

DA NEWS

SUMMER 2024
JULY



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Message from DA Rocah

We kicked off the summer and National Gun Violence and Prevention Month for June with another successful gun buyback.

Community efforts like gun buybacks, in partnership with law enforcement, and sensible gun safety legislation like New York's strong red flag laws are key to keeping firearms out of the wrong hands.

I am pleased to see the latest SCOTUS ruling that upheld the federal law prohibiting individuals with domestic violence restraining orders from having firearms. Also, through the filing of an amicus brief with the Supreme Court, I joined my colleagues nationwide in urging SCOTUS to uphold federal regulation of ghost guns.

Together, through sensible laws, community collaboration on safe storage practices, and my commitment to vigorous prosecution of gun traffickers, we are working to save lives and keep all our neighborhoods safer.

Miriam Rocah

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75 Guns Surrendered in New Rochelle at National Gun Violence Prevention, Awareness Month Kick-Off



NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y.–Seventy five firearms were collected June 1 at a community gun buyback held at Shiloh Baptist Church in New Rochelle. A total of \$13,750 in gift cards were exchanged, with no questions asked, for surrendered shotguns, handguns and rifles from the public.

Joined by Shiloh Baptist Church New Rochelle Rev. Dr. H. Lee Jordan, Jr., Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America volunteers and New Rochelle community leaders, DA Rocah and Commissioner Gazzola commemorated the start of National Gun Violence Awareness Month in support of proactive community-based efforts like gun buybacks, education on safe gun storage practices and enforcement of New York's enhanced gun safety laws.

"I am proud to kick off National Gun Violence Awareness Month by getting 75 firearms off our streets and out of potentially the wrong hands," DA Rocah said. "I thank the New Rochelle Police Department and Shiloh Baptist Church for being valuable partners in today's successful buyback event, and to our community advocates who work with us year-round to reduce gun-involved incidents, including suicides."



NOTABLE CASES

Yonkers Police Officer Indicted for Assaulting Man

Yonkers Police sergeant Hector Cartagena was indicted for assaulting a suspect who was being placed into custody on March 14. The defendant allegedly kicked the suspect four times and punched him 10 times in the face, causing him a fractured orbital bone. Prior to the incident, the suspect allegedly led police on a high-speed chase following reports he had stolen a vehicle. The pursuit ended in a crash on Warburton and Glenwood avenues in Yonkers. The suspect is being prosecuted by the DA's Office on grand larceny, assault and reckless endangerment charges.

According to the Yonkers Police Department, their Internal Affairs Division initiated an investigation and determined that Cartagena utilized force in a manner not consistent with department policies. Yonkers police placed the defendant on restrictive duty and referred the matter to the DA's Office. **Public Integrity and Law Enforcement Integrity Bureau**

Queens Men Indicted for Home Burglary as a Hate Crime

Following a multi-agency investigation, Juan Carlos Sierra Gonzalez, Jaime Bryan Chang-Fuentes and Job Vera Zambrano were indicted on burglary and hate crimes charges for a September 2023 residential burglary in Ossining where they allegedly targeted the home based on stereotypes about the wealth of the resident, who is Asian. It is alleged that the defendants unlawfully entered the home of a local business owner and stole designer handbags. It is further alleged that the defendants were in possession of burglar's tools commonly used to forcibly enter premises. **Violent Criminal Enterprise Bureau**

Port Chester Man Sentenced for Sexually Assaulting Two Teens

Richard Olmino was sentenced June 3 to 15 years in prison for sexually assaulting two teenagers during two separate attacks in Rye in June 2023. The defendant asked a 16-year-old female jogging in Rye Town Park for help, then took her phone and threw her to the ground as she tried to run away. The defendant told the victim he had a knife before exposing himself and sexually assaulting her. DNA evidence from the incident linked the defendant to an earlier, separate incident, where the defendant approached an 18-year-old female who was walking home from an after-prom party. The defendant asked the teen for help, took her cell phone and threatened her before sexually assaulting her. **Sex Crimes Bureau**

Peekskill Councilman Charged with Filing Fraudulent Petitions

Peekskill Councilman Robert Scott was arrested and charged with filing designating petitions containing forged signatures for a seat on the Westchester County Board of Legislators in the June 2023 Democratic primary election. It is alleged that on April 10, 2023, the defendant filed, with the Westchester County Board of Elections, designating petitions containing forged signatures of eight individuals, who told DA's Office investigators that they never signed a petition for the defendant. The alleged forged signatures appeared on three of the 37 sheets that the defendant signed as a witness. **Public Integrity and Law Enforcement Integrity Bureau, Criminal Investigators Squad**

Peekskill Cab Driver Gets 16 Years for Sex Acts with Child

Luis Urgiles was sentenced April 23 to 16 years in prison after a jury convicted him of Course of Sexual Conduct Against a Child in the First Degree and Endangering the Welfare of a Child. The defendant, a cab driver in Peekskill, met the victim's family while they were passengers in his cab. The defendant befriended the family and began grooming the then 10-year-old victim in order to sexually abuse and assault her. The defendant repeatedly subjected the victim to multiple sex acts between October 2021 and July 2022. **Child Abuse Bureau, Sex Crimes Bureau, Special Prosecutions Division**

Yonkers Man Sentenced to 12 Years in Prison for Arson

Following a two-week jury trial in April, Angel Rivera was convicted and sentenced in May to 12 years in prison for setting a Yonkers apartment on fire in the middle of the night in June 2021 with a resident inside. The defendant lit an object and threw it into an open window of a ground floor apartment on Elm Street, causing the unit to catch fire. A good Samaritan kicked in the door of the apartment and helped a resident, who was sleeping, escape before the Yonkers Fire Department arrived to put out the fire. The incident, which made the apartment uninhabitable, was captured on surveillance video. **Trials & Investigations Division**

Mt Kisco Man Gets 18 Years for Deadly Stabbing of Housemate

Oscar Manolo Morales was sentenced in May to 18 years in prison after pleading guilty to fatally stabbing his housemate, 36-year-old Rey David Esquivel Lemus, with a kitchen knife. In June 2023, the defendant and victim engaged in a verbal dispute that turned physical in their multi-family home in Mt. Kisco. The defendant grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed the victim four times throughout his body, including his chest. The victim was transported to Northern Westchester Hospital and pronounced dead. **Homicide Bureau**

Iohud. The Journal News

NEW ROCHELLE

Inaugural Westchester DA awards highlight teamwork in New Rochelle sex abuse case

Jonathan Bandler
Rockland/Westchester Journal News

Published 7:40 a.m. ET May 16, 2024 | Updated 7:40 a.m. ET May 16, 2024



Investigators, prosecutors and support staff whose work led to the conviction of a sexual predator of teenage boys in New Rochelle were among the recipients of the 2023 awards in the Westchester District Attorney's Office.

The inaugural Patrick P. Moore Award for Excellence in Prosecution and the Stuart Cohen Award for Investigative Excellence went to the extended team that investigated and prosecuted [Jason Ricketts](#), who was sentenced to 21 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexually abusing three boys in New Rochelle over a four-year period and videotaping the abuse.

Cyber Crimes Bureau Chief Laura Forbes, Domestic Violence Deputy Bureau Chief Janelle Armentano, Child and Elder Abuse Bureau Chief Christine Hatfield, Senior Assistant District Attorney Mollie O'Rourke of the sex crimes bureau, Melissa Sheeley, investigations information coordinator and Stacey Nolan-Meaney, clinical trauma therapist, shared the prosecution award.

The investigative award went to Criminal Investigators Thomas Woodburn and Marecia Baltimore, Senior Criminal Investigator Lathia Smith and crime analyst Chloe McSwiney.

Moore was a retired 35-year veteran prosecutor in the office who died last year while participating in Swim Across America in Larchmont. Cohen was a senior criminal investigator who worked in the DA's office for 11 years until his death in 2007 from a fatal narcotics exposure suffered during a raid of a heroin stash house in Hartsdale.



Some of the Westchester District Attorney's Office 2023 award winners pose with DA Mimi Rocah (third from right) on May 14, 2024. From left: Thomas Woodburn and Chloe McSwiney, recipients of the Stuart Cohen Award for Investigative Excellence, and Laura Forbes, Stacey Nolan-Meaney and Christine Hatfield, recipients of the Patrick P. Moore Award for Excellence in Prosecution. *Provided By Westchester District Attorney's Office*

The Priscilla Patrinos Staffer of the Year Award went to Olivia Kelly, coordinator of administration, who has worked in the DA's Office since 2006. Patrinos worked under three administrations during a 31-year career in the DA's Office before retiring in 2010.

"The people of Westchester County should be proud to know that some of the most dedicated, hard working and committed public servants are fighting every day on behalf of victims and ensuring justice is served," District Attorney Mimi Rocah said in a statement announcing the awards that she established this past year. "By instituting these awards, we have an opportunity as an office of more than 250 people to celebrate the remarkable achievement of our prosecutors, investigators, analysts, aides and support staff."

Westfair Business Journal

Legal Aid Society of Westchester opens training center in White Plains

By PETER KATZ - June 27, 2024

Members of the judicial and legislative branches of state and county government were on hand for the grand opening late yesterday afternoon of the Legal Aid Society of Westchester's (LASW) new Training Center in downtown White Plains.

Located at LASW's headquarters at 150 Grand Street, the 6,337-square-foot Training Center features a cutting-edge Moot Courtroom, two spacious conference rooms, two offices, and three public areas: reception, kitchenette, and lounge which also double as breakout areas. A Moot Courtroom simulates a real court environment to give law students an opportunity to put their learning into practice. It also can be used by attorneys in their trial preparation. The Moot Courtroom uses the latest technology including four large video screens that seamlessly connect to all other screens in the Center.

"This Training Center came out of our mission to improve mandated representation across New York State, and particularly in the ninth Judicial District, which incorporates Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland counties. Our purpose is to provide training for all of the public defenders and Family Court representation within the Ninth Judicial District," said LASW Executive Director Clare J. Degnan. "Young attorneys need to understand that they can be incredible advocates



Ribbon-cutting at the new Legal Aid facility in White Plains. From left: State Sen. Shelley Mayer; Westchester County DistrAttorney Miriam Rocah; Clare J. Degnan; Chief Judge of the State of New York Hon. Rowan D. Wilson; Senior AssociaJustice, Appellate Division, 2nd Dept. Hon. Cheryl E. Chambers; Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiativ Hon. Edwina D. Richardson; Legal Aid Society of Westchester Deputy Executive Director Sherry Wallace; County LegislatJewell Williams Johnson; Office of Indigent Legal Services Director Patricia Warth; and New York Assemblyman ChBurdick. *Photo by John Vecchiolla.*

to stand up for their clients and push back at any injustices or biases. But the way to do that is to practice in an area that you're comfortable with. That means you get comfortable in a courtroom like this. You can take that skill set outside and do what you need to do as a public defender in the real world."

Degnan noted that the Training Center is not just for lawyers but is for the entire community.

LASW provides free criminal and family court al representation to persons who are unable to afford an attorney. It also handles appeals and post-conviction matters for its clients. The staff includes experienced defense attorneys, family court attorneys, social workers, investigators, and professional support individuals.

IN THE COMMUNITY



Child Abuse & Elder Abuse Bureau Chief Christine Hatfield (above left at podium) joined organizers and members from our Special Prosecutions Division (top right) at the walk and information & resources event in support of Third Annual Yo Digo No Mas/I Say No More Walk Against Sexual Abuse of Children in Yonkers April 27.



Rye Bureau Chief Cynthia Adimari (far left) and Deputy Criminal Investigations Chief Wade Hardy (second from left) met students from Port Chester Middle School at their College and Career Fair on May 17.

Members of the DA's Office DEI Committee at the 20th Annual White Plains Juneteenth Parade & Festival June 8 honoring Westchester County's oldest celebration honoring Juneteenth.



Assistant DA Christine Cervasio, Mount Vernon Bureau Chief, spoke to middle school students on June 4 for Career Day at Benjamin Turner Academy in Mount Vernon, where she shared her career path to being a prosecutor.



DA Rocah returned to Pace University's Elisabeth Haub School of Law for this year's "Law Day" with the White Plains Youth Bureau where she delivered remarks for the 2024 theme "Voices of Democracy."

IN THE COMMUNITY



Among the countywide events throughout the year that the Office participates in to speak to seniors on protecting themselves from becoming targets or victims of crimes: the annual Salute to Seniors where DA Rocah and Senior Domestic Violence Aide Karen Simmons met seniors at the May 30 info and resources expo at the Westchester County Center; and Child and Elder Abuse Bureau Chief Christine Hatfield (bottom, second from right at table) speaking at a scam prevention panel May 14 at the Larchmont Mamaroneck Local Summit.



Members of the Office's Criminal Investigators Squad ran in the Tri-County Law Enforcement Torch Run on May 6 in support of Special Olympics New York during 2024 National Police Week. The run included eight legs throughout the county starting in Yonkers and ending in Peekskill, and marked the 38th year Westchester County law enforcement participated in the annual tradition.



The Westchester Jewish Council and the Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center hosted the Annual Westchester Yom Hashoah Commemoration for Holocaust Remembrance Day in the Garden of Remembrance in White Plains May 6.

Deputy Chief Investigators Andy Grascia and Wade Hardy spoke about their law enforcement backgrounds and the role of the DA's Office to members of the Westchester Youth Police Academy on May 24 at the Westchester County Courthouse. The six-week internship program, run by Westchester police departments and high schools, offers seniors with an interest in criminal justice and law enforcement an opportunity to learn more about careers in the field.

Honoring Jewish American Heritage at the DA's Office

The Office was proud to honor DA Miriam Rocah during Jewish American Heritage Month in May. Elected in 2020, DA Rocah is Westchester County's first Jewish American woman District Attorney, making her the second Jewish American to lead the DA's Office and one of just two currently sitting Jewish district attorneys in the state of New York.

Westchester County's first Jewish American DA was Leonard Rubinfeld, who served from 1962 to 1967. A graduate of Peekskill High School, the University of Alabama, and Fordham Law School, Mr. Rubinfeld served in WWII in the Army Combat Infantry in the Pacific Theatre of Operations, 81st Infantry Division, before serving in the New York State Attorney General's Office as an Assistant AG and then as an Assistant DA in this Office before his election to DA. He ascended to the bench following his term as DA, becoming a Westchester County Court Judge, Justice to the Supreme



Court of the State of New York, Associate Justice to the Appellate Term of the Supreme Court for the Ninth and Tenth Judicial Districts, and Acting Deputy Administrator of the Ninth Judicial District. He was also a volunteer Fireman in Peekskill, President of the New York State District Attorneys' Association, and Past Commander of the Westchester County Council of the Jewish War Veterans. He passed at the age of 97 in December 2009 in Peekskill



Office Welcomes 2024 Summer Interns

The Office welcomed our 2024 Summer Interns representing 21 colleges and universities, and six law schools. These 37 students started their eight-week, full-time program, which includes a rotation throughout our bureaus and divisions to learn how the criminal justice system works.

#WearOrange Day at Office

Taking part in what is now an annual tradition, teams throughout the DA's Office proudly wore orange on National Gun Violence Awareness Day in memory of all victims and survivors of gun violence. The Wear Orange Day campaign, created in memory of Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old victim of a fatal 2013 shooting in Chicago, raises awareness among youth, families, and communities impacted daily by gun violence.



DA's Office at 13 locations for Aug. 6 National Night Out

The Westchester DA's Office will be stationed at 13 locations throughout the county on Tuesday, Aug. 6 for National Night Out, the annual community-building nationwide campaign that promotes police-community partnerships.

In addition to safety information, the DA's Office tables will be giving away toys and sweets at the following locations: Town Hall in Greenburgh; Hartley Park in Mount Vernon; City Hall in New Rochelle; Pugsley Park in Peekskill; Lyons Park in Port Chester; Depot Square in Tuckahoe; Kensico Dam in Valhalla; Lexington Avenue in White Plains; Andrus Park, JFK Marina, Speckman Community Center and Sullivan's Oval Park in Yonkers; and Memorial Field in Yorktown.

For more information, visit: <https://natw.org>



Child Abuse Bureau Chief Recipient of 'Extra Mile' Award

Child Abuse and Elder Abuse Bureau Chief Christine Hatfield was a recipient of the "Extra Mile Award" presented by the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) at the Westchester County Institute of Human Development during their April 25 ceremony and breakfast.



Christine Hatfield
Child Abuse Bureau Chief

The CAC recognized members from partner agencies during Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month who go above and beyond, the "extra mile," in support of its mission to provide services toward child welfare as well as research, education and prevention of child abuse in the county.



Members from the Special Prosecutions Division with ADA Christine Hatfield (third from left) at the CAC awards ceremony April 25.

ADA Named President-Elect to HV Hispanic Bar Assoc.

Senior ADA Livia Rodriguez (second from left) was sworn in as President-Elect of the Hudson Valley Hispanic Bar Association at its gala June 27 in Mahopac, New York.

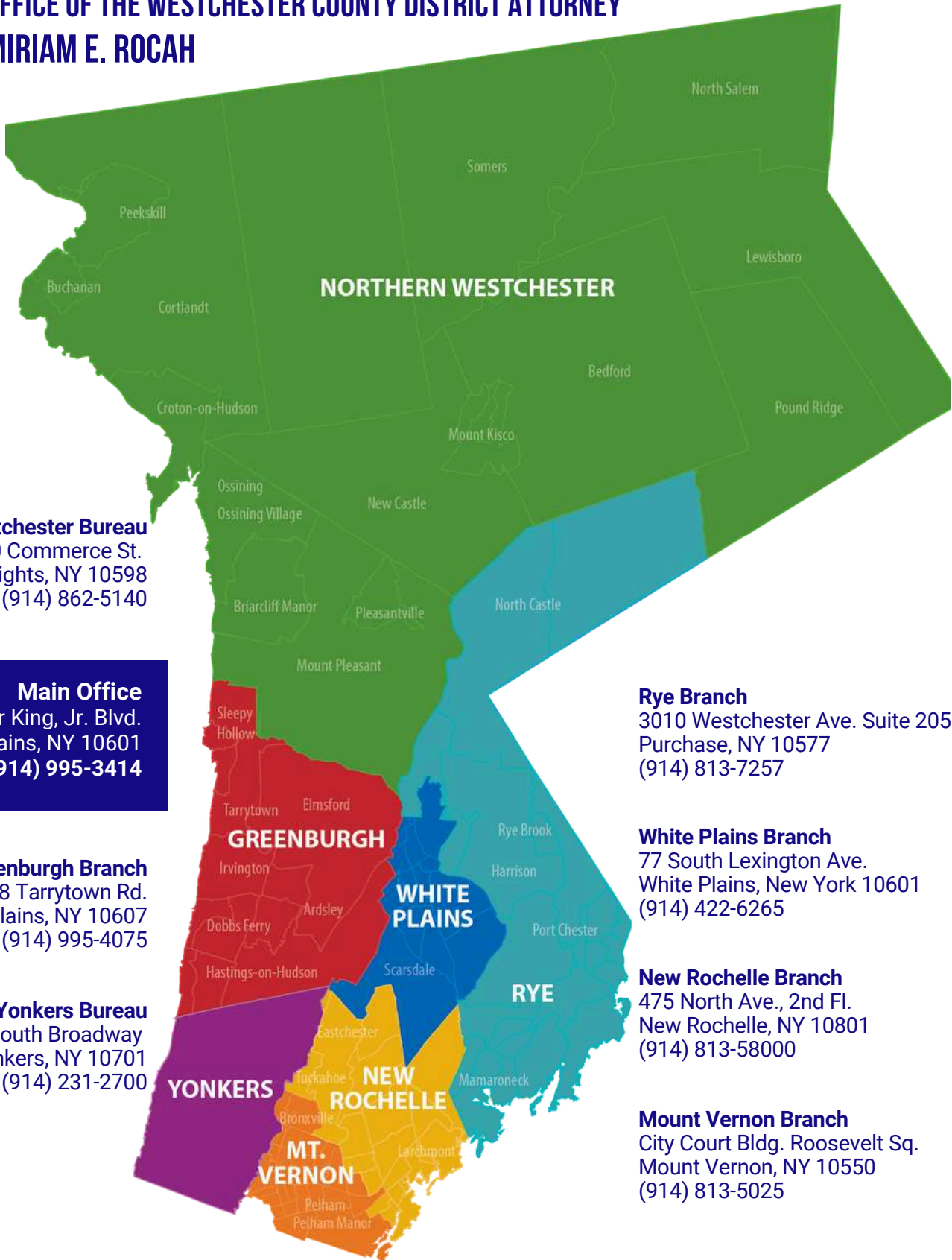
The inaugural gala featured a keynote address by Hon. Joseph A. Zayas, Chief Administrative Judge of the New York State Unified Court System, and honorees Hon. Maria Vazquez-Doles and Hon. Anne E. Minihan, judges in the Ninth Judicial District of New York, Hon. Walter Rivera of the New York Court of Claims and, Hon. Nelson S. Román of the U.S. District Court for SDNY.





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