

Useful to think about this incident near Dorney Park as we approach the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police July 28, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

An “old” case in the news today. You no doubt remember it well. A Lehigh Valley police officer killed a mentally disturbed man near Dorney Park two years ago. The allegation in the suit is that the officer was poorly trained. Gadfly is by no means suggesting that the Bethlehem police officers are poorly trained. But this case is a useful reminder of the kinds of issues now discussed nationally in the wake of the George Floyd event and that surely will be discussed here locally at the August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting and beyond in whatever form the Community Engagement Initiative takes. For instance, might the tragic outcome have been different if a mental health specialist had answered this call or accompanied the police officer on it? Gadfly remembers much sincere perplexity at the time surrounding the handling of this matter.

from Peter Hall, “Estate of man shot and killed by former South Whitehall cop sues in federal court.” Morning Call, July 27, 2020.

The former fiancée and children of a man killed by a police officer near Dorney Park two years ago are suing South Whitehall Township and former officer Jonathan Roselle in federal court.

The lawsuit filed Monday in U.S. District Court in Allentown alleges Roselle’s actions were the foreseeable result of South Whitehall’s practice of putting inexperienced officers into service without testing or training in real-world scenarios.

The suit alleges Roselle violated Joseph Santos' constitutional rights by using excessive force to stop him and by failing to provide medical assistance after shooting him.

Santos, 44, of Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, died July 28, 2018, after Roselle shot him five times on Hamilton Boulevard. Roselle was informed by a passing motorist of a man interfering with traffic and encountered Santos, who banged on the windows and climbed on the hood of Roselle's police car, the suit says.

Although Roselle told dispatchers that he would wait for backup to deal with Santos, he got out of his cruiser and shot Santos, who was walking toward the officer with his hands raised. Roselle's admissions to another officer who arrived shortly after the shooting that he had "f—ed up," and that he "didn't know what to do" were captured on Roselle's police body camera, which he believed was switched off, the suit says.

Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin found Roselle's use of deadly force was not justified and charged him with criminal homicide. At Roselle's trial in March, a state police expert in use of force testified that Santos was not charging and appeared lethargic when Roselle shot, and that Roselle had ample time to switch from his gun to a less-lethal option. Cpl. Kevin Selverian also testified he had "never heard such a definitive admission of mistake" as Roselle's after the shooting, the suit noted.

Roselle was [found not guilty at the end of the two-week trial in Lehigh County Court](#) where jurors saw video of the incident and heard Roselle testify that he feared Santos would disarm him.