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Is 'Killer' Fit to Stand Trial?

Two Years After Murder, Memorial Unveiled to Honor Veteran EMT

By BOB HENNELLY Mar 22, 2019 Updated Mar 22, 2019 0



STILL VERY MUCH IN THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS: Emergency Medical Service colleagues as well as cops and firefighters joined family members of Yadira Arroyo March 17 for the unveiling of a plaque in her memory—two years after she was murdered, allegedly by a criminal with mental-health issues who commandeered the veteran Emergency

Medical Technician's ambulance, then ran her over.

The Chief-Leader/Michel Friang

Hundreds of Emergency Medical Service members stood at attention for the March 17 unveiling of a plaque honoring Paramedic Yadira Arroyo, who was murdered on the same spot in the Soundview section of the Bronx two years earlier. As a ceremonial bagpipe played, an FDNY helicopter hovered overhead.

On March 16, 2017 Jose Gonzalez allegedly carjacked Ms. Arroyo's ambulance and ran over the 14-year veteran, dragging her body several feet before he crashed the rig into the sidewalk and was apprehended by an off-duty Metropolitan Transportation Authority police officer.

Tribute to Upbeat Nature

The plaque, with a portrait of the 44-year-old mother of five in her work clothes, was mounted on a red call-box adorned with painted butterflies to reflect what her colleagues recall as Ms. Arroyo's upbeat attitude about her work serving the community. On the day of the incident, she and her partner, Monique Williams, were on their way to a distressed pregnant-woman call.

In addition to the large turnout from District Council 37's Locals 2507 and 3621, which represent Emergency Medical Technicians and officers, firefighters, members of the NYPD and community members who knew Ms. Arroyo were also on hand.

FDNY Chaplain Ann Kansfield told the grieving audience that the memorial's central location should serve as a comfort to them while they went about their duties. "When you see this place, know that you are important and vital to the life of this city," she said.

In the two years since Ms. Arroyo's murder, her large extended family, along with EMS union members, have not missed any of the Bronx Criminal Court proceedings involving the prosecution of Mr. Gonzalez, who was 24 at the time of the attack.

Mental Fitness an Issue

For months the prosecution and defense lawyers in the case have been battling over whether Mr.

Gonzalez is competent to assist in his own defense. Earlier this month, two mental-health experts working for the Bronx District Attorney's Office told the court that he was competent.

He was indicted for first-degree murder, manslaughter, robbery, and operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If convicted on the top charge, he faces life in prison.

He had been widely reported as having serious mental-health issues which required that he take medication daily, something he routinely failed to do. In addition to dozens of prior arrests, he had allegedly kicked out the rear window of a police van. While staying at a city supportive housing unit for the homeless, in June 2016 he allegedly assaulted a member of the staff.

Just a few weeks before he allegedly killed Ms. Arroyo, he was released by Bronx Criminal Court Judge David Kirschner, who ignored a request from prosecutors to set \$5,000 bail for a case in which he allegedly assaulted a police officer during a robbery arrest. He had previously been ordered freed without bail by Bronx Judge Laurence Busching in the case involving the assault of the homeless-shelter staff member.

Delusional Remarks

Immediately after Mr. Gonzalez's arrest in the Arroyo case, his behavior was reported to be erratic. He refused to leave his jail cell to go before the grand jury. He also told the arresting police officers "he was going home in a Maserati."

Mr. Gonzalez also claimed he was high on PCP, marijuana and the schizophrenia drug Seroquel at the time of his attempt to steal Ms. Arroyo's rig.

The next hearing in the case is April 4, at which point, a source in the District Attorney's office said, the defense was expected to challenge the findings of the state's mental-health professionals.

"It's important to understand these hearings are still just about whether or not he's competent to contribute to his own defense," the source said. "You would have to have another hearing over whether or not he was insane at the time of the crime."

Oren Barzilay, president of Local 2507, said in a phone interview that his members were "a little frustrated that we don't yet have a resolution of the criminal matter after all this

time.

He Won't Walk Streets

He continued, "Yet, we are optimistic that no matter which way this goes, at this point he will never be able to walk the streets again, whether that's because he is in prison or in a psychiatric facility."

The EMS unions have been making the case since Ms. Arroyo's line-of-duty death that the incident highlighted the dangers of their work and the pay and benefit disparity that exists between their service and other first-responders.

In a sign of progress, in 2017 the State Legislature passed and Governor Cuomo signed into law a bill that requires that the family of any FDNY EMT who is killed in the line-of-duty receive one year's salary. That benefit is automatically granted to the families of city cops and firefighters who are killed in the line of duty.

At the time of Ms. Arroyo's death, Mayor de Blasio used his discretionary powers to grant the line-of-duty death benefit to her five children.

A Dangerous Job

EMSWorld reported that, according to the Annals of Emergency Medicine, the rate of on-the-job deaths for the EMS workforce was more than twice the national average for the workforce as a whole. Per 100,000 workers, firefighting proved the most deadly occupation at 16.5 deaths, followed by the police at 14.2 and EMS at 12.7, compared to 5 per 100,000 of all workers.

Joel Rosado, Ms. Arroyo's brother, who worked as a private-sector EMT, is currently enrolled in the FDNY Academy as an EMT.

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