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Manhunt on for stabbing suspect

Hannah Bulley Sep 4, 2000

LOWER POTTS GROVE - A Norristown man was clinging to life Monday after an early morning stabbing in the parking lot of the Sanatoga Thriftway.

ADVERTISING

The advertisement is set against a blue background with a wavy, water-like texture. On the left, the SeaWorld Orlando logo is displayed above the slogan "REAL FEELS AMAZING". Below this, a small copyright notice reads "©/© 2019 Sesame Workshop. ©SeaWorld. All Rights Reserved." In the bottom left corner, the head of a blue Muppet character is visible. On the right side, the SeaWorld Orlando logo is repeated, followed by a "NEW" tag and the "SESAME STREET LAND" logo, which includes a small Sesame Street character icon. Below this, it says "ONLY AT SeaWorld ORLANDO". A large yellow and white text block reads "SAVE \$50 ON SELECT TICKETS". At the bottom center, there is a white rectangular button with the text "BUY NOW" in blue. A small white square is located in the bottom right corner of the ad area.

The suspect in the stabbing, which occurred in the victim's truck, remained at large late Monday after stealing the truck, crashing it in New Hanover Township and apparently fleeing on foot, according to police.

The incident occurred just after midnight Monday. The victim left a trail of blood nearly one quarter of a mile long as he searched for help after the attack.

Gregory Bailey, 35, was flown by SkyFlight Care helicopter to Brandywine Hospital for treatment of severe stab wounds to his head, face, neck and back, according to Lower Pottsgrove Police Chief Raymond Bechtel Jr.

Bailey was in surgery for hours and was listed in extremely critical condition Monday afternoon, Bechtel said.

The incident occurred at approximately 12:01 a.m. when Bailey was allegedly assaulted as he sat inside his white Ford Ranger in the parking lot of the Thriftway store in Lower Pottsgrove, Bechtel reported. The store, and the adjacent K-Mart store, were closed at the time of the incident.

It appeared there was a struggle inside the vehicle, Bechtel said. Police are considering the possibility that the victim may have known his assailant and been in the truck with him prior to the stabbing, he said.

The suspect, described only as a white male with a couple of days beard growth and short, possibly brown hair, fled the scene in the pickup and allegedly crashed it into a curb and utility pole at the intersection of Cross and Sanatoga roads in New Hanover Township where police located it within minutes of the assault, Lower Pottsgrove officer Robert Greenwood said.

Police recovered a folding "Buck-type" knife with a 6-inch blade, according to Bechtel. The knife had suspected blood on it, he confirmed, and the location where it was found was consistent with what Bailey had told police earlier in the morning.

"The victim was able to tell us that the knife that was used to stab him was dropped in a trash-can outside the Thriftway building," Bechtel said. "The location of the knife and the blood on the windows and portico of the store confirm his report, and that he went there for assistance."

Police officers from more than 10 neighboring departments descended upon the scene of the crash, including the West Conshohocken K9 Unit, Greenwood said. The specially trained police dog was able to pick up and track the suspect's scent along Cross Road to New Hanover Square Road, where the trail disappeared, police said.

After the stabbing, the victim fled to the Thriftway store where he attempted to get help, leaving a series of bloody handprints and stains along the front windows and portico of the store, Bechtel said.

When no one responded, he made his way up the store's driveway, and along the north side of High Street to the Exxon gas station at the northwest corner of Pleasantview Road and High Street, police reported.

Once at the gas station, which was still open, Bailey collapsed in a pool of his own blood, attracting the notice of an off-duty Lower Pottsgrove police officer and an off-duty nurse who happened to be driving by and responded immediately, according to Lower Pottsgrove Sgt. Gregory Maskrey.

At approximately 12:30 a.m., when the criminal and geographical magnitude of the incident became evident, Lower Pottsgrove police closed High Street between Pleasantview Road and Sunnybrook, redirecting traffic toward Buchert Road.

The investigation at the three separate "traveling crime scenes" lasted well past sunrise.

Throughout the night, police received updated condition reports from Brandywine Hospital after Bailey, covered with blood from head to toe, was airlifted from the rear parking lot of the Sanatoga Fire Company. Although he had been conscious and was talking at the scene, police did not expect to receive further information from him until Monday night at the earliest, Bechtel said.

While officers canvassed a vast area of northwestern Montgomery County for the suspect, police investigating the scene of the stabbing spent hours scouring the large parking lot, the Exxon station and the area of High Street between the two, tracking Bailey's path of blood under high intensity lighting provided by Sanatoga and North End Fire Co. engines.

The hours-long search revealed a large pool of blood near a parking space in the lot, where the pickup truck had allegedly been parked, police said.

Montgomery County Detectives arrived in the township at about 2:30 a.m. to assist in the investigation and collection of forensic evidence, Bechtel said.

"The county policy is that anytime there is a homicide or wounds so severe that death is possible we must call them (county detectives)," Bechtel explained. "They've always been very good to work with."

As dawn approached, the significant physical evidence mounted, including the knife, the victim's clothing which detectives picked up from the hospital and the vehicle which had been secured at the Lower Providence Police Department, according to Sgt. Maskrey.

With approximately 40 police officers, firefighters and fire police present at the scene for hours, Bechtel called in the North Penn Goodwill food truck to supply much needed coffee and breakfast to the weary troops.

High Street was closed for about five hours, reopening at about 5:30 a.m. when the bulk of the physical investigation at the scene was completed.

Darkness turned to daylight as detectives began to sort through and evaluate the information and evidence they had collected since midnight, and other personnel began to make their way home for some much-needed sleep.

The motivation for the crime has not been determined, according to Bechtel, though he agreed that "it is unusual for a vehicle to be (parked in the lot) at that time of night," when the stores are closed. The victim is not an employee of the Thriftway or the K-Mart, he confirmed.

Lower Pottsgrove police and Montgomery County Detectives were assisted by Limerick Township, Pottstown Borough, New Hanover Township, Douglass (Mont.) Township, Upper Providence, Upper Perkiomen, North Coventry, West Pottsgrove, Pennsylvania State Police from Skippack and West Conshohocken police departments, according to Greenwood.

Also assisting at the scene were Goodwill Ambulance, SkyFlight Care, Lower Pottsgrove Fire Police, and the Sanatoga and North End fire companies, he said.

The incident is under investigation, and police are appealing to anyone who may have seen Bailey at anytime during the 24 hours prior to the assault to contact the Lower Pottsgrove Police Department, 610-326-1508.

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