

# Prince William Times

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Covering Prince William County and surrounding communities, including Gainesville, Haymarket, Dumfries, Occoquan, Quantico and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.



## Trial begins for gunman in 2019 Denny's fatal shooting

### Manassas man charged with 1st degree murder in DoorDash delivery man's death

By Cher Muzyk  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Denny's manager Ali Safari knew something was wrong when he heard someone yell, "Everybody down! Everybody down!" as he spoke to a customer at the counter. He turned and saw a masked man near the entrance, holding a handgun. Soon after, the man smacked a to-go order from Safari's hands with the gun.

"Food went everywhere," Safari said, "I froze for five seconds, then realized what was going on." The restaurant he managed for a decade was being robbed in the early morning hours following



Jordan Anderson

"There's a whole crew inside, customers, crew, everybody. ... I'm going back. Nobody's in charge. I'm the one in charge. I am worried about my employees," Safari told the operator.

Christmas Day 2019. As the masked man stepped away, Safari said he walked quickly toward the kitchen and ran out of the building, "expecting to get shot in the back anytime."

Safari said he was shaking and couldn't dial 911 outside in the cold. He rushed to a nearby 7-Eleven and called 911.

What Safari didn't know then was that the chaotic scene inside the Denny's restaurant only intensified after he escaped.

Two armed assailants -- Jordan Anderson, who had the gun, and Ryan Thomas Walker, who wielded a baton -- allegedly proceeded to terrorize the restaurant's staff and patrons, about 22 people in total, ordering them to lie on the floor and hand over their cell phones and money as Anderson demanded that employees open the cash register.

The harrowing incident, which took place at about 2:30 a.m. on Dec. 26, 2019, lasted under three minutes and resulted in the shootings of two men, including DoorDash delivery man Yusuf Ozgur, 56, who died later that night at a nearby hospital.

See TRIAL, page 6

## Bristow-area data centers on hold for now

### 'Devlin Technology Park' deferred but protests continue against larger 'PW Digital Gateway'

By Jill Palermo  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The proposed "Devlin Technology Park," a plan to allow between seven and 11 new data centers to be built behind homes in Bristow, is on hold for now. But protests continued Tuesday against the much larger Prince William Digital Gateway, which was scheduled for its first public hearing before the Prince William County Planning Commission this week.

On Tuesday, Sept. 13, the Devlin Technology Park comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning was supposed to go before the Prince William Board of County Super-



PHOTO BY DOUG STROUD

About 100 Bristow area residents protest the "Devlin Technology Park," Saturday, Sept. 10. The plan would have added seven to 11 new data centers to an area behind two neighborhoods -- Silver Leaf Estates and Amberleigh Station -- where 11 new data centers are already planned for construction.

visors for a final public hearing and vote. The application seeks to replan and rezone about 270 acres at Devlin and Linton Hall Roads in Bristow to allow for seven to 11 new data centers on property now slated to become a new residential area of 516 homes.

Amid heated opposition that cul-

minated in a protest Saturday, Sept. 10 of more than 100 people along Linton Hall Road, developer Stanley Martin pulled the plan from the supervisors' agenda late Monday night -- less than 24 hours before the public hearing.

DATA CENTERS, page 2

## Former elections chief charged with lying, corruption

By Jill Palermo  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A former Prince William County general registrar who resigned abruptly in March 2021

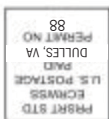


Michele White

was criminally indicted by a grand jury last week on two felonies and one misdemeanor relating to alleged wrongdoing before and after the 2020 elections.

The alleged actions, however, did not impact the local outcome of the presidential election or other contests on the ballot that year, according to current Prince William County Director of Elections Eric Olsen.

See INDICTMENT, page 7



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'The Courageous Four' teachers who led school integration honored, page 3



New, lower Manassas car tax bills on the way, page 4



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# Trial begins for gunman in 2019 Denny's fatal shooting

TRIAL, from page 1

Safari recounted the events leading up to the fatal shootings on Friday, Sept. 9, the first day of witness testimony in the trial of Anderson, 25, of Manassas. Anderson is charged with first-degree murder, attempted capital murder and about 80 other crimes in connection with Ozgur's death and the shooting of Bradley Sheetz, of Manassas, who was seriously wounded but survived.

If convicted, Anderson faces multiple life sentences and 208 years of mandatory minimum sentences.

The matter was set for trial twice before, but jury selection finally took place on Tuesday, Sept. 6 in the Prince William Circuit Court before Judge Kimberly Irving, who is presiding over the trial. Attorneys screened more than 200 potential jurors over three days before seating a jury panel of 18 -- 12 jurors and six alternates, including five women and 13 men -- who will hear the case. The jury appeared diverse in age and race.

Commonwealth's Attorney Amy Ashworth presented the prosecution's opening statement to the jury, previewing the evidence they plan to present over the course of the trial.

## Via video, jury hears Anderson confess to the shootings

On the evening of Christmas 2019, Ozgur left his family at home to work as a DoorDash driver. He drove to Denny's, at 8201 Sudley Road in Manassas, to pick up a delivery but had no idea that two minutes before he arrived, Anderson and Walker had entered the restaurant with the intent to steal money from the register, Ashworth said.

The men, both 22 at the time, had their hoods up and wore masks (pre-COVID-19). Anderson walked from booth to booth threatening patrons with a gun and ordering them to the floor, while Walker collected their cell phones and money, Ashworth said.

After Safari left, Anderson looked for an employee to open the register. He moved staff members from the back to the front of the restaurant at gunpoint, "getting angrier and angrier" that no one could open the register, Ashworth said.

Anderson then racked the slide of the handgun while pointing it at a victim. Everyone in the restaurant was on the floor, panicked and scared, Ashworth said.



SUBMITTED

A surveillance photo of two suspects in the Dec. 26, 2019, armed robbery at a Denny's restaurant in Manassas that resulted in the fatal shooting of DoorDash delivery man Yusuf Ozgur, 56.



DoorDash delivery man Yusuf Ozgur, far right, with his family.

COURTESY PHOTO

At about that time, Ozgur got out of his car and approached the entryway. Walker said to Anderson, "Let's go," Ashworth said. As they walked toward the front door, Anderson shot Sheetz, who was crouching against a booth, attempting to calm his girlfriend and her sister, Ashworth said.

Walker saw Ozgur open the door and hit him over the head with the baton. Then Anderson shot Ozgur in the chest. Ozgur fell to the floor and dragged himself into the vestibule. Another victim pulled Ozgur into the building and locked the door, Ashworth said.

Shortly after Anderson and Walker fled the restaurant, police arrived and rendered first aid to the men. Ozgur was later pronounced dead at Prince William Hospital. Sheetz underwent surgery at Fairfax Hospital, Ashworth said.

Ashworth said that the facts are "relatively undisputed." Police have video from Denny's security system, DNA evidence, the firearm that was used in the shootings and the clothing Anderson wore during the robbery. Also, Anderson admitted to police in an interview "that he was the gunman who shot Sheetz and Ozgur," Ashworth said.

On Monday, Sept. 13, Ashworth played a video recording before the jury of the police interrogating Anderson at the Central District police station on Dec. 29, 2019, the day of his arrest, which was three days after the robbery.

The four-and-a-half-hour recording began with a detective reading Anderson his *Miranda* rights. Later, without a lawyer present, the video showed Anderson confess to the robbery and shooting both Ozgur and Sheetz. Anderson said he "did not intend to kill anybody."

Referring to Ozgur, Anderson said, "I didn't mean to kill him. I didn't want to do it. ... I felt terrible." He also said he shot Sheetz, because "I thought he was going to stop us from leaving. My adrenaline was pumping."

Anderson said he and Walker targeted Denny's because it was open 24 hours. It was the last of a string of robberies the pair had committed along the Sudley Road corridor over the previous few weeks. The two also robbed a Walgreens, multiple 7-Eleven stores and Bowl America, Anderson said during the video-taped interrogation.

Kristina Robinson, chief deputy commonwealth's attorney, and Christian Malott, senior assistant commonwealth's attorney, joined Ashworth on the prosecution team.

## Defense argues against premeditation

Public defenders William Warriner and Shawn Stout are defending Anderson. During their open-

ing statement, Warriner told the jury he and Stout would not contest the facts of the case but would question "which of the 80 charges is he actually guilty of?" noting that the prosecution must prove every element of every single charge.

Warriner argued the premeditation element is lacking for charges related to the shootings of Ozgur and Sheetz as well as the robbery charges. Anderson and Walker planned for the robbery to be quick and clean -- "get the money and go," but "things went wrong right away," Warriner said.

In Warriner's telling, Anderson is a troubled young man who endured years of abuse and neglect who entered the restaurant with Walker to steal money that night but never meant to shoot anyone.

Everything happened "lightning fast" during the robbery, Warriner said. Anderson was running around. When he saw Sheetz crouched down and positioned differently than every-

one else who was lying on the floor, he panicked. When he saw Sheetz raise his hand, Anderson thought Sheetz was going to stop them from leaving Denny's, Warriner said, indicating his shooting was not premeditated but a reaction to the series of events.

Anderson then saw Walker colliding with Ozgur at the front door and thought Ozgur "was going to keep them inside the building," Warriner said, asserting that Anderson shot Ozgur out of fear and panic, not premeditation.

"It was all so fast," Warriner said.

The defense attorneys also said they will introduce evidence that Anderson suffers from developmental trauma disorder as a result of years of "extreme interpersonal violence," including abuse, neglect and deprivation in his family life. The disorder conditions people to be impulsive and not think clearly, especially in the face of traumatic events, Warriner said.

Finally, the defense said it plans to rely heavily on the video of the police interrogation of Anderson because it shows Anderson's desperation and remorse, and that he never planned to kill anyone.

Emotions ran high in the courtroom as Ozgur's family members sat only a few rows behind the prosecution and were visibly upset. Many times, the defense team could be seen comforting Anderson by placing a hand on his shoulder.

Anderson's trial is expected to last about five weeks. Walker is awaiting trial, which is currently set to begin on April 24, 2023.

Reach Cher Muzyk at [cmuzyk@fauquier.com](mailto:cmuzyk@fauquier.com)

**"I didn't mean to kill him. I didn't want to do it," Jordan Anderson said in a video of police questioning shown to the jury.**



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TIMES STAFF PHOTO/JILL PALERMO

More than 300 people attended a public hearing Wednesday night and Thursday morning for the "Prince William Digital Gateway," which narrowly won the planning commission's approval early Thursday, Sept. 15.

## PW Digital Gateway advances in a pre-dawn vote

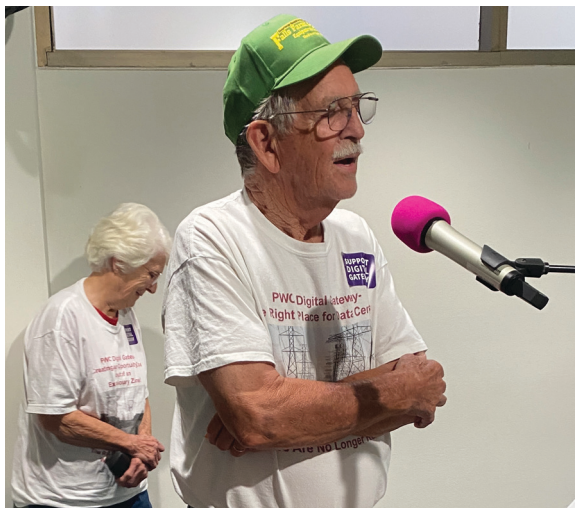
Backers cite 'profoundly positive' impacts, opponents decry unresolved issues

By Jill Palermo  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The recent marathon, all-night meeting of the Prince William County Planning Commission revealed two clear sides of the debate over the "Prince William Digital Gateway," a plan to open 2,100 acres in the county's rural crescent to major new data center development.

The plan either poses serious risks to the Manassas National Battlefield Park and the county's water quality, environment and overall aesthetic -- or it offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to generate millions in tax revenue to improve county schools, raise salaries for public servants and expand affordable housing and social programs.

See GATEWAY, page 6



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/JILL PALERMO

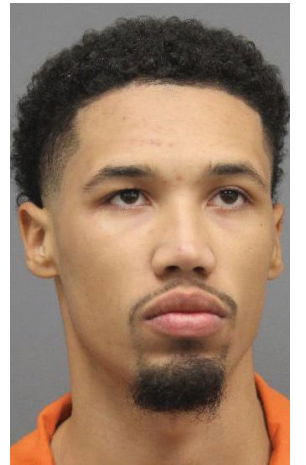
Pageland Lane area resident Philip Harrover speaks in favor of the PW Digital Gateway before the planning commission. Harrover's 17 acres along Pageland Lane are under contract with data center developer QTS, according to county documents.

## Fate of gunman in Denny's slaying goes to the jury

Defense: Anderson suffers from trauma; shootings were not premeditated

By Cher Muzyk  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Jury deliberations began this week in the trial of alleged gunman Jordan Anderson in the 2019 attempted armed robbery of a Manassas Denny's restaurant that resulted in the shooting death of DoorDash delivery man Yusuf Ozgur, 56.



Jordan Anderson

See JURY, page 2

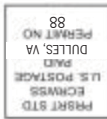
## Manassas Park boosts police, firefighter pay with traffic-camera fees

By Cher Muzyk  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

All Manassas Park police officers and firefighters will soon receive a \$11,000 boost in pay as a result of the city council's recent decision to use proceeds from the city's speeding and red-light-camera enforcement program to fund the increases, which are expected to cost about \$500,000 annually.

The Manassas Park City Council voted Sept. 13 to approve the raises and use revenues from the city's traffic camera program to fund the \$560,812 increases in salary and benefits. The decision came after Manassas Park Police Chief Mario Lugo told the council the police department had a turnover rate of 52% over the last two years. Lugo also spoke about the toll the vacancies are taking on the police department.

See RAISE, page 4



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'Read with Carylee' kids book festival comes to Hylton, page 12



Occoquan Fall Arts & Crafts fair happening this weekend, page 11



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# Fate of gunman in Denny's slaying goes to the jury

JURY, from page 1

Anderson's defense team rested Tuesday after presenting only one day of witness testimony. Anderson, 25, of Manassas, did not take the witness stand. Closing statements were planned for Wednesday, Sept. 21, and the case was set to go to the jury by the end of the day.

Prince William County prosecutors took five days to present their case, after which Anderson's team of public defenders submitted a motion Monday, Sept. 19 to strike many of the 80 charges initially filed against him for lack of supporting evidence.

Prince William County Circuit Court Judge Amy Irving, who is presiding over the case, dismissed about 30 of the indictments, leaving Anderson facing about 50 charges, including first-degree murder and aggravated malicious wounding in connection with Ozgur's death and the shooting of Bradley Sheetz, 36, of Manassas, who was seriously wounded but survived. If convicted, Anderson faces multiple life sentences.

On Tuesday, Sept. 20, public defenders William Warriner and Shawn Stout presented their theory of the case: that Anderson suffers from a trauma disorder after years of abuse at the hands of his father and that he shot the victims during the Dec. 26, 2019, robbery of Denny's out of fear and panic, not premeditation. They presented both lay and expert witness testimony in an effort to support their arguments.

"Our house wasn't a safe place," Anderson's older brother, Jeremy Delvalle, 32, testified when asked about their home life growing up. "The only time I remember my brother smiling was when we were outside of the house."

Delvalle testified that his younger brother felt "no peace or safety" in the presence of his father and Delvalle's stepfather, Adolphus "Barry" Anderson, who Delvalle said would regularly beat them both with a belt. "Barry disciplined Anderson with whoopings" three to four times a week, he said.

Their father had "no regard" for where he was swinging the belt, Delvalle said, motioning in all directions on the witness stand. The beatings would "leave welts" on Anderson's back, legs and arms, he said. Delvalle also demonstrated the way he remembered their dad folding a leather belt in half and snapping it quickly to make a popping sound and threatening "do you want to get your ass whooped?"

Anderson's older sister, Camille Anderson, 34, testified that she lived in Buffalo when Anderson was growing up but visited during several summers. She said their father would strike her brothers repeatedly with a belt for a few minutes and then tell them they "better not cry." Neither prosecutors nor the defense have yet called Barry Anderson to the witness stand, and it's not clear whether he has attended any of the trial.

Delvalle testified that when he was younger the family had financial troubles, and their mother worked hard to support the family. "She was working two jobs just trying to keep us afloat," he said, but "we watched ourselves." Delvalle said the family moved around a lot, always trying to find "the cheapest place to live" and lacked stable housing.

"There was a time we lived in a shelter in Woodbridge," he said, adding that they stayed with family members at times. "I've seen what trauma he went through. I've witnessed things that went on in our lives that weren't right," Delvalle testified.

Sandra Rodriguez testified she met Anderson when they were fourth grade students at Hybla Valley Elementary School in Alexandria. She said Anderson was "not happy as a child." They lost touch when Anderson moved away in fifth grade, but she said she messaged him on Facebook after they both graduated from high school in July 2015, and the two dated until he went to jail in September 2017, after pleading guilty to felony receiving stolen property charges.

When they communicated through letters and over the phone while Anderson was incarcerated, Rodriguez said Anderson was "down, depressed." When he got out in 2019, they argued, Rodriguez said. She observed Anderson to be "reserved, quiet and anxious," and "seemed frustrated" because he was not able to find work.

On cross-examination by Commonwealth's Attorney Amy Ashworth, though, Rodriguez testified that Anderson's mother was supportive and that Anderson got a job at the same Walgreen's store where his mother worked.

Anderson's best friend, Ralph Caldwell, testified that he and Anderson met more than 10 years ago when they both attended Prince William County's New Directions Alternative High School in Manassas. The school has since closed and was replaced by the county's Independence Nontraditional School, which opened in 2018 in Independent Hill.

Caldwell said they both lived in Woodbridge. "We met at 14. We were just good kids who got in trouble." He said there were "fights constantly" at New Directions. "It was a bad school -- a lot of gangs, drugs and violence."

Caldwell testified that he saw Anderson's father "get physical" with Anderson during high school and would "rough him up."

They talked on the phone daily when Anderson was in prison, Caldwell said, adding that Anderson was "depressed" and "felt like he wasted a lot of time."

When Anderson got out of prison, Caldwell said they "did everything together." He said they would get food, watch movies, play video games and sports.

On Christmas Day 2019, Caldwell said he went and picked up Anderson and brought him back to his house for a Christmas party that was attended by about 10 to 15 people. Ashworth asked if Christmas dinner was at 2 p.m. that day, which would have been about 12 hours before the armed robbery at the Denny's restaurant and the fatal shooting.

After Anderson's siblings and friends testified, the defense called Lucy Guarnera, Ph.D., a forensic psychologist and psychology-law researcher at the University of Virginia Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy. Guarnera is a licensed clinical psychologist and said she specializes in "traumatic stress."

Guarnera was qualified as an expert witness in her field. She testified that she has done more than 300 forensic evaluations, including some for the Prince William Commonwealth Attorney's office.

Repeated objections from Ashworth to Guarnera's testimony made this portion of the case one of the most contentious. However, the trial court allowed Guarnera to testify that after evaluating the evidence in the case, she diagnosed Anderson with "other specified trauma and stressor related disorder," a condition listed in the professional psychiatry diagnostic manual known as the "DSM-5."

Trauma from regular beatings by his father and exposure to fighting and violence while in school are strong predictors of Anderson being hyper-vigilant or "always being on alert for new danger," Guarnera said. She also testified Anderson displayed persistent depressed feelings, was "emotionally numb" and "expressed negative beliefs" about himself – all of which are consistent with a trauma background.

Those who have been exposed to trauma from past dangerous situations are constantly scanning their environment for threats and in their heightened state tend to interpret benign actions as threats, Guarnera testified.

With his background, Guarnera testified that during the robbery, Anderson "panicked" and was "reacting rather than thinking through his actions."

The defense rested after Guarnera's testimony, and the prosecution announced that they would not present any rebuttal witnesses.

Ozgur's family members have attended the jury trial daily. Prince William Sheriff Glen Hill visited the courtroom many times throughout the trial.

The trial was initially expected to last five weeks, but the attorneys presented their arguments and evidence in close to half that time. After closing arguments by both the prosecution and defense, the matter will go to the jury with a verdict to follow.

Reach Cher Muzyk at [cmuzyk@fauquier.com](mailto:cmuzyk@fauquier.com)

Prince William Health District	Vaccinations	
<b>Weekly COVID-19 report</b>	% of population fully vaccinated (2 shots)	
<b>Level of Community Transmission:</b>	Prince William: 73.6%	
<b>Prince William County: LOW</b>	Manassas: 72.5%	
<b>City of Manassas: LOW</b>	Manassas Park: 66.7%	
<b>City of Manassas Park: MEDIUM</b>	% of residents with at least one booster shot by age group	
<b>Total cases: 131,958 (Up 513)</b>	<b>5-11:</b> 5.8%	<b>45-54:</b> 45.2%
<b>Hospitalizations: 4,101 (Up 1)</b>	<b>12-15:</b> 21.7%	<b>55-64:</b> 55.9%
<b>Deaths: 882 (Up 4)</b>	<b>16-17:</b> 21.6%	<b>65-74:</b> 68.5%
<b>Percent-positivity rate:</b>	<b>18-24:</b> 35%	<b>75-84:</b> 73.1%
<b>14.7% (Down from 20.3%)</b>	<b>25-34:</b> 27.1%	<b>85+:</b> 59.9%
	<b>35-44:</b> 35.7%	

Numbers reflect the total cases, hospitalizations and deaths since the pandemic began and are current as of Wednesday, Sept. 21. New cases, hospitalizations, deaths in parentheses were added between Sept. 14 to 20. Numbers in red reflect worsening metrics, while numbers in blue represent metrics that have improved over the past week. Source: Virginia Department of Health

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## Data centers' secrecy often keeps residents in the dark

By Peter Cary

PIEDMONT JOURNALISM FOUNDATION

On Sept. 6, at the end of a long Prince William Board of County Supervisors' meeting, Jeanine Lawson, R-Brentsville, took the mic. First, she thanked constituents for their help with various things. Then she lit into Amazon.

Lawson used her "supervisor's time" to express her displeasure, even her "disgust," at how the mammoth data center company had dealt with residents of Great Oak sub-

division near Manassas, who were complaining about the noise coming from an Amazon complex next door.

Amazon Web Services had refused to answer basic questions posed to the company, she said. "Everything that the community is asking regarding these problems with noise, AWS is, their canned response is always, 'It's proprietary.' It's proprietary to the point where like, they won't even tell you what they had for lunch."

See **SECRECY**, page 3



Bristow dentist Dr. Steven Pleickhardt speaks during a Sept. 10 protest against the Devlin Technology Park, a development of seven to 11 data centers at Devlin and Linton Hall roads now on hold, and another 11 data centers moving forward on land behind Amberleigh Station and Silver Leaf Estates in Bristow.

PHOTO BY DOUG STROUD



COURTESY PHOTO

Hundreds of students walked out of Hylton High School in Dale City on Tuesday, Sept. 27, to protest proposed draft policies that roll back transgender students' rights.

## Students 'walk out' to protest new LGBTQ rules

'I want school to remain safe for transgender students,' organizer says

By Jill Palermo

TIMES STAFF WRITER

When friends Shane Juarez and Klaus Walker decided to lead a student walkout at Gar-Field High School Tuesday morning to protest Virginia's new proposed guidelines for transgender students, they didn't know how many students would take part.

So, when a long line of teens streamed out of

the building and onto the football field—nearly filling the running track -- they were pleasantly surprised.

"We estimated that about 800 of our students attended," Juarez said in an interview after school. "That's quite a lot more than we were expecting."

See **WALKOUT**, page 2

## Jury: Gunman in 2019 Denny's slaying guilty of 2nd degree murder

Jordan Anderson, 25, of Manassas, could face life in prison, prosecutor says

By Cher Muzyk

TIMES STAFF WRITER

A Prince William County jury on Tuesday found Jordan Anderson guilty of second-degree murder -- rather than the charged first-degree murder -- for the 2019 shooting death of DoorDash delivery man Yusuf Ozgur, 56, who was killed during an attempted robbery of a Denny's restaurant on Sudley Road in Manassas.

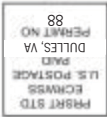


Jordan Anderson

The jury also convicted Anderson, 25, of Manassas, on two counts of aggravated malicious wounding as well as more than 40 other charges in connection with the incident, which occurred during the early morning hours of Dec. 26, 2019.

After three days of deliberation, the jury announced to Judge Kimberly Irving at about 11:30 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 27 that it had come to a consensus on some of the indictments.

See **VERDICT**, page 5



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It's peak apple-picking time in Virginia, page 8



UPCOMING EVENTS: The 39th Annual Fall Jubilee in Manassas is this Saturday, Oct. 1, page 10



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# Judge delays hearing for former elections chief charged with corruption, lying

By Cher Muzyk and Jill Palermo  
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

The trial of a former Prince William County elections chief who has been indicted on charges of corruption, lying and neglect of duty in connection with her actions in 2020 will be delayed until at least late October as a result of a judge's decision Friday to extend the case.

But the short hearing, held in a Prince William County courtroom on Friday, Sept. 23 before Judge Carroll Weimer Jr., revealed no additional details about what former county registrar Michele White is accused of nor why she was indicted by a Prince William County grand jury earlier this month on two felonies and a misdemeanor in connection with her official duties as the head of the county's department of elections.

Both White, 51, of Occoquan, and Virginia Assistant Attorney General Josh Lief, who is prosecuting the case for the commonwealth, declined to comment after the hearing.

Upon leaving the courtroom, White said she was "not yet prepared to comment."

White served as Prince William County's general registrar from 2015 to April 2021. She is facing felony charges of corrupt conduct as an officer of an election and making a false statement on a state required form or report. She also faces a misdemeanor charge of "willfully ne-

glecting her duty" as an officer of an election, according to the indictment, which has been filed in Prince William County Circuit Court.

During the Sept. 23 hearing, White told Weimer she has selected an attorney "but need[s] more time to hire her." White then requested an extension until December or January 2023, but Weimer declined that request, saying the case needs to go to trial sooner than that.

Weimer instead set White's next court date for Friday, Oct. 21.

"We're going to set this case for trial, and we're going to set it soon," Weimer told White during the hearing, adding that the case could wait "another couple of weeks, maybe, but I'm not going months before this case is set."

Weimer then told White she had a right to an attorney and that the court would provide one if she could not afford one, and if it were determined that she qualifies for a public defender. If she does not qualify, he said she might have to appear without counsel.

White resigned from her post as the head of the county's office of elections after an emergency meeting of the Prince William County Electoral Board on Monday, March 29, 2021. The meeting was called only to discuss White's tenure at the



Michele White

office of elections, then Electoral Board Secretary Keith Scarborough said at the time. White's last day of duty was April 9, 2021.

Back in March 2021, Scarborough declined to comment about the reasons for White's resignation but said the decision had nothing to do with the handling of recent elections nor the processing of ballots or votes. Since White was arrested, Scarborough has declined to answer requests for comment.

In March 2021, a former Prince William County Office of Elections staff member who asked not to be identified said the office had a higher than usual amount of staff turnover, losing three of its 15 employees through firings or resignations since the beginning of that year.

The Sept. 23 hearing took place on the first day of early voting in the Nov. 8, 2021, general election, when Virginia voters began casting their ballots for congressional contests as well as several local races.

The election processes across the country have come under intense scrutiny in the wake of former President Donald Trump's false statements about the 2020 election, including his numerous accusations that the outcome of the presidential race was fraudulent. Trump's claims

have since been disproved by court cases as well as election audits in several states.

## Investigation followed 'anomalies' discovered by current registrar

Current Prince William County Registrar Eric Olsen did not attend the hearing Friday and has offered only limited information about the case except to say that it originated in some "anomalies" he found in paperwork from 2020 and that the issues would not have impacted the outcome of any of the races on the ballot in November 2020.

In an interview after the Sept. 23 hearing, Olsen said he discovered the issues while he was "reviewing documents and records" in the Office of Elections earlier this spring and then reported them to the Virginia State Board of Elections.

The state board "quickly got it on their agenda and took action," Olsen said.

The state board "voted to have the matter investigated," Olsen said, and the discrepancies were reported to Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares (R).

Shortly thereafter, Olsen said, an investigator from Miyares' office interviewed current and former staff members as well as members of the local electoral board.

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## Jury convicts gunman of 2nd degree murder in DoorDash deliveryman's death

VERDICT, from page 1

The jury also revealed it was deadlocked on two of the charges -- the attempted murder charge and associated firearm charge -- for the shooting of Bradley Sheetz, 36, of Manassas, a Denny's patron who was seriously wounded but survived.

Commonwealth's Attorney Amy Ashworth said the prosecution moved to dismiss those charges.

In addition to convicting Anderson of second-degree murder for Ozgur's death, the jury found Anderson guilty of two counts of aggravated malicious wounding for the shootings of both Ozgur and Sheetz, three robbery and burglary charges, 17 counts of abduction for pecuniary benefit in the confinement of more than 20 victims inside the restaurant during the incident and 22 felony gun charges for use of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

The jury found Anderson not guilty of only two charges, both of which related to the robbery of Sheetz's girlfriend, Leyla Shafag, who said during trial she didn't get her cell phone back after the robbery.

Prosecutors alleged at the three-week trial that about 22 people were victimized during the attempted robbery of the Denny's on Christmas night 2019. Prosecutors said that Anderson terrorized Denny's staff and patrons when he and another alleged assailant, Ryan Walker, 25, of Chantilly, ordered them to lie on the floor at gunpoint and hand over their cell phones and money as Anderson threatened them and demanded that employees open the cash register.

But the cash register was never opened because the restaurant's manager, Ali Safari, had escaped through a back door and called 911, according to trial testimony.

Many of the victims testified during the trial that they were terrified and scared for their lives during the incident. Anderson admitted during a

**"This was a difficult case. The whole crime took a matter of less than two and a half minutes. The defense argument that they didn't intend to commit murder when they walked into the Denny's has some validity and believability."**

COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY  
AMY ASHWORTH

police interrogation to shooting both Ozgur and Sheetz but said that he hadn't meant to kill anyone.

During the trial, Anderson's defense attorneys argued that Anderson did not intend to kill anyone during the robbery and that prosecutors failed to prove the intent element necessary for first-degree murder. The jury apparently agreed, as evidenced by their decision to convict Anderson of the lesser, second-degree murder charge.

### Juror: 'I'm so sorry for your loss'

Emotions ran high as Ozgur's wife and daughter hugged in the hallway after the trial but declined to comment on the verdict because the second assailant's case has not yet been brought. Walker is awaiting his own trial, which is set to begin on April 24, 2023.

After jury members were thanked and relieved of their duties, a female juror walking to the courthouse elevators caught sight of Ozgur's family leaving the court room and broke down in tears. She approached Ozgur's wife and daughter and said, "I am so sorry for your loss."

Ozgur was shot and killed by Anderson as he opened the door to the Denny's restaurant to pick up a DoorDash order just as Anderson and Walker were leaving.

During the trial, Anderson's public defenders ar-

gued that Anderson suffers from a trauma disorder caused by years of abuse at the hands of his father, and that he shot both Ozgur and Sheetz out of fear and panic. The attorneys presented both lay and expert witnesses who testified in support of that theory.

Ashworth held a press conference after the close of the trial Tuesday. Asked about the jury's choice to convict Anderson of second-degree murder rather than the first-degree charge, Ashworth said: "This was a difficult case. The whole crime took a matter of less than two and a half minutes. The defense argument that they didn't intend to commit murder when they walked into the Denny's has some validity and believability."

Ashworth said she was "sure it was difficult for the jury."

"They deliberated for a long time on what seemed like a really relatively uncontroversial case, but that was the crux of the case," she said referring to the intent element of the crime, which was disputed by the defense team throughout the case.

Ashworth said she is satisfied with the verdict -- 45 felony convictions -- because she believes justice was done for the many victims of the crime.

Ashworth said she is satisfied with the verdict because she believes justice was done for the many victims.

"It's been our position from day one that each person inside of the Denny's was the victim of a crime. The jury confirmed that today," she said.

The sentencing phase of the trial will be next. Ashworth said she intends to seek a sentence of life in prison for Anderson because the state code indicates it is "an appropriate sentence" for the crimes Anderson committed.

Anderson's public defenders, attorneys Shawn Stout and William Warriner, declined to comment on Tuesday.

Anderson's next hearing is set for Oct. 7, during which Judge Irving said she would entertain any post-trial motions and also set a sentencing date.

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