



Delaware roads: Man jailed in deadly crash near Smyrna

Police: Social workers killed by drunk driver

BY ROBIN BROWN • THE NEWS JOURNAL • APRIL 3, 2010

A Newark man has been charged with manslaughter and other crimes in a crash that killed two social workers as they drove from a clinic in Smyrna to one in Middletown.

Mark Bednash, 53, of Wharton Drive in Pine Brook apartments, also injured in the Feb. 25 crash on U.S. 13 just north of the Smyrna rest area, was charged after his release from Christiana Hospital.

Delaware State Police spokesman Senior Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh said Friday that Bednash is being held in Young Correctional Institution in Wilmington on two charges of felony manslaughter, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended license and failure to stop at a red light.

For two minor crashes Bednash had with other vehicles as he drove south on Del. 1 before taking the north Smyrna exit, Bednash also is charged with two counts of reckless endangering, also a felony, and leaving the scene of an accident. Bail was set at \$72,250 secured.

Police say Bednash, driving a sport utility vehicle, came off Del. 1 -- where other drivers reported his erratic driving -- and turned directly into the path of northbound traffic on U.S. 13, causing a head-on crash that killed Christopher Sturfels, 42, of Middletown, and Michael T. Kriner, 47, of Newark.

The social workers, pronounced dead at the scene of the 4:30 p.m. crash, were on their way from the Connections Community Support Programs clinic in Smyrna to its clinic in Middletown.

Connections Chief Executive Officer Cathy McKay said another employee of the nonprofit service organization was in traffic, saw the wreckage, recognized the Connections car, stopped and identified Sturfels and Kriner for police.

Meanwhile, she said, employees at the Middletown clinic stayed late waiting for them and checked in with Connections administrators, she said.

They and family members started trying to find the missing social workers, McKay said.

But when McKay checked www.delawareonline.com to see if anything had happened, she saw an initial news report and she, too, recognized the car. She called the Middletown clinic and said she barely could believe it herself.



Mark Bednash, of Newark, faces 2 manslaughter counts.

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[1](#) | [2](#) Next Page



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(2 of 2)

"I told them, 'They're dead.' "

The deaths of Sturfels, who was driving, and Kriner, his passenger, devastated their families, friends and colleagues at Connections, she said.

McKay said it was tragic Sturfels and Kriner -- both devoted husbands and fathers -- were killed by someone with the problems they specialized in treating, that they died driving that Thursday afternoon between Smyrna and Middletown clinics providing mental health and substance-abuse treatment, especially for those with DUIs.

Sturfels established the Smyrna and Middletown clinics, providing the first substance abuse services in the towns, she said. His accomplishment and dedication led to his promotion to director of alcohol and other drug-related services.

Kriner, on Delaware State University's social-work program faculty, had spent more than 20 years in mental health and substance abuse treatment. He joined Connections a month before the crash, having previously directed Gateway Foundation's residential treatment facility in Delaware City.

Many people are angry and want vengeance, McKay said, but she tries to encourage them to see the situation and Bednash's substance abuse problem as Sturfels would have.

"Chris would have said, 'There but for the grace of God' and he wouldn't have blamed him," she said. "Chris would have forgiven."

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Previous Page 1 | 2