

# Drinking, driving didn't mix

## Larksville woman faces vehicular homicide plus lesser charges

By Andrew Staub  
Staff Writer

NANTICOKE — Sarah Ann Marquis told police officers she usually kept her Jeep Wrangler in second gear after drinking to avoid speeding.

But witnesses testified Thursday they estimated she was driving nearly 90 miles per hour when she allegedly hit and killed Erik Vannucchi on her way home after a night of drinking in May.

Now, the Larksville woman will face charges of homicide by vehicle and two counts of accidents involving death or personal injury — among several other lesser charges — after Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, Nanticoke, bound over the charges to Luzerne County Court during a preliminary hearing.

"We're very confident in the facts of the case," Assistant District Attorney Tim Doherty said after the hearing. "(Vannucchi) had a lot of promise in life. It's a real tragedy."

Vannucchi, 19, of Plains Township, was waiting for his motorcycle to be towed during the early morning hours of May 29 when a yellow Jeep Wrangler traveling at a high rate of speed struck him and John Kovatch, Vannucchi's friend and tow truck driver, police said. The impact sent Vannucchi nearly 97 feet.

Vannucchi had a pulse after the accident, but was not breathing, police said. He was taken to Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre, where he later died. Kovatch sustained injuries to his right shoulder.

Vannucchi's girlfriend, Kristin Kochanski, was with Vannucchi at the time of the accident, shortly after 1 a.m. She heard the Jeep approaching and saw it speeding toward the scene, she said.

Amber Strish, Kochanski's friend, was also at the scene and told police the Jeep was traveling "90 to 100 miles per hour. I mean it was going fast," according to arrest papers.



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**Attorney Demetrius Fannick walks with Sarah Ann Marquis, 26, after a preliminary hearing in Nanticoke. She is accused of hitting Erik Vannucchi, 19, of Plains as he waited for his motorcycle to be towed on East Main Street in Plymouth.**

Neither Kochanski nor Strish saw the accident, but both heard a loud thud they thought was Vannucchi's motorcycle falling on the tow truck after the Jeep passed them. They turned toward the sound and saw Vannucchi's body in the air, they testified.

"I looked over and the bike was there," Kochanski said. "And as I looked over, I could still see Erik in the air." The impact threw Vannucchi out of his shoes, she said.

There was little room for Kovatch and Vannucchi to move; they were standing against the tow truck at the time of the accident, Kovatch said.

The Jeep was "right on top of us," Kovatch said, adding he only saw the vehicle approaching when it was 22 to 24 feet away.

After the accident, the Jeep continued north on East Main Street, turning onto

fied. It never reappeared.

"There wasn't even brake lights," Kochanski said.

About 10 hours after the accident, police found a 2000 yellow Jeep Wrangler owned by Marquis, 26, with damage consistent with the accident parked in the driveway of Brian Patton's Ashley home on the 100 block of Manhattan Street. When police knocked on the door, Patton appeared confused, but Marquis interjected, Plymouth police Officer Anthony Gorey testified.

"It's for me. I'm in trouble," Gorey recalled Marquis saying.

Marquis later told police she had hit "someone" on her way home from a night out at the bars, Gorey said. Marquis told police she had consumed at least seven beers at three area bars before driving home, police said.

Marquis could not recall if she put her Jeep in second gear or how fast she was driv-

Doherty said, adding DUI charges couldn't be filed because of the time lapse between the accident and Marquis' questioning.

Marquis did not testify. After the hearing, she walked out holding the hand of her attorney, Demetrius Fannick, who said he advised his client not to make any statements.

Friends and family of Vannucchi gathered at the hearing, many wearing buttons with Vannucchi's face on them. At times they cried openly.

Kim Kasteleba, Vannucchi's best friend since preschool, came to the hearing to support Vannucchi's family. Kasteleba also recently helped organize a roller derby at Skateaway in Wilkes-Barre to benefit the family.

"You can't make up for the loss," Kasteleba said. "But there's things you can do to make yourself feel better about it."

# Larksville woman enters guilty plea in fatal hit-and-run

By James Conny  
Staff Writer

WILKES-BARRE — A Larksville woman faces at least a year in prison after pleading guilty Thursday to a hit-and-run accident that killed 19-year-old Erik Vannucchi earlier this year.

Sarah Marquis was driving the Jeep Wrangler that hit Vannucchi on East Main Street in Plymouth on May 29. The 26-year-old Barney Street resident's sentencing on the incident is scheduled for Feb. 19 before Luzerne County Judge Michael Toole.

Marquis admits she was drinking the night she hit Vannucchi, but her blood alcohol level could not be tested because of the amount of time that lapsed between the accident and when she was questioned by police. If authorities could prove Marquis was drinking at the time of the accident, she would have faced up to three years in prison.

Albert Vannucchi, Erik's father, declined to comment on what jail time the family believes Marquis should face until her sentencing.

"Collectively, right at this point in time, the family is just relieved this portion of it is over," Albert Vannucchi said. "Now we're focusing on the sentencing phase in February. What I was most happy about today, although it's not a happy situation, was the turnout of Erik's friends and family."

Between 30 and 40 members of Erik Vannucchi's family and friends packed the courtroom to hear Marquis' plea.

"We really appreciate their support," Albert Vannucchi said. "To say the least, it's a struggle every day. We pretty much put one foot in front of the other. With the holidays and stuff going on right now, it's even more difficult. We lost a very important member of our family."

Luzerne County Assistant District Attorney Tim Doherty established restitution at about \$15,000, a significant portion of which Marquis could have to pay Erik Vannucchi's family after sentencing.

Erik Vannucchi was loading a motorcycle onto a tow truck when he was hit by Marquis' Jeep Wrangler.