

Around the Valley

3 hurt in court shooting leave hospital; gunman ID'd

The gunman, Patrick Dowdell, 61, was shot and killed by an unidentified German Township police officer.

MASONTOWN (AP) — The wife of a gunman killed after he opened fire at a Pennsylvania municipal building Wednesday said in a social media post that she was OK but did not say whether she had been injured in the shooting.

Crystal Dowdell, 39, posted on her Facebook account that she was fine late Wednesday and that police had taken her phone as evidence. Pennsylvania state police confirmed Thursday that Patrick Dowdell, 61, was the deceased gunman.

Dowdell entered the Mason-town Borough building about 60 miles south of Pittsburgh after 2 p.m. Wednesday with a handgun drawn and began firing into the crowded complex's lobby. He wounded a

police officer, who was treated and released for injuries to his hand, before wounding three civilians.

Authorities would not say whether any of the victims were Dowdell's intended target or related to the domestic violence charges he was scheduled to appear in court to face Wednesday.

The three were taken to Ruby Memorial Hospital in Morgantown, W. Va. A spokeswoman said Thursday the two men, ages 35 and 47,

and a 39-year-old woman were all released Wednesday night.

Dowdell was shot and killed by a German Township police officer, who has not been identified.

Dowdell had been arrested Aug. 25 and charged with aggravated assault, terroristic threats, strangulation, simple assault and harassment.

Media outlets obtained court records related to a protective order granted against Dowdell and obtained by his

wife Crystal.

Crystal Dowdell said in her Aug. 27 request for a protective order that her husband had grabbed her and threatened her with a gun three days earlier after she asked for a divorce.

She reported to police that he also choked her with a belt two days earlier, after accusing her of blocking his phone number and ignoring his calls.

"He said if this is the way I want it this is the way it

will be. He said there would be no divorce and he would take out whoever he needed to take out," she wrote in the petition.

The final protection order granted on Sept. 10, ordered authorities to get his belongings, and car from the shared home and to confiscate any of Patrick Dowdell's firearms or weapons.

It was unclear Thursday if the order had been executed.



Submitted

McKeesport police Officer Nick Matthews and K-9 Farkle stopped by Mary of Nazareth School in White Oak earlier this week to pick up donation money raised by students. Matthews and Farkle are standing with students, from left, Teegan Lewis, Edrea Burgwin, Zachary Karp and Orlando Watson.

Mary of Nazareth School comes to K-9 Farkle's aid

By JEFF STITT
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The McKeesport K-9 Unit made the sad announcement a couple of weeks ago that K-9 Farkle was diagnosed with cancer.

Farkle, an 8-year-old Dutch shepherd who was donated to the unit in 2012 by friends and family of the late McKeesport police Officer Frank Miller, had a tumor on the roof of his mouth. Veterinarians determined Farkle had an oral melanoma that would need to be treated with radiation and a melanoma vaccine, according to the department.

The McKeesport Police Department began asking for the public's assistance to raise money for Farkle's medical expenses.

The unit, which is a nonprofit, is completely supported by fundraisers and donations. Farkle's medical costs are expected to exceed \$9,000.

Last week, students at Mary of Nazareth School in White Oak, who have met Farkle and his handler, Officer Nick Matthews, at various community events and K-9 demonstrations, heard Farkle's story and asked administrators if the student body could do something to help.

The school decided to have a "dress down day" on Monday. For a \$1 donation, the students were able to ditch their school uniform for the day and wear their everyday clothes.

"The students wanted to help Farkle," school spokeswoman Amy Sullivan said. "(Farkle) is such a sweet boy. Our saints raised \$200 for Farkle."

Matthews and Farkle stopped by the school earlier this week to pick up the donation.

"I want to thank the school and the kids," Matthews said. "They did an awesome job, and I wan to thank them for

being so caring. Farkle and I appreciate it so much."

Matthews said Farkle has started his treatments and is doing well.

"Farkle was a bit groggy at times after his treatment last Thursday, but he's pushing through it," he said.

He said Farkle's next treatment is today, and he hopes that everyone around the Mon Valley will be sending their positive thoughts Farkle's way.

Matthews said the K-9 Unit is still raising money for the medical bills.

Monetary donations for Farkle's medical expenses can be dropped off at the McKeesport Police Department. Parkview Community Federal Credit Union, located at 2100 Eden Park Boulevard McKeesport, PA 15132, is also accepting donations for

the unit.

Dawn Cumpston, a Murrysville resident who is a friend of the K-9 Unit, also started a GoFundMe crowd-funding page where more than \$4,700 has been raised as of presstime on Thursday. To donate to the Farkle page visit www.gofundme.com/mckeesport-k9-officer-farkle. The page has been approved by the police department.

Matthews said he is grateful to the entire community for "springing into action."

"Farkle is my best friend and partner. I spend 24/7 with him, and he means the world to me," he said. "I am so thankful."

For more information about helping the K-9 Unit, call Nichole Angert at 412-969-1581 or email nikki1983@comcast.net.

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Fayette County 1st in state to OK land bank legislation

The measure will enable the redevelopment authority to take an active role in dealing with blighted properties.

By KAYLIE MOORE
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Fayette County became the first in the state to grant land bank powers to its redevelopment authority Thursday, making it easier for local officials to fight community blight.

The ordinance was made in accordance with Pennsylvania Act 33, which was introduced by state Sen. Pat Stefano, R-Bullskin Township, last year and signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf in June. Act 33 grants redevelopment authorities the same powers currently allotted to land banks through the Pennsylvania Land Bank Act.

The new legislation, which will enable redevelopment authorities to take a more active role in acquiring and rehabilitating blighted properties and neighborhoods, was passed by both the Senate and the House of Representatives in consecutive unanimous votes.

Stefano thanked Fayette County commissioners Vince Vicites and Dave Lohr for adopting the ordinance during their meeting Thursday. Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink was absent.

"I've been on several task forces and blight tours throughout the region, visiting some of our cities and boroughs and there's a common theme everywhere," Stefano said. "We have abandoned buildings and homes and issues with trying to address who owns them."

"How do we rehab them and can we get that done before they become a danger?"

Stefano said, while the county has many tools to address blight, the land bank legislation "started right here."

"There are 16 land banks throughout Pennsylvania and they are helping," Stefano said. "But it's difficult and very expensive to form them, not just in rural Pennsylvania, but in urban areas, because it's government duplicity."

Fayette County Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Andrew French said, while the county's redevelopment authority has been performing the same functions for a long time, it will now be "more official."

"We are setting the state precedence right here in Fayette County," French told commissioners. "This will give us one more tool in our toolbox, so we thank you."

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Vince Vicites said many people helped make the "significant" legislation a reality.

"I think it's important," Vicites said. "It not only puts Fayette County on the map as being the leader in this effort, but it helps a lot of other counties that don't want to form land banks who can now do that through their own redevelopment authorities."

Vicites said the county is prepared to move forward with tackling various dilapidated structures.

"Having these types of powers for the authority is important, because we can do a lot of proactive things to manage blight," he said.

Since the Land Bank Act's passage, French said, the redevelopment authority has acquired and rehabilitated nine properties for resale to low-income homebuyers; rehabilitated 33 owner-occupied residential properties; demolished over 40

residential blighted properties and seven commercial blighted properties; and aided in the construction of over 40 new homes for sale to first-time, low-income homebuyers.

In total, French said, the authority has invested over \$7.1 million in those efforts using a variety of local, state and federal resources.

Lohr thanked Stefano and French for their hard work on the land bank legislation and said Fayette is proud to be the first county to enact it.

"Everyone who worked on this - kudos to them, hats off to them," Lohr said. "They did a great job bringing us to the top."

"We have some great people working together to make this stuff happen, and things really are happening."

Lohr said that while the legislation's overall impact may be "a slow process at times," it will also be a "huge asset to move the county forward."

"We can address the blighted areas, get some things cleaned up," he said. "It's going to be great."

Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink said she was pleased when Harrisburg amended the former Land Bank Act.

"This amended legislation can benefit Fayette County only if truly used towards the removal of blighted properties that then are redeveloped for economic growth," Zimmerlink said.

"It is essential that open discussion and planning are done to reap the benefits of the legislation and to use these public dollars for the betterment of our county."

For more information, contact French at 724-437-1547, ext. 210, or afrench@racfpa.org.

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