

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Boyfriend charged in stabbing death of Gateway teen

By Brian C. Rittmeyer
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Monday, August 20, 2007

Police filed homicide charges Sunday against an 18-year-old Monroeville man accused of stabbing his 16-year-old cheerleader girlfriend to death and then trying to kill himself.

The charges were filed shortly before about 1,500 people gathered at Gateway High School to remember Demi Brae Cuccia, who died Wednesday.

"The outpouring of friendship and love for our family has been overwhelming," the girl's mother, Jodi Cuccia, of Monroeville, told the crowd.

The suspect, John Mullarkey Jr., is under police guard at his bed at Allegheny General Hospital, North Side, said Monroeville assistant police Chief Doug Cole. Police said Mullarkey attacked Demi Cuccia at her home before slashing his own throat in an apparent murder-suicide attempt.

According to court documents, Cuccia suffered 16 stab wounds to her upper torso, and an autopsy determined the cause of death was a stab wound to the left shoulder.

Police said they found a folding knife with a 3 1/2-inch blade on the living room floor of the Cuccia home on Elliot Road.

According to court documents, a witness, whom police did not identify, told police of hearing hysterical screams coming from the Cuccia home Wednesday evening. The witness reportedly saw Demi Cuccia walk outside, her chest covered with blood, and twice scream, "He stabbed me!"

The witness then saw Mullarkey come outside, and Cuccia screamed, "Get away from me! I hate you! I hate you!" before losing consciousness. Mullarkey walked a short distance away from the witness before falling unconscious.

The documents say a paramedic called to the scene asked Mullarkey who had hurt him. He reportedly responded: "I did this."

An Allegheny General spokeswoman would not release a report on Mullarkey's condition yesterday. According to court documents, he suffered a severe neck laceration.

The first witness told police of hearing Demi Cuccia and Mullarkey arguing in the past.

A second unidentified witness said Cuccia told her Tuesday that Cuccia had

received text messages from Mullarkey indicating he intended to harm her, according to court documents.

A third witness said he was present on Aug. 12, when Mullarkey confronted Cuccia at her home and started a loud, violent argument with her, court documents say. Previously, Cuccia's friends described Mullarkey as possessive and controlling, forbidding her to wear a bikini or travel out of town for a summer cheerleading camp.

The 1,500 students, parents, friends and relatives gathered at Gateway's Harry J. Furrie Sports Complex to remember Demi Cuccia in a vigil organized by the Gateway Cheerleading Booster Club.

Many participants wore black-and-white T-shirts bearing an image of her.

Mourners used pink, Cuccia's favorite color, in her memory.

School counselor Colleen Tortorella said staff will be there for Gateway students when they return to class next Monday.

"Don't think for a moment Demi won't be on our minds," she said. "We truly are here for you if you need us, always."

Tears and sadness filled the vigil, but there was laughter as well when Demi's mother read from one of her daughter's writings, "Life Is Short, Enjoy It," about her interests, favorite things, pet peeves and her plans for her future.

Her interests included typical teenage pastimes: listening to music, talking on the phone, going to movies and shopping. Her two heroes: her mother and Jessica Simpson. Her fears: needles and Indians.

She hoped to attend college, become a doctor or lawyer and having a family with a house near the beach, her mother said.

"I just want to thank you and everyone in my family thanks you for your love and your support. We love you, and Demi loves you too," Jodi Cuccia said.

A no-flame rule prohibited the use of candles, but organizers asked participants to wave their lighted cell phones to the song "I Will Remember You."

At the end of the vigil filled with word, song and prayer, her fellow cheerleaders released dozens of pink balloons into a dark, rainy sky.

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