

Local

Wed. 06.30.10



Parents pack meeting room as Passaic school board approves special ed contracts. 2



Police chief rescues fawn that was hit by car. 6

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ROAD WARRIOR



JOHN CICHOWSKI

Decals' benefits to teens far surpass risk

Is it likely that predators will prey on New Jersey teens who now must stick Graduated Driver License decals on their license plates? Or is it likely that these tiny red identifiers will prevent serious crashes — even deaths?

These questions are no longer local. Decal opponents point to the Miami region, where thugs were able to prey on tourists because their rental-car plates were coded. But advocates say safety benefits override these concerns. They point to Great Britain and Australia, where adult drivers often stop to assist GDL-labeled drivers in trouble. Decal-inspired attacks on teens have not been reported in these countries, nor in the state of Georgia and our own Monmouth County, where pilot decal programs were begun.

Are such comparisons exact? Critics say no. In Georgia and Monmouth, for example, the identifiers were voluntary, not compulsory. And some believe cultural differences negate comparisons with countries where driving is done on the left side of the road instead of the right. As Wayne reader Peter Smith noted, Britain's GDL identifier is required only for those practicing for a road test, and they must be accompanied by an adult driver.

"This avoids the possibility of young drivers being targeted by predators," Peter reasoned. "Avoid" may be too strong a word, but he has a point — except for Australia. There, as in New Jersey, GDL licensees may drive alone — with identifiers. But in 30 years, teens have not been singled out for attack this way.

"Never!" said Ian Faulks, an Australian psychologist and safety expert. Faulks, once responsible for monitoring road safety Down Under, interviewed novice Aussie drivers upon learning of the New Jersey controversy.

"Boys and girls and their parents have been very surprised," he said. One young driver told him identifiers simply "show we may be more likely to hesitate or make a mistake."

"You can always lock the doors," a young woman told him.

Some standards differ, however, between the former British penal colony in the Pacific and the mid-Atlantic colony that helped lead the American Revolution. For example, Australians may drink at 18. Aussie identifiers are much larger than New Jersey's tags, too. And unlike our program, novice Aussie drivers of all ages must get GDLs.

But the main reason that Australia, Great Britain, Germany, Japan and New Jersey require decals is the same: Without them, police are unable to recognize GDL drivers who must obey driving curfews, passenger limitations and hands-free cellphone restrictions that prevent novice crashes, injuries and deaths.

Although there have been See ROAD Page L-6

Haledon councilwoman sues

Accuses chief of sexual harassment

By MAGGIE ASTOR STAFF WRITER

HALEDON — Councilwoman Heather Kilminster has sued suspended Police Chief Louis Mercurio and the borough alleging sexual harassment, her lawyer confirmed Tuesday.

The lawsuit, filed in state Superior Court, also charges Mercurio with defamation. It not only claims that Mercurio made sexually explicit remarks to Kilminster at least a few times a month but that his allegation that Kilminster was under investigation for cocaine use constituted slander and libel.

The suit alleges that Mercurio made vulgar, derogatory remarks about her sex life and said that he wanted to have sex with her. Kilminster reported the incidents to Mayor Domenick Stampone, Borough Clerk Allan Susen, Borough Attorney Andrew Oddo

and other council members, the suit adds, but those officials failed to respond.

Christopher Gray, an attorney for Mercurio, denied the claims. Of the suit, he said, "Nothing more than an attempt to basically shift the focus of Mercurio's disciplinary hearing to something different.



KILMINSTER

She [Kilminster] is trying to use this as some sort of diversion. The chief is completely innocent."

Stampone declined to comment while the case is pending.

This is the latest twist in a protracted battle that began last June, when Mercurio appeared at a Borough Council meeting to allege that one member — whom he did not name at the time but later identified as Kilminster — was See LAWSUIT Page L-6

Ax killer found guilty



ELIZABETH LARA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fernando Chireno, right, with attorney Harley Breite before a jury convicted Chireno of murder in the 2008 slaying of his wife, Luisa Emilia Chireno.

Jury rejects insanity claim in estranged wife's murder

What's next

Passaic County Assistant Prosecutor Mark Ranges said the jury's verdicts today on two aggravating factors will determine whether Chireno faces a sentence that gives him any chance at parole. If the jury finds either or both of the aggravating factors exist, the state will seek a sentence of life in prison with no chance of parole. If the jury doesn't find aggravating factors, the state will seek a sentence of life in which Chireno would have to serve 85 percent of the sentence — about 58 years.

By RICHARD COWEN STAFF WRITER

Fernando Chireno claims that the voices inside his head led him to kill his estranged wife with an ax, but on Tuesday a trial jury rejected that defense and convicted the Passaic man of murder.

Chireno, 34, of Passaic, who pleaded insanity and claims to be a paranoid schizophrenic, showed no emotion as the state Superior Court jury in Paterson convicted him of killing his wife, Luisa Emilia Chireno, 26. Members of

the victim's family embraced each other and sobbed softly as the jury foreman read the verdict convicting Chireno of all seven counts, including murder, weapons possession, burglary and endangering the welfare of a child.

Although Tuesday's verdict resolved the issue of Chireno's sanity and his guilt, the jury is not finished with the case. It is scheduled to return today to decide two aggravating factors: whether Chireno violated a restraining order when he killed his wife, and if the murder was committed during the course of

another crime, that is, a burglary.

That decision on aggravating factors is important because, Passaic County Assistant Prosecutor Mark Ranges said, it will likely determine whether Chireno will receive a sentence that guarantees the rest of his life in prison, or presents an eventual chance at parole after nearly six decades of prison time.

Either way, Tuesday's conviction means that Chireno will go to prison for a long time, and not to a mental hospital for the criminally insane.

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WPU debuts first leg of science expansion

By KERI ANN FLACCOMIO STAFF WRITER

WAYNE — William Paterson University has unveiled its Science Annex, Phase One of a two-part project using cutting-edge technology and faculty mentorship to retain student interests in science.

The 67,000-square-foot addition to the science building — dedicated on Tuesday by university officials — consists of 18 modular

research labs for undergraduate studies and research and 12 teaching labs for upper-level courses.

The labs are outfitted with bench space to permit students and faculty members to collaborate. Mentors will work with an average of two or three students, guiding them through research projects.

Sandra DeYoung, dean of the College of Science and Health, See WPU Page L-6



AMY NEWMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kathy Hu of Ringwood taking a tour of the new Science Annex at William Paterson University in Wayne.

Hands-on science

The new Science Annex at William Paterson University is equipped with state-of-the-art digital technology:

- Touch-screen digital control systems to which faculty can connect laptops.
- Document cameras.
- DVD/VCR/Blu-ray players.
- Single-unit digital displays with podiums and touch-screen controls.
- Dual projectors to allow for multiple projected images.
- Electronic wide-screen with ceiling-mounted LCD projectors.
- Wireless technology building-wide.

