

Teen charged with rape

Waterbury police made arrest days after Fulton Park assault

BY JONATHAN SHUGARTS
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — Arrest warrants unsealed Friday show that a city teenager was accused of brutally raping a girl at random in Fulton Park, robbing a group of kids playing basketball and is now suspected in a street robbery near the park.

Although those crimes occurred in early to mid-July, police didn't notify the public of them in the days after they occurred.



Crawford

The highest priority for police, said Police Chief Vernon Riddick Jr., was to catch the rapist. After the sexual assault was reported, Riddick said, he placed plainclothes officers, undercover units and decoys in the park to prevent another rape from occurring.

"We thought that too much information early on would spook the perpetrator and we would never catch him," Riddick said. "It was a very

See ASSAULT, Page 7A

Are we still blaming victims?

BY JONATHAN SHUGARTS
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — Donna Palomba knows the trauma of sexual assault. She lived it. Survived it.

Palomba, founder of Jane Doe No More, was the victim of a serial attacker who raped her in her home while her children slept nearby.

With a violent rape reported in Waterbury three weeks ago, Palomba said she wants the recent victim, and others who may be in the same situation, to know that they are not alone. That there's support for her, and there are

RAPE: 'No More' founder urges victims to speak out

Continued from Page One

people who will listen.

"She needs to be believed and supported, not just by law enforcement, but by friends and family." Palomba said of the assault survivor in Waterbury. "To know you're not alone is so important."

City police investigated a brutal attack on a teenage girl on July 9. The lead prosecutor for Waterbury Superior Court has said the victim was attacked from behind, choked and suffered hemorrhaging in both her eyes during the attack.

Rashard Crawford, an 18-year-old city man who did not know the girl, was charged with aggravated sexual assault and remains jailed on bonds totaling \$1.75 million.

Rape can be an extremely traumatic experience, said Palomba, whose non-profit organization raises awareness of sexual abuse.

She was attacked in 1993. Her assailant, later identified as John Regan, broke into her home and tied her up after she awoke to find him in her bedroom.

It took years to arrest Regan because police did not initially believe Palomba, she said.

Jane Doe No More and other groups that aid sexual assault survivors want victims to know that counselors can help them through the maze of feelings they may struggle with in the aftermath of the attack.

Even years after the rape, victims can experience "triggers" — sights, smells, sounds — that cause anxiety or flashbacks, she said.

"I would encourage her to talk about it. It's nothing to hold in," Palomba said of the survivor in the recent Waterbury attack. "It will mani-

FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

- » Find a safe location to escape the assailant
- » Preserve all evidence of the attack. Don't shower after an attack, as critical evidence could be lost
- » Report the assault to police
- » Seek medical care

FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

- » One in five children are solicited sexually online
- » Assailants who are known to their victims make up more than 70 percent of rapes
- » Each year, there are more than 230,000 victims of sexual assault nationwide

FOR HELP

Victims of sexual assault, or their friends and family, can call confidential hotlines run by local nonprofits:

Susan B. Anthony Project hotline: 860-482-7133

Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury: 203-753-3613

SELF-DEFENSE CLASSES

Jane Doe No More has partnered with a self-defense program in order to offer free self-defense classes to women and girls who are 12 years and older. For information about the classes, which are coming up on Aug. 24, visit: www.janedoenomore.org/events/escape-alive

— Jane Doe No More and Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury

fest itself in bad ways."

Barbara Spiegel, executive director of the Torrington-based Susan B. Anthony Project, said that a victim can blame herself for the attack, feeling shame or embarrassment, which can lead her to question how she could have avoided the situation. But it's the perpetrators, not the victims, who are to blame for the rape, she said.

Palomba agreed, saying the larger community needs to focus more attention on the crime and end the silence about it, she said.

"The victim blaming has got to stop," she said. "Men and women have got to stand up and say 'no more.'"

Statistics provided by Palomba's organization show that there is a victim of sexual assault every two

minutes in the United States. About 25 percent of girls and about 16 percent of boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthdays, the organization estimates.

Waterbury police investigated two rapes in 2013, which marked a decrease from 2012, when seven were reported in the city, according to statistics submitted to the FBI.

When asked if there was ever closure in the type of trauma brought on by sexual assault, Palomba said she would not use that word to describe the lasting effects. The post-traumatic stress of the event can continue to manifest itself later in life.

"With love and support and nurturing, you can get through it, you can get stronger," she said.