



May 1

Arrest Made After Alleged Chase in Belmont County

BELMONT COUNTY, OH - An Alledonia man was arrested Monday night after leading a Belmont County deputy on a chase, first in a car, and then on foot. Sheriff Dave Lucas said Franklin Welch, 28, was driving on Banfield Road and was spotted by a deputy who knew there was a warrant out for him. He pulled him over, but the sheriff said Welch hit the gas and sped away, while a woman passenger could be heard screaming to be let out. He said Welch stopped briefly to let her out, then sped off again, soon jumping out himself and letting the car go on without a driver. The deputy got out and chased him. "On foot into the woods. Deputy Sanders pursued Welch into the woods, very thick, steep hillside, and from all the rain, very muddy. He deployed his taser," said Belmont County Sheriff Dave Lucas. In the end, the deputy tazed Welch twice and got assistance from Bridgeport Police. Welch was jailed under \$29,000 bond. He's charged with assault on an officer, resisting arrest, driving under the influence and unlawful restraint, regarding his screaming passenger.

May 1

Armed Robbery Suspect Arrested in Wheeling

WHEELING, WV - Wheeling police arrested 35-year-old Eduardo Alvendia in an armed robbery case on Tuesday morning. He was later arraigned for robbery with a threat of deadly force. Alvendia is believed to be responsible for a holdup at 'Up on the Lane,' along Edgington Lane on April 15. Police say Alvendia's girlfriend, Kristina Morris, opened the door for him before he told the clerk he had a gun. Alvendia then pointed the gun at the clerk and threw a pillowcase at her, threatening her and demanding cash. Alvendia got away with nearly \$6,000. He was arraigned on Tuesday afternoon by Ohio County Magistrate Joe Roxby and is headed to the Northern Regional Jail. His bond is set at \$20,000 cash only. There is no word on whether or not Morris will face charges.

On Tuesday, Eduardo Alvendia, 35, of Wheeling was arrested on one count of robbery.

Update: On Wednesday, Kristina Morris, 33, was arrested and has been charged with one count of conspiracy. She was arraigned, and has been released on a personal recognizance bond.

May 1

Investigation Continues into Brutal Murder of a Mother on Wheeling Island

WHEELING, WV - It's been more than a month since a young mother was brutally killed on Wheeling Island. Wheeling Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger says they have a lot of evidence, and he's hoping it leads to an arrest soon. Cries from 21-year-old Rayna Vaughan's 2-year-old daughter are what alerted neighbors and then police about a brutal murder on South Wabash Street on Wheeling Island on March 21. She had only lived the island for a week. Before that, she was a Weirton resident. More than a month later, an investigation continues. "This investigation is a complex one, and we have been really focused on creating a timeline, interviews, and more importantly, a slew of evidence has been sent to Charleston and the lab there has been very gracious in bumping this case to the forefront," Schwertfeger said. Vaughan died from a blow to the head. Her daughter, who was in the next room, was not harmed. Schwertfeger says the case is complex, but he doesn't think the public, particularly the Wheeling Island Community, should worry? "I want to stress there is no concern on behalf of the Wheeling Police Department that there is any immediate threat to the general public," Schwertfeger said.

May 2

Man Arrested After Allegedly Forcing Way into Woman's Home, Threatening to "Kill Her"

WHEELING, WV - An Ohio County man was arrested early Wednesday morning after allegedly forcing his way into a woman's home and reportedly threatening to kill her. Michael Mortakis Jr. was arraigned by Magistrate Roxby in Ohio County after Wheeling Police arrested him for felony nighttime burglary. Officers say Mortakis Jr. reportedly forced his way into a Jacob St. house threatening to kill a woman inside. According to the criminal complaint, the victim called police at approximately 2:50 a.m, telling officers that she awoke to Mortakis Jr. standing in her doorway, saying he was going to kill her. Mortakis Jr. then allegedly slammed the bedroom door and then went into the garage. The victim was able to lock the garage door before calling police. According to the victim, Mortakis Jr. does not live at that Jacob Street residence anymore, but he had when he was younger. The victim showed officers a side door that she believes Mortakis Jr. entered. The victim told police that the side door is secured with a screw to keep it from opening, but the screw had been loosened, allowing the door to be opened wide enough for someone to enter the residence. He is currently being held in the Northern Regional Jail on a \$10,000 cash only bond.

May 7

Man Pleads Guilty to Stealing Ambulance in Martins Ferry

BELMONT COUNTY, OH - A man accused of stealing an ambulance from East Ohio Regional Hospital in December reached a plea agreement on Monday. Anthony Norman pled guilty to disrupting public service before Judge Frank Fregiato. Norman was arrested after he was spotted driving the ambulance by the Belmont County Sheriff's Office on Interstate 70 in December. The ambulance was in the process of making a transport for a medical flight. Norman will be sentenced later this month.

May 7

Trial Begins in Wheeling for Man Accused of Sexually Assaulting a Young Girl

WHEELING, WV - A Cleveland man is accused of sexually assaulting a young girl in Wheeling. Prosecutors say David Thomas sexually assaulted a young girl while she was asleep. However, the defense claims there's no proof that ever happened. On Monday, the trial began in Ohio County. The alleged incident happened during summer 2016. The young girl's mother had a relationship with Thomas. West Virginia State Police say the mother was showering when Thomas assaulted the young girl. They also say she pretended to be asleep during the assault. The defense claims the incident didn't involve Thomas, but instead another man. They also say the child waited to report the incident. Prosecutors explained why. "The sexual assault happens and nothing is done about it until there is curriculum in school that explains to children they're not supposed to be touched like that by someone who isn't supposed to touch them," the prosecution said. Thomas faces 15-35 years in prison. Right now, he is free on bond. The case will continue on Wednesday because Circuit Court is closed for Election Day on Tuesday.

May 8

Belmont County Man Behind Bars for Allegedly Assaulting Pregnant Girlfriend

ST. CLAIRSVILLE, OH - The call came in the early hours of Saturday, saying 27-year-old Robert Chilson had beaten his live-in girlfriend. A sergeant with the Belmont County Sheriff's Department responded to the couple's Elizabeth Street house and found the woman reportedly with facial bruises and swelling. The sergeant placed Chilson under arrest. Sheriff Dave Lucas confirms that Chilson was once an employee of the sheriff's department. "The sergeant made an arrest for domestic violence and placed the suspect in custody," said Sheriff Lucas. "It was several years ago that this suspect (Chilson) started in the jail division of the sheriff's office. And he didn't complete his probationary period." In the sheriff's words, "He just didn't work out." He said Chilson is no longer in the law enforcement field. Records show prior domestic calls to the same household in recent months.

May 9

Health Department Urges Residents to Not Ground Feed Animals After Two Bitten by Cat with Rabies

WHEELING, WV - The Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department is urging residents to not groundfeed wild and domestic animals, especially in residential areas. According to Administrator Howard Gamble, two people were bit by a domestic cat that tested positive for rabies in the Market Street area in North Wheeling. The cat died on May 3rd, and tested possible for rabies on Monday, May 7th. This is the first laboratory confirmed animal rabies case in Ohio County for 2018. According to officials, ground feeding of wild fowl, game birds, pigeons, doves, and other birds is currently prohibited under Wheeling City Ordinance 505.08. The ground feeding of other domestic and wild animals, including cats, dogs, deer, and raccoons, can lead to other public health issues and an increase in some diseases like rabies, Lyme, West Nile, and other zoonotic diseases. The health department is urging Ohio County residents to be on the lookout for animals acting strangely or aggressively. They also recommend pet owners keep their vaccinations up-to-date. Rabies is a virus that infects warm-blooded animals, affecting mainly the brain. The disease is common in wildlife, especially bats, raccoons, foxes, and skunks. It is extremely rare in rodents and there have not been any identified naturally-occurring cases in birds. It spreads through the bites and scratches of an infected animal. It can be fatal if left untreated. Animals are regularly tested for rabies throughout the year by the Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department and other county health departments in West Virginia, along with the United States Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services. Residents should also control and secure residential garbage waste in and around homes and businesses.

May 10

Husband, Wife Indicted on Drug Trafficking Charges in Belmont County

BELMONT COUNTY, OH - A husband and wife were indicted by the Belmont County Grand Jury on an alleged drug trafficking case on Thursday morning. Ashley Padgett, 30, is under investigation for allegedly writing prescriptions on Dr. Rodney Curtis' prescription pads. She was indicted on four counts of deception to obtain a dangerous drug. A former employee of the doctor, Padgett recently was found guilty of possession of drugs and drug trafficking. Ryan Padgett, 32, faces two counts of deception to obtain a dangerous drug. Public defender Frank Pierce told the court he would hope the marital relationship would trump the normal stay-away orders. Judge John Vavra agreed to that. "I'm not complying that either one of them is a known drug trafficker and or user, but I will exempt that from that provision so they can continue to have contact and reside together," Vavra said. The couple is scheduled for a pre-trial hearing June 11.

FRI, APRIL 27-MON, MAY 7

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