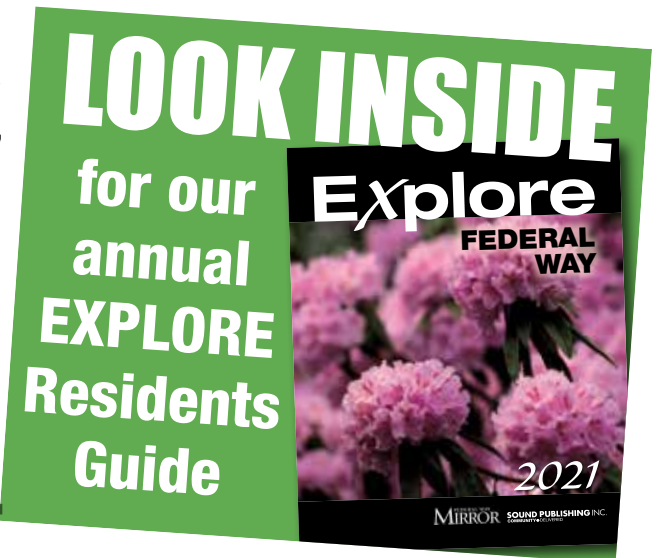




FEDERAL WAY MIRROR

SOUND PUBLISHING, INC. FEDERALWAYMIRROR.COM \$1.00 FRIDAY, JULY 16, 2021



2 men charged with murder for 'retaliatory' drive-by shooting

By OLIVIA SULLIVAN
osullivan@fedwaymirror.com

Two men have been charged in what prosecutors say was the "retaliatory murder" of a 19-year-old man killed last year in a drive-by shooting in Federal Way.

Erick R. Alvarez-Lopez, 20, and Angelo D. Trejo-Martinez, 19, have each been charged with

one count of first-degree murder, according to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. The last known addresses for both of the men are in Des Moines.

"Their actions demonstrate without question that they are each a threat to community safety and to the safety of Westway residents in particular if released," stated Senior Deputy Prosecuting

Attorney Terence R. Carlstrom in the charging documents.

The charges have been filed in connection to the April 20, 2020, death of Damien Helmbrecht. Around 10:40 p.m. on that date in the Westway neighborhood of Federal Way, Helmbrecht was shot in a drive-by and died at the scene.

Helmbrecht was walking past the neighborhood community

center to meet a friend when the two men abruptly stopped and opened fire on him with a large caliber revolver, documents state.

At the time of the shooting, it was illegal for either of the men to possess a firearm — Alvarez-Lopez due to a felony robbery conviction from 2017, and Trejo-Martinez due to being 17 years old at the time.

Alvarez-Lopez's bail has been set at \$2 million and Trejo-Martinez's bail has been set at \$2.5 million because, by his own admission, he admitted to firing the shot that killed Helmbrecht.

Their arraignments are at 9 a.m. July 27 in the GA courtroom of the Maleng Regional Justice Center in

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FW's online crime map temporarily out of order

By OLIVIA SULLIVAN
osullivan@fedwaymirror.com

A routine server switch has resulted in a pause in crimes that are uploaded to the Federal Way Community Crime Map, according to the Federal Way Police Department.

The community crime map, operated by LexisNexis, is an online database showing the types and locations of crimes Federal Way Police respond to. The maps also shows the case report number, the date of the crime, and the time the incident occurred.

"We have control over what we want to upload," said Michelle Roy, crime analyst and crime prevention program coordinator for Federal Way Police. Theft, robberies, burglaries, homicides and assaults are generally uploaded to the map.

Crimes involving involuntary committals, or other medical incidents, may not be uploaded because of possible HIPAA violations, Roy said. Suicides, sex offense crimes and crimes involving children are uploaded depending on circumstance.

Federal Way officers record about 18,000 case reports annually and respond to about 70,000 calls for services per year.

Data is automatically updated daily and contains the most recent six months of data online, according to the city website.

However, a routine update of the outdated server has resulted in broken processes and has changed the database structure, said Michelle Roy, crime analyst for Federal Way Police.

This disruption was not anticipated, she said, and now software engineers are working to translate the data and write code to reintroduce the server connections.

Due to the switch, crime data has not been uploaded and available for public viewing since June 21. Once back up and running, the community crime map will show all of the backlogged data from June through the present day, Roy said.

While there is no official timeline for the crime map to return, Roy said the hope is to have data uploading to the map again within the month.

Roy said she is the primary employee who maintains the data for the public's viewing. Information comes from Federal Way's records management system.

To view the Federal Way Community Crime Map and recorded incident prior to June 21, visit cityoffederalway.com/police/crimestats.

'AJ's coming home'

Family treasures memorial bench for Thomas Jefferson High School student.

By OLIVIA SULLIVAN
osullivan@fedwaymirror.com

AJ Ford was known for his hugs, high-fives and huge smiles.

During a family walk along the Tacoma waterfront years ago, teenaged AJ took off running past the other walkers, joggers, people enjoying the view. He ran straight up to a stranger and wrapped his arms around him.

AJ's mother, Jean Ford, rushed to catch up and began apologizing profusely. The man looked at her. "I really needed that," he said, and hugged AJ back.

At AJ Ford's memorial service, Jean Ford asked how many people had felt the joy of AJ's hugs. A sea of hands rose in the air, showing AJ's love lives on.

The Ford family moved to Federal Way in 1990. One of the main reasons for their move was because the district had inclusive schools, Jean Ford said.

AJ, her youngest son, was her bonus baby born in 1986.

"He was my 'I'm what?'" she said with a loving laugh. After dozens of doctor visits, AJ was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder with autistic-like tendencies at 13 months old.

A few years later, the family bought a house near Thomas Jefferson High School. It sits on the corner of a cul-de-sac neighborhood. Jean Ford, 64, and her husband, Rick, 63, celebrated 44 years of marriage in June.

Her daughter Lea, now 41, graduated from Federal Way High School. Her son Bryan, now 39, was a Decatur High School graduate. AJ began at Thomas Jefferson High School in ninth grade and spent three years in the special education classes.

He never needed glasses, but wanted to wear a pair because his brother did. He loved movies and playing sports with his siblings and neighborhood friends. Though he was considered non-verbal, he was the one to say grace and name each person at the table during any family gathering, Jean Ford said.

He was funny and loved being around other people. He wouldn't have liked having to wear a mask all the time, Jean Ford joked.

On July 16, 2003, the family went to downtown Seattle to get AJ's birth certificate. His siblings had recently gotten their driver's licenses and he wanted his own identification card, Jean Ford said. They made it a day trip and went out to lunch, too.

When they got home, AJ took a



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEAN FORD

AJ Ford.

few movies to watch in his room. A short time later, Jean Ford went to tell him dinner was ready.

"I went back there to tell him he needed to come out for dinner and he was already gone," she said.

She and her older son did CPR, but it was too late, she said. First responders arrived quickly and because AJ was 17 years old at the time, it was treated like a crime scene, she said.

AJ's death certificate says his heart stopped. The King County Medical Examiner's Officer ruled AJ's death as natural and said he died from cardiomegaly with biventricular hypertrophy, which is an abnormal enlargement of the heart with a thickening of the heart's ventricles.

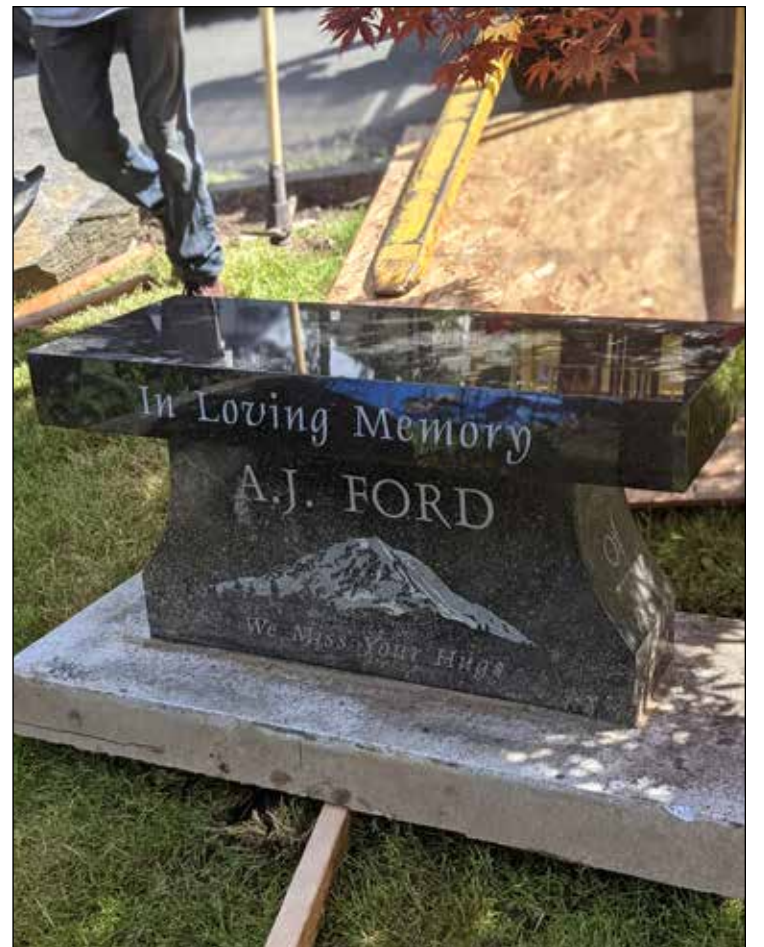
A 2017 American Journal of Public Health report analyzed 40 million deaths in the U.S. to find what role injury played in the deaths of individuals with autism.

Between 1999-2014, there were 1,367 deaths of people with an autism diagnosis. Of those, 381 were attributed to injury. The study found that people with autism die at a much younger age than those without autism — about 36.2 years old compared to the mean age of death for the general population, which is 72 years old.

The cause of AJ's death doesn't change the reality.

"This was so unexpected. It was really hard on all of us," Jean Ford said. "But we have a good, strong community within the school and the neighborhood."

A family friend at Thomas Jefferson that year carried a white rose across the stage at graduation in AJ's honor. The 2004 Thomas Jefferson yearbook dedicated an entire page to AJ, so he wouldn't miss out on the senior section.



AJ Ford's memorial bench was previously at Thomas Jefferson High School. In June, it was moved to the Ford's Federal Way home.

The school's efforts to honor AJ were wonderful, Jean Ford said.

"But I didn't want him to be forgotten."

To commemorate his life, the family had a memorial bench built to be placed at Thomas Jefferson. The bench is made with granite from Africa and, under AJ's name and an engraving of Mount Rainier, reads "we miss your hugs."

In the years after AJ's death, the

bench remained a calming spot for students in the school's special education classes to reflect and

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AJ

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regroup, Jean Ford said. When plans to rebuild Thomas Jefferson High School began, the district informed Jean Ford that the bench would need to be moved. The district took inventory of the numerous historical and sentimental items installed on the Thomas Jefferson High School campus when construction processes started, said Kassie Swenson, chief of communications and strategy for Federal Way Public Schools. "While we honored the past, we also looked toward the future knowing we wouldn't have the space to reinstall all historical items at the new building," Swenson said. The district considered the practical aspects of preserving and reinstalling the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEAN FORD
AJ Ford posing for a photo while standing up through the sunroof of his brother's mustang.

items, some of which were not able to be preserved due to their age, location or material, she added. "We recognized the unique significance of memorial items and felt it was important to reach out to families regarding those memorial items that were not able to be reinstalled on the new campus," she said, adding that the district used existing resources to relocate AJ's bench. The new Thomas Jefferson High School campus is set to

open in the fall. On June 16, the bench was delivered to the Ford's Federal Way home. The transition was proof of the district's care and heart, Jean Ford said. "I am so, so grateful," Ford said. "They, to me, are going above and beyond. They are showing the desire to honor what this bench represented." Now, AJ's bench sits on the southern corner of their cul-de-sac property, nestled between two Japanese maple



Vern and Jon, from Federal Way Public Schools maintenance department, safely transported AJ's memorial bench to the Ford's home on June 16.

trees and a raised flower bed. Soon, a peace rose planted nearby will bloom. When Jean Ford told her older kids about the bench's delivery, she simply said: "AJ's coming home." From their house, the Ford's can see AJ's bench through their front windows. If the couple decides to move to be closer to their older children, AJ will move with them. Sometimes Jean Ford wonders if she should have made a memorial scholarship in AJ's name for students studying to become special education teachers or something similar to benefit future generations. But the bench gives her a place to see and be with AJ again. "Something I can hug if I need to."

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