



Delaware roads: Social-worker crash victims mourned

2 killed in head-on accident Thursday

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A Newark man was a hit-and-run driver in two collisions Thursday, minutes before his third crash left two social workers dead near Smyrna, police said.

Christopher Sturmfels, 42, of Middletown, and Michael T. Kriner, 47, of Newark, died in the Thursday afternoon crash.

Both were on the staff of **Connections Community Support Programs Inc.**, where colleagues remembered them as devoted family men who dedicated themselves to helping Delaware's most-troubled residents.

The man police say was responsible -- Mark Bednash, 53, of Wharton Drive in Pine Brook -- has not been charged. He remains in Christiana Hospital in critical condition, authorities said.

Bednash was driving a sport utility vehicle south on Del. 1 when he was involved in two minor crashes with other vehicles but did not stop, said state police Senior Cpl. Jeff Whitmarsh. While on Del. 1, other motorists reported seeing him driving erratically, Whitmarsh said.

Bednash took the highway exit for north Smyrna, Whitmarsh said. That exit provides access to U.S. 13 just north of the Smyrna rest area. Bednash drove directly into oncoming northbound traffic, Whitmarsh said.

His SUV had a head-on collision with a car Sturmfels was driving with Kriner as his passenger, he said. Both were pronounced dead at the scene; Bednash was flown by helicopter to Christiana Hospital.

"Several witnesses have called in and provided valuable information which has helped to piece much of this incident together," Whitmarsh said.

The men's deaths were tragic for Connections Community Support Programs Inc., a nonprofit based in Wilmington that provides medical, mental health and substance-abuse treatment, including residential recovery programs statewide.

As colleagues mourned their deaths, spokeswoman Rebekah C. Robertson said they wanted others to know what good and helpful people they had been.

Kriner, a member of Delaware State University's social-work program faculty, spent more than 20 years in Delaware's mental-health and substance-abuse fields. He last directed Gateway Foundation's residential treatment facility in Delaware City before joining Connections last month as clinical services director.



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He valued education, and never hesitated to share his knowledge in a positive, uplifting way, colleagues said.

Colleagues also remembered Kriner, a karate black belt, as a devoted husband to his wife, Carmen, and father to their children, Felicia, Liam and Daniel.

"Connections had high hopes for what Mike would be able to do for the organization, its staff and clients, and are devastated by his loss and the loss of such great potential," Robertson said.

Sturmfels "was one of the backbones of Connections," she said, having joined in 2001 as an outpatient counselor.

Sturmfels "built Connections' practices in both Middletown and Smyrna, where there had previously been no substance-abuse services," she said.

He later became the program's director of Alcohol and Other Drug Services.

Colleagues recalled the most important thing in his life was his family -- wife, Kingsley Simendinger, and son, Beck.

"Chris was a humble man who did not promote himself, but he was one of the best things that ever happened to Connections," Robertson said. "Connections will never forget him."