

NYPD trio on trial in groom's death

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The death of an unarmed man caught in a barrage of 50 police bullets on his wedding day can't be explained "as a mere accident or mistake," a prosecutor said Monday at the opening of the trial of three undercover police officers.

The hail of gunshots outside a strip club killed Sean Bell, who had been at a bachelor party on the night before his wedding, and wounded two of his friends. The shooting has sparked protests and debate over excessive force and police conduct in New York City. The lawyer for one of the defendants told the judge in his opening statement that he would introduce



Protesters gather outside Queens Criminal Court during the opening arguments in the trial for the NYPD officers charged in Sean Bell's shooting death on Monday, in New York. The protesters counted down the 50 shots fired on the night that Bell was killed.

evidence showing that Bell was drunk and "out of control" during the early morning confrontation.

The defendants waived their right to a jury trial, so State Supreme Court Justice Arthur J. Cooperman is hear-

ing the case by himself.

Bell's fiance, Nicole Paultre-Bell, is expected to be the first witness at the trial, and she has said she plans to be in court every day.

Assistant District Attorney Charles Testagrossa said in his opening statement that one of the three undercover officers failed to display his badge in a clearly visible manner and wait for backup before confronting the three men, and gave contradictory orders to Bell and his friends.

Testagrossa was referring to Detective Giscard Isnora, who fired 11 of the shots during the Nov. 25, 2006, inci- (See NYPD, Page 5)

Will there be a trial in West Virginia rape-torture case?

By Cash Michaels

Special to Sentinel-Voice

RALEIGH, N.C. (NNPA) - Is the West Virginia prosecutor in the Megan Williams rape/torture case making plea deals with the suspects in an effort to avert what are sure to be highly publicized and racially charged trials in the case?

Trials that might expose a strong racial undercurrent in a Southern state where only three percent of the population is Black, and where authorities have never prosecuted a hate crime charge until now.

At presstime, four of the original six, White, career criminals accused of kidnapping the 21-year-old Black woman last summer — beating, raping, stabbing and torturing her by forcing her to eat dog and rat feces — have copped to reduced charges that wipe away the likelihood of any of them serving more than 30 years in prison.

On the kidnapping charge alone, all six faced up to life behind bars. An additional first-degree sexual assault charge tacked on up to 35 years more.

But last week, the purported ringleader of the group, Frankie Brewster, 49, pleaded guilty to second-degree sexual assault on Williams.

In return, Logan County prosecutor Brian Abraham dropped the kidnapping, assault during the commission of a felony and conspiracy charges against Brewster.

Instead of facing a possible life sentence, Brewster,

who was convicted of manslaughter a decade ago, now only faces between 10 and 25 years in prison when she is sentenced on March 3.

"She was lawfully charged and could have been convicted if a jury would have believed the evidence we had to present," prosecutor Abraham told *The Charleston Gazette* afterwards. "A 10- to 25-year sentence may result in life for her. It's certainly a very lengthy sentence."

Exactly why a plea deal was made with Brewster is unclear.

Prosecutors had already cut deals two weeks ago with suspects Alisha Burton 23, and George Messer, 27, in return for their testimony against Brewster and four other defendants indicted Feb. 5 by a Logan County grand jury.

Only one of those five, Karen Burton, Alisha's mother, was charged with a hate crime for stabbing Williams, and then telling her, "This is what we do to niggers around here."

For their testimony against Karen and Frankie, Alisha Burton and Messer pleaded guilty to one count of kidnapping and one count of assault during the commission of a felony for beating Williams.

They face up to only 10 years in prison.

Those deals, signed-off on by Williams and her family, were seen as crucial in turning state's evidence against the suspects that investigators had determined were more

responsible for most of the sexual and racial brutality against the Black woman.

"These two defendants pled guilty, I was pleased," Attorney Malik Zulu Shabazz of Black Lawyers for Justice, and legal advisor to Williams and her family, (See Rape-Torture, Page 11)

Anti-Braids

(Continued from Page 3) policy.

"Since I talked to you, I made some calls and had some conversations and meetings to try to get exactly what our policy says and to determine exactly whether it's being interpreted right in this location that we've been talking about or not. I also have spoken to two of our senior executives, our head of human resources and our senior vice president in charge of operations," he said. "The issue that was raised, the question that was raised was whether or not servers can wear multiple braids working in our restaurants, the answer is yes they can. And, yes, our managers have been interpreting the policy to say that they can not. That's not been correct. And it will be corrected. And we will communicate this to all of our operations people, all of our management in all of our restaurants so they'll understand that if they are interpreting the policy to say that multiple braids cannot be worn, that's not accurate. So, their servers will be able to wear multiple braids or cornrows or that style of hair."



Sentinel-Voice photo by Jeremy Burkett

Grace Salvant shows the petitions with more than 500 names against the Ruby Tuesday dining chain's anti-braids policy.

Johnson said the policy does, however, prohibit the wearing of dreadlocks by servers.

"Our concern with dreadlocks... We're concerned about it from a hygiene standpoint, from whether or not employees are keeping their hair clean and whether or not there are any issue of cleanliness, and that's what's that's about. It's specifically related to that," Johnson said.

Health and food service sanitation codes vary from state to state. But, health codes in the District of Columbia do not address the cleanliness of dreadlocks or

Throng in Raleigh march for equality

By Jeanna Covington

Special to Sentinel-Voice

RALEIGH (NNPA) — Keeping on course with their promise to continue marching until all of their demands are met, the North Carolina NAACP and 80 coalition groups led demonstrators for a second time to the N.C. General Assembly's Legislative building with the intent to pressure legislatures to endorse a 14-point "People's Agenda," calling for justice and equality for all in the state.

Approximately 7,000 individuals were in attendance, according to event organizers.

The rallying point was Chavis Park. During the era of Jim Crow, Chavis was the only public space in then segregated Raleigh Blacks could freely use for recreation.

Joyce Fennell has been a resident of the surrounding Chavis Heights community for years. In fact, she was born and raised in the area and can recall how it's changed.

The original public housing community, which was built in the 1930s, was eventually torn down and replaced with mixed-income communities. Some residents, according to Fennell, were unable to return to the area for financial reasons.

It's not that she has a problem with change. "I have a problem with not including certain people in those changes," said Fennell.

Thousands more share that same sentiment. Demonstrators came far and wide from throughout North Carolina and other states including, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee and New York to participate.

Rev. Nelson Johnson, founder of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Project, called upon state legislatures to financially back a N.C. Truth and Reconciliation Commission to evaluate the abuses and human rights violations made throughout the state's history.

Representatives of various partner groups then deliv- (See March, Page 10)

take them out. I told him yes, and that was the only way I was able to get hired," Hathorn said.

She worked there a little more than a month before she'd had enough. "I wasn't happy with having to take my hair out because my hair is natural and I didn't want to straighten it every day before I go to work," she said.

Johnson said the Ruby Tuesday anti-braids and anti-dreadlocks policy was "made as a decision among the senior human resources and operations leadership of the company."

Despite the turnover of the policy, Salvant says she will no longer pursue employment at Ruby Tuesday, nor will she spend her money there.

"That turned me off toward Ruby Tuesday as a corporation, as a restaurant, as anything. And I will never eat there again. I will never put my money in there again," Salvant said. "It's ridiculous that you had the policy in the first place, and I just don't want to work for a company that would actually take that into consideration... This is 2008, not 1965."

"He asked me if I would