

York Dispatch, The (PA)
May 31, 2006
Section: Local

Anger over fatal chase

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Article Text:

Friends and family of Bobby J. Greer II gathered on a sidewalk where a memorial had been built. Others gathered outside his South George Street home in York.

Regardless of the place, the sentiments of suspicion, anger and grief were present at each gathering. They were also present during a news conference outside City Hall yesterday afternoon, where one woman walked past, called officers liars and blamed police for Greer's death.

Greer, 19, died Monday in a car crash that stemmed from a police chase.

Although the investigation into the chase has just begun, police said there were no indications that three officers involved strayed from protocol. The officers, whose names have not been released, are on administrative leave while law enforcement officials investigate, said York City Police Commissioner Mark Whitman.

"These were suspects with guns traveling at a high rate of speed," Whitman said. "Chances are, they needed to be stopped before they hurt someone. They chose to do this."

Reviewing policy: He said police are reviewing policy that enables officers to determine initially, until a supervisor steps in, whether to give chase or back off. The department continually reviews policy and in coming months, department officials will look at other police agencies' chase policies to pull from the "best of all worlds" if changes are necessary, he said.

That's something Greer's friend Elaina Jones said should happen.

"The cops killed him; they chased him," Jones said yesterday morning while sitting near the memorial at East Cottage Place and South Queen Street. "I have no faith in the system."

Greer was a passenger in a white Cadillac driven by D. Ron Kent, 18, of York. Police were given a description of the men and the car about 6:30 p.m. Monday.

A resident reported that the men had a handgun and were involved in a fight in the 200 block of South Pine Street, police said.

As officers were en route, one spotted the Cadillac that fit the description. That officer called for backup because weapons were reportedly involved. Police followed the car until colleagues arrived and then initiated a traffic stop at West Princess Street and South Pershing Avenue, Whitman said.

He said it was unclear whether officers were in their cruisers or preparing to exit vehicles when the Cadillac took off. Police gave chase along Cottage Place; officials have not determined how fast the cars went.

Red light, minivan, pole: State police said Kent drove through a red light at Cottage Place and Queen Street and was hit by a southbound minivan before striking a utility pole. None of the five people in the minivan was seriously hurt.

Greer died at the scene from injuries to his head and chest, according to the York County Coroner's Office.

Kent was arrested on multiple charges, including homicide by vehicle, reckless endangerment and fleeing or attempting to elude police. He is in York County Prison with bail set at \$250,000. Officers after the chase recovered a pellet pistol, 12-gauge shotgun and two kinds of ammunition.

This was the second fatal crash connected to a police chase in York in the past seven months. The first occurred Nov. 13, 2005, at the intersection of South Pine and East King streets when police were chasing a blue Subaru Outback that had been reported stolen. The car ran a red light and struck a northbound Kia, killing the driver, Jorge Nazario, 35, of the 800 block of Fahs Street.

The driver of the 1996 Subaru, Dashaun Laquinn "DJ" Jamison, is in jail awaiting trial on a third-degree murder charge.

The York County District Attorney's Office cleared the department of wrongdoing in Nazario's death.

Cousin opposes chases: Jennifer Coleman, Greer's 20-year-old cousin, said anger didn't begin to describe her feelings. Yesterday morning, Coleman sat near Jones on a grassy area in front of the memorial where Greer died. She'd spent Memorial Day with Greer at a family cookout. Minutes before he died, Greer sent her a text message that read, "I love you."

"They killed him; it's their fault," Coleman said about police. "There shouldn't be any chases in the city. If they wouldn't have (chased), he still would've been here with us."

Jones pointed to adults on the sidewalks, to children playing nearby. She spoke about Nazario's death, saying that the chase worsened what easily could have ended in an arrest for unauthorized use of a motor vehicle. "Now (Jamison) is sitting in jail for murder."

Monday's was the second police chase Greer was allegedly involved in. The first happened Dec. 16, 2005. Greer was charged in connection with an accident, fleeing or eluding police, resisting arrest, driving without a license and improper display of a license plate.

He was free on \$15,000 bail, awaiting trial, according to court documents.

Kent was free on \$10,000 bail stemming from a drug arrest Dec. 14, 2005, according to court documents.

Decision based on reports, driving: Whitman said the decision to chase the men was based on reports of weapons and erratic driving. Officers reported the Cadillac's license-plate number, but the owner was listed as a dealer because the title had either not been transferred or was in the process of being transferred.

"Our hearts go out to the family; any loss of life is tragic," Whitman said. As for rumors that a police cruiser struck the Cadillac, Whitman said there is no indication that a police cruiser was involved in the crash.

State police are investigating the crash because city police were involved. The district attorney will investigate the incident to determine whether additional charges will be filed; city police also will continue its investigation of the chase.

Lt. Patrick Gebhart, commander of the Loganville state police barracks, said the investigation includes accident reconstruction, diagrams and damage assessments, and could take three to six months.

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