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The most important meal of the day

Pre-K students Deja Hawkins, left, and Jazyiah Miller enjoy breakfast in their classroom Tuesday at Belmont Elementary School as part of National School Breakfast Week, an annual celebration to raise awareness about the importance of school breakfasts. Belmont Elementary teamed with the American Dairy Association North East, Morgan Moses of the Baltimore Ravens and anti-hunger organizations.

Ex-Laurel police chief contacted victims after series of arson fires

He's accused of keeping enemies list, starting blazes

By Alex Mann

Evelyn Henderson awoke to the urgent voice of her husband, Scott, around 3 a.m. on Dec. 9, 2017: "Get up. Get up. Get up."

Smoke had filled their bedroom in Ellicott City and grew thicker as they approached the kitchen, they would later testify in court. Scott pulled open the door that connected the house to the garage, revealing a wall of flames.

"I screamed," Evelyn said, recounting the family's escape.

Hours later, Evelyn received an email from her down-the-street neighbor, former Laurel Police Chief David Crawford. They had worked together on a Howard County school redistricting initiative, but had a falling out after she interrupted his presentation at a community meeting.

"Evelyn, we were most distressed to hear of your home and its fire," Crawford's email read. "Thankfully, nobody was injured or worse, but nevertheless a devastating impact to your family. ... Your help in the redistricting effort was instrumental and critical to our success. We should feel blessed to help. Just let us know."

More than a year would pass before investigators recognized a connection between the fire at the Hendersons and about a dozen other arsons around the state, spanning from 2011 to 2020.

The blazes were set with gasoline and occurred between 1 and 4:30 a.m. All but one began in a driveway.

And the nine people whose houses or properties were set ablaze — some more than once — were named in a coded list found on Crawford's phone. They were people who, investigators say, Crawford felt had slighted him in matters either personal or professional.

For challenging him, Crawford would put flame to the Hendersons' home twice, according to prosecutors, inflicting devastating losses on the family while eerily maintaining friendly contact.

Those were two of four Howard County fires Crawford stood trial for beginning last week. Charges against Crawford are pending in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. He entered an Alford plea — maintaining his innocence, but conceding there was enough evidence to convict — to arson in Frederick.

County prosecutors presented evidence from all of the blazes Crawford was linked to statewide.

The jury began deliberating Wednesday and will resume Thursday, equipped with hundreds of pieces of evidence introduced over seven days of trial.

Among the first to testify was Martin "Marty" Flemion, whose Laurel City-issued Ford SUV was scorched in a May 28, 2011 blaze. Flemion was deputy city administrator in Laurel at the time Crawford was forced to resign for reasons that remain unclear in 2010, according to court papers.

Video of the fire at Flemion's property showed what became a familiar pattern: The arsonist arrived in a silver sedan, carried jugs over to the driveway and poured liquid out before igniting the fluid.

Ten years later, police raided Crawford's house in Ellicott City and seized electronic devices. On one computer, investigators found a June 14, 2011 post to a medical forum.

"I am treating a second degree burn at home after seeing the dr," the post read.

Video of the fire at Flemion's property showed what became a familiar pattern.

"I am currently applying ointment and bandages to my calf. ... When does that discomfort go away? the burn is approx. two weeks old."

The arsonist in Laurel burnt his clothing. A scar was visible on Crawford's left leg in a 2021 police photograph.

Crawford's internet history revealed another pattern: He looked up the addresses of his targets and searched for news articles about the blazes afterward. Sometimes, he contacted the people whose properties he's accused of setting ablaze. He made calendar appointments for several of the fires, using phrases like "Dunloggin fire," the Hendersons' neighborhood.

Defense attorney Robert Bonsib said in closing arguments the state didn't prove Crawford, 71, committed the arsons, and that it failed to establish the attempted murder charges.

"The person who set these fires did not intend to kill anybody," said Bonsib, describing the fires as inconvenient rather than deadly.

Assistant State's Attorney Patricia Cecil said Crawford's internet searches

alone were "textbook premeditation." She argued Crawford chose to set houses on fire with people inside when they were most likely sleeping, saying the victims would've died if they hadn't woken up.

Numerals next to some of the names on Crawford's "target" list matched the number of fires set at those properties.

Three fires were set at the properties of his stepson, Justin Scherstrom, in Montgomery County. Crawford's list read "Justin (3)."

Scherstrom testified about his "tumultuous" relationship with the man who helped raise him.

"He preferred that I call him 'sir' rather than 'dad,'" Scherstrom said of Crawford.

He told investigators he suspected his stepdad in the first fire at his townhouse, on Sept. 5, 2016.

He did not mention Crawford's name when the same house was set ablaze a year later. Or when the detached garage at the home in Clarksville he moved his family to exploded in 2020.

"Ma told me about ur garage ... if u think I would be of any value I would be glad to meet u at the garage tomorrow and take a look," Crawford wrote in a text to Scherstrom days after the garage explosion. "Who is your fire investigator? Any video? Did they search your backyard?"

Scherstrom testified he was haunted by what Crawford said to him after each of the fires: "Arson is one of the most difficult crimes to solve."

In Howard County, the Hendersons redesigned their home.

Evelyn's voice cracked in court as she recalled their younger daughter's harrowing rescue of the family dog, Scooby.

The couple took out a second mortgage for everything not covered by the \$200,000 insurance payout.

After the 2017 fire at the Hendersons, prosecutors said, Crawford set his chiropractors' house in Elkridge ablaze while they, their children and a relative were home. They also said he ignited a car outside of the Ellicott City house of a nonprofit director his wife butted heads with.

He kept track of the Hendersons' rebuild in the meantime.

On Feb. 26, 2018, he sent a text message to Evelyn Henderson with photos of the house under construction. "They r making progress," he wrote.

Crawford asked neighbors about the origin and cause of the fire. He even offered his investigatory skills.

In a public social media

post in September 2018, Evelyn asked for help getting the utility company to restore power to their almost-rebuilt house.

Crawford responded, saying he stopped by the Hendersons' house to check on the electricity.

Four days later — about a week before the family was slated to move back in — the house was burned down. Investigators said the arsonist used gasoline.

Nobody was home, but it was a total loss.

Police sergeant held on assault charges

Jailed Baltimore cop allegedly drew his gun while at a bar in West Baltimore

By Dan Belson

A Baltimore Police sergeant was arrested Sunday by a fellow officer on assault charges that allege he pulled out a handgun outside a West Baltimore bar when he was asked to pay his tab.

Sgt. Larry Worsley was stripped of his police powers and jailed at Baltimore Central Booking and Intake following the encounter Sunday night, when police wrote in charging papers that Worsley also twisted the arm of a woman at the bar and dragged another out of the bar by her hair with the gun still in his hand.

Police wrote in charging papers that they determined Worsley, 40, had become "noticeably intoxicated" after drinking three shots at Tequila Sunset, a bar in the 2700 block of Pennsylvania Avenue in Penn North, and was asked to leave the establishment.

Worsley was then "observed assaulting an unidentified female that he was accompanied with inside the bar" and shoved her out of the way before leaving, and then proceeded to grab another woman by the arm, twist it, and say she was "coming with me."

Patrons separated Worsley from the second woman, police wrote.

A bartender went outside and told Worsley he had to pay a tab of \$42, police wrote. Then Worsley drew the handgun and racked the slide to chamber a round, stating he would not pay. He then proceeded to drag the first

woman by her hair and put her in a car, and the woman drove off alone as Worsley walked up Pennsylvania Avenue, police said.

Western District officers wrote that they later found Worsley on Reisterstown Road and detained him, also finding a gun and his Baltimore Police identification card. Worsley was transported to the Western District police station and to Baltimore Police headquarters for "administrative matters." He was also taken to a hospital at his request but was immediately discharged and taken to Central Booking.

Worsley was ordered to remain held without bond at Central Booking at a Tuesday bail review, according to court records. He is charged with first-degree assault and three counts of second-degree assault, and faces firearms and theft offenses. He's scheduled for a preliminary hearing in Baltimore City District Court on April 5.

Worsley is a 19-year veteran of the department and was assigned to juvenile booking at the time of his suspension, according to a police spokesperson.

In 2018 the sergeant was charged with a drunken driving offense following a crash. Officers had pulled Worsley over due to damage on his vehicle and let him go but stopped him again once they realized he was a police officer.

He was ultimately acquitted by a Baltimore District judge, who ruled officers did not have probable cause to pull him over the second time.

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