

# THE REGION

Region editor: Eric Knopsnyder, 532-5069

Wednesday, July 17, 2002

# Records reveal murder suspect

## Documents unsealed in Bedford County case

By KATHY MELLOTT  
TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT BEDFORD BUREAU

HOLLIDAYSBURG - A Blair County man whose actions bordered on harassment and stalking has been a suspect in the brutal beating murder of Dana Gates, court records show.

In court documents unsealed, at least in part, by a Blair County judge this week, the man was identified as Cordell Ebersole of Martinsburg. He at one point dated Gates and at the time of her death was reportedly attempting to revive the relationship.

Her fiancé, Lorin Burket, also was severely beaten in the attacks.

Ebersole, who could not be reached for comment, has denied any involvement. Police would not say yesterday if he remains a suspect.

No arrest has been made.

The affidavit of probable cause filed by Blair County District Attorney David Gorman in early December - under court seal

for more than seven months - paints a portrait of a man determined to have a relationship with Gates. He had feelings for her she apparently did not share.

The affidavit was filed to get a search warrant for Ebersole's home and vehicles.

At one point, Gates told her mother, Alice Wynn Gates, "that she did not like Cordell because he was too young, not mature and Cordell liked Cordell," the six-page court document stated.

Ebersole is about six years her junior.

Gates, 31, of Schellsburg Road just west of Queen, was found beaten lying naked, covered with blood and mud in the front yard of her home shortly after 4 a.m. Nov. 30.

Authorities found Burket, 31, with whom she lived, inside the residence badly beaten.

Troopers have ruled out any possibility that Burket was involved in the murder.

Ebersole is portrayed as having a temper and was said to have punched holes in walls when a former girlfriend broke up with him.

Police, in seeking the search warrant, talked to eight people including Gates' mother, other relatives, a friend and co-workers at Allegheny Lutheran Social Services in Bedford.

"Cordell Ebersole believed that he had a significant relationship with Dana Gates. It is further believed that the affidavit shows that this relationship did not exist as far as Dana was concerned," the document stated.

"The background investigation ... has failed to establish any other motive other than a spurned lover."

The search warrant, which names only Ebersole as a possible suspect, was initially sealed for 60 days at the request of authorities. Gorman was then successful in five sub-

sequent requests to Judge Jolene Kopriva to have it sealed for periods of 30 days.

Authorities said that release of the information would hamper police efforts to find the killer. Later, Gorman maintained in court documents that a second suspect, meaning perhaps that two people had been involved in the attacks, had emerged in the investigation.

This time, Gorman sought and received a seal on only a small portion of the document. As with the other re-seals, this order on the redacted document will be for a period of 30 days.

The first three pages of the document released yesterday by Blair County Prothonotary Carol Newman appear to contain the full text of the search warrant.

Much of the information still not being released appears to deal with the sites where

Gates and Burket were attacked and areas where trails of blood and spatters were found by state police.

The document shows Gates made at least one trip back the hallway to her bedroom and at some point someone, probably Gates, tried to get in a car belonging to the couple. Blood spatters were found there.

The document also states that Burket was "struck about the face and head," while he was sitting upright.

Ebersole told police that he first met Gates in summer 2000 when her long-term relationship with Burket had dissolved after Burket failed to set a wedding date.

The relationship between Gates and Ebersole was described by Gates' mother as a "brief relationship consisting of meeting at the bar and Cordell would occasionally return home with Dana and watch TV."

Gates' mother told police it was not a romantic relationship but an "acquaintance relationship."



Clyde Williams/for the Tribune-Democrat  
Norma Sitton (left), Charlotte Benn (center) and Veronica Washington prepare sweet potato pies at AME Zion Church at the corner of Haynes Street and Menoher Boulevard in Johnstown.

## Family fun

### NAACP holds weekend celebration

By KIRK SWAUGER  
THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

When civil rights dominated the tumultuous landscape in the 1960s, the Johnstown branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People staged a three-day enlightenment program, "Know and Understand."

In the 1980s, the organization held a three-day event at Richland Mall during Black History Month.

But never before has it organized simply a weekend for black families to enjoy fun, fellowship and good food.

Friday through Sunday, will mark the first Black Family Weekend in Johnstown. It will be held at various locations.

Johnstown has the largest black population in the region with 2,561 out of 23,906 residents, or 10.7 percent, the latest census figures indicate.

"It'll be a good time, renewing friendships, meeting new people, getting back to our ethnic foods," said Claudia Jones, chairwoman of the NAACP's heritage committee.

Organizers aren't sure what the turnout will be. But Jones said she has received e-mail from former Johnstown residents now living in Atlanta, Philadelphia, Washington and Harrisburg indicating they'll be coming home for the weekend.

"I don't know what to expect, but I've been getting more and more inquiries," she said.

The event will begin at 6:30 p.m. Friday with a banquet at St. James Missionary Baptist Church, 400

Pine St. in Hornerstown.

More than 25 community pillars, age 85 and older, will be honored as heritage leaders for nurturing and inspiring black youth in the city, including Frances Banks, 88, and Maggie Segars, 85, both "Rosie the Riveters" during World War II.

Pauline H.L. Gordon Mortuary, 662 Main St., will be recognized as the oldest black business in the community.

The featured speaker will be Prospect native Sandra Timmons, chief operating officer of Girls Inc., a nonprofit youth organization based on Wall Street.

Beginning at noon Saturday, a community gathering will be held at Keystone Economic Development Corp., 1954 Mary Grace Lane in Prospect.

The daylong picnic will include gospel and jazz music, vendors, a genealogy workshop, a photo display looking at the history of blacks in Johnstown, pony rides for children and a youth dance in the evening. The dance will take place from 9 p.m. to midnight at the development corporation.

And of course, there will be plenty of food.

In addition to typical picnic fare, Jones said AME Zion Church at the corner of Haynes Street and Menoher Boulevard, the oldest black church in the city, will be preparing staple desserts: Sweet potato pie and pound cake.

"It's like celebrating FolkFest," Jones said. "We want to celebrate the African-American presence in Johnstown, and the contributions they made to society."

## Dad pleads no contest in baby-smother death

By SANDRA K. REABUCK  
TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT EBENSBURG BUREAU

EBENSBURG - A Portage man put up no defense yesterday in county court to a charge of recklessly endangering his infant by getting drunk and falling asleep on a couch with the boy on his chest.

Six-month-old Joseph Burda was smothered to death Sept. 3 at the family's home as he lay on a sofa with his father, 22-year-old Samuel J. Burda.

The baby's mother, Alyshia, found her son on the couch behind her husband's knees early that morning when she returned home from work, police said.

Burda faces up to two years in prison and/or \$5,000 in fines. He will be sentenced Aug. 21 by Judge Gerard Long on his no contest plea to reckless endangerment.

At a November preliminary hearing, District Justice Charity Nileski dismissed two more-serious charges - involuntary manslaughter and endangering the welfare of a child - after ruling that prosecutors had failed to show sufficient evidence for those charges.

Burda was not aware of what had happened to his son until after being awakened by his wife. She picked up the lifeless body of her baby and ran to her porch screaming for help while attempting to revive him.

Emergency workers at the nearby borough fire hall heard her screams and went to her assistance.

Although the death was not intentional, the father still has criminal liability from drinking while watching his son, said Assistant District Attorney Gary Costlow after the hearing.

"He was drinking, and that's a risk around a child," Costlow said.

Defense attorney Thomas Dickey of Altoona said his client is remorseful about what happened to his son.

But, Dickey contended, "Legally we still don't believe he did anything wrong criminally. He decided to plead no contest because he wanted to get it (the case) over with and get on with his life."

The judge asked Burda whether he needed counseling for an alcohol problem, but he said he has not had any alcohol since the incident.

Long approved a defense request that Burda's house arrest conditions be lifted. Dickey said Burda has spent about 10 months on house arrest while released from jail on bond.

Because of serving the house arrest, the defense will ask for a probationary sentence for Burda, a first-time offender, Dickey said in an interview after the hearing.

## Nursing home patient found dead in Everett

By KATHY MELLOTT  
TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT BEDFORD BUREAU

EVERETT - A man who walked out of a Bedford County nursing home at 2 a.m. yesterday was found dead a short distance away around 3:30 p.m.

James Hotstad, 57, originally from Keyser, W.Va., apparently died of natural causes, police said late yesterday.

Hotstad's body was located three hours after local authorities gave up on a 10-hour search that included a scent-tracking dog and a state police helicopter.

Hotstad, described by friends as a successful insurance broker before he contracted Parkinson's disease in 1996, was initially believed to have left with the intent of visiting an old girlfriend in West Virginia.

The police dog - which belongs to a Bedford County deputy sheriff - allegedly tracked Hotstad through the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River to a spot four miles south of Everett along Route 26.

There, the scent was lost.

John Shaffer, owner of Everett Christian Home on Masters Avenue, said Hotstad was seen in his room during a 1:30 a.m. bed check and was gone when a worker checked back at 2.

Hotstad was described as being mentally alert but

physically disabled from the Parkinson's.

Friend Linda Alexander said that she and Ron Freeman, who is in charge of Hotstad's business affairs, took him swimming at Shawnee State Park last week and he was in good spirits and was able to walk farther than he had in a long time.

"He was great. He shocked me. He walked into the water and everything. He was even able to walk to the bathroom," Alexander said in an interview outside the home.

Alexander and Freeman were concerned because of Hotstad's reliance on medication which he had not received since 8 p.m. Monday.

Everett police Chief Wayne Emerick said Hotstad may have planned to leave the area.

"It's indicated that he may have had this on his mind," Emerick said in an interview in Everett.

At one point, more than 30 volunteers conducted a ground search looking for the man. The aerial search encompassed an area of 10 miles or more around the Everett and Clearville area.

**More state, local news/A5, A6.**  
**Public schools lead charters, study finds/A5.**  
**Pa. offering investors riskier tuition options/A6.**

## Springs Museum opens wing

Springs Museum in southern Somerset County will hold an open house and dedication of its new wing at 7 p.m. Monday.

The museum is on Springs Road in the small village of Springs.

The new wing will allow for proper display of a large Conestoga wagon, a steam engine and other farming-related equipment the museum has, said Harriet Berg, the museum's program coordinator and member of the board of Springs Historical Society.

The new wing also will feature an exhibit of items belonging to the late Alta Schrock, who founded the museum in 1957, Berg said in a telephone interview.

Schrock died at the age of 90 in 2001. The former biology professor at Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Md., was instrumental in founding of the historical society, also in 1957.

The museum is caretaker for more than 2,500 artifacts depicting lives of early settlers of the Casselman Valley.

Monday's program is free to the public.

Admission tickets for the annual Somerset County Senior Citizens Picnic are still available from the Area Agency on Aging of Somerset County.

Tickets are available at the aging agency at 1338 S. Edgewood Ave. in Somerset and at senior centers in Boswell, Central City, Conemaugh Township, Confluence, Meyersdale, Somerset and Windber. Prices are \$6 for those 55 and older and \$10 for those younger than 55. Tickets will be available through July 24.

The picnic will be held July 25 at Idlewild Park on Route 30 in Westmoreland County.

A program titled "Forestland Challenges" will be presented from 5:30 to 9:15 p.m. July 30 at Cambria County Extension Office, 499 Manor Drive, Ebensburg.

Featured will be Gary San Julian, wildlife resources professor, and Jim Finley, forest resources professor, both of Penn State University.

They will discuss challenges facing forest

landowners. The program also will be of interest to members of hunting clubs and recreation clubs, said Michael T. Wolf, forest resources extension agent.

The cost to attend is \$5 a person per \$10 per family. The checks should be made payable to Cambria County Extension Office and mailed there or dropped off there by July 26, Wolf said.

Marcia Itle of Loretto was among 4-H members who participated in this year's State 4-H Capital Days in Harrisburg.

The participants received a guided tour of the state Capitol, met with legislators and took part in educational workshops, said Scott Myers, Cambria County Extension agent.

Itle is a member of Cambria County 4-H Dairy Club. She is the daughter of Andy and Delores Itle of Loretto.

Plans are being made for the 45th anniversary reunion of the Class of 1957 of the former Jenner-Boswell Joint High School, which since has become North Star High School.



Ted Potts  
Here & There



Unidentified visitors look at a large Conestoga wagon at Springs Museum in Springs, Somerset County.

The Class of 1957 is trying to find these classmates: Lois Ann Gathagan, Ed Gathagan, Richard Conahan, Peggy Hammer, James Aldridge, Nick Fetsko and Harry Jacobs.

Any class members who have not received a reunion invitation and those

with information about classmates should contact Joan (Cicciarelli) Bruening at 441 Beam Church Road, Boswell, or Donna (Holsopple) Krause, P.O. Box 183, Jennerstown.

The reunion will be at 6 p.m. Oct. 12 at Oakhurst Tea Room, west of Somerset.

Ted Potts' column appears Wednesdays in The Tribune-Democrat. Mail for him may be addressed to The Tribune-Democrat, 425 Locust St., Johnstown, Pa. 15907.