

Molester handed 10 year sentence

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VALPARAISO — Turns out Chesterton resident Brian Hill was correct when he told a young family he was molesting that if the child told anyone, he would “go to jail for a long time.”

The 38-year-old was sentenced this week to the maximum 10 years behind bars allowed for by his plea agreement.

Porter Superior Court Judge Mike Fish cited Hill’s position of control over the child, the “significant” harm suffered by the victim and their family relationship.

Hill will be required to register as a sexually violent predator upon his release from prison and undergo sex offender treatment, according to the sentence.

Hill pleaded guilty in December to molesting the child.

He had faced multiple charges including child molesting, incest and vicarious sexual gratification, but all but one count was dropped as part of the plea agreement he struck with prosecutors.

In the case, which was filed in April 2021, it was said the child was unsure at first what Hill meant when he asked the child to “help him with something.”

What followed was four weekly incidents of sexual abuse beginning near the start of the school year in 2019, according to charging information.

“Brian then told (the child) not to tell anyone or he would go to jail for a long time,” according to a police description of the first incident of the alleged abuse.

The first incident occurred in a garage, and Hill then asked again a week later “if (the child) could help him with something,” court records state. The child “knew what that meant since he had asked (the child) this way before.”

Sex offender sent to state penitentiary

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VALPARAISO — A 29-year-old Portage man was sentenced this week to five years behind bars after pleading guilty to picking up a student from an area middle school he met online and then sexually assaulting the child, records show.

Ryan Cash, who pleaded guilty to a felony count of sexual misconduct with a minor, was sentenced by Porter Superior Court Judge Mike Fish per the terms of the plea agreement to 10 years behind bars with five years suspended and to be served on formal probation.

Cash is required to undergo sex offender treatment and to register as a sex offender upon his release from custody.

Fish cited Cash’s criminal history and a recent probation violation.

The sentence is to be served consecutive to another case in Lake County involving allegations of dealing marijuana, carrying a handgun without a license and possessing paraphernalia, the judge said.

The case stems back to October 2021 when police were notified about an area middle school student claiming to have been raped outside the Portage Walmart store.

The child said Cash approached on line and arranged for a pickup after school, according to the charges. He then drove to the area of the Portage Walmart and The Home Depot stores where the child reported being choked and sexually assaulted before being driven home.

Verdict not reached in 2022 homicide

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CROWN POINT — A Lake Criminal Court jury had not yet rendered a verdict Thursday night in a Chicago man’s 2022 homicide over a purported argument about a car engine after a three-day trial in Lake Criminal Court.

George D. James, 47, stood trial for the murder of Arlandus Jackson, 37, Thursday this week.

Jurors left around 2:30 p.m. to deliberate and had not yet reached a verdict by 9 p.m.

The jury listened to testimony from an eyewitness, numerous detectives and forensic experts throughout the trial. Jackson was shot multiple

times on Oct. 2, 2022 outside James’ residence on the 900 block of Williams Street.

Witness Marcus Johnson testified at trial Tuesday that he and Jackson left Chicago around 4:30 p.m. and arrived at James’ Williams Street residence around 6:30 p.m. to deliver the engine. Quickly, the men started to argue about where to put the engine and the environment turned hostile, Johnson said.

Johnson testified James walked away from the argument toward a shed and came back three minutes later with a large gun. James shot toward Jackson, who collapsed onto the tailgate of the truck and instructed James to push Jackson’s body further into the truck and leave or “you’re next.” Johnson said he called Ernest Shed, the friend who connected him

with James, and asked him to direct him to a hospital. Johnson arrived at Methodist Hospital in Gary around 7 p.m. with Jackson’s body in the back of his truck.

Deputy Prosecutor Bernard Johnsen said during closing arguments that Johnson’s testimony is corroborated by the investigation. Phone records show Johnson called Shed on the morning of Oct. 2, again around 3:10 pm. and around 4:50 p.m. Johnson then made four calls to Shed in the span of 15 minutes, starting around 6:40 p.m. Detective Kristopher Adams testified that when Johnson was showed a photo lineup after the shooting, he immediately identified James as the shooter.

“Everything Marcus Johnson said added up to the evidence,” Johnsen said.

Defense attorney Gojko Kasich

said during his closing argument that Johnson was a less than credible witness. He said Johnson had previously misidentified James, even pointing out a mugshot of another man once and telling attorneys it was James “disguising himself,” Kasich said. Police did not find a gun to connect with the crime and there was little physical evidence available. He questioned why detectives never brought Johnson to the crime scene and asked him to point out where the shed was.

The state, he argued, did not meet their burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt that is necessary for a murder conviction.

“No person in our country should be convicted for a crime of murder unless there is absolute certainty of his guilt,” Kasich said.



JOHN J. WATKINS

Mayor Tom McDermott reads “How to be a Lion” to 2nd graders at Kenwood Elementary.

McDermott reads to students

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HAMMOND — Second grade students at Kenwood Elementary School had a special guest join them Thursday.

Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. took part in a story time hour with the students, reading to them a story about an unlikely friendship between a lion and a duck.

The book was “How to Be a Lion” by Ed Vere, a seemingly fitting choice given the elementary school’s mascot being a lion.

After the mayor finished reading the story, the students were asked about the book’s main

theme of benevolence and about what acts of kindness they could do in their own lives

The students also took part in an activity where they wrote poetry about kindness.

McDermott read to the Kenwood students as part of “Read Across of Hammond Week,” an effort put together by Books, Brushes & Bands for Education, a local nonprofit organization.

The goal is to bring story time to all second grade classrooms in the School City of Hammond, with the mayor being one of the 35 volunteers serving as readers.

The volunteers come from several local entities, including professors from the local colleges, business people and other

Hammond city officials.

The initiative is part of a partnership with BBB4E and Hammond schools.

McDermott said the story time was a great opportunity for him to interact with the next generation and talk about his role as the city’s leader.

“I think it’s important to make them understand that they can be the mayor one day,” he said.

Before leaving, McDermott presented a proclamation to the students declaring this week as “Read Across Hammond Week”.

In addition to the classroom story times, BBB4E will be hosting “Read-a-Palooza,” a family event at the Hammond Public Library from 1-4 p.m. to com-

memorate Read Across America Day on March 2. Participants will be able to receive free books, take part in a bilingual story hour and a community poetry project, as well as build their own books.

“We’re really trying to get the whole family excited about reading and revitalize the importance of books,” said Ian Brundige, the communications and development manager for BBB4E.

The group is known for its door-to-door book deliveries as well as its activities centered around literacy, and visual and musical arts for children.

More information about BBB4E can be at bbb4e.org or by calling 219-218-3029.

Rust fight to get on ballot has NWI connection

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John Rust’s ongoing quest to compete in the May 7 primary election as a Republican U.S. Senate candidate has a Northwest Indiana connection.

LaPorte County Republican Chairman Allen Stevens appears in a lawsuit Rust filed Wednesday challenging his removal from the ballot by the Indiana Election Commission for failing to vote in two Republican primary elections, as state law requires for a candidate to automatically affiliate with a political party.

Indiana statutes also permit candidates lacking the requisite voting history to be certified as a party member by their home county’s GOP leader.

Amanda Lowery, chairwoman of the Republican Party in Jackson County, where Rust currently resides, refused to certify Rust’s candidacy after the Indiana Republican Party last year endorsed U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, R-Columbia City, for the party’s U.S. Senate nomination.

However, Rust included in his lawsuit an affidavit from Stevens promising to certify Rust as a Republican if Rust established residency in LaPorte County.

According to court records, Rust obtained a residence in LaPorte County and a bank account, and was preparing to move to LaPorte County, when the two-primary requirement was enjoined Dec. 7 by a Marion County judge who deemed the mandate unconstitutional.

The Indiana Supreme Court lifted the judicial stay on the two-primary requirement Feb. 15 — approximately 23 hours before the deadline for Hoosier voters to

challenge candidate qualifications and seek to remove them from the ballot.

But Rust argues in his lawsuit that enforcement of the two-primary requirement was halted during the entire candidate filing period, and he therefore cannot be challenged for not complying with a law that wasn’t in effect when he filed to run for U.S. Senate.

Indeed, Rust said the only reason he didn’t follow through on his plan to relocate to LaPorte County, and secure certification from the LaPorte County Republican chairman, was because the two-primary requirement no longer applied while the injunction was in effect.

“If Rust is Republican in one county; he is Republican in another,” Rust said in his lawsuit. “The (election) commission ignored this evidence and criticized Rust for not relocating or otherwise seeking certification while the statute was enjoined

even though Rust was not legally required to do so.”

Ultimately, the lawsuit asks that Rust be restored to the ballot and permitted to compete for the Republican U.S. Senate nomination.

Any ruling may need to be made quickly since ballots across the state are set to be printed soon. Rust, however, said he’s willing to go as far as it takes to qualify for the ballot.

“This process has shown me how far the establishment is willing to go to maintain control over our elections. At every turn, I’ve been challenged by party bosses who have already picked their insider candidate and are desperate to get him into the United States Senate,” Rust said.

“It’s this kind of gamesmanship that has eroded trust in our political system. I’ll fight this all the way up to the United States Supreme Court because Hoosiers deserve a choice and they deserve a change.”