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New judge handling sex cases against Old Forge public officials

BY STEVE MCCONNELL (STAFF WRITER)

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RECENT DOWNVALLEY NEWS

Lackawanna County Judge Michael J. Barrasse will not preside over the upcoming trials of two suspended Old Forge police officers and a former borough firefighter accused of sexually assaulting a teenage girl.

The cases of suspended Old Forge Police Chief Larry Semenza, Capt. Jamie Krenitsky and former firefighter Walter Chiavacci have been transferred to Lackawanna County Judge Vito P. Geroulo, officials said.

The reason why the cases were taken out of the hands of Judge Barrasse was not available. Efforts to reach him and Judge Geroulo on Friday were unsuccessful.

"I was just told it was a conflict," Capt. Krenitsky's attorney, Jason Mattioli, said. "I didn't ask why."

Deputy District Attorney Jennifer McCambridge said she was told the cases were transferred to Judge Geroulo, although she also was not sure why.

She has not been given an order from the court explaining the rationale. Both judges specialize in criminal cases.

Chief Semenza's attorney, David J. Solfanelli, was a former clerk under Judge Barrasse. Efforts to reach him were unsuccessful.

State police and county investigators arrested Chief Semenza, 48, on May 9 and charged him with sexually assaulting a teenage girl, starting in 2004 when she was 15 years old. The relationship continued through 2007, police say.

The victim, now 23, told investigators about their sexual relationship on May 2. She also claimed she was sexually assaulted by Capt. Krenitsky, 34, and Mr. Chiavacci, 47.

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

A few court documents in their cases remain under court-ordered seal.

Their trials are not expected to get under way until next year, Ms. McCambridge said.

Chief Semenza has a pre-trial hearing scheduled for Dec. 3.

Capt. Krenitsky has a pre-trial hearing scheduled for Nov. 27, according to orders handed down by Judge Geroulo.

Court documents for Mr. Chiavacci were not available.

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