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Police kill man pointing gun in TC

Crawford County traffic stop was start of lengthy pursuit

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Article Text:

TRAVERSE CITY — Pat Buchan woke to the sound of what he thought were firecrackers going off in his normally quiet neighborhood near East 8th Street.

But it wasn't firecrackers. Instead gunshots, the sounds of police fatally shooting a man who pointed a weapon at officers, the culmination of a vehicle pursuit through three northern Michigan counties.

"I heard the shots and I thought it was fireworks," Buchan said. "Someone shooting off fireworks." Michigan State Police said officers shot and killed Gary Welch, 56, of Oscoda, shortly after 1 a.m. at Barlow Street and Boyd Avenue, just a few doors down from Buchan's house. Welch, police said, led deputies on a lengthy pursuit that started early Tuesday when Crawford County deputies observed his pickup driving across a center line. Welch drove away from a traffic stop and through Kalkaska and Grand Traverse counties, then on to Traverse City with officers from five different police agencies in pursuit.

Welch finally stopped his vehicle in Traverse City, on Barlow Street, in front of the home of his estranged ex-wife, and emerged with a rifle. Police said he pointed the weapon at officers. Two Crawford County deputies and a Traverse City police officer fired at him.

"He came out of a car with a long gun and confronted the officers with the weapon," said state police 1st Lt. David Street. "He was given orders to disarm himself, ordered to drop his weapon, and failed to do so.

"It went to the point where the officers were in fear for their lives and safety and made the decision to fire their weapons," Street said.

Welch died at the scene. A sergeant with the Oscoda Police Department said Welch "has no criminal history in our township."

It was not clear if he had a criminal history in other jurisdictions.

Street said an investigation will determine how many shots were fired. Law enforcement did not give any indication that Welch discharged his weapon.

State police were at the scene Tuesday, photographing a damaged fence in the yard and measuring the trajectory of a bullet hole in the residence. The shooting site is immediately adjacent to a Traverse City Light & Power transfer station and railroad tracks.

"The investigation is in the infancy stages," Street said. "We don't want to impede or interfere with investigators' ability to do their jobs. We want to get all the information and get it right."

Caption:

Sgt. Bill Tyrrell, with the Michigan State Police laboratory in Grayling, measures the trajectory of bullet holes Tuesday in a house at Barlow Street and Boyd Avenue in Traverse City. A man was fatally shot at the house after leading police on a...

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