

# Suspect's pretrial hearing in killing of couple put off

## Her health at issue, judge told

DEBRA HALE-SHELTON  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

CONWAY — A judge on Thursday postponed a pretrial hearing for a woman charged with murdering a Conway couple last year after her attorney said he needed to check on some "medical issues" involving his client.

Anastasia Roberts, 18, of Conway is one of four teenagers charged in the July 21, 2015, shooting deaths of Robert and Patricia Cogdell, both 66, of Conway.

Roberts appeared to have been crying when she arrived in Faulkner County Circuit Court for a hearing. Wearing striped jail clothes, handcuffs and long, braided pigtails, Roberts said nothing audible as she stood beside her attorney, James Wyatt.

Wyatt told Judge Troy Braswell that he wanted to "err on the side of caution" regarding the medical concerns.

Neither Wyatt nor Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Hugh Finkelstein would comment further on the medical issues after the hearing.

"She was obviously under stress," Finkelstein said.

Braswell set Roberts' next pretrial hearing for Nov. 7. Her trial is tentatively set to begin Dec. 12.

A plea agreement is "definitely in the realm of possibilities," Finkelstein told reporters. "We're negotiating."

He said the prosecution still views Roberts as "the least culpable of all four" teen-

age defendants.

There were some expectations that Roberts might change her plea Thursday as two of her co-defendants did at pretrial hearings. In May, Wyatt withdrew his client's request to transfer her case to juvenile court. He said at the time that the defense was still working out issues with prosecutors and said "it would be premature" to proceed with the transfer request "if something else works out with the state."

If a juvenile transfer hearing happens, that would take any plea agreement "off the table," Finkelstein said.

More spectators than usual were in the small courtroom Thursday. Among them were relatives of Roberts and the Cogdells.

Roberts' boyfriend, Connor Atchley, 18, of Greenbrier, and the boy the Cogdells were raising, Justin Staton, 15, have pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and other offenses and been sentenced to prison. A fourth defendant, Hunter Drexler, 19, of Clinton, remains jailed on capital murder and other charges and is awaiting an October hearing on whether to transfer his case to juvenile court.

The Cogdells had been Staton's legal guardians since at least 2010. They had thought he was their grandson until genetic testing proved their son was not his father. They still sought and were granted guardianship.

## Dome's day



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/MELISSA SUE GERRITS

A worker does routine maintenance on the state Capitol dome in Little Rock on Thursday. Capitol facilities staff members keep an eye on the building, which was completed in 1915, and perform repairs and beautification.

# For fraud, man gets year, day in prison

## Stole from liquor firm, he told court

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A Little Rock man who admitted in February that he stole more than \$225,000 from his employer, a local alcohol distributor, was sentenced Wednesday to a year and a day in federal prison.

Edward Lee Casey, 41, was also ordered to pay restitution of \$225,184.47 to Glazer's Distributors of Arkansas, where he worked from 2001 through December 2012.

In a plea negotiation worked out by his attorney, Bill James of Little Rock, Casey pleaded guilty Feb. 17 to a single charge of mail fraud. He admitted that from sometime in 2010 through January 2014, he created phony invoices from a company he created and called Renaissance LLC, and then paid the invoices using Glazer's funds.

He admitted to U.S. District Judge D. Price Marshall Jr. that he mailed the payment checks to a North Little Rock post office where he picked them up, then cashed them and deposited the money into his personal account.

The mail-fraud charge was punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, although federal sentencing guidelines recommended a lower penalty range within the statutory framework.

The extra day tacked onto the yearlong sentence makes it possible for Casey to be released early under certain conditions. Marshall ordered Casey to serve three years' probation after his release.

# Schools-vote results given final approval

CYNTHIA HOWELL  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The Pulaski County Election Commission on Thursday certified the results of the North Little Rock and Little Rock school elections that took place earlier this week.

Dorothy "Dot" Williams and Tanesha Richardson-Wiley were elected in uncontested races for the North Little Rock School Board's Zone 1 and Zone 4 seats, respectively.

The two candidates were grouped together on the ballot and received 68 votes, according to the newly certified, final results from Tuesday elections.

The final, certified totals on the North Little Rock district's 48.3-mill tax rate were:  
**For**..... 53  
**Against** ..... 34

The certified totals on the Little Rock district's 46.4-mill tax rate were:  
**For**..... 262  
**Against** ..... 126

There were no changes proposed in the existing tax rates in either district, but the Arkansas Constitution requires that school tax rates be voted on annually. Even if a majority of voters opposed the tax rates in one or the other or in both districts, the tax rates would remain unchanged.

The Little Rock district had only the millage on the school election ballot because the district is operating under state control and without an elected school board.

The Pulaski County Special School District, which will exit later this year from five years of state control for fiscal distress, will elect seven new school board members in conjunction with the Nov. 8 general election. In that November election, voters also will act on the district's existing 40.7-mill property tax rate for school operations.

The Jacksonville/North Pulaski School District held a special election in February on a 7.6-mill property-tax increase for schools. That election — in which the tax increase was approved — met the district's obligation for having an annual vote on the school tax rate that is now 48.3 mills.

All seven members of the Jacksonville/North Pulaski School Board were elected in September 2015. They drew lots for the lengths of their terms, which range from two to four years. Two of the seven seats will be open for election in September 2017.

# White River bridge rally set for Saturday

## Its supporters to gather in Clarendon after filing suit, compiling petition

NOEL OMAN  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A rally to help build support to preserve the historic U.S. 79 bridge over the White River in Clarendon will be held Saturday, organizers say.

The Friends of the Historic White River Bridge said the rally will be held from noon to 1 p.m. at the base of the bridge's eastern approach in the Monroe County seat.

"There is tremendous enthusiasm among our citizens to save this bridge," Clarendon Mayor Jim Stinson III said.

The rally, which will feature brief speeches from Stinson and others, as well as refreshments, comes amid a lawsuit seeking to block demolition of the bridge and an online petition to save the bridge.

The city and the Friends of the Historic White River Bridge sued the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department in June. A federal judge denied a temporary restraining order, but the department withdrew a project to demolish and remove the 85-year-old bridge from a June bid letting, which allowed the bridge supporters to proceed with a full hearing on the merits of the lawsuit to halt the project without requiring them to pay a bond.

**An online petition to save the bridge was launched on Sept. 14, and has garnered more than 800 signatures from the around the United States and 22 other nations.**

The bridge was replaced by a new one that opened Aug. 15. The new bridge and its approaches cost about \$100 million. The old bridge is barricaded to keep traffic off the bridge, according to a department spokesman.

An online petition to save the bridge was launched on Sept. 14, and has garnered more than 800 signatures from the around the United States and 22 other nations.

"The world is watching," said Connie DePriest, the nonprofit's board president. "Surely there's a way for all the parties to come together to resolve this in a way that's beneficial to all involved."

Supporters say the old bridge and its approaches can be the centerpiece of a plan to boost ecotourism in the

impoverished Delta region by converting it into what they say will be the longest pedestrian and bicycle bridge in the world.

The effort to save the bridge has drawn support from the Department of Arkansas Heritage and Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who met with top U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials on a visit to Washington.

For the plan to work, the western approaches of the bridge must be kept. They extend over part of the environmentally sensitive Cache River National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge was established in 1986 to protect significant wetland habitats that provide feeding and resting areas for migrating waterfowl.

The wildlife refuge covers about 56,000 acres in Jackson,

Woodruff, Monroe and Prairie counties, and is one of the few remaining areas in the Lower Mississippi River Valley unaltered by significant channelization and drainage, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the refuge.

To build the new bridge, the Highway Department had to reach an agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service to mitigate the damage the new bridge would inflict on the refuge. Under the agreement, the federal agency required the removal of the western approaches, although the actual river span over the White River could stay.

## Today's radar speed checks

Little Rock and North Little Rock police and the Pulaski County sheriff's office will use radar to detect speeding at these locations. Police and sheriff's deputies may conduct radar checks in other locations as well.

**Little Rock:** Leawood Blvd.  
**North Little Rock:** 2400 Lakeview Rd.  
**Pulaski County:** Garrison Rd.

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# AETN Family Day

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**10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
**350 S. Donaghey Ave.,**  
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**Meet & greet Walkaround Elmo and Walkaround Cookie Monster from Sesame Street • Meet & greet with Exploring Arkansas host Chuck Dovish • Bounce houses & obstacle course • Arts & crafts Face painting • Storytime • Daniel Tiger, Curious George, The Cat in the Hat and Clifford the Big Red Dog • Donation drives for "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" Sweater Drive, Project Homeless Connect and Books for Christmas. For information visit**

[aetn.org/familyday](http://aetn.org/familyday)

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