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Clown murder trial again delayed

Newly discovered leads pursued in decades-old Wellington case

Hannah Phillips Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

Investigators are still unearthing new information in the decades-old murder of Marlene Warren, whose accused killer was set to face jurors in fewer than two weeks.

Prosecutors say it was Sheila Keen-Warren who dressed as a clown and shot the Wellington woman to death in 1990. But the discovery this week of a file con-



Keen-Warren

taining roughly 40 other leads has given reason for pause.

The 25-page file, handwritten in 1990 by the case's original investigators, could aid in Keen-Warren's defense, said her attorney, Greg Rosenfeld.

Its discovery is a sort of vindication for Keen-Warren's attorneys, who have long argued that prosecutor Reid Scott and lead investigator Paige McCann "willfully turned a blind eye" to evidence that could help absolve their client.

Their accusations appeared to fall on deaf ears



Suskauer

Tuesday, when Circuit Judge Scott Suskauer denied the motions outlining their concerns. Now the judge is reconsidering.

Suskauer said he had no choice Friday but to delay the trial yet again, which was originally scheduled for early 2020 and has been pushed back several times. He is also considering imposing sanctions on Scott for his actions preceding this latest delay.

See TRIAL, Page 9A

Pretty in pink: Colorful statement at Boca home



A unique home at 1165 NE Second Terrace in Boca Raton is on the market for \$1.99 million and has a plethora of pink accents. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY COASTAL HOME TOURS

Town's signature color is taken to (easily changed) extremes

Kimberly Miller

Palm Beach Post
USA TODAY NETWORK

Home stagers often extol the virtues of neutral hues in taupe or beige or something called "smoked oyster" as the best colors for selling a house.

But a unique property on the market for \$1.99 million in Boca Raton is going with something punchier — shades of pink. And not a subtle buff pink, but something more in line with flamingo pink, bubblegum pink and Barbie pink.

Lang Realty Broker Associate Erik Nissani took on the challenge of representing the uber upgraded and restyled three-bedroom home built in 1962 in the coveted "golden triangle" area of Boca Raton, which is within walking distance to dining at Royal Palm Place and shopping at Mizner Park.

Near Federal Highway and Glades Road at 1165 NE Second Terrace, the home is also a short ride to the beach.

"When I saw it I thought it was more like something creative that you would see in Miami or Fort Lauderdale, but it's set in Boca Raton," Nissani said. "It really is something that is an homage to a retro look for Boca Raton."

Pink has been a signature color of Boca Raton for



Lang Realty Broker Associate Erik Nissani points out the pink kitchen cabinets are among the elements that could easily be changed.

decades. The former Boca Raton Resort and Club, now the Boca Raton Hotel, was all pink until a \$200 million makeover painted the iconic 1926 Cloister hotel a nice cream, which is closer to its original color.

Nissani emphasized that several of the pinkest parts of the house, such as the kitchen cabinets, doors and gate, can be replaced or toned down. Most of the walls are white with clean lines and accents of mint. One bedroom is painted black.

Knowing some people may immediately shy away

See PINK, Page 8A

Probe sought in alleged threat from Cruz juror

Terry Spencer and Anthony Izaguirre

ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT LAUDERDALE — Prosecutors of Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz called for an investigation Friday after a juror said another panelist threatened her during the deliberations that ended with a life sentence for Cruz's murder of 17 people four years ago at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Prosecutor Carolyn McCann told Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer during a brief hearing that prosecutors are not trying to invalidate Thursday's jury vote and reported the threat only for safety reasons and so the Broward County Sheriff's Office can investigate.

In their written motion asking for the hearing, prosecutors said the juror told them another juror did something during deliberations that "she perceived to be a threat."

McCann said they did not ask any further questions because they didn't want to taint any investigation and said the Broward state attorney's office has no intention of getting involved further.

See THREAT, Page 8A

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Governor's backers give to relief fund

Campaign contributors add to positive publicity

Zac Anderson and Douglas Soule
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE – Shortly after Hurricane Ian made landfall, the Florida Disaster Fund was activated to help tens of thousands of victims of one of the nation's worst natural disasters in history.

It has since raised roughly \$45 million, a record for the Fund, and in the process is lifting the profile of Florida first lady Casey DeSantis, who is promoting it, and giving the governor's office some positive publicity at a time when Gov. Ron DeSantis is less than a month away from reelection.

It's also given major donors to DeSantis' election committee another avenue to get in the good graces of the governor and his wife, one of his closest advisers. More than two dozen major DeSantis campaign donors have given to the relief fund.

The governor's office initially released the names of 68 donors to the Florida Disaster Fund. Of the 68, at least 25 either donated to the governor's political committee directly or through their company or organization ties, according to a review of donations by USA Today Network-Florida.

Volunteer Florida, the state agency overseeing the Disaster Fund, later released a much longer list of 51,000 donors to the Fund. The vast majority – 83% – are small donors who gave \$200 or less. But a significant portion of the money raised so far by the Fund – and disclosed publicly – has come from large donors who gave \$10,000 or more, and among those donors at least a dozen contributed to the governor's political committee. The Volunteer Florida list only includes donations that have been processed, not all of the pledges, and most of the 68 donors mentioned by the governor's office are not on the list. Many not listed also contributed to the governor's political committee.

Asked if donating to the Fund could be perceived as an indirect way to curry favor with the governor, DeSantis spokesman Bryan Griffin said: "Though critics may not want to believe it, there are, of course, many generous groups and individuals across the political spectrum who want to help their neighbors after a natural disaster."

"To draw such an unfounded conclusion as you have suggested is to ignore the thousands of other donors and dona-



From left, Florida first lady Casey DeSantis, Gov. Ron DeSantis, first lady Jill Biden and President Joe Biden arrive at Fort Myers Beach on Oct. 5 to survey the damage caused by Hurricane Ian. SAUL YOUNG/KNOXVILLE NEWS SENTINEL-USA TODAY NETWORK

tions to the Fund to try to craft narratives about a few," Griffin added.

Volunteer Florida reported that it had so far processed about \$23.3 million from donors, large and small. At least \$3.7 million comes from donors who also contributed to DeSantis' political committee.

Big name donors

Based on the list disclosed publicly by the governor's office, the donors that overlap between the governor's political fundraising and disaster fundraising include his two largest – real estate tycoon and space entrepreneur Robert Bigelow and billionaire hedge fund manager Ken Griffin. It's not clear how much each gave to the Disaster Fund because their pledged donations have yet to be processed. Ultra-rich DeSantis donors, including John Childs and Norman Braman, also have contributed to the Fund, according to the governor's office list.

Other donors to the Fund are Florida businesses or affiliated entities that have a big stake in state government policies. They include JM Family Enterprises, Centene Charitable Foundation, Nomi Health and Florida Power & Light.

Centene has big contracts in Florida to provide health coverage for Medicaid patients and inmates in more than 70 detention facilities. Nomi Health won no-bid contracts from the DeSantis administration for COVID-19 vaccine and testing work. JM Family Enterprises recently received a \$16.5 million grant from the

DeSantis administration for a facility at the port of Jacksonville. Florida Power & Light received a \$5 billion rate increase from a utility regulation panel controlled by DeSantis appointees.

The biggest donation to the Disaster Fund is \$5 million from Charles Schwab. It's not clear if the donation was made by the company he founded or by the billionaire himself. He's not a major contributor to DeSantis' election committee, but his wife, Helen Schwab, gave \$100,000 in 2021.

Disaster dollars

While the Disaster Fund could be viewed as another way for these companies to try and influence DeSantis and boost his political fortunes, one government watchdog said the money, if well-spent, would at least perceptibly be better spent than typical campaign donations.

"A lot of people [are] critical of the huge amounts of money that go into political campaigns that wind up paying for television ads that we all get pretty sick of seeing," said Ben Wilcox, research director and co-founder of the nonpartisan government watchdog Integrity Florida. "At the same time, people would say, 'It's a shame that all that money that goes into campaigns couldn't be used for some good.' In this case those same political donors are making donations to help people affected by the hurricane."

Wilcox said he doesn't see a problem with Casey DeSantis leading the effort.

"Some might see that as a political advantage, but I think overall that it's a legitimate effort and the First Lady is using her role as First Lady to try to do some good and help people," said Wilcox, who cautions, however, that the mix of donations should not be ignored.

"I do have some concerns about these large corporations that may also be campaign donors to Gov. DeSantis, they're making contributions to this disaster fund that could in effect be used to curry favor with the governor," he said.

This isn't the first time the Fund has been used to raise money for hurricane victims.

The Fund is under the umbrella of Volunteer Florida, a state agency. Donations to the Fund go through the Volunteer Florida Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

According to its website, where to distribute the funds is evaluated by "the Executive Director of the [Volunteer Florida Foundation], in discussion with staff and executive committee of the board of directors."

The money is distributed through two types of grants: immediate needs response grants, which go out quickly to approved organizations, and long term recovery grants, which are awarded through a competitive process and can be contracted for one year. The Fund spent at least \$6.5 million after Hurricane Irma in 2017, and at least \$16 million after Hurricane Michael in 2018, according to the Volunteer Florida website. The money went to dozen of charities involved in disaster relief, paying for everything from tree removal to home cleaning.

Fund donations are already being spent to help Hurricane Ian victims, with \$1 million awarded to groups such as Catholic Charities, The Salvation Army, American Red Cross, Feeding Florida and United Way Collier County. The governor's office announced Thursday that another \$2 million is being awarded to the Florida Sheriff's Association, the Florida Police Benevolent Association, the Florida Fraternal Order of Police and the Florida Professional Firefighters to "aid their members in the storm recovery process."

Follow Herald-Tribune Political Editor Zac Anderson on Twitter at @zacjanderson. He can be reached at zac.anderson@heraldtribune.com

USA Today Network-Florida government accountability reporter Douglas Soule is based in Tallahassee, Fla. He can be reached at DSoule@gannett.com. Twitter: @DouglasSoule

Threat

Continued from Page 1A

"We don't want to touch this with a 10-foot pole," she said.

Scherer agreed that if a possible crime was committed, deputies should investigate. The information has been turned over to sheriff's investigators, who will contact the juror.

Florida criminal defense attorneys Richard Escobar and David Weinstein, who are both former prosecutors, said in interviews that even if a threat was made to a juror, the jury's decision cannot be overturned because of double jeopardy,

or trying the same defendant twice for the same crime.

Scherer said two jurors tried to speak to her after Thursday's decision was announced, she said, but she told them that wouldn't be appropriate.

Jurors have told local TV stations that the final vote was 9-3 for death, with one of the three voters for life adamant she would never change her mind. Under Florida law, a death sentence requires a unanimous vote, and jurors decided there was no point in continuing deliberations.

Scherer will sentence Cruz to life without parole at a Nov. 1 hearing – a punishment whose announcement left many families of the victims angered.



Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooter Nikolas Cruz reacts to the verdict on Thursday.

AMY BETH BENNETT/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL VIA AP POOL

Pink

Continued from Page 1A

from the pinkness, he added a photo-shopped picture to the listing of the kitchen with gray cabinets.

"It's the kitchen and the gate and the front doors that are mostly pink and those can be easily changed for someone," he said. "It's definitely a home done with a designer's eye. Every designer has loved this house."

The pool tile is also pink and white.

The 1,750-square foot, mid-century modern home was purchased in November 2019 for \$570,000 by Declan Morgan. Nissani said the owner gutted the house and rebuilt it with a new garage, new roof, new air conditioning, impact glass, matte Italian porcelain flooring and an oversized heated pool and spa.

High-end finishes include kitchen countertops of snow quartz and a single slab of black granite for the primary bathroom's double sinks.

"I love all shades of pink," said Kathie Kime, an accredited home stager for the Palm Beach Real Estate Team.

But she likes her pinks in accent pieces or artwork. Pink walls, which



A unique home at 1165 NE 2nd Terrace in Boca Raton is on the market for \$1.99 million and has a plethora of pink accents. PROVIDED BY COASTAL HOME TOURS

Nissani's listing doesn't have, are an "immediate objection," she said.

"There might be 100 people that like bright pink, for others, it's a negative first impression," Kime said. "Pink is such a personal decision, people may rule it out."

Nissani, who will donate part of his commission to breast cancer research with a matching amount from Lang Realty, is undeterred.

He said homes in the "golden triangle" are selling for \$1.5 to \$1.7 million, then buyers tear them down to build

new. It's not a historic neighborhood and has no homeowners association fees.

"It's just about finding that specific person," Nissani said about selling the home.

Boca Raton has seen other challenging home sales, including the notable "Star Trek" home of Marc H. Bell that first hit the market in 2014 for \$35 million touting a theater with a "Next Generation"-style captain's ready room and a replica of the bridge of the starship Enterprise.

Bell, a Star Trek lover since the age of 10, never sold the 27,000-square-foot estate with nearly 20,000 square feet under air, and never changed the Star Trek theater. He recently added a helipad to the 1.6-acre estate to make it easier for people to visit.

Bell is co-founder and CEO of Terran Orbital, which makes small satellites and has its headquarters in Boca Raton.

"It's a Trekkie's dream come true," Bell said about his job.

Kimberly Miller is a veteran journalist for The Palm Beach Post, part of the USA TODAY Network – Florida. If you have news tips, please send them to kmiller@pbpost.com.

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