type meetings ear-

lier this year.

Starting Aug. 1, the new weekend Mass schedule will be as follows:

■ Immaculate Conception: Saturdays at 4 p.m. and Sundays at 11 a.m.

■ St. Patrick's: Saturdays at 5 p.m. and Sundays at 10:15 a.m.

■ Good Shepherd: Saturdays at 6 p.m. and Sundays at 8 and 9:30 a.m.

— JIM DINO