

# The Journal Times

## Caledonia

Village fulfilling broken developer promise to finish park LOCAL, PAGE B1

## Going green

St. Patrick's Day events start this weekend GET OUT & ABOUT



## Boys basketball

How does this St. Catherine's team compare to the 2021 state champions? SPORTS, PAGE C1

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Caroline Noonan scoops up a bag of popcorn at the Sugar Shack Sweet Shop, 530 Monument Square, Tuesday afternoon. Caroline has been working the candy counter at her mother's business since she was 8, and she began learning how to make popcorn last year.

# Pop 'til you drop

Today is National Popcorn Lover's Day

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RACINE — It doesn't matter if you enjoy it freshly popped, pre-

made from the store or a bag of the many microwaved varieties. Today is National Popcorn Lover's Day.

The annual event honoring the airy treat takes place the second Thursday in March.

Many sources claim the day of recognition was started in 2012

by Bob Matthews of Rochester, New York.

Matthews is a fan of popcorn, and shares the snack with his wife every Thursday.

### A history

While the origin of this cele-

bration is relatively new, popcorn has been a beloved snack around the world for thousands of years.

According to Popcorn.org, the oldest ears of corn used for popping were found in The Jornada

Please see POPCORN, Page A3

## Police, schools investigating Muskego racism charges

Beloit parents, basketball players want accountability

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MUSKEGO — Police and two school districts are investigating allegations of racism that visiting basketball players and families say occurred last Friday at Muskego High School.

Players from the Beloit Memorial High School boys basketball team and their parents allege racist words and symbols were written, and racial discrimination that could have turned violent took place Friday night when the team traveled to Muskego for a playoff game, which Muskego won 70-65.

Photos and videos shared with The Journal Times appear to show the N-word written and swastikas drawn in dust atop lockers. Some attendees in the Muskego student section are shown wearing black ski masks and tank tops.

"I believe the ski mask represents a veiled attempt at blackface, and I believe that the tank top represents a stereotypical portrayal of how African-Americans dress," Beloit parent Rick Daniels said.

Many Beloit players and fans at the game were Black, while nearly all Muskego players and

Please see MUSKEGO, Page A3

## Arrest made in cold case

Forensic genealogy leads to charges in 2000 murder

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RACINE — It has been 23 years since the murder of Linda Fields, who was just 37 when she was found under a tree near the lakefront, strangled to death.

DNA was collected but it never led to a suspect, until recently.

Racine Police Department Chief Maurice Robinson announced Wednesday that Lucas Ascencio Alonso, 66, was arrested at his workplace in Racine and booked into the Racine County Jail.

Alonso is charged with first-degree intentional homicide.

Carl Fields, Linda's son, said the family has been "living in a



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Carl Fields, the son of Linda Fields, and Cathy Fields, the younger sister of Linda Fields, spoke Wednesday about the arrest of a suspect in the 23-year-old homicide case.

fractured way for a long time." "We have hurt quietly and silently," he said.

Cathy Fields, Linda's younger

sister, said all the family wants is justice.

Please see COLD CASE, Page A3

## Murder trial still on docket

Judge declines to dismiss case, despite lack of witnesses

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RACINE — A man charged in connection to a shooting he claims he did not commit continues to face a jury trial after a judge declined to allow the prosecution to dismiss the charges — despite a lack of witnesses.

Kenneth L. Booker, Jr., 22, is charged with attempted first-degree intentional homicide with use of a dangerous weapon in a shooting that occurred Dec. 21, 2020, near the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and Albert Street.

On Tuesday during a pre-trial hearing in Racine County Circuit Court, Deputy District



Attorney Dirk Jensen said he was unable to subpoena two witnesses and a third was not cooperating.

Jensen said he was ready to dismiss the case, with the potential to refile if the witnesses become available.

Laura Walker, Booker's attorney, spoke in favor of the dismissal, but Judge Robert Repischak was not willing to dismiss the case.

Repischak told Jensen that the trial, which is scheduled to begin April 3, will remain on the calendar.

If the state does not have witnesses by then, Repischak said the case will be dismissed.

Please see TRIAL, Page A3

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Weather Breezy, afternoon flurries High 39 • Low 31 FORECAST • A4

### Inside

Classified B9 Money B2 Puzzles B9 Comics B9 Nation/World B3 Records B4 Legals B7 Opinion B5 Service Directory B8



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## Popcorn

From A1

Bat Caves in New Mexico. The cave is one of the earliest agricultural sites in the American Southwest and the ears of corn were about 4,000 years old.

Business kept booming — or popping — for the snack, even when others faltered during The Great Depression.

Bags of popcorn were priced at a nickel or a dime, making it an affordable treat for families at the time.

The advent of “talking pictures” also happened around this time, which cemented the pairing of popcorn and movies — which endures to this day.

In the 1950s, as television gained popularity and more people enjoyed entertainment at home, theater sales of popcorn declined.

But, ever the adaptable treat, popcorn began being enjoyed at home in a pre-popped format.

An early version of microwavable bags of popcorn was patented by General Mills in 1981.



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Caroline Noonan shifts around a batch of popcorn, all while watching the kettle of the popcorn maker for more to come, at her mother's business, Sugar Shack Sweet Shop, 530 Monument Square, Tuesday afternoon. The popcorn is shifted around during popping so the unpopped kernels fall into slots at the bottom of the collection bucket.

## Homegrown and hand-popped

Sugar Shack Sweet Shop, 530 Monument Square, is one of the

only businesses in Racine County to pop its own popcorn.

Owner Michelle Noonan has been popping the treat at her Downtown Racine business for

16 years.

Her daughter, Caroline, helps at the store, and has been a lover of her mother's popcorn since a young age.

Michelle said that popcorn is one of the best sellers at the Sugar Shack, especially during events in Downtown Racine.

“It's so hard to pick what our best thing is, because so many of them do well,” Michelle said.

Sugar Shack also sells ice cream and candy.

“But definitely, this (popcorn) is one of our top ones,” Michelle said. “We have people coming in all year long, just for the popcorn.”

Sugar Shack uses mushroom popcorn kernels, the chewier, rounder kind of kernels often seen at fairs.

The kernels are acquired from Nyholm Pop N' Good of Mount Pleasant.

Seasoned coconut oil is used to pop the kernels, and three to four batches are often made at a time to allow the popper to properly run.

Caroline, who soon will be a freshman at Case High School, has spent the last year learning how to make batches of popcorn, but she's spent time working the

shop's candy counter since she was 8.

“For the last five years, she has been working candy,” Michelle said. “She's always been really good with math and communicating with people. For a year now, she has been doing everything (around the store).”

Sugar Shack offers the classic varieties of the salty snack: butter, caramel and cheese corn, with the latter two combined to make Chicago style popcorn.

Michelle likes the cheese corn best and Caroline likes to combine all three flavors together.

Since she is still learning how to make it, the process of getting the kernels popped still scares Caroline sometimes.

Michelle said that the popping part can get crazy and intimidating for people just starting to learn how to make popcorn because of the high temperature involved and the unpredictability of the kernels.

“They can go everywhere,” Michelle said. “It can get crazy.”

“Often times I'll just keep the door shut,” Caroline said, as she watched as a batch of kernels she put in the kettle began to pop out.

## Muskego

From A1

fans at Friday's game were white.

Beloit supporters said they believe the words and actions violated policies of Muskego High School and the state high school sports governing body. They want students and administrators held accountable.

“We believe that the student section demonstrated racially biased behavior,” Daniels said. “It was clear in the locker room with the words that were written on top of the lockers that there was racist — not racially motivated, not racially biased — behavior that took place ... The administration did not make any good-faith attempt to stop the behavior.”

## Investigations ongoing

Muskego High School issued an apology Sunday afternoon for the behaviors during Friday's game.

The Muskego-Norway School District and the School District of Beloit are investigating potential violations of school district policies.

The Muskego Police Department is investigating potential criminal conduct.

Muskego Police Department Lt. Andy Kraus said both school districts are cooperating with the the department's investigation.

According to Kraus, after the game, a school resource officer confirmed the “clearly inappropriate” writing on top of lockers, and the investigation began Friday night shortly after that.

Kraus said the timeline for when the MPD investigation will end is “hard to say” because it involves actions in a locker room to which hundreds of students had access.

Kraus said the investigation has so far entailed interviewing students and looking at video recorded by school cameras to try to determine who wrote the racial slurs and drew the swastikas.

People interviewed by MPD have so far been cooperative, and Kraus is “hopeful we're able to narrow down the source of this writing.”

In response to a request for comment, Kelly Thompson, Muskego-Norway School District superintendent, referred to a statement from Muskego High School activities department and administrators.

The statement apologized for behaviors on Friday that “do not represent the values of Muskego High School or the Muskego-Norway community.”

The statement said the high school takes “allegations of this nature very seriously” and that



SUBMITTED

Some attendees in the Muskego High School student section are shown wearing black ski masks and tank tops during a basketball game last Friday against Beloit Memorial High School. Beloit supporters viewed the attire as racially discriminatory and a violation of school policy. Police and two school districts are investigating allegations of racism stemming from Friday's game.

“consequences for inappropriate actions will be prompt.”

According to the statement, MHS administrators received an email from the Beloit Memorial athletic director “indicating concerns regarding the theme of the student section and racist images traced in the dust on top of the gymnasium lockers.”

“We were deeply disappointed and saddened by the information shared,” the statement reads. “Student safety is our number one priority, and we work to ensure students have a positive and rewarding experience while competing in a safe environment ... We are wholeheartedly dedicated to improving processes that will ensure our commitment of providing an environment that meets the expectations of our community and demonstrates respect for others.”

Beloit parents appreciated the apology but said more work remains for Muskego community members, including educating themselves about racial bias and prejudice.

“An apology is a start, but it doesn't create the healing or make our kids feel any better about the situation that occurred,” Beloit aunt Brandy Hereford said.

State Sen. Mark Spitzer, D-Beloit, released a statement supporting the school districts' investigation and condemning the “unacceptable behavior from Muskego students.”

“Racism cannot be tolerated in our communities,” Spitzer wrote. “Beloit students who traveled to Muskego to play a game that they love were instead met with hate, swastikas and racial slurs ... The Muskego-Norway School District must treat this with the seriousness that it deserves. I stand with our students, their families,

and our community against racism.”

State Rep. Clinton Anderson, D-Beloit, who graduated from Beloit Memorial, released a statement supporting Beloit players and school district leaders.

“What took place at the Beloit Memorial boys basketball game vs Muskego was incredibly harmful to not only our student athletes, but our entire community,” Anderson wrote.

## ‘Unacceptable actions’

School District of Beloit Superintendent Willie Garrison II informed Beloit staff and families on Saturday that “some unacceptable actions transpired” in Muskego.

“We are aware of the alleged racial slurs written and unsportsmanlike phrases being chanted,” Garrison wrote. “We take this matter very seriously. All students should be able to play in a safe, competitive sports environment.”

Beloit school district officials also informed the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association and are working with the WIAA “on next steps,” Monica Krysztopa, School District of Beloit chief of communications and marketing, wrote in an email.

The WIAA governs state high school sports.

According to Todd Clark, WIAA communications director, the WIAA Executive Office was made aware of the allegations in Muskego over the weekend.

“The membership of the WIAA objects to any and all disrespectful behaviors at interscholastic athletic events,” Clark wrote in an email. “We are always willing to assist our schools in their efforts to ensure high school activities are conducted in a positive and

safe environment.”

Clark said the WIAA considers sanctions for policy violations “if a school has ongoing egregious sportsmanship issues and fails to address the ongoing sportsmanship concerns.”

Daniels believes Friday's behaviors violated WIAA policy.

“Every student-athlete must be able to compete in a climate of respect, free of threat, free of fear, intimidation and harassment,” the WIAA's harassment policy states. “The membership disapproves of any form of taunting or expression that is intended or designed to embarrass, ridicule, disrespect or demean others under any circumstances including on the basis of race.”

According to Beloit families, demeaning actions on the basis of race occurred Friday.

Hereford said the alleged words and actions caused a “dehumanizing,” traumatic experience for the young men trying to play basketball.

Hereford said her nephew, a freshman on the team, sobbed when he saw her after the game.

“That's a lot of pressure to take, to know that someone has hatred for you for no reason,” Hereford said. “My nephew came to play basketball, not to be insulted, not to be intimidated.”

## School policies violated?

Daniels, who has a doctorate in education and is the director of campus inclusion at Oakton College near Chicago, also said he believes Muskego students violated their school diversity policy, dress code policy and student anti-harassment policy.

“I don't want the narrative to be focused on how offended we were, or how we didn't feel like we were in a safe space,” Daniels

said. “The narrative also needs to be focused on what's going to happen with the clear violation of policy that was displayed at that game.”

The Muskego High School diversity policy states that it “has a commitment to pursue a learning and working environment in which differences are reflected, recognized, and respected. These differences must not be the basis for discrimination against anyone participating in Board-sponsored activities.”

The high school's dress code policy has language stating that “no clothing determined to be offensive in a discriminatory fashion, provocative, revealing or sexually explicit will be allowed.”

The school's student anti-harassment policy states that it will “maintain an educational environment that is free from all forms of harassment.”

## Unwelcome environment

Beloit families said the environment felt unsafe and unwelcome when they arrived at Friday's game.

“I personally could feel the racist energy in the air,” Daniels said. “For those who are wondering how that's possible, my response to that is that when you've lived with racism as long as we have, you can always tell when you're in an environment that is not completely safe.”

Beloit supporters were angered and saddened by the disrespect and hostility the players experienced.

“It's sad that any student, any child would have to go through that, still in 2023,” Beloit parent Michelle Nora said.

According to Beloit families, violence nearly broke out after the game when Muskego students and Beloit players briefly spoke to one another.

“It almost turned violent, and that does not need to be swept under the rug,” Daniels said.

Beloit families expressed pride in the players for the way they handled the situation.

“We want them to understand that when these situations happen, this is how we come together as a community,” Daniels said.

Hereford is encouraged that Beloit community members have supported the players by “rallying around them and really being like, ‘This was not OK, and we want to stand up and say something about it,’ because so many times it's ignored or swept under the rug,” she said. “We most definitely have to recognize that trauma and begin that process of healing for our students, for our families and for our whole community.”

## Trial

From A1

### Case history

A witness to the 2020 shooting told investigators that he was one of three people in a vehicle that stopped at the intersection of Albert Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

The witness said one of the other people in the vehicle got out and had a confrontation with someone in a Mercury Grand Marquis, according to a criminal complaint.

The person in the Grand Marquis, who the witness called “Little Ken,” allegedly shot the person 6-8

times with a handgun.

The shooting victim suffered a head wound, but survived.

The witness reportedly identified Booker from a photo lineup. However, he later said Booker was not the shooter.

A search warrant was served at Booker's residence and reportedly led to the recovery of a .22 caliber revolver, a .38 special and ammunition.

With information provided by the witness, investigators initially believed Booker and his mother committed the crime while driving her car, which was seized.

However, she had an alibi for the night of the shooting.

## Cold case

From A1

### Case history

The Racine Police Department responded to the 1100 block of Lake Avenue on Feb. 24, 2000, after a report of a woman lying under a tree who was deceased.

According to the criminal complaint, investigators interviewed friends and family members who said the last time Linda Fields was seen by someone who knew her was Feb. 22, 2000.

The RPD investigated, but

eventually ran out of leads.

The case was reassigned over the years until former Police Chief Howell assigned Investigator Chris Blackmore to take another look in August 2020.

In January 2022, Blackmore met with agents from the Wisconsin Department of Justice and the state crime laboratory to discuss a familial DNA search, which had the potential to identify close relatives of the suspect.

In February, the familial DNA search identified an individual who was the parent, brother or son of the person

whose DNA was found on Linda Fields.

That individual was ruled out as the DNA contributor, as was his brother.

On Feb. 21, 2023, Blackmore received a search warrant to collect DNA from Alonso.

His DNA was determined to be a match to the DNA found at the crime scene.

Alonso, who was arrested March 6, reportedly told investigators that he became angry at Linda Fields while the two were engaging in intercourse and choked her, and that he thought she was still alive when he walked away.