

Police could face suit in man's death

A lawyer representing the family of a man who died last summer while in the custody of City of Newburgh police said Thursday he plans to sue eight city officers in federal court.

The lawyer, Michael Sussman, made the announcement at a press conference at his Goshen office. Sussman was accompanied by 12 members of the family of Nathaniel Cobbs. Cobbs, 25, of the City of Newburgh, died July 8 after police arrested him when he allegedly tried to break into the home of an ex-girlfriend.

A grand jury this week cleared five officers who took part in the arrest of any wrongdoing, concluding Cobbs died as a result of a combination of drugs he had taken prior to the arrest. But Sussman said he intended to sue those five officers and three others he contended shared responsibility for causing Cobbs' death.

"We believe those officers who were cleared — and three other officers we will name — tased this man and had a dog bite him," Sussman said. "He died from blood loss."

Sussman said the incident happened near St. Luke's Hospital. But rather than bring Cobbs there after subduing him, the officers took him to the police station where he was handcuffed in a police car for "20 to 40 minutes" before they transported him to St. Luke's, Sussman said.

Sussman said he expected to file the suit in federal district court within 30 days.

Newburgh Police Chief Eric Paolilli could not be reached for comment Thursday.

—Larry Hertz

IN BRIEF

Woman faces probation for cocaine possession

A Wappingers Falls woman admitted in court Thursday she had cocaine for sale last June when police arrested her.

Ellen Kiefer, 46, of Gary Place, entered a guilty plea to criminal possession of a controlled substance, a felony, before Dutchess County Court Judge Thomas J. Dolan. Kiefer acknowledged she had a quantity of cocaine June 6 and she intended to sell the drugs.

In exchange for her plea, Kiefer was promised a sentence of five years on probation. Sentencing is set for March 6.

Thief gets probation, must repay \$2,935

A Wappingers Falls man who stole almost \$3,000 worth of jewelry from a Town of Wappinger home was placed on probation for five years Wednesday and ordered to pay his victim for the loot he stole.

Dutchess County Court Judge Gerald V. Hayes imposed the sentence on David Fava, 20, of Robinson Lane. Fava entered a guilty plea last month to grand larceny, a felony.

Under the terms of his probation, Fava must pay the owner of the jewelry \$2,935.

SPEAK UP

Vote online now



Jersey Belle

Thursday's question

Have you registered your dog with your local municipality?

79 responses
Yes: 37 | No: 42

Today's question

Are tax rebates a good idea? (Please see story, Page 1A.)

Vote on today's Speak Up and see what others think at www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com.

Scroll down to the poll on the right. And follow the link to our story forums to post your thoughts on a range of topics.



Karl Rabe/Poughkeepsie Journal

Heather Gilles, a soprano with Instant Opera, part of the charity organization Sing for Hope, performs Thursday for students at Smith School in the City of Poughkeepsie.

Fun show helps introduce city students to opera

Kids provide ideas that are incorporated into show

By Alice Hunt
Poughkeepsie Journal

Popular comedian Chris Rock isn't a likely character in an opera, but in Thursday's Instant Opera performance at W.W. Smith Humanities Magnet School, anything was possible.

The Instant Opera, an opera appreciation and improvisation program, was performed for the Poughkeepsie school's fourth-grade students in hopes of introducing the children to the musical form.

The performance was funded by a grant through the Sing for Hope Foundation, which encourages musicians and singers to become active in their communities. Soprano Heather Gilles, a South Dakota native whose family relocated to Dutchess County, received a Dutchess County Arts Council grant to bring opera to Dutchess children. Her troupe had several performances in eastern Dutchess earlier in the week.

Making a case for opera

Gilles, mezzo-soprano Alexis Tantau and pianist Elizabeth Brown used classic opera music and improvisation to teach the children opera vocabulary such as "aria" and "overture" while creating a unique performance using ideas from the young audience. "It's 'Whose Line is it Anyway?' for opera," said Gilles, referring to the improv television show.

Gilles and Tantau had the children choose,

by way of audience applause, several arias, or songs, to incorporate into the story, and Brown invited the children to choose the musical introduction, or overture.

Then the women asked students to contribute to the storyline by adding setting, characters and action. Characters in Thursday's opera included comedian Chris Rock and Rapunzel. The setting was the forest.

The two singers then created a story line, and performed the "instant opera" for the children.

Exposure to opera is limited if you live outside a major metropolitan area, she said.

"There are a lot of kids that don't get the chance to hear opera," she said.

The students howled with laughter as "Chris Rock," played by Gilles, tried to climb Rapunzel's (Tantau's) "extensions" for better cell phone reception. Tragically, the story ended with the braids breaking and Rock plunging to his demise. The children had requested the story have a sad conclusion.

"It was very excellent," 9-year-old Saibon Gary said of the performance. "I love opera."

Gary's grandmother and grandfather were opera fans and their enthusiasm was passed down to him.

"Opera is like an expression to me," Gary said, "It's with feeling."

Reach Alice Hunt at hunta@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4819.

[online extra >](#) **PHOTO GALLERY:** More photos of singers and audience.
poughkeepsiejournal.com

PNC GANG TRIAL

Testimony nets gun buyer a light sentence

Deal reduces felony charge

By Larry Hertz
Poughkeepsie Journal

A former Poughkeepsie man who testified last year at the trial of two leaders of a City of Poughkeepsie street gang had a felony weapons charge reduced to a misdemeanor Thursday under a deal he made with Dutchess County prosecutors.

David Stokes, 22, acknowledged he had a Smith & Wesson revolver in his possession when he was arrested in Pleasant Valley on June 10, 2006.

Stokes, who has since been relocated to another county, testified in November at the trial of Ykim Anderson, 21, and Avery Green, 22, two reputed leaders of a gang called Partners N Crime.

Gun purchased

Stokes told the jury he purchased the gun from Anderson on June 9, 2006, at the Rip Van Winkle apartment complex in the city. The day Stokes testified, Senior Assistant District Attorney Matthew Weishaupt

said the witness had been warned on several occasions not to testify at the trial, presumably by people affiliated with Partners N Crime.

Green was convicted last month of first-degree murder and 33 other crimes. Anderson was convicted of the sale of the gun to Stokes and seven other felonies. Both men are scheduled to be sentenced Feb. 28.

In exchange for his testimony at the trial, Stokes was permitted to withdraw his guilty plea to third-degree criminal possession of a weapon, a felony, and plead instead to fourth-degree criminal possession of a weapon, a misdemeanor.

Under the agreement with the district attorney's office, Stokes will be placed on probation for three years. He is scheduled to be sentenced by County Court Judge Gerald V. Hayes on March 10.

Reach Larry Hertz at lhertz@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4824.

Man faces 2-4 years in Home Depot theft

Accomplice, 15, helps convict him

By Larry Hertz
Poughkeepsie Journal

A Town of Poughkeepsie man convicted of stealing a television and other merchandise from the Home Depot store in the town faces up to four years in prison for the crime.

A Dutchess County jury deliberated for about two hours Wednesday before finding 44-year-old David Seymour guilty of grand larceny, a felony.

During the two-day trial, witnesses testified Seymour and a 15-year-old accomplice entered the store about 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 9, 2006, and placed a large-screen television, priced at \$1,999, in a shopping cart.

The accomplice told the jury Seymour distracted a cashier while he wheeled the television to Seymour's car.

Thirteen days later, the two returned to the store and placed about \$690 worth of electronic equipment, including MP3 players and walkie-talkies, into a cart. This time, security guards caught the teen trying to take the merchandise from the store while Seymour drove away. He was arrested several hours later, according to Senior Assistant District Attorney David Kunca.

Kunca said he would ask County Court Judge Thomas J. Dolan to impose the maximum

'Now he's upped the ante from being a criminal himself to trying to train young people to be criminals. I find that particularly distasteful.'

David Kunca

senior assistant district attorney on David Seymour, convicted of grand larceny

sentence, two to four years in prison, on Seymour when he returns to court Feb. 5. The prosecutor noted Seymour had a previous felony conviction — also for grand larceny — and numerous convictions on misdemeanor offenses, most of them for stealing or possessing stolen property.

"David Seymour is a career thief — that's the best way to describe him," Kunca said Thursday. "And now he's upped the ante from being a criminal himself to trying to train young people to be criminals. I find that particularly distasteful."

Seymour was represented at the trial by Cynthia Kasnia.

Dolan sent Seymour to the county jail without bail pending his sentencing. Under state law, he faces a mandatory sentence of at least 1½ to three years in prison because he was convicted of another felony within the last 10 years.

Reach Larry Hertz at lhertz@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4824.

Grants help teachers expand program options

By Alice Hunt
Poughkeepsie Journal

Dover Middle School teacher Lorraine Cleaveland had an idea to bring sixth-graders and high school students together in the name of science.

As part of sixth-grade science, students study physics, but there was never enough time to expand on the part of the unit the children liked best: the application of physics in building. So, Cleaveland thought to create an Engineering Club that would team younger students with high-schoolers to build structures using physics concepts. But the building materials were really expensive, she said.

"My typical yearly budget wouldn't come close to being able to buy as much as we needed," Cleaveland said.



Cleaveland applied for a grant from the Dutchess County Community Foundation, and received the \$732 needed to fund the club's materials at no cost to her school district, or herself.

Teachers get grants

Last year, the foundation awarded more than \$24,000 in grants to local teachers through the Excellence in Education and Taconic IPA Science Education grants programs.

"As a community foundation, we do have a strong education focus," said Nevill Smythe, vice president of programs for the foundation.

The grants, which can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, can be for a variety of programs, from writing to science, and one is even designed to support programs using puppets. Others are general grants, Smythe said.

Arlington High School biology teacher Maribel Pregnell has received nearly \$12,000 in grants from the foundation since 1990.

A 2001 grant paid for equipment to study the effectiveness of using bioengineered bacteria to clean up oil spills, and a 2002 grant helped pay for the marine biology ecosystem in her classroom.

"These grants enrich my curriculum significantly," Pregnell said. "I cannot imagine teaching about marine biology without my aquaria."

Despite the grants' various

On the Web

Visit www.cfdny.org for information or an application for the 2008 Taconic IPA Science Education Grants Program or the 2008 Fund for Excellence in Education Grants Program. Applications are due Feb. 15. Available grants, **3B**

uses, Smythe said there is some difficulty drumming up applicants.

"Filling out a grant application on a day off is probably the last thing they want to do because they're so busy," Smythe said of local teachers. "But this funding is here for them."

The application vetting process is blind, Smythe explained, meaning no one knows

who the teacher applying is or which school he or she belongs to. Public and private school teachers may apply.

For Pregnell and Cleaveland, the grants have been the difference between simply teaching the curriculum, and enriching their children's academic experiences.

"These grants make my teaching more meaningful and more exciting," Pregnell said. "Students often return years later to take a tour of the room in order to see how we have expanded our aquaria or to see if their projects are still alive!"

Dollars & Sense explores fiscal or financial issues that affect the public. It runs each Friday. To suggest a topic, please call 845-437-4834. Reach Alice Hunt at hunta@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4819.