Questions abound after female student battered inside RHO

By Amy Diaz amydiaz@mail.usf.edu and Emily Wunderlich ewunderlich@mail.usf.edu

The man slipped into Residence Hall One by following a resident through the locked entrance. Once inside, police say, he waited for a female resident he had briefly dated to return to her room. When she did, he dragged her by the hair to a stairwell, where he battered her. Then he forced her into her car and drove her to a secluded spot near Gandy Beach, where he battered her again.

The assailant, whom campus police identified as a non-student named Anthony Xavier Brown, 19, of Tampa, was arrested shortly after he brought the young woman back to campus seven and a half hours later.

He faces six charges ranging from assault to aggravated battery and false imprisonment. He is being held in the Pinellas County jail, with bail set at nearly $200,000.

The shaken victim was left with bruises to her throat, left shoulder and right bicep, police say. There was a cut on her left cheek and large tufts of hair missing from her head.

Meanwhile, other students – especially residents of RHO – were left bewildered, angry and full of questions:

How safe is RHO? What can be done to prevent this from happening again? And why did university officials wait six days before Dean of Students Jacob L. Diaz sent an email to students to “make you aware of a situation that occurred in one of our residence halls late last week.”?

“How can the dorm entrances get more secure?” asked Annie Schneider, a senior interdisciplinary social sciences major. “Housing can tell residents all they want not to hold the door for people, but social norms tell these students otherwise and doors get held open all the time.”

Allyson Capati, a sophomore, said in a Facebook comment that the situation is “kind of scary.” “You don’t really expect to hear this happening when living here,” she said. “But it is very scary to think a student was assaulted horribly here. We can’t really tell who is a student and who is a stranger here.”

“I love St. Pete and consider it my home, but this makes me feel so uneasy and makes my stomach turn for the first time with how I’ve ever felt,” she said. “I understand the suspect was in custody by the time it was resolved, but this happened a week ago. I would have expected an email the next day to be informed and made aware.”

Bulls to the Polls: Elections start today

By Dylan Hart dhart4@mail.usf.edu

Voting will begin today to determine the next USF St. Petersburg student body president and vice president alongside nine uncontested senate seats. Students can vote in The Reef from today through Feb. 28.

A contested presidency

This year’s ballot features two presidential candidates and their running mates.

Last year, the candidates for student body president and vice president, Daniel “Kaedem” Kelso and Ysis Jordan, ran uncontested after their respective opponents, Mariah McQueen and Sam Fiore, were disqualified for illegally collecting campaign signatures.

The student body president earns $10,908 a year. According to SG statutes, their job includes signing legislation, nominating the members of the executive and judicial branches, initiating the annual budget process and acting as a student representative for the campus. The vice president earns $8,325 a year, and their job includes representing SG at campus events, overseeing the executive branch and assuming the role of student body president should they be unable to complete their term.

The two presidential tickets consist of experienced SG members, but both have different focuses. Senate appropriations chair Gregory Cote and his running mate, senate policy chair Tyra Warren, are running against director of sustainable initiatives Jadzia "Jazzy" Duarte and her running mate, senate president pro tempore Hannah Rose Wanless.

Duarte and Wanless’ platform centers on sustainability. They say that a priority is to make USF St. Petersburg a “TreeZero campus,” replacing all paper products on campus with biodegradable products from Atlanta-based company TreeZero Inc.

Duarte, an environmental science major, wants to push for a greener campus by working with student organizations like the Student Green Energy Fund. Additionally, they want to open an office of sustainability in Student Government.

But while Cote thinks that sustainability is important, he thinks that Duarte and Wanless are leaving key issues unaddressed.

Cote was a senator in 2017 and 2018, and, if elected, he wants to continue work that he started as a senator. His primary focus is helping student organizations grow.

Cote also wants to finish his January 2019 plan to install a food pantry on campus, expand the College of Arts and Science and introduce a theater program.
In February 2019, University Police Chief David Hendry praised the victim for doing everything right. "She did what she could to control the relationship," he said. "She's getting resources to help her now and so we're appreciative of that."

Hendry said university police characterized the victim's injuries as "minor" because of the legal distinction between "battery" and "aggravated battery" in Florida law. Aggravated battery would mean "much more serious injuries," such as a fracture or stab wound, Hendry said.

When the victim returned to her dorm room, Brown dragged her by her hair to a stairwell, where he battered, punched and strangled her with his bare hands and her jacket. He then took her car keys and forced her to her car parked outside the dorm, police say. He drove her to a "secluded location near Gandy Beach," which is a dozen miles from campus, and "continued to batter her."

When Brown finally returned the victim to RHO about 4:30 a.m. on Feb. 14, she immediately called the police, who arrested Brown nearby minutes later.

University police chief Hendry said, RHO residents should not let anybody else follow them through the entrance. As always, he said, students should not walk alone at night, should be alert to their surroundings and should report any suspicious activity to police.

There is also a new safety app USF students can download titled "USF Safe." The app allows students to make emergency calls, report tips to the police and track friends who share their location as they move across campus.

On Feb. 15, the day after Brown's arrest, university police posted a short crime alert bulletin on their website titled "Physical Assault Incident/Arrest." The bulletin reported that "a student in residential housing" had reported an assault and that a former boyfriend, "not affiliated to the university," had been arrested promptly. It said the student "received minor injuries and has been provided supportive victim resources."

It did not elaborate, specify the residence hall or describe the assault.

Neither did the longer email that Jacobs sent to all students on Feb. 20, six days later.

Although RHO has a locked entryway, it's easy for a non-resident to wait outside until a resident opens the door using their student ID and then follow him or her inside.
The Crow’s Nest is committed to providing its readers with news relevant to the University of South Florida St. Petersburg and its surrounding communities. The Crow’s Nest abides by the highest ethical standards and focuses on stories that help readers make informed decisions on current topics. The Crow’s Nest recognizes the public’s trust in our news reporting and strives to uphold the highest standards of reporting as defined by the Society of Professional Journalists. Opinions in this newspaper do not necessarily represent those of the administration, faculty or student body.

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The Crow’s Nest accepts letters to the editor. All submissions should be no more than 500 words. Writers must include their full name. In addition, USF faculty should include their title, department, and institution. All letters are subject to editing for clarity and length. Letters can be sent to wellstrom@mail.usf.edu with subject title “Letter to the Editor.”

From the Tampa faculty

"USF achieved preeminence status in 2018 only after years of concerted, focused, coordinated effort. It is highly implausible that USF could attain preeminence operating as three separately managed entities focused primarily on implementing their own individual projects, rather than working together as a unified institution. The costs of losing preeminence status would be enormous in terms of the acclaim garnered by USF faculty on students and their degrees, on faculty and on the institution, in addition to the obvious financial costs."

See the full memo at: http://crowneststpete.com/2019/02/24/tampa-faculty-squash-st-pete/.

Arsenault’s reaction

“Preeminence is a laudable goal, but slavish adherence to legislatively created metrics which are subject to revision or even eventual abandonment will not serve us well. The great strides forward at USFSF during the past 15 years testify to the wisdom of shared governance and a certain level of local autonomy and identity. The USF Tampa letter, using the rationale of streamlined administration and enhanced metrics, offers a condescending and ultimately insulting characterization of the faculty members, administrators, and staff assigned to campuses outside of Hillsborough County.”

See the full memo at: http://crowneststpete.com/2019/02/24/tampa-faculty-squash-st-pete/.

Karen Holbrook, USF Sarasota-Manatee regional chancellor

COURTESY OF USFSP

COURTESY OF USFSM

THE CROW’S NEST
February 25, 2019

FACULTY, continued from P1

The memo “offers a condescending and ultimately insulting characterization of the faculty members, administrators and staff assigned to campuses outside of Hillsborough County,” said Ray Arsenault, president of the USF St. Petersburg Faculty Senate, said Tampa’s memo opposing branch campuses is “based on a series of false and misguided assumptions about the relationship between academic excellence and corporate-style authority,” said Arsenault.

“The task force provided the trustees with little control over campus identity – an unacceptable outcome to supporters of the St. Petersburg campus. USF system President Judy Genshaft has not embraced the term “branch campus” is implausible that preeminence operating as three separately managed entities focused primarily on implementing their own individual projects, rather than working together as a unified institution. The costs of losing preeminence status would be enormous in terms of the acclaim garnered by USF faculty on students and their degrees, on faculty and on the institution, in addition to the obvious financial costs.”

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Meet the 2019 senate candidates

By Dylan Hart
dhart4@mail.usf.edu

To qualify for candidacy, senate candidates had to be enrolled in at least six credit hours as an undergraduate or four as a graduate student. They also had to have a minimum 2.5 GPA and collect 25 signatures from the student body.

Senators represent the student body and help allocate $1.6 million in student fee revenue to clubs, organizations and events. They must sit on at least two committees and attend general assembly meetings.

To be elected, senators must get 25 votes from students.

Jasmine Ayo-Ajaji
Year: Freshman
Major: Unspecified
Age: 18
Hometown: Broward County, Florida
Email: jayojayi@mail.usf.edu

Ayo-Ajaji is heavily involved in campus organizations, particularly the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Black Student Organization.

“My priorities would be to make sure we are funding programs that help elevate students to be better,” Ayo-Ajaji said in an email to The Crow’s Nest.

Michael Johnson
Year: Freshman
Major: Environmental science
Age: 19
Hometown: Oviedo, Florida
Email: mjjohnson24@mail.usf.edu

While Johnson is a freshman, he already has experience in government.

Johnson was an intern for U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla, in summer of 2018. He was also a member of student government in high school.

Johnson’s priority as a senator would be to “expand student involvement” in government and student organizations.

Kevin Jimenez
Year: Junior
Major: Biology
Age: 20
Hometown: Coral Springs, Florida
Email: kjimenez2@mail.usf.edu

Jimenez, like Warren, is from Coral Springs, only minutes away from Parkland.

Because he lived in a community so heavily affected by a mass shooting, Jimenez is concerned about the possibility of a similar shooting here, and wants to make safety his top priority as a senator.

“There is a need to address campus safety,” he said.

“With the recent incident detailed by the University Police in Feb. 1st Crime Alert Bulletin, it’s clear that there is more to be done. What will happen if someone gains access to the residence hall again and has a weapon?”

Additionally, Jimenez wants to address plastic waste created by The Reef.

Lydia Anderson
Year: Freshman
Major: Anthropology and history
Age: Unspecified
Hometown: Unspecified
Email: lydia11@mail.usf.edu

Anderson did not respond to several emails from The Crow’s Nest requesting a comment.

COURTESY OF LAUREN KHAWAM
Lauren Khawam
Year: Freshman
Major: Political science
Age: 19
Hometown: Tampa, Florida
Email: laurenkhawam@mail.usf.edu

Khawam’s top priorities are to be a student voice and to help students prepare for the effects of consolidation.

She went with USF St. Petersburg students to Tallahassee earlier this month for Day at the Capitol, and says that the relationships she made there will help her as a student senator.

“I would be a great senator because I enjoy being involved in politics, and I hope, through my work, I can educate others on social issues so that they aren’t afraid to speak out,” she said.

COURTESY OF KARLA CORREA
Karla Correa
Year: Junior
Major: Political science
Age: 19
Hometown: Clearwater, Florida
Email: kcaroalcorrea@mail.usf.edu

Correa is in her second semester at USF St. Petersburg, and says that she wants to spend the rest of her time here “being as involved as possible.”

As a senator, Correa wants to bring student concerns before senate and aims to “make the school more inclusive to racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ members and women” by working with student organizations.

Correa thinks that transparency, accountability and trust are her most important qualities.

COURTESY OF ARIEL DUHART
Ariel Duhart
Year: Junior
Major: Environmental science and policy
Age: 20
Hometown: West Palm Beach, Florida
Email: ariel.duhart@mail.usf.edu

Duhart is the senate chair of special funding. Now, she’s seeking re-election.

“If (re-elected) to senate, I would make it a priority to bring new ideas and initiatives to Student Government,” Duhart said.

Duhart also works for Compass as a programming team member and is a member of the USF St. Petersburg Pre-Law Society.

COURTESY OF VELIZA’S MERCEDES
Yelizza S Mercedes
Year: Freshman
Major: Unspecified
Age: 18
Hometown: Oviedo, Florida
Email: ymercedes@mail.usf.edu

Mercedes is a member of several student organizations, including medical fraternity Phi Chi, OMA and the Pride Club. She is also a member of the St. Petersburg chapter of the League of Women Voters.

Before coming to USF St. Petersburg, she was a member of student government at Seminole State College, a community college in Seminole County, Florida.

Mercedes wants to be a student advocate in senate. She says that her position as a bilingual Afro-Latina student will additionally allow her to represent students who speak Spanish and “come from a mixed ethnic background.”

COURTESY OF LAUREN KHAWAM

COURTESY OF ARIEL DUHART

COURTESY OF JASMINE AYO-AJAJI

COURTESY OF MICHAEL JOHNSON

Make your vote count

When: Feb. 25 - 28
Time: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Where: The Reef and Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
Online at: https://orgsync.com/78912/events/2660897/occurrences/6423340