

Teacher Admits to Threat, Surrenders License

CRANFORD — A Cranford-based special education teacher has admitted to making a perceived general threat against the school where he worked late last year, acting Union County Prosecutor Michael A. Monahan announced Thursday.

Matthew Acosta, 34, of Kenilworth pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct, a petty disorderly persons offense, during a court hearing before state Superior Court Judge Joseph P. Donohue Thursday morning. Acosta was initially charged with one count of third-degree terroristic threats and one count of fourth-degree risking widespread injury or damage for an incident.

A joint investigation by members of the Prosecutor's Office and the Cranford Police Department determined that on Thursday, November 1, 2018, Acosta made a comment to a colleague at Orange Avenue School in Cranford indicating that he might commit an act of gun violence at the school, according to

Prosecutor's Office Investigations Supervisor John Esmerado, who prosecuted the case. Moments later, Acosta indicated that he was not being serious when he made the remark.

Acosta was arrested the next day without incident and later remanded pending a mental health evaluation for dangerousness; that evaluation indicated that Acosta was not believed to be a danger to himself or others, and he was released pending adjudication of the case.

Acosta forfeited his position as a teacher in the Cranford Public School District and will be permanently banned from ever again holding any public office in New Jersey, including any teaching position, according to the terms set down by Judge Donohue during sentencing Thursday. He also is permanently banned from ever again visiting any Cranford Public School District property. He also must forfeit all of his weapons to the State of New Jersey.

The Cranford Board of Education at their public board meeting of November 12, 2018, voted to terminate Acosta's employment "in accordance with the provisions of his contract," according to an email from Michele Cammarata, executive assistant to the Superintendent of Schools.

POLICE BLOTTER

CRANFORD

Wednesday, December 19, Alyssa Spiecker, 25, of South Amboy was arrested and charged with possession of a controlled dangerous substance (CDS) and possession of drug paraphernalia as a result of a motor vehicle stop at South Avenue West and Washington Place for a seatbelt violation. Spiecker, a passenger in the vehicle, was charged with suspected heroin found in her possession. She was processed and provided with a state Superior Court appearance date. In addition, she was issued a motor vehicle summons for a seatbelt violation.

Friday, December 21, Christopher Conner, 31, of Atlantic Highlands was arrested and charged with possession of a CDS and possession of drug paraphernalia after police units were dispatched to the area of North Lehigh Avenue and Mansion Terrace for a reported suspicious motor vehicle. Conner was charged with possession of suspected crack cocaine. He was processed and provided with a state Superior Court appearance date. In addition, he was issued a motor vehicle summons for possession of a CDS in a motor vehicle.

Friday, December 21, Brian Merkel, 24, of Cranford, Connor Scanlon, 19, of Westfield and Kevin Reinhard, 19, of Westfield were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct as well as other charges after police units responded outside of a North Avenue East business for a reported fight in progress. Following an investigation at the scene, Merkel, Scanlon and Reinhard were all charged with disorderly conduct. In addition, Scanlon was charged with exhibiting a false government identification to police and underage consumption of alcohol. Reinhard also was charged with underage consumption of alcohol. All three men

were processed and provided with a state Superior Court appearance date.

GARWOOD

Saturday, January 5, while on patrol police observed a motor vehicle traveling on South Avenue with the brake lights on the right side not working. Police initiated a motor vehicle stop and upon approaching the vehicle observed the occupants frantically moving about the vehicle and reaching under the seats. An officer ordered all occupants to sit upright and show their hands. The rear left-side passenger refused to comply and continued reaching under his seat. The officer opened the rear left-side door and observed the passenger, identified as Pharoahe M. Thomas, 18, of Secaucus, still attempting to conceal something under the seat,

which was now visible to the officer to be suspected marijuana. In furthering the investigation, a fanny pack containing marijuana also was found under the driver seat, which the driver, identified as Justin M. Simerman, 19, of Piscataway, admitted to possessing. Thomas and Simerman, as well as three juvenile passengers, were transported to police headquarters. Simerman was issued several motor vehicle and criminal complaints including maintenance of lamps, failure to wear a seatbelt and possession of CDS. Thomas also was issued several complaints including possession of CDS and possession of CDS paraphernalia. Both individuals were released pending an appearance in Municipal Court. The juveniles were not charged with any offense but were released to their legal guardians.

History of Josephine, The Empress Gardened

CRANFORD — Garden Historian Lesley Parness will give a special presentation, "Josephine — The Empress Gardened" on Tuesday, January 22, at 7 p.m. at the Cranford Community Center.

The event is hosted by The Hanson Park Conservancy. Ms. Parness will discuss how French Empress Josephine's fine taste informed 18th and 19th century style, from couture fashion to interior design. Likewise, she was influenced by her Caribbean heritage, her narrow escape from the guillotine, and her legendary love for flowers.

When divorced from her husband, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, this powerful style-maker and lifelong fashionista focused her energies on her estate, Malmaison. There, Josephine's passion for plants grew and bloomed. Her legendary love of roses stopped a war, cost a fortune, set explorers to

sail, and started a floral industry that endures today.

Ms. Parness is the retired superintendent of horticultural education at New Jersey's Morris County Park Commission where she oversaw programming at The Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Willowood Arboretum and Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center. She is a member of the Herb Society of America, The Council on Horticultural and Botanical Literature, and Garden State Gardens, a consortium of New Jersey's public gardens of which she is a founding member.

The Cranford Community Center is located at 220 Walnut Avenue in Cranford. The program is free and open to the public. No registration is required, but seating is available on a first-come, first-serve basis. This presentation is sponsored by the Hanson Park Conservancy. To learn more, please visit, www.hansonparkconservancy.com.

Play Reading at Cranford Library

CRANFORD — On Saturday, January 12, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Cranford Public Library, located at 224 Walnut Avenue, The Theatre Project will present a staged, script-in-hand reading of an original play, followed by a discussion with the playwright, director and cast. The Theater Project is an acclaimed professional theater group and the winner of two NJ Tony Awards. This program is sponsored by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library. Admission is free and all are welcome.

Support Local Journalism



goleader.com/subscribe