

Pet cremation fraud suspect plans to plead guilty

Patrick Vereb accused of defrauding more than 6,500 clients

BY TAWNIA PANIZZI

Whatever amount of punishment former pet crematory director Patrick Vereb gets won't be enough for Harrison resident Pam Yaconis.

Vereb, 72, is accused by the state Attorney General's Office of tossing animal remains into landfills instead of providing proper afterlife care.

He is expected to plead guilty Oct. 22 during an appearance before Judge Jaime Hickton in Allegheny County Court. Details of the agreement were not made available Thursday.

"What this guy did, it's sick," said Yaconis, who entrusted Vereb to cremate her

11-year-old Aussie mix, Blue. "My granddaughter still cries over this dog. She was so little when I got Blue, and she was attached to her for the dog's whole life."

"We have a blanket with the dog's picture that she covers up with every day. I hope he gets jail time and has to pay everyone restitution

and then some."

A representative for Vereb's attorney, Louis Emmi, said his office does not comment on pending cases.

Vereb, of Hazelwood, owned a funeral home and pet crematory in Harrison and another in Hazelwood.

He was charged in April 2025 with multiple felony



Vereb: AG's office says he took \$660K for cremations that never happened or were improperly handled

Office alleged Vereb defrauded more than 6,500 pet owners between 2021 and 2024, receiving about \$660,000 for cremations that never happened or were improperly handled.

In addition to being accused of dumping pets' bodies, Vereb is accused of routinely giving pet owners ashes from animals that were not theirs.

He originally had been

VEREB • A7



Work continues on asphalt plant site along Route 119 in East Huntingdon. (Louis B. Ruediger | TribLive)

LAYING A FOUNDATION

Site preparation for \$10M asphalt plant underway in East Huntingdon

BY RENATTA SIGNORINI

Land is being cleared along Route 119 in East Huntingdon for a proposed asphalt plant expected to open in the spring.

A public meeting and hearing about the project are scheduled next week.

The Westmoreland County Industrial Development Authority on Monday will consider a request from Sand Hill Materials to secure up to \$10 million in bond financing on their behalf, according to the board's agenda.

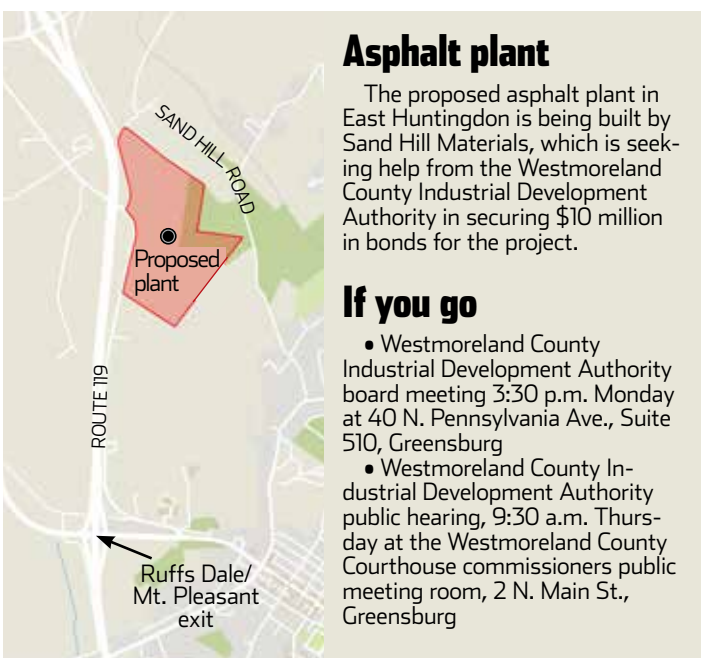
The authority Thursday is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the

matter. Meanwhile, East Huntingdon supervisors said they have been working with the Department of Environmental Protection through the permitting process to make sure the plant meets the agency's requirements.

"We're not going to sit back and let this plant come in and do what they want," especially if it affects nearby businesses and residents, said Supervisor Jeff Keefer.

Preparation at the site, visible to southbound traffic on Route 119, has been ramping up over the past month. The plant is anticipated to

ASPHALT PLANT • A4



Asphalt plant

The proposed asphalt plant in East Huntingdon is being built by Sand Hill Materials, which is seeking help from the Westmoreland County Industrial Development Authority in securing \$10 million in bonds for the project.

If you go

- Westmoreland County Industrial Development Authority board meeting 3:30 p.m. Monday at 40 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Suite 510, Greensburg
- Westmoreland County Industrial Development Authority public hearing, 9:30 a.m. Thursday at the Westmoreland County Courthouse commissioners public meeting room, 2 N. Main St., Greensburg

Experts decry Pa. rape case loophole

State's 'voluntary intoxication' clause similar to one being used to halt prosecution at Cornell

BY PAULA REED WARD

A loophole in New York law makes it tough to prosecute someone for rape when the victim is willingly intoxicated.

Pennsylvania's law isn't much better, experts say.

Now a state legislator is pushing to close what is known as the voluntary intoxication loophole, which has taken on national significance following gang-rape allegations at a Cornell University fraternity in Ithaca, N.Y.

The renewed attention on consent and impairment stems not just from the level of intoxication of the alleged victim at the Ivy League school, who reportedly said she voluntarily drank alcohol and was pressured to snort ketamine, but also from the potential problems with charging any of the alleged perpetrators in light of the circumstances.

Because the consumption was voluntary, New York law appears to prohibit a prosecutor from filing charges in the Cornell case — even if Jane Doe could not provide meaningful consent for sex due to her level of intoxication.

Eighteen other states, including Pennsylvania, include similar language in their rape laws, though Pennsylvania's wording allows for prosecution in some cases.

Under New York law, rape can be charged when a victim is mentally incapacitated to the extent she cannot provide

LOOPHOLE • A7

CDC sending 'disease detective' to help Pa. fight measles outbreak

Epidemiologist's arrival to come after weeks of feuding between state and federal officials

BY JAMES ENGEL

After weeks of feuding between state and federal health officials, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will send a scientist to help Pennsylvania battle a measles outbreak that has so far infected more than 1,200 people.

The so-called "disease detective" — part of the CDC's Epi-Aid program — is expected to arrive this week, though neither federal nor state authorities offered any scope of the scientist's work in the state.

The agency also provided Pennsylvania with nearly \$4

million in measles response funding, which will support operations through most of 2027.

Pennsylvania Health Secretary Dr. Debra Bogen previously said a federal response likely would consist only of one to three epidemiologists who would assist with examining a specific issue for a few weeks at a time, not a response that would supplant the state's efforts.

Bogen said the state health department has mounted a "very robust response" of its own with a staff of more than 300 and maintains a healthy



Adalja: Infectious disease specialist says, "It's to the benefit of everyone to have more minds focusing on this."

relationship with the CDC. The state health department did not respond Thursday to TribLive inquiries.

The move comes after a prolonged dispute between state officials including Bogen and Gov. Josh Shapiro and federal Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — a longtime vaccine skeptic.

The officials battled over the

MEASLES • A2

Health officials continue to investigate Franklin County measles-related death

BY JAMES ENGEL

A measles-related death reported Monday by the Franklin County coroner has still not been recorded in Pennsylvania data as state health officials say they continue to investigate the fatality.

The Franklin County Coroner's Office announced a 39-year-old woman with "several underlying conditions" died Saturday after a "past diagnosis of measles."

Her death marks the sixth measles-related fatality in the state amid an outbreak that has topped more than 1,200 confirmed cases as of Wednesday.

All of the deceased were unvaccinated.

The woman's cause of death was a "probable acute cardiac event due to possible complications of the measles," the coroner's office said in a statement.

"Per the direction of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, all deaths are considered measles associated with clinically relevant symptoms within the last 30 days prior to death," the statement said.

The coroner's office did not answer questions about when exactly the woman had

DEATH • A2

INSIDE



ENTERTAINMENT

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

» The documentary "Andy Warhol and Jamie" highlights the Pittsburgh art icon's nephew. **A10**

OPINION

LAURELS & LANCES

» Thumbs up to a summit trying to eradicate hate. Thumbs down to springing a school closure idea on parents. **A6**

SPORTS

'BITTERSWEET DAY'

» For Steelers cornerback **Jamel Dean**, heading back to Tampa to face his former team will be emotional. **B1**

