

Town: Minister bound, hurt

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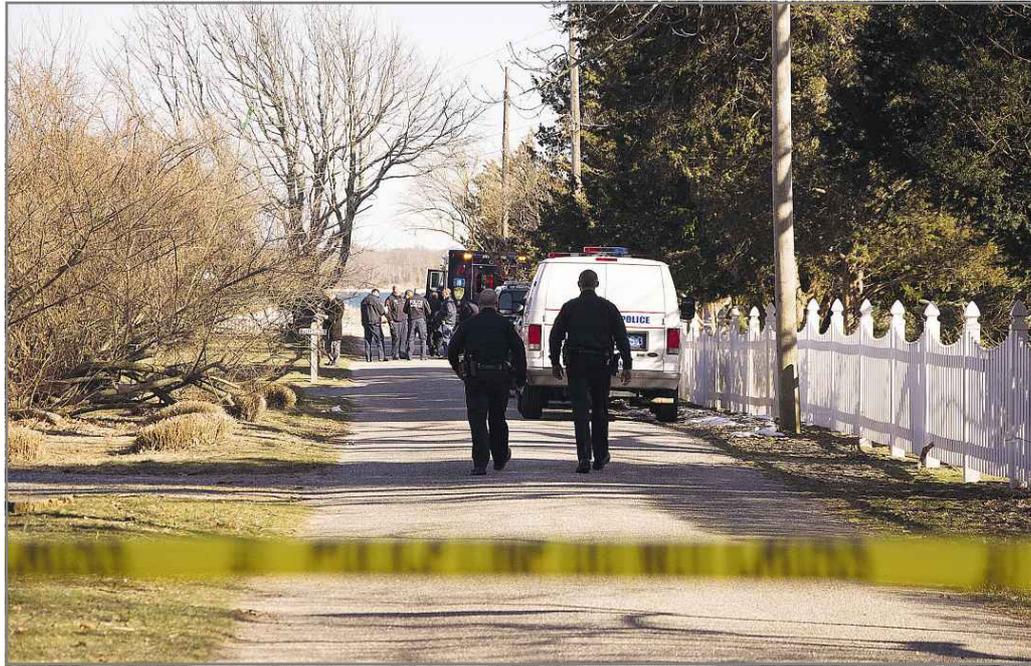
A retired minister on Shelter Island was tied up in a home invasion several days ago and found Monday by a friend during a wellness check, authorities said.

The victim, who was not identified by police, was found seated in a chair at his home, not far from Shell Beach, and was airlifted to a hospital, said Town Supervisor Gary Gerth, who spoke to police at the scene. The minister has friends checking on him every three or four days, Gerth said.

"His garage door was open, so his friend went directly into the house and found him tied up and . . . immediately called 911," Gerth said. "The person was in pretty difficult shape."

In an email asking for prayers, the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island identified the victim as Paul Wancura, a long-time priest and one of its former archdeacons, and said he was a victim of a home invasion. Voting records show Wancura is 87.

The Rev. Charles McCarron of St. Mary's Episcopal Church



Police investigate Monday at the Shelter Island home of a man who was found tied up and injured.

on Shelter Island said he found Wancura tied up.

Wancura told him he had been bound for at least a couple days but was not entirely lucid due to his condition, McCarron said.

After Wancura did not show

up as scheduled to serve at the Church of the Messiah in Central Islip, McCarron said that church leaders there asked him to check on the retired minister.

The victim has serious injuries but details on what hap-

pened were still being gathered, Gerth said.

Investigators from town and county police departments, including Suffolk crime scene investigators, were visible at the roped-off Oak Tree Lane on Monday afternoon.

Wancura was undergoing surgery Monday night at Stony Brook University Hospital, where McCarron said he was waiting.

Wancura had been the minister for at least 25 years at the Caroline Church of Brookhaven in Setauket, McCarron said.

Gerth described the victim as a "good man" who had been as active as he could be, going at one point to physical fitness classes at the school and driving around, albeit slowly.

Town police could not be immediately reached.

A Suffolk police spokesman said he was awaiting details of the case.

On Monday, residents of the quiet, small town were wishing the victim well and wondering about the motive for the crime, Gerth said.

"Why? There's so many empty houses on Shelter Island, and he's such a good person," Gerth said. "It's really been a shock to all of us. This type of thing, a home invasion, doesn't really happen out here. We tend to be . . . caring and everybody knows their neighbor, so this is a once-in-a-300-year occurrence."

Trees cleared on 60-acre site for solar farm

BY MARK HARRINGTON
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The developer of a planned solar farm in Mastic has completed clearing 60 acres of the 100-acre wooded property, but opponents of the project say they won't give up a lawsuit to stop it, and one lawmaker continues to press for alternative sites.

A spokesman for developer Gerald Rosengarten's Middle Island Solar Farm said crews finished clearing trees on Thursday, two weeks after work started. They faced an April 1 deadline related to restrictions on bat habitat.

Spokesman Michael Woloz said the thousands of trees felled will be chipped in place or carted away. He said he wasn't sure if still-rooted tree stumps will be removed — an important point for Assemb. Steve Englebright (D-Setauket), who said

he has identified a property that would be more appropriate for the project.

"It ain't over till it's over," said Englebright, "and it ain't over."

Englebright said he recently added pine barrens protection for the Mastic Woods property to the Assembly budget bill, a move to restrict future uses for the property, not Rosengarten's solar farm, along with about 800 acres around the shuttered Shoreham nuclear plant. Englebright's measure, along with a companion State Senate version by Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson) passed the legislature last year, but Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo vetoed it.

Keeping the stumps in place could allow the forest to rejuvenate itself if another site is chosen. A spokesman for Cuomo indicated the governor is working on a separate track to preserve the Shoreham property,

but not Rosengarten's privately owned land. Cuomo's budget would also preserve smaller town and county parcels in Mastic Woods.

Cuomo spokesman Rich Azopardi said, "We're actively working with all parties on a solution that will allow for both renewable energy projects and land preservation."

Opponents of the project say they will press ahead with a lawsuit that argues the project does not conform to a town code preventing clearing wooded land for solar. The developer argues that because the code wasn't in place when he submitted his application, it doesn't apply.

"We're demanding an injunction to stop any further work and that all equipment be removed," said MaryAnn Johnston, a plaintiff and president of the Affiliated Brookhaven

Civic Organization. A state judge issued a temporary restraining order when the work began, but it was lifted after a day.

Opponents of the plan say they have been blindsided by the amount of clearing that has gone on at the property.

A Brookhaven Town spokesman initially told Newsday last week that Rosengarten was permitted to clear only 40 acres. But later he corrected that to say that all 60 were allowed.

The cleared land for the solar farm begins at the southern end of the property between Barnes Road and Cranford Boulevard and Moriches-Middle Island Road.

"It's absolutely outrageous," said Dick Amper, executive director of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society. "We were told that all they could do was at

most 40 acres. The town wasn't watching the store." Rosengarten and Brookhaven Supervisor Edward P. Romaine have been sparring about whether trees could have been spared.

Romaine, in a March 2 letter to Rosengarten, noted the town in December "proposed the use of several pieces of land for your solar project in exchange for the preservation of the entire Mastic Woods parcel. Unfortunately, this offer was rebuffed by you and your team."

Rosengarten, in a response to Romaine on March 9, said the town "never formally presented us with locations of land that would be swapped for the Mastic Woods lot."

Despite the clearing that is already complete, Rosengarten told Romaine "we want to preserve as many trees as possible while pursuing a critical renewable energy project."