

Wings' limo driver faces charge in crash

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

The limo driver who had traces of marijuana in his system the night of the crash that left two Detroit Red Wings disabled will not face felony charges, according to the Oakland County prosecutor.

Richard A. Gnida, 28, of Westland will be charged with a misdemeanor — driving on a suspended license, second offense — that carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison, prosecutor David G. Goreycza said at a press conference Wednesday.

The driver will not face more serious felony charges in the June 13 crash in Birmingham because it can not be proven that the low levels of marijuana detected in his system impaired his ability to drive, Goreycza said.

"One of the nation's leading forensic toxicologists has informed us that, in her expert opinion, we absolutely cannot prove the marijuana level in Richard Gnida's system was high enough to legally impair his driving ability," Goreycza said. "Because impairment while operating the motor vehicle is the most crucial element (needed) to sustain a felony charge, no felony charges will be issued," he said.

The prosecutor had asked Dr. Marilyn Huestis, a senior research scientist at the National Institute of Baltimore, to review

and analyze laboratory reports from the crash. She reported that Gnida "most likely" smoked marijuana within 8 hours of the crash, but the low levels detected would support the conclusion his driving was impaired, Goreycza said.

The announcement came within hours of the opening of the 1997-98 hockey season, with the Red Wings scheduled to Calgary without star defenseman Vladimir Kostantinov and massor Sergei Mnatsakanov. Both remain in William Beaumont Hospital, where they have been since their rented limo, driven southbound by Gnida, unexpectedly veered across several lanes of traffic on Woodward and struck a tree.

Konstantinov and Mnatsakanov — along with another player, Slava Fetisov — were celebrating the Red Wings' winning the Stanley Cup, symbol of the highest championship in professional hockey.

Konstantinov and Mnatsakanov seated in the rear of the limo, facing forward and not wearing seat belts, when the vehicle crashed. Police said they were thrown forward on impact and sustained head and spinal injuries.

Both were comatose following the crash. Doctors at Beaumont said they have made major progress, but they will need to undergo "months and months" of treatment before being able to speak normally or walk.

Fetisov, who was sitting at the front of the

limo with his back to the driver, sustained fewer injuries. The defenseman was expected to play Wednesday as the Red Wings opened the season.

Gnida was also injured in the crash, but he did not require extensive hospitalization. He is expected to turn himself in to Birmingham police Thursday or Friday.

His attorney, James D. O'Connell of Highland Park, was unavailable for comment.

The Oakland prosecutor wanted to charge Gnida — who did not have a valid operator's license at the time of the crash — with one or more felonies that could have resulted in a lengthy prison sentence.

But under existing law — and without proof the marijuana impaired Gnida's driving — the maximum provable charge was the misdemeanor, said Goreycza.

"This tragedy illustrates the need for new measures to rid our roads of drivers who continue to operate vehicles while their licenses are suspended," the prosecutor said. "Driving is a privilege, not a right. People who abuse that privilege must be held accountable."

Goreycza has been in contact with the governor and the Legislature, lobbying for tougher laws and penalties for people convicted of driving on suspended licenses. The prosecutor said bills creating new penalties for driving on suspended licenses have been introduced and will be considered this fall.

Business students need more customer focus, say business leaders

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Major employers are helping Oakland Community College analyze the job skills their employees will need.

That will help the two-year college upgrade students' skills to what the increasingly global market needs.

"You can take any job and profile it on a scale," said Cheryl Kostel, OCC's executive director of workforce development. "You can also determine where a student is at."

She spoke at a joint meeting Sept. 29 of the college board and members of the Business and Community Development Alliance. Its members split into teams to analyze workplace skills.

Besides Oakland County's employment and training division, executives came from Ralco Industries, Prudential Securities, Mel Farr Automotive Group, Arab American and Chaldean Council, Kelly Services, Lear Corp., Great Lakes Media, IBM, Paragon Restaurants, 12 Oaks Mall Unique Restaurant Corp. and A.B. Heller Inc.

Starting point is a list produced by American College

Testing Inc., famed for its ACT tests. Major skills:

- Problem solving — applied math, applied technology, observation.

- Communication — listening and writing, locating information, reading for information.

- Interpersonal — teamwork.

After an hour of discussion, employers supplemented them with their own list, with "focus on the customer" as a major need followed closely by a "work ethic."

"Academic and business people largely agreed," said Martha Smydra, president of OCC's Royal Oak-Southfield campuses.

They agreed that companies and workers need an international outlook "because we've become a world attraction here in Oakland County," Smydra added.

"There must be customer focus, whether the customer is external or internal," said Roger Jackson of Lear Corp. "Effective communication is an absolute must."

It was the third meeting this year of the OCC board and its Business Alliance. All have been conducted on the Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

County recognizes those who build quality of life

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Saturday morning in the Bald Mountain Recreation Area, about 1,100 people are expected to strut their stuff on behalf of the American Heart Association.

Their efforts are expected to raise as much as \$5,000, which will go to research, according to Dianne Addington, president and CEO of T&C Federal Credit Union, the walk's principal sponsor.

While the event will benefit the heart association, it's also an example of a corporation adding to the quality of life in Oakland County, according to county executive L. Brooks Patterson.

Patterson talked about the credit union's involvement Tuesday at the 5th Annual Q2 (that's "Q squared") Breakfast at the Troy Marriott. The Q2 designation denotes the intent to honor "Quality People, Quality County."

The Bloomfield Hills based credit union represents the first time county officials have commemorated the efforts of a corporation, rather than individuals as in the previous four years.

Individuals honored at the Q2 breakfast this year are Alexander E. Bailey, superintendent of Oak Park schools and Thomas G. Donomme, vice chair and chief administrative officer of the Chrysler Corporation.

Bailey was recognized for his work in education and his involvement in organizations like the Children's Center in Detroit and the local soup kitchen, noted Patterson.

Bailey, the son of a Baptist preacher, grew up in Philadelphia. "I never realized we were poor until I was in my 20s," he said. "And I never believed being poor meant you couldn't achieve your goals."

Donomme, a West Bloomfield resident, was honored because of his work as director of the Congressional Economic Leadership Institute and the Committee for Economic Development. He also serves on a number of hospital boards.

Donomme, one of seven children, grew up on Detroit's east side. "When I was in high school, I knew my life always had something to do with automobiles."

He spent 20 years with the Ford Motor Co. before moving to Chrysler in 1980. He became a vice president in 1981 and was elected to the Chrysler Board of Directors in 1990. "I'd like to be remembered as somebody who was interested in the community as much as a successful businessman," he said.

"All of our Q2 recipients have made a difference in our community," said Patterson. "They made Oakland a better place in which to live, recreate and raise a family."

"We're honoring a corporate entity this year," said the executive, "because of its extensive involvement on behalf of the community."

In addition to helping people meet financial needs, the credit union has been involved in the Baldwin Community Center of Pontiac that, among other things, helps feed the homeless, the Three Rings Circle of Safety, a program to protect children;

NetDay Michigan, when the credit union sponsored Frost Elementary School in Pontiac get wired on the Internet.

The credit union has 140 employees in six offices, including Clarkston where it helped sponsor the 4th of July Parade.

Needle-free flu shots offered

Area residents can get \$10 needle-free flu immunizations at all southeastern Michigan Farmer Jack stores through Nov. 8.

The Flu Immunization Campaign will use the Biojector 2000, an advanced injection device that enters vaccine into a person's arm without the use of a

needle, according to the Visiting Nurses Association of Southeastern Michigan.

The New England Journal of Medicine states that workers who receive a flu shot suffer 25 percent fewer upper respiratory illnesses, require 43 percent fewer sick days, and save an estimated \$47 in healthcare costs.

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