NAPA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
NEWSLINE
A publication of the Napa County District Attorney’s Office

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Two promoted at the Napa DA’s Office

DDA Susemihl Recognized by MADD For Efforts to Combat DUIs in Napa County

By Carlos Villatoro
Public Affairs and Media Officer

Hundreds of law enforcement professionals gathered at the Citrus Heights Community Center on July 16, 2024, for the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Sacramento Law Enforcement & Prosecutor Recognition Awards.

Each year MADD recognizes and honors prosecutors and other members of law enforcement for their efforts to combat impaired driving; Napa County Deputy District Attorney Katie Susemihl was among those honored at this year’s ceremony. Deputy District Attorney Susemihl is a veteran prosecutor who has dedicated

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In the previous edition of Newsline, I spoke of the retirements of Chief of Investigations Leslie Pate and DA Investigator Joe Dulworth, both esteemed members of our law enforcement community with decades’ worth of service to the people of Napa County.

Given these recent departures from our office, it is my pleasure to announce the promotion of two exceptional members of our team. Ana Baber, whose dedication and expertise have been indispensable to our office, has been promoted to Chief of Investigations. Ana's leadership skills and unwavering commitment to justice make her the perfect fit for this critical role. I am confident that she will continue to excel and lead our investigative team with care, honor and distinction.

Additionally, Rachel Cardin has been promoted to Lieutenant. Rachel's diligence, professionalism, and remarkable ability to navigate complex cases have earned her this well-deserved promotion. Her strategic insights and relentless pursuit of truth will undoubtedly enhance our office's efforts to ensure justice for the cases we prosecute on behalf of the People.

While we celebrate these promotions, we also bid farewell to Deputy District Attorney Kecia Lind. Kecia has been a cornerstone of our office, consistently demonstrating exceptional legal acumen and a steadfast commitment to protecting the community. She will be greatly missed as she transitions to her new role as a Napa County Superior Court Judge. We are confident that Kecia will continue to serve our community with the same dedication and integrity she has shown throughout her career with us, and she will be greatly missed.

These changes reflect our office’s ongoing commitment to fostering talent and ensuring that our team is led by individuals of the highest caliber. Please join me in congratulating Ana and Rachel on their promotions and in wishing the Honorable Judge Lind all the best in her judicial career.
INSIDE THE DA’S OFFICE

Napa County Implements MADD Victim Impact Panel for Drunken Driving Offenders

By Carlos Villatoro
Public Affairs and Media Officer

The Napa County District Attorney’s Office, Napa County Probation Department and Napa County Superior Court have teamed up to keep its roadways safer by including a new probation requirement for certain offenders convicted of driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol.

The new probation term and condition is a Victim Impact Panel administered by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and will be requested for offenders who meet specific conditions.

MADD’s Victim Impact Panel is an opportunity for offenders to hear testimony from individuals who have been impacted by DUIs in an effort to create a better understanding of consequences of getting behind the wheel of a vehicle while impaired. The online panel aims to create a bit of empathy among offenders to curb the behavior that got them into trouble explains Lori Bergenstock, the program specialist/law enforcement liaison for Northern California’s MADD in Sacramento.

“The goal of the panel is to help people understand that it isn’t just a DUI and it isn’t a victimless crime,” she said. “So many people think that DUI is a victimless crime. When someone loses someone or someone is impacted personally, there’s a victim there. So that’s our hope, is to help them see that as firsthand as you can online.”

The Victim Impact Panel will be requested for any DUI case with any of the following:

1. Any Felony DUI.
2. Any case where there is DUI or reckless driving with injury.
3. Any case where this is the second (or more) conviction for DUI.
4. Any case that involves a DUI and child endangerment.
5. Any case charged with an enhancement for BAL above .15 percent.

Napa County’s incorporation of MADD’s Victim Impact Panel into its DUI cases came at the behest of Napa County Assistant District Attorney Paul Gero, who forged a partnership with the Napa County Probation Department and the Napa County Superior Court to make it happen.

Regarding his motivation to institute this program by forging partnerships with probation and the court, Assistant DA Gero said: “We want to combine enforcement and accountability with community education on the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. One of the most innovative ways to do this is to reach the most dangerous drivers in our community – those who have already been convicted and hopefully deter them from ever doing it again. The Victim Impact Panel is powerful, direct evidence that driving under the influence can seriously injure or kill, and drivers with empathy will naturally be affected. Even if we save one life, this additional requirement is completely worth it.”
The Napa County District Attorney’s Office offers a dynamic internship program designed to provide students who are interested in a career in law with hands-on experience in the field of criminal prosecution.

During Summer 2024 the DA’s Office hosted five interns who worked closely with prosecutors, investigators, and victim advocates to gain insight into the various stages of the criminal justice process. From observing court proceedings, shadowing various staff members, or participating in outreach events, interns are immersed in the day-to-day operations of the office. This practical exposure is invaluable for those considering a career in law, particularly in public service. The internship program emphasizes mentorship and professional development for participants and gives the DA Office’s staff an opportunity to shape future legal minds.

Interns at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office are also provided the opportunity to contribute to meaningful projects that impact the local community. Whether assisting in the preparation of high-profile cases or engaging in community outreach initiatives, the interns play a crucial role in the office’s mission to seek justice and promote public safety.

The program not only prepares interns for future legal careers but also instills a sense of civic duty and commitment to justice that will guide them in their professional journeys.

Nicholas Dominici

Nicholas Dominici was born and raised in Napa and graduated from Vintage High School in 2022 as the Associated Student Body President. Nicholas’ commitment to being an active member of the community, by volunteering his time to several nonprofit organizations, is unwavering. He is a member of The GIGG and the Patrick Savage Memorial Corporation, as well as a co-founder of the Youth Leadership Academy of Napa. The leadership academy takes young people each Summer and connects them with active leaders in our community. The camp aims

MADD continued for page 1

herself to holding intoxicated and drugged drivers accountable for their crimes Napa County Assistant District Attorney Paul Gero said.

She handles the Napa County District Attorney’s most complicated cases. In 2023, she handled felony DUI with injuries, vehicular manslaughter and Watson murder cases. In People v. Jevarian, the defendant pled to all charges (including gross vehicular manslaughter) and DDA Susemihl persuaded the judge to impose a six-year state prison sentence.

In that case, defendant was under the influence of alcohol and marijuana, drove the wrong way on the highway, hitting two vehicles, injuring five people and killing her passenger.

“These cases are complex, requiring patience, professionalism and expertise,” Assistant District Attorney Paul Gero said. “DDA Susemihl had a great year in 2023 and deserves to be recognized for her efforts.”
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to empower young people to be leaders in their own lives. Nicholas is in his third year of studies at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he is double majoring in Political Science and Law, Societies, & Justice (LSJ) and has received an introduction to law. He plans to attend law school after his undergraduate studies.

“I am not yet sure what kind of law I would like to practice, though I have always gravitated towards criminal law, which may stem from my constant binging of bad television,” he said. “I am excited for this opportunity to work in a formal legal setting, learning the intricacies of the job while I am home for the summer. In looking at working in the District Attorney’s Office, I was instantly intrigued by the Victim Services Division, although I lacked a complete understanding of their role. In my short time here, I have grown accustomed to the great responsibility that the advocates hold in the office.”

**Allyson Qui**

Allyson is a recent political science graduate from the University of California, Irvine, with an interest in both law and teaching. As she embarks on her professional career, she centers her philosophy around the phrase “leaving someone better than you found them.” Thus, she is excited about working in fields centered around humanity, compassion, and service.

Her experience at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office, specifically the Victim Services Division, has done an exemplary job at embodying those ideals. She initially was unaware that a division dedicated to victim advocacy existed and was heartened to be able to contribute to such a great organization for California citizens. She states that “the most notable aspect about this role is being able to observe and learn from the impressive victim advocates who each have their own distinct passions and reasons as to why they chose to work in advocacy. To see them come together and work as a team with a genuine care for victims of crime inspires me to leave a legacy of service and compassion in whatever career path I pursue.”

**Logan Cherry**

Logan Cherry joined the Napa County District Attorney’s Office in late May as a college intern. She is currently finishing up her last year of college at CSU East Bay, where she plays water polo and studies Political Science and Criminal Justice. Logan is interested in pursuing criminal law and attending law school after completing her bachelor’s degree.

“The District Attorney’s Office has opened my eyes to a world of criminal law that I was unaware of,” she said. “I am beyond excited to enter into law school with the knowledge I have obtained.”

**Kirin Sidhu**

Kirin Sidhu is a student at Vintage High School who will be entering high school as a senior in the fall.

She plays water polo and coaches that sport as well. Kirin is interested in pursuing a career in law and has an interest in journalism. She is working diligently to complete her high school diploma and plans to attend college after graduation.
By Erin Harper  
**Victim Witness Program Manager**

It's been a summer of learning over at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office since the Victim Services Division launched its inaugural “Summer School” program, a weekly series of presentations for our staff given by local community partners and nonprofit organizations.

The DA’s Summer School is designed to strengthen connections between the office and important agencies serving the Napa community. Throughout the summer, the Victim Services team invited nonprofit groups that work in Napa to provide presentations about their programs, information about how clients can access their service and to share topical trends about which they would like the District Attorney’s Office to be aware.

The staff at the DA’s Office connected with NEWS – Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Services, Mentis, Puertas Abiertas, and the Immigration Institute of the Bay Area.

In addition to the outside agencies, Jessica Solano of the DA’s Office’s own Courage Center gave a presentation on forensic interviewing.

Community building is an important part of the role of victim advocates, and this summer our team sought to engage in this role not just by providing education about victim services at outside events but also by inviting into our office important partners in building a safe and healthy Napa County.

We serve victims best when working with all resources available, and Summer School is one step to strengthening the connections between those of us with a shared vision for the community.

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**JOIN THE CONVERSATION!**

The Napa County District Attorney’s Office has a Podcast for your enjoyment!

The Sidebar Podcast encompasses everything pertaining to the work the DA’s Office performs on behalf of the People, both in and out of the courtroom. Subscribe to our [YouTube] channel so you don’t miss an upload!
DA Staff Updates

Ana Baber, Chief of Investigations

Ana Baber has been promoted to Chief of Investigations at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office. Chief Investigator Baber grew up in Napa and attended St. Apollinaris and Vintage High School.

As a bilingual individual with an immigrant background, she has dedicated herself to public service, working with underserved populations through law enforcement for over 22 years.

She began her career with the City of Berkeley Police Department in 2002 and was later hired as an Investigator at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office in 2016, where she served for three years before being promoting to Lieutenant in 2019. In July 2024, she was appointed as Chief Investigator.

In addition to her commitment to law enforcement, Chief Baber joined the United States Air Force Reserves in 1995 and retired in 2019 after an honorable career. Beyond her public service, she has been a business owner for over 18 years, demonstrating her diverse skills and dedication to this community.

Rachel Cardin, Lieutenant

Rachel Cardin, a native of Santa Rosa, has been promoted to Lieutenant at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office. Rachel has dedicated herself to public service for over 19 years.

She began her law enforcement career with the City of Cloverdale Police Department in 2005, where she worked for 10 years before joining the City of Novato Police Department in 2015. During her tenure, Lieutenant Cardin served in many roles, including Field Training Officer, Crisis Negotiation Team, Honor Guard, and Detective, specializing in child forensic cases.

In 2019, she was hired as an Investigator at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office, where she continued her work with special victims. Her hard work and dedication led to her promotion in July 2024. Lieutenant Cardin’s academic accomplishments include a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice Administration from Sonoma State University.
IN THE COMMUNITY

Out & About

Chief DAJ Leslie Pate’s Retirement Send Off 7/12/2024

Training with Napa Sheriffs @ Lake Berryessa 7/01/2024

Training with Napa Sheriffs @ Lake Berryessa 7/01/2024

Justin-Siena Leadership Camp 7/09/2024

Photo credits: courtesy
People V. Tito James Rivera and Alejandro Gonzalez Marquez

Tito James Rivera, age 20, pled no contest to attempted murder and felony assault by means to produce great bodily injury. He additionally admitted the special allegations of use of a firearm in commission of a felony and participation in a criminal street gang.

His accomplice Alejandro Gonzalez Marquez, age 20, pled no contest to assault by means to produce great bodily injury and unlawful firearm activity, in addition to admitting the special allegations of participation in a criminal street gang and a prior strike.

Rivera and Marquez were involved in two separate gang-related incidents leading to the charges. The first incident took place on the evening of May 19, 2022, at 9:52 p.m. Rivera brandished a pistol and fired at a Door Dash driver who was delivering food to a nearby home in American Canyon. Rivera and Marquez immediately fled in a vehicle, with Marquez driving. American Canyon Police Officers stopped the fleeing subjects shortly after and found both Rivera and Marquez armed with loaded, untraceable firearms commonly known as “Ghost Guns.” Both men are known Norteño gang members in Napa County and had felony warrants for their arrests. They were both booked at the Napa County Department of Corrections for the attempted murder of the Door Dash driver.

The second incident took place on October 18, 2023, at the Napa County Department of Corrections. While being held in custody for the first incident Marquez, Rivera and other men were involved in the beating of a rival gang member at the jail which was captured on surveillance cameras. The beating left the victim with bruising and the two men were charged for the assault.

Rivera will be sentenced to 20 years in state prison as part of the plea agreement; Marquez will be sentenced to 7 years in state prison for his part in the crimes. Rivera is due in court at 3 p.m., on August 9, 2024, in Department 1 of the Napa County Superior Court for a sentencing hearing. Marquez is due in court at 3 p.m., on August 6, 2023, in Department 1 of the Napa County Superior Court for a sentencing hearing.

The cases against Marquez and Rivera were prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Rolando Mazariegos.
**People V. Jasmine Arguello**

A Napa jury convicted Jasmine Amanda Arguello, age 26, of misdemeanor domestic violence after a short jury trial that took place in early July, presided by Napa County Superior Court Judge Scott Young.

The jury found true that Arguello hit and scratched her boyfriend leaving multiple visible scratches after a night of drinking led to an argument in the early morning hours of January 29, 2022. The case against the defendant was handled by Deputy District Attorney Lauren Kownacki.

Arguello is due back in court at 8:30 a.m., on August 9, 2024, in Department 4 of the Napa County Superior Court for sentencing.

**People V. Somona Marie Lofton**

A Napa jury convicted Somona Marie Lofton, age 39, of two counts of misdemeanor battery during a jury trial that took place in late July. Napa County Superior Court Judge Francisca Tisher presided over the case, which took two days, and Deputy District Attorney Lauren Noga prosecuted the case on behalf of the People.

The jury found true that the defendant assaulted two women at a local homeless shelter, slapping and punching one victim several times, while the victim sat on a bed, causing her injuries.

The jury also found true that Lofton pushed another victim who attempted to stop the assault. The second victim fell backwards and sustained minor injuries.

The defendant last appeared in court on July 24, 2024, and the Honorable Judge Tisher sentenced her to a year of probation with terms and conditions, no additional jail time, and ordered her to pay fees and restitution totaling $260.

In addition to the conviction, Lofton faces separate charges of assault and battery, and resist, obstruction, delay of peace officer or EMT.

**People V. Porfirio Sanchez**

Porfirio Sanchez, age 56, is charged with two counts of felony vehicular manslaughter, felony hit and run driving resulting in death, misdemeanor altering evidence, and misdemeanor providing false information to a peace officer.

It is alleged that on October 17, 2023, Sanchez failed to properly secure the lumber load he was hauling along Silverado Trail. This failure allowed a large piece of lumber to swing out perpendicular to the truck ultimately striking two bicyclists who were riding alongside the road. Both bicyclists lost their lives as a result of the collision.

On June 26, 2024, a preliminary hearing was held before Napa Superior Court Judge Scott Young. Following the prosecutor’s presentation of evidence, which included civilian witness and law enforcement testimony, photographs, and video surveillance, Judge Young found there was sufficient evidence for a holding order and bound the matter over for trial.

The defendant is due in court at 8:30 a.m. on August 26, 2024, in Department 1 of the Napa County Superior Court for a plea/setting hearing. The case against Sanchez is being handled by Deputy District Attorney Shashawnya Worley.
People V. Oscar Jesus Chavez

Oscar Jesus Chavez, age 34, is charged with assault with intent to commit a felony, sexual penetration by foreign object, three counts of assault by means to produce great bodily injury, and criminal threats.

Chavez is additionally charged with the special allegations of prior strike and increasing seriousness of priors/sustained petitions.

Chavez is being held without bail at the Napa County Department of Corrections and is ordered to appear in court on August 7, 2024, for the setting of a preliminary hearing. The case against the defendant is being handled by Deputy District Attorney Kristen Orlando.

People V. Ryan Warner and Sara Krueger

The petition for a new sentence for Sara Lynn Krueger, age 34, and Ryan Scott Warner, age 36, was denied by Napa County Superior Court Judge Francisca Tisher during two separate hearings that took place in late July. Krueger and Warner stand convicted of assault on a child causing death and first-degree murder of three-year-old Kayleigh Slusher in 2014.

On February 1, 2014, police found the dead body of toddler Kayleigh Slusher in her east Napa apartment. The girl had bruises covering her body and had been badly beaten and tortured by her mother, Krueger, and her boyfriend, Warner, who had fled the apartment prior to police arrival. It is believed Kayleigh had died at least a day before the discovery of her body, according to court reports, and the couple was arrested at an El Cerrito BART station on February 2, 2014.

The Napa County District Attorney’s Office prosecuted Krueger and Warner together and two separate juries found them both guilty of the crimes they stand convicted of.

The couple had originally been sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. Their sentences were reduced in 2021 after the Court of Appeal reversed the juries’ findings of the special circumstance of torture, finding there was insufficient evidence they harbored the intent to kill Kayleigh. Krueger is currently serving 25 years to life at Central California Women’s Facility in Chowchilla, and Warner is serving 25 years to life at California Men’s Colony in San Luis Obispo.

Krueger and Warner each filed a petition to be resentenced in accordance with a change in California law. Under Senate Bill 1437, which became effective on January 1, 2019, a person can be convicted of murder only if they actually killed the person, helped in the killing with the intent to kill, or were a major participant in a felony, and acted with reckless indifference to human life. This means that people who didn’t kill, intend to kill, or act with extreme disregard for human life can no longer be charged with murder just because they were involved in a related felony. The law also allows people previously convicted under the old rule to apply for resentencing.

During the separate resentencing hearings, Deputy District Attorney Kecia Lind argued that neither defendant met their burden to show that they qualified under the new resentencing statute. Victim Advocate Belinda Ruiz assisted DDA Lind during the resentencing hearings. Warner is eligible for parole in April 2029 and Krueger is eligible for parole in April 2031.
August 6th 4-7pm
Napa Valley College
2277 Napa Vallejo Highway

National Night Out is an annual event that encourages community-police partnerships, crime prevention and neighborhood camaraderie. It sends a message to criminals that your neighborhood is organized, aware, and fighting back! Last year, more than 38 million people and 17,000 communities across America, Canada and military bases around the world participated!

For more information contact:
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