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NJ State Police Sgt. charged with assault in Carneys Point

Thursday, April 23, 2009
Randall Clark
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CARNEYS POINT TWP. - A New Jersey State Police sergeant was arrested Wednesday afternoon and charged with allegedly sexually assaulting and holding captive a woman in his unmarked police car on Easter morning, authorities said.

Sgt. Jonathan Gardenhire, 41, of Franklinville, was taken into custody for allegedly picking up a woman at a Carneys Point truck stop on April 12 around 5:30 a.m., driving her to an undisclosed location and allegedly committing an act of sexual penetration on her, according to the Salem County Prosecutor's Office.

Salem County Prosecutor John Lenahan said Gardenhire had allegedly identified himself to the 27-year-old victim as an undercover officer, holding her "in a condition of involuntary servitude" and apparently making her believe she had to remain in the vehicle.

An employee of the Flying J rest stop here said, on condition of anonymity, that the victim was believed to be a prostitute who frequented the area. Police would not comment on that statement.

He added prostitutes are known to hang around the truckers constantly passing through here, the last stop along Interstate 295 before reaching the Delaware Memorial Bridge.

Charges against Gardenhire include sexual assault, criminal restraint and one count of official misconduct.

Lenahan said Gardenhire is a 16-year veteran of the force who had been working out of the Woodstown Barracks.

In the wake of his arrest he has been suspended without pay, said state police Sgt. Stephen Jones.

"It's disturbing and it's disappointing when you have to investigate a law enforcement officer for allegedly breaking the law," Lenahan said.

"(Officers) did a very thorough and professional job during the course of this investigation."

The case is being handled by detectives from the Salem County Prosecutor's Office, state police Office of Professional Standards and Carneys Point Police.

"All I can say is, it's an unfortunate situation," said Carneys Point Police Chief Edmund Spinelli Jr....

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