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FEATURED

Police capture shooting suspect in Woodstock after pursuit

By Charles Paullin The Northern Virginia Daily
Dec 10, 2020



Virginia State Police 1st Sgt. B.C. Andrews talks on his cellphone outside the scene of this crash involving a state police armored vehicle and a U-Haul box truck. Police began pursuing the truck in Harrisonburg after the driver refused to stop.
Rich Cooley / For the DN-R

A shooting suspect who was chased by police from Harrisonburg north into Shenandoah County was apprehended in Woodstock on Thursday morning.

At around 10 a.m. Thursday, there was a shooting at the Motel 6 on South Main Street in Harrisonburg, according to the Harrisonburg Police Department. The female shooting victim was transported to the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville where she was reported in stable condition with serious injuries Thursday evening, police said.

Witnesses to the shooting alerted police that the suspect had left the scene in a U-Haul truck and was traveling north on Main Street, according to police. Police chased the U-Haul driver north on Interstate 81 and then on Route 11 to just north of Woodstock where state police were able to stop him, according to a Harrisonburg Police Department news release.

Umar Burley, 50, of Baltimore, was driving the truck and taken into custody, the release states. Burley was charged with malicious wounding and attempted murder.

The pursuit of the U-Haul truck ended between 10:30 and 10:45 a.m. in front of the Woodstock Equipment Company when a tactical vehicle hit the left rear bumper of the U-Haul truck, said Bobby Funkhouser, a salesperson at the store. He said the hit forced the U-Haul truck to spin out into a ditch.

The U-Haul truck driver then tried to drive off, but the tactical vehicle came around to the front of it and stopped it before the suspect was apprehended, Funkhouser added. Officers at the scene had their weapons drawn, in the form of both pistols and long rifles, but Funkhouser said he never heard a shot.

It was about five minutes from the time of the crash and when the suspect was taken into custody, Funkhouser said. About 20 mins later, the suspect was being treated at an ambulance, Funkhouser said. He said he counted 34 police cars from several different departments in the area where the chase ended.

"It was pretty intense," Funkhouser said.

Shenandoah County's central school campus went into a modified lockdown for about 30 minutes from about 10:20 a.m. to 10:54 a.m. as a precaution during the incident, according to Lori Swortzel, the principal at Central High School. A modified lockdown means no one is allowed to enter or leave the building, but instruction carried on.

This appears to be an isolated incident that remains under investigation and additional charges are pending, Harrisonburg police said.

Anyone with additional information regarding the shooting and the pursuit is encouraged to contact that department's Major Crimes Unit at 540-437-2640. To remain anonymous, contact Crime Solvers at 540-574-5050 or text "HPD" and the tip to CRIMES (274637).

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https://www.nvdaily.com/nvdaily/petition-calling-for-removal-of-shenandoah-county-school-board-president-filed-in-court/article_ddcf24b1-fbf4-5cb2-a40b-0394239800d8.html

Petition calling for removal of Shenandoah County School Board president filed in court

By Charles Paullin The Northern Virginia Daily
Dec 28, 2020

Over 400 people have signed a petition seeking the removal of Shenandoah County Public School Board Chairwoman Karen Whetzel amid the School Board's legal battle in the county's circuit court over the recent decision to change the Confederate-themed names of schools and a mascot.

Filed in Shenandoah County Circuit Court on Dec. 10, the petition states three reasons for the removal. It was drafted by attorney Brad Pollack, who is a county Board of Supervisors member and who also is listed as counsel for the petition challenging the School Board's renaming decisions.

The first reason on the petition to remove Whetzel alleges neglect of duty and incompetence or being incompetent in the performance of duties for allowing the superintendent of schools to refuse to open schools in violation of the Constitution of Virginia and against the advice of the health director of the Lord Fairfax Health District.

The second reason cites misuse of office and incompetence or being incompetent in the performance of duty for voting to retire the names of Stonewall Jackson High School and Ashby Lee Elementary School without receiving the approval of the Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors. This is part of the initial petition challenging the School Board's decisions.

The second reason also states "and in violation of numerous provisions of the School Board's Policy Manual," but doesn't provide further detail.

The third reason argues that the first two reasons have led to a failure to educate pupils in the county and has caused her constituents to be unnecessarily divided and aggrieved.

Neither Attorney Robert Vaughn, who filed the petition to remove Whetzel for the plaintiffs, nor Whetzel returned a request for comment.

A hearing for the initial petition on challenging the school renamings scheduled for Dec. 10 was postponed because of a scheduling conflict with the presiding judge, Pollack said Wednesday. No other date has been set for the hearing. On Oct. 8, Judge Kevin C. Black recused himself and Judge William Sharp, who adjudicates cases in Warren County, was assigned to that case.

Since the initial filing of the first petition and the School Board attorney's response to it in September, multiple motions have been filed in the case.

The law office of O'Connor & Vaughan filed a notice to appear as counsel for the petitioners on Nov. 16.

This month, a motion to disqualify the counsel for the School Board was filed by Vaughn. A memo filed in support of the motion states, in part, counsel for the School Board has previously represented Pollack in matters, adding the School Board's counsel is privy to his philosophy and work styles.

Also this month, a motion to have the "Coalition of Concerned Citizens for Better Schools" intervene as a party plaintiff was filed by Vaughn. The coalition is an unincorporated association of Shenandoah County citizens, including people with children attending schools in the county, who have an active interest in bettering the schools in the county, the motion reads.

A third motion, asking the court to delay the defendant's efforts to gather evidence in the case, was filed by Vaughn. The motion states, in part, as the parties are still arguing about the School Board's motion to demurrer and if the School Board's counsel is disqualified or not, the plaintiffs responding to the defendants' questions may expend their time or fees for no purpose if the case doesn't move forward.

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https://www.nvdaily.com/nvdaily/edinburg-man-dies-from-fire/article_d81012af-6cf8-5a6f-b514-37de16e998b4.html

Edinburg man dies from fire

By Charles Paullin The Northern Virginia Daily
Dec 15, 2020

Floyd Coverstone loved being outside and took pride in his garden.

He was stubborn and loud, and loved to talk to people.

“We was always a very hard worker,” said Megan Billhimer, one of his three daughters.

Coverstone, 64, succumbed to second and third-degree burns and smoke inhalation injuries Monday night after his clothing caught fire in the basement of his home at 79 Massanutten Drive, Edinburg, Joe Loving, assistant fire marshal in the Shenandoah County Fire Marshal’s Office, said Tuesday.

Coverstone had attempted to use a petroleum liquid, like gasoline, to start the fire in a fireplace and his clothes caught on fire, Loving said.

His daughter, Amber Coverstone, 34, reported that she heard a boom in the basement and her father yell, Loving said. She went downstairs to help, poured water on him and immediately called 911, Loving said. Amber Coverstone was not injured.

The call came in at 4:17 p.m., Loving said, and the Sheriff’s Office was the first on scene at 4:22 p.m., with Shenandoah County Fire and Rescue firefighters arriving shortly afterward. First responders from both agencies entered the building and found Coverstone unconscious in the basement doorway, Loving said.

He was treated at the scene and flown to the Burn Center at MedStar Washington Hospital Center in Washington D.C., where doctors requested the family to visit because of the grave injuries he sustained, Loving said. Coverstone died late Monday night around midnight, with about 60 percent of his body burned, Loving said. He was burned from the waist up.

Unlike a cut that can be bandaged or stitched, burns can’t be corrected, Loving said. The burns went down through the top layers of Coverstone’s skin, Loving said.

“He used that fireplace since we were babies,” said Billhimer, 29, of her father’s familiarity with the woodstove.

She hopes the accident prevents someone from using gasoline to start a fire because it can cause an explosion, it’s not safe and “definitely fatal,” she said. Loving also said not to use gasoline when igniting fires.

Minimal damage to the home consisted of residual smoke and was contained to the area where Coverstone was found, Loving said. Responding units also included the Edinburg, Woodstock, Mount Jackson, and Conicville fire departments and Woodstock Rescue Squad.

Amber Coverstone is staying with Billhimer, her husband and child. Anyone looking to provide any assistance is asked to call Billhimer at 540-252-6041.

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