1992 killer granted parole

Family critical of parole for man who killed their daughter

By Conor Morris
Athens NEWS Associate Editor

A Nelsonville man convicted in 1993 of murdering his girlfriend was granted parole by the Ohio Parole Board this week despite an objection from the Athens County prosecutor.

Michael Eckels, 48, will be released from prison on or after Feb. 1, 2020, the Ohio Parole Board decided on Monday. That’s according to Ohio Department of Reha-

bilities and Corrections spokesperson JoEllen Smith. The “decision sheet” on why he was granted parole will be made available next week, she added.

Eckels, 22 at the time, pleaded guilty to a charge of murder in March 1993 for killing his girlfriend, Mia Russell, 21, with a 12-gauge shotgun outside of their apartment in Nelsonville on Aug. 15, 1992. Multiple wit-

nesses reportedly stated that he shot her multiple times with the shotgun, according to previous Athens NEWS reporting. He was sentenced by then-Athens County Common Pleas Judge L. Alan Goldsberry to 18 years to life in prison.

Athens County Prosecutor Keller Blackburn confirmed Tuesday that he had requested that the Ohio Parole Board not grant Eckels parole on four separate occasions in 2012, 2016, 2018 and, most recently, this year.

Blackburn’s office made copies of those letters to the Parole Board available to The NEWS. The most recent one reads:

“Ms. Russell was shot multiple times by Mr. Eckels, the first shot as she attempted to flee from him,” Blackburn wrote. “This incident continues to have a profound impact on the victim’s family, the community in which she grew up in, as well as the community in which the offense took place, as it was witnessed by numerous individuals.

“Ms. Russell was in her twenties at the time of the offense,” Blackburn added. “This was an extremely violent murder, and it is my belief that Mr. Eckels should remain in prison.”

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This photo of Michael Eckels appeared on the cover of The Athens NEWS on March 3, 1993 for an article about Eckels pleading guilty to a reduced charge of murder in connection with the shotgun slaying of his girlfriend, Mia Russell, on Aug. 15, 1992. Eckels remains in prison, though his parole was granted earlier this week. Photo by Stan Kokotajlo.