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WARMER
High: 66
Low: 40

THE SUN

Monday, April 8, 2024 \$2.50 FACEBOOK.COM/LOWELLSUN TWITTER.COM/LOWELLSUN lowellsun.com

LOWER HIGHLANDS

Lowell man accused of firing gun after crash

Jonathan Deleon, 40, held without bail

By Aaron Curtis
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LOWELL » A hit-and-run motor vehicle crash in the Lower Highlands turned violent when one of the drivers involved is alleged to have fired a gun following a confrontation over the wreck.

Jonathan Deleon, 40, of Lowell, who allegedly caused the crash on Branch Street, is accused of assaulting the other driver and then shooting at him, according to a

police incident report.

Police said at about 10:15 p.m. April 1, a man called 911 to report he had been involved in a crash, and the driver of the other vehicle was threatening to fight him. Moments later, the man again called 911 to state the other driver had just shot at him, but he was able to get away.

The alleged victim, a 30-year-old Lowell man, told responding officers the incident began when a man driving a black Chevy pickup

truck had rear-ended his vehicle in the area of 122 Branch St. When he got out to inspect the damage, the driver of the truck drove away.

According to the alleged victim's account, he followed the truck, catching up to it nearby in the area of School Street and Sawtelle Place. The alleged victim told police he got out of his vehicle to confront the other driver, who then punched him several times in the face.

Police noted in the report that the alleged victim was bleeding

from the nose, lips and left ear as they talked to him.

According to the police report, after the assault, the alleged victim claimed the suspect pulled out a handgun. The alleged victim told police he quickly got back into his car and sped off. As he was driving away, he alleged hearing two gunshots ring out.

Police said they recovered one 9mm shell casing on the ground in the area of where the alleged victim claimed the suspect had been standing.

While investigating the scene,

police said they talked to a man who walked out of 405 School St., located at the intersection of Sawtelle Place, about surveillance cameras located on his building. According to police, the man told officers he did not have access to the cameras, which he said belonged to his landlord. The man also claimed he did not hear or see anything regarding the alleged shooting.

Police received help with the investigation the following evening, shortly before 7 p.m. April 2.

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TWEEKSBURY ELECTION

MACKEY, RYDER TAKE SELECT BOARD



Supporters and family of Eric Ryder, a Tewksbury Select Board candidate, hold signs outside Town Hall on April 6, 2024. From left, Mike Hudd, Serina Ryder, Eric Ryder's wife; Grayson Ryder, Eric Ryder's son; Eric Ryder, Joe Ready; and Ready's kids, Ashley and Ryan Ready.

Garabedian, Moncada win School Committee

By Peter Currier and Aaron Curtis
MediaNews Group

TWEEKSBURY » Voters went to the polls Saturday for the annual town election, where James Mackey retained his seat on the Select Board with newcomer Eric Ryder joining him, while Bridget Garabedian topped the ticket for the School Committee with Chris Moncada taking the second seat.

In a race for two seats on the Select Board between four candidates, Mackey received 1,771 votes, Ryder 1,603, Jomarie Buckley 1,412 and Thomas Bowley 1,163, according to unofficial results. Mackey's term was up, and Select Board Chair Todd Johnson had opted not to run for reelection, making his seat open.

Mackey said in a phone call after the results came in Saturday evening that he was "feeling great" about receiving a second term on the board.

"It was a highly contested race. There was a lot of misinformation, but also a lot of positive support," said Mackey. "I am really happy with the enthusiasm of the residents in this year."

Mackey echoed his campaign promises to focus on bolstering Tewksbury's cybersecurity and

to get the town's aging water infrastructure repaired and replaced.

Ryder was equally pleased with the result. "I cannot thank my supporters, friends and family enough. The residents came out today and supported my message," said Ryder.

Ryder said his priorities as a first-time member of the board would be to get up to speed on the nuances of actually being a member. "I'm going to get in and try to understand everything, do my homework, dive right in, and get acclimated so that I can hit the ground running," said Ryder.

In a race between three candidates for two seats on the School Committee, Garabedian took home the most votes on the entire ballot with 2,615, Moncada received 1,576 and challenger Collin McNaught 1,290. Garabedian's seat was up this year, and committee member Nick Parsons did not run for reelection.

Garabedian said after the results came in that she was happy that the race was actually contested.

"I am happy that there was an actual race, and that there are people who stepped up and put



From right, James Mackey III, a candidate for the Tewksbury Select Board, and one of his supporters, Nick Lizotte, a member of the Tewksbury Planning Board, hold signs outside the Tewksbury Public Library on April 6, 2024. Mackey won reelection to a second term.

WILMINGTON

18-year-old killed in single-vehicle wreck

By Aaron Curtis
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WILMINGTON » An 18-year-old was killed as a result of a single-vehicle crash that occurred at about 2:30 p.m. Saturday on Industrial Way.

Kevin Stano, of Wilmington, was transported to a nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead, according to a joint statement from Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan and Wilmington Police Chief Joseph Desmond.

A preliminary investigation suggests Stano struck a telephone pole when he lost control of the vehicle while driving around a bend, authorities said.

Stano was the sole occupant of the vehicle.

An investigation into the crash is ongoing and is being conducted by the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, the Wilmington Police Department, and the State Police Collision Analysis Reconstruction Section, and Crime Scene Services.

Follow Aaron Curtis on X, formerly known as Twitter, @aselaacurtis

HEALTH CARE

Law change may help physician assistants fill labor gap

By Alison Kuznitz
State House News Service

BOSTON » Dressed in white lab coats, nearly 200 physician assistant students and providers on Thursday pitched their potential to help solve a health care workforce shortage that could worsen given the challenges facing Massachusetts hospitals owned by Steward Health Care.

The leader of the Massachusetts Association of PAs (MAPA) said removing an administrative licensure barrier for physician assistants and allowing them to practice without having a supervising physician could become an urgent need should there be an

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B4 FESTIVALS

Monday, April 8, 2024 @ MORE AT FACEBOOK.COM/LOWELLSUN AND TWITTER.COM/LOWELLSUNNEWS

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ADVICE

Finding peace after a loved one loses their battle to addiction

DEAR READERS: A great many of you wrote in with stories of your own about the pain of caring for a loved one who is in the middle of an addiction. Below are two letters that I hope bring some comfort to those living with loved ones who are struggling with addiction to know they are not alone. I also encourage family members to attend Al-Anon meetings.

ANNE LANE
Dear Annie —

DEAR ANNIE: About a week ago, "Heartbroken Grandpa" sent a letter about his granddaughter's addiction and death. He wonders if there was something else he should have done. I've been there. My son also had an addiction, but his was with alcohol.

We did everything that we could. He knew that he was an alcoholic; he tried to get away from it. He would attend AA meetings, and then after a week or two, he would stop going and be back to drinking again. This pattern was repeated several times. He entered detox centers several times. We even had an intervention.

All of this was in vain, because he always returned to drinking. He seemed helpless to control the addiction, and this helplessness took its toll. He also ended up dead, by his own hand.

That was many years ago, and he was only a few years older than the granddaughter in the letter. So, "Heartbroken Grandpa," let go of the guilt; there probably was nothing that you could have done to change the situation. Just pray for her, as I pray for my son every day. Be at peace.

— Still Heartbroken

DEAR ANNIE: I really appreciate your response to "Heartbroken Grandpa," whose family members regret that they had made the difficult, tough love decision to separate themselves from the destructive, addicted granddaughter, only to see their prayers for her go unanswered.

Addiction is truly a cruel beast, as you wisely noted, and one of its nastiest twists of the knife is the fantasy that applying good, commonsense solutions to chaos will necessarily prevail. Yes, tough love and prayer often can work, but not always, because addiction is a relational disorder that can separate individuals from needed communities, as well as a medical disorder and, of course, a spiritual separation.

Grandpa is heartbroken because what is being asked of him is almost impossible. Whereas love unifies, addiction separates, and there is no one correct path but to remember your words — "your granddaughter was so much more than her addiction." The future of any successful solution to the addictions that plague us must start with that enlivening thought: the addict is so much more than their addiction.

Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

TRAVEL



Natadola Bay's public beach, beside the Intercontinental Hotel & Resort, is one of Viti Levu's best.

STEVE HAGERSTY — TNS

Lush foliage, dazzling beaches & more put Fiji's islands on the map

By Anne Z. Cooke

NADI, FIJI ISLANDS — "That's Tom Hanks' island, in 'Cast Away' the movie," said the passenger sitting nearby, on the rear deck. We'd seen him standing in line, a college kid in a red shirt, packing and repacking a knapsack while we waited to board the early morning ferry out of Viti Levu, largest of Fiji's 330 islands. Leaning over the railing, he pointed at the horizon and a faint grey-green shape.

"His real name is Modriki, and it's small, just 100 acres," he said. "But the beach is awesome. Tourists can't wait to go."

No surprise there. For most South Pacific travelers, nothing rivals Fiji's sandy beaches, palm-shaded gardens, starry nights and Melanesian hospitality. We'd island-hopped over the years, tried a dozen different beach resorts, and liked most of them. Until 2019, when we joined a hiking group for a long look at the island's mountains.

Finally last fall, with COVID in decline and Fiji open for tourists, we hopped a plane and headed back. Finding hotels wasn't easy, but we crossed our fingers, found five with rooms and struck gold at three places begging for a repeat visit.

The Fiji Orchid, a stately manor house near Viti Levu's northwest shore and the former home of Hollywood actor Raymond Burr, star of the detective series "Perry Mason," felt nothing like a hotel and everything like a home away from home.

Hotel Manager Deepika Dinkesh arranged an authentic Fijian dinner, and co-owner Gordon Leewie told tales of Fiji life in the early days. Though Nadi (NAN-dee) International Airport was 20 minutes away, our bare (BOO-ry, room, house), one of six in the lush tropical garden, was as quiet as a cemetery.

"We've had guests who stayed for weeks," said Dinkesh at dinner.

Curious about Lautoka, Viti Levu's second-largest town on the northwest shore, we hired tour guide and driver Kesho



Navala Village, Fiji's last traditionally thatched village, is an hour from the Fiji Orchid Hotel and welcomes visitors.

STEVE HAGERSTY — TNS

Groundar, who (like many Fijians) speaks Fijian, English and Hindi. Stopping at the town's huge covered market, he bought a couple of kava "sticks," the gifts we would need — for the chief — if we visited a village. Then it was on to the Sibetsu Mountains and the Garden of the Sleeping Giant. A popular park, it was founded by Burr, a worldwide orchid collector. Hundreds of orchids, planted along the trail to the summit, a huge head-like rock, are the highlight of a visit. And the adjacent forest — a tower of vines, shadowy branches and strange flowers — was a set waiting for a movie.

The next day we headed up-country to Navala Village, the country's last thatched village, driving past banyans, gardens, sugar cane fields, villages, the occasional manufacturing plant and Methodist, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Catholic-oriented primary schools.

At first glance Navala looked empty, until guide Mark Navaraka came out to collect our \$25 entrance fee and a kava stick for the chief. This is how

we used to build houses," he said, leading us inside the chief's official structure, where a couple of village leaders sat cross-legged, talking. "They built it in 1954 when five dying Catholic villages joined together," he continued, leading the way to the school and church.

"Turning onto the Nausori Highland Road — not another car in sight — we hunched uphill over a rocky, potholed track for more than an hour, each hill steeper than the one before, until we rounded the top, a photographer's delight. Finally, around the corner, we passed two lanterns on horseback with riddles and dogs.

Moving to Viti Levu's southwest corner, we checked into the Intercontinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa, a 35-acre landscaped property on Natadola Bay. The hotel was as busy as a country club on a holiday weekend. Dads and kids played volleyball; moms worked out at a fitness center. We spotted kids racing hermit crabs, and others learning Fijian words and Polynesian dances. Menus at the hotel's sev-

eral restaurants listed continental and some Fijian dishes.

Coaxed into trying the Jet Ski "experience," we flew over the waves, riding tandem behind two watersports guides. But the skies were trumped by the hotel's Coral Planting project, headed by marine scientists Lawati Koroyava and Luke Rotomanababu. Joining them in the water, we learned how to plant healthy corals onto damaged reefs. Most memorable was the river cruise with Singatola River Safari. Wide and long, the river winds through an endless valley, weaving past rocky hills, farms and meadows. Children splashed in it and men scrubbed their horses, waving as we passed. Pastoral and peaceful, it was a nod to an older country.

The 35-mile-long trip ended at a village, with a tour, lunch at the community center and a kava ceremony — shaved cups — with the chief and his fathers. Kava is calming, some say. Just more weak tea, say others.

As our last week approached, we took the ferry to Lomani Island Resort — yes, an adults-only beach resort — on Masulolo Lailai island, a single hour's ferry ride to the mainland and Nadi International Airport. You can stay overnight and still make it to the airport on time.

But it wasn't the beach that earned the gold star. It was the charming cottages, each with a private yard and plunge pool.

"It's peaceful here," said Shelley White, the general manager, when we met at the cocktail bar. "And quiet. But with Nadi next door, we stay busy with weddings and anniversaries, and lately, even business retreats."

"Still, we love to have visitors like you, people who know this place and like it," she added, with a puckish smile. "Let me know the next time you travel. I might decide to come along."



The Nausori Highland Road, scaling ancient lava slopes, reveals the origins of Fiji's birth.

STEVE HAGERSTY — TNS