

Men face robbery trial

By **JIM SMITH**
Eagle Staff Writer

Two men were ordered to stand trial on charges they stole \$500 from a man during a home invasion in the city last month.

However, at the defendants' preliminary hearing Monday, their attorneys tested the credibility of both the alleged victim and a key witness.

District Judge Pete Shaffer, following testimony at the hourlong hearing, ruled Alfred Irvin, 27, of Butler and Chad Hilliard, 27, of Jefferson Township be held for court on robbery, burglary, conspiracy and theft charges.

Daniel Schnur, 22, testified he was on his couch watching television about 3 p.m. Jan. 9 when he heard the door at his Fairview Avenue apartment kicked in.

Before he knew it, two men, one of which had a metal pipe in his hand, stood over him.

"They told me to empty my pockets," Schnur said. "Money, wallet, drugs — that's what they asked for."

Schnur testified he did not recognize either man. He said the intruders, one black and one white, both wore hooded sweatshirts.

He said the black man, later identified as Irvin, did all the talking while the white man, later identified as Hilliard, held the pipe.

Assistant District Attorney Chris Studeny asked Schnur if he felt threatened.

"They both had their arms back," he said. "They didn't ask me nicely for my stuff."

He handed Irvin his wallet and the two intruders left.

But Schnur followed the men outside and asked them to return his wallet, which contained \$600.

2 accused of stealing \$500 in home invasion

Irvin opened the wallet and took out \$500; he gave the wallet with \$100 inside back to Schnur. The suspects left.

Jerry Cassidy, Irvin's attorney, asked Schnur why, if he felt threatened by the defendants, would he follow them outside. Schnur replied he only wanted his wallet back and said if anything happened, he expected there would be people outside to help him.

"Do you always carry that much money around?" asked Hilliard's attorney, public defender Charles Nedz.

"It was money left over from Christmas," Schnur said, "and I was going to pay rent with it."

Cassidy asked Schnur how the defendants would know he had so much money.

Schnur suggested someone, maybe Tiffany Kroll, an acquaintance, possibly told them.

Kroll, 21, of Butler testified she was at her boyfriend's home on Federal Street about 3 p.m. when she got a call on her cell phone. Irvin, a friend, was on the other end.

"He said he just needed a ride," she said.

She and her boyfriend, Ed Grey, a friend of Schnur's at that time, got into her dark blue minivan, drove to Brown Avenue and picked up Irvin, who was with Hilliard.

Kroll told Studeny that Irvin seemed somewhat "nervous" but neither he nor Hilliard said much after they got into the van.

She testified that Irvin had a

lot of money in his hand.

"He got in and (the money) went everywhere," she said. "He must have lost it out of his hand."

Schnur, meanwhile, was in his car and following the suspects. He saw them get into a dark blue van on Brown Avenue.

He called police on his cell phone and reported what happened. Officers were immediately dispatched.

Kroll said she and Grey dropped off the suspects on Boyd Avenue because "they were acting weird." She said she and Grey drove through East Butler back to her house, but did not contact police.

During questioning by Nedz, she admitted she had seen Irvin earlier that day, but denied she planned to meet up with either defendant later.

Kroll also seemed to contradict Schnur's testimony that he did not know either defendant prior to Jan. 9. She said she believed Schnur knew Hilliard "through a mutual friend."

A short time after getting out of the van, Irvin and Hilliard were arrested at the corner of East Boyd and Center avenues.

Schnur said he was taken in a police car to where the suspects were standing with other officers. As the car slowly drove by, he identified them as the men who robbed him.

Police the next day traced the van back to Kroll, who was interviewed by Detective Sgt. David Dalcamo at the station.

At one point during cross-

examination, Kroll admitted she agreed to testify for the prosecution to avoid being possibly charged herself.

Nedz, in a twist, called Dalcamo to testify after Studeny rested her case.

Dalcamo said he wanted to speak with Kroll because "I was informed her van was involved in a burglary and robbery and I needed her to come down and give a statement."

He also said when police searched the defendants, they did not find any weapons or Schnur's money.

After the hearing, Studeny said no one else has been charged in the case, which she noted was still an "open investigation."

Neither defense attorney seemed impressed by the prosecution's case, when questioned outside the courtroom.

"I think there's more to it than what we heard today," Nedz said. "Both the victim and the star witness have something to hide."

Irvin and Hilliard remain in the Butler County Prison on \$50,000 bond each.

BIRTHS

Butler Memorial Hospital

Born Jan. 31:

To Melissa (Congalton) and Stephen Weaver of Slippery Rock, a son at 7:55 p.m. Grandparents are Scott Congalton and Carolyn Congalton, both of Saxonburg, and Dale Weaver and Rosemary Weaver, both of Slippery Rock. Great-grandparents are John and Antonietta Weber of Allison Park and Bill and Peg Congalton of Pittsburgh.

To Charlene (Callihan) Cook and Oscar Sasse Jr., both of Butler, a daughter at 2:08 p.m. Grandparents are Lois Callihan of Butler, the late

Edwin Callihan, Oscar Sasse of Butler and the late Deanna Sasse.

Mercy

Pittsburgh

Born Jan. 31 to Melissa (King) and Jason Mirich of Carnegie, a daughter at 12:05 p.m. Grandparents are Frank and Carole King of Butler and Paul and Debbie Mirich of McDonald. Great-grandparents are Dave and Katherine Opezynsik of Carnegie.

Out-of-Area Births

Born Feb. 2 to Michelle (Neff) and Joseph Zandarski of York County, a son.



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Judge to decide man's sentence

Felony sex charges with minor dropped

By **KIM PASKORZ**
Eagle Staff Writer

A Butler County judge will alone decide the punishment for a Lancaster County man accused of attempting to solicit sex from a 13-year-old girl.

As part of a plea bargain arrangement with the Butler County District Attorney's Office, 43-year-old Patrick Gehris of Lancaster pleaded guilty to multiple counts of criminal solicitation.

In exchange for the plea, prosecutors agreed to drop multiple other crimes that had been pending against Gehris, including felony unlawful contact with a minor.

However, Gehris and prosecutors came to no agreement about a punishment to be recommended to Judge William Shaffer.

And, because of that, Shaffer alone will make the call.

But first, the judge has ordered Gehris to be evaluated by the state's Sexual Offenders Board to determine if he meets the criteria to be declared a sexually violent predator under the state's Megan's Law.

Gehris, according to court documents had no prior criminal record when he was arrested Feb. 19, 2007.

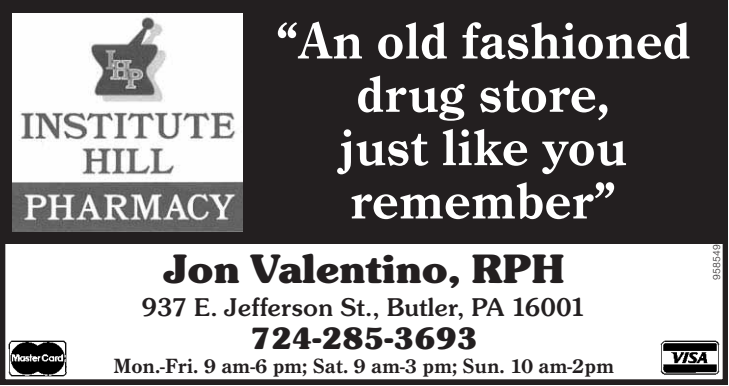
According to court documents, Gehris for four months prior had been communicating on the Internet with an undercover trooper, posing as a 19-year-old woman.

Gehris communicated with the trooper by e-mail, in chat rooms and by telephone in hopes of arranging for a sexual liaison with a different girl who was 13 years old.

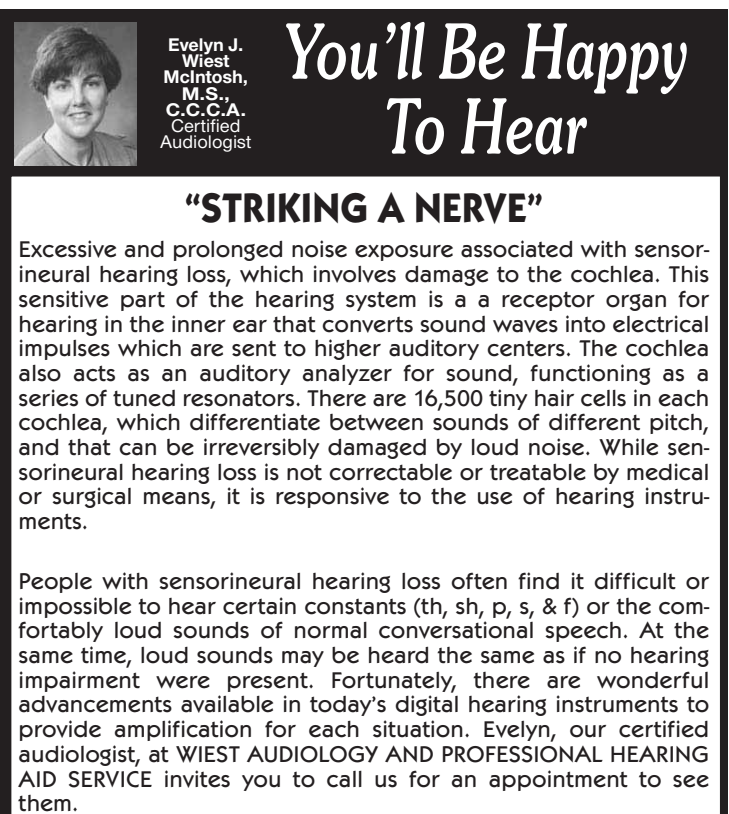
He apparently believed he had set up such a liaison when he traveled to a Butler Township hotel.

Gehris instead was met at the hotel by state police who arrested him.

During prior court hearings, Gehris has identified himself as a financial adviser and father of two teenage girls.

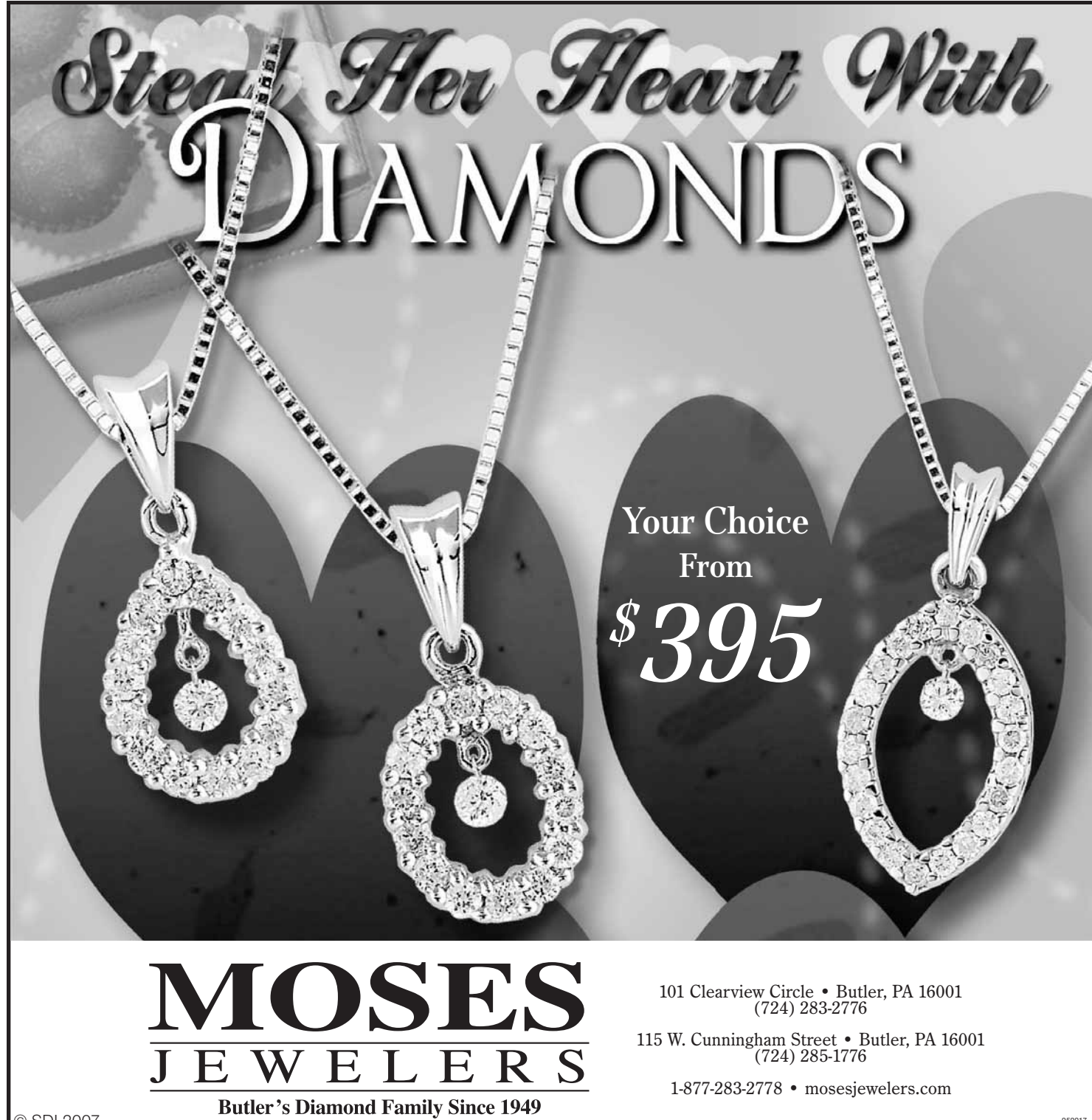


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