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Norwalk officer arraigned on sexual assault charge

By John Nickerson, Staff Writer
Published 12:00 p.m., Monday, October 19, 2009

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STAMFORD -- Stunned friends of Anthony Santo said the veteran Norwalk police officer is a model citizen who is the least likely person they would expect to be accused of having sex with a minor girl.

Santo, who earned his Eagle Scout badge at age 16 in 1983 and two years later became a squadron commander of the Norwalk Junior Air Force ROTC at Norwalk High School, left state Superior Court in Stamford without comment following his arraignment Friday morning on charges of second-degree sexual assault and risk of injury to a child.

As Santo stood alongside his Stamford attorney Peter Truebner, Judge William Wenzel transferred the case to the Part A docket, where the most serious cases in the Stamford-Norwalk judicial district are handled.

Santo, 42, a 18-year police veteran volunteered over the past two decades as a crew chief with Westport Volunteer Emergency Medical Services. Now he is facing an evidence file in the state's attorney's office

stuffed with police reports, transcripts of interviews and other reports in the investigation.

"He was exceptional. He was a good guy, who the crew looked up to for guidance. It is really a shock to me and I am surprised," said Edwin Audley, former Westport police captain who founded the WVEMS.

After a three-month investigation by Greenwich police, Santo was arrested a week ago and released after posting \$25,000 bond.

While Greenwich police would not release any details of the case, and the arrest affidavit been sealed for the next seven days, Norwalk Police Chief Harry Rilling said the arrest stems from an incident that occurred at a private residence with a minor girl in Greenwich five or six years ago.

Rilling said the incident appeared to be a single occurrence and had no connection to Santo's work as a police officer; he was not on duty at the time of the incident. After his arrest, Santo was placed on administrative leave, Rilling said.

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Santo, who was most recently working the midnight shift as a patrol officer, has been honored as officer of the month twice in his career and has accumulated many letters of accommodation from citizens he has helped, Rilling said.

"Anthony was always a very effective and good police officer. This certainly is very, very surprising. Again, I stress the fact that we do not want to jump to conclusions. All people, including police officers, are entitled to the presumption of innocence until they are proven guilty," Rilling said Friday.

Rilling said he is working closely with the Stamford state's attorney's office to determine exactly what the allegations are so they can determine what the department's response will be.

Police union president Sgt. [Thomas Roncinske](#) had no comment on the matter.

Santo's Troop 44 scoutmaster Donald Hunter of Norwalk said he could not believe that Santo could be in trouble.

"I'm shocked. I can't believe the allegations have any truth to them. There is nothing in my experience with Anthony Santo that would make me believe any such charge," Hunter said. "In my observation he was very ethical. There was never a hint of any wrongdoing, no fist fights or petty thefts and nothing that would not be upright and proper."

Santo's assistant Troop 44 scoutmaster [Thomas Kish](#), who now lives in Newtown, said he could not understand how Santo could have done what he is accused of.

"I can't think of anything Anthony would do wrong. It is definitely both a shock and I can't believe it. Anthony is straight as an arrow," said Kish, who remembers that Santo wanted to get into the FBI as a young man.

Santo is to return to court Oct. 30.

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