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Old Forge police captain and volunteer firefighter arrested in alleged sexual assault

BY DENIS J. O'MALLEY (STAFF WRITER)

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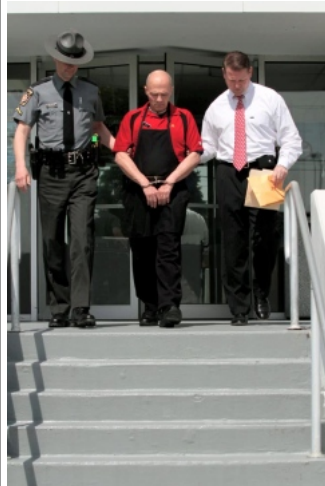
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Jake Danna Stevens / Staff Photographer
Walter Chiavacci, 46, of Old Forge, is escorted out of the state police barracks in Dunmore on Thursday. Mr. Chiavacci and Old Forge police Capt. Jamie Krenitsky, 34, were charged with sexually assaulting the same girl.

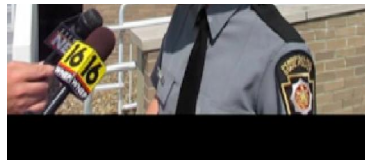


Walter Chiavacci, 46, of Old Forge is escorted out of the State Police Barracks in Dunmore on Thursday, May 3, 2012.
Jake Danna Stevens / Staff Photographer

The second-highest-ranking member of the Old Forge Police Department and a member of the borough's volunteer Fire Department were charged Thursday with sexually assaulting the same 15-year-old girl between 2004 and 2005.

Old Forge police Capt. Jamie Krenitsky, 34, 19 Casey Ave., Old Forge, was arraigned on charges of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, indecent assault and corruption of minors and later posted \$25,000 bond for his release from Lackawanna County Prison.

Walter Chiavacci, 46, of Old Forge, was charged with aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault and corruption of minors. His bail information was not available late Thursday.



The investigation began Wednesday when the victim, now 23, reported the sexual assaults to the Lackawanna County district attorney's office.

State police said Capt. Krenitsky was taken into custody at his Casey Avenue home early Thursday and later admitted, in part, to the allegations against him.

Mr. Chiavacci was taken into custody hours later and confessed to sexually assaulting the then-15-year-old girl as well, according to a criminal complaint.

Old Forge Mayor Michele Avvisato said Capt. Krenitsky was suspended without pay and that Police Chief Larry Semenza was put on administrative leave with pay because he is also under investigation, though she would not elaborate on why he is being investigated.

When asked about Ms. Avvisato's comments, Lackawanna County District Attorney Andy Jarbola declined to comment on whether Chief Semenza was under investigation.

Mr. Jarbola said Thursday afternoon that the investigation remains open and that additional arrests may be forthcoming. He would not say whether any of the remaining persons of interest are also members of the Old Forge Police Department.

A message left on Chief Semenza's cellphone was not returned Thursday.

Officer Kim Buggey, a 9-year veteran of the Old Forge Police Department, was named officer-in-charge by Ms. Avvisato in Chief Semenza's absence.

Chief Semenza's leave and Capt. Krenitsky's arrest and suspension leave the department with three full-time officers, including Officer Buggey, and 13 part-time officers, Officer Buggey said.

In an interview with investigators Wednesday, the victim explained she and Capt. Krenitsky became friendly through her involvement with the borough Fire Department. In January 2005, about the same time Capt. Krenitsky was promoted to captain, their relationship became sexual, she said.

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Capt. Jamie Krenitsky

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The Times-Tribune does not identify victims of alleged sexual assault.

Over the course of about six months, Capt. Krenitsky and the victim would walk into the bunk room of the Fire Department - which is in the same building as the Police Department, 310 S. Main St. - lock the door behind them and the on-duty officer would take off his police belt, according to the complaint.

Then, the two would remove their pants and perform oral sex on each other, according to the complaint.

After outlining the allegations during the interview, the victim placed a recorded phone call to Capt. Krenitsky during which he admitted to the sexual activity the victim had described to investigators and repeatedly apologized, telling the victim that he "never wanted to hurt her," according to the complaint.

Soon after, investigators were at Capt. Krenitsky's Casey Avenue home, where he agreed to come in for an interview at the district attorney's office.

There, Capt. Krenitsky admitted to being in the Fire Department bunk room with the victim, according to the complaint, but denied performing oral sex on her.

Asked if she had performed oral sex on him, Capt. Krenitsky responded: "I would have to say yes," according to the complaint.

Hours later on Thursday, investigators from the state police and the Lackawanna County district attorney's office took Mr. Chiavacci into custody and he agreed to speak with them about the allegations against him, according to a criminal complaint.

Mr. Chiavacci told investigators that he was at a party with the 15-year-old in July 2004 and he noticed she was very upset over breaking up with her boyfriend. After asking her if she would like to go for a walk to talk about the issue, Mr. Chiavacci and the 15-year-old girl went outside in a wooded area near Burger King, according to the complaint.

Mr. Chiavacci tried to kiss the girl, but she turned her head away, at which point Mr. Chiavacci put his hands inside her underwear and touched her inappropriately, according to the complaint.

Following each of their arraignments, preliminary hearings for Capt. Krenitsky and Mr. Chiavacci were scheduled for May 9.

On Thursday night, Old Forge Borough Council held an executive session with borough solicitor William Rinaldi and Ms. Avvisato.

After the closed-door meeting, the mayor made about a minute-and-a-half-long statement, saying she and council "are certainly concerned for the victim and her family."

The mayor, who noted she discussed the arrest with borough officials during the executive session, also said they are "shocked" and cooperating with authorities in the investigation.

The mayor added that Capt. Krenitsky is suspended without pay until council meets at its "regular meeting and takes further action." Council's regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 15.

After reading her statement, she and council members refused to answer questions.

About a half-dozen members of the public attended Thursday's meeting.

"I was looking for some answers," Eileen Stefanko said. "I'm very disgusted about this."

Robert Hughes said he is outraged and "very angry."

"They have no respect for the taxpayers whatsoever," he said.

Capt. Krenitsky's arrest Wednesday night was not the first time he was accused of inappropriate behavior toward members of the opposite sex.

In February 2008, a former part-time female police officer with the department filed a federal sexual harassment lawsuit against Capt. Krenitsky and the borough, claiming he had asked fellow officers, both via two-way radio and in front of her, if they would either marry or have sex with her.

The former officer, Michelle Venturi, later settled the case out of court for \$125,000 in January 2010.

Mr. Jarbola asked that anyone with any information regarding the case and the Old Forge Police Department or Fire Department contact state police at 963-3156.

JOSH MROZINSKI, staff writer, contributed to this report.

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