

Conviction in fatal car crash

BY BRIDGET MURPHY
bridget.murphy@newsday.com

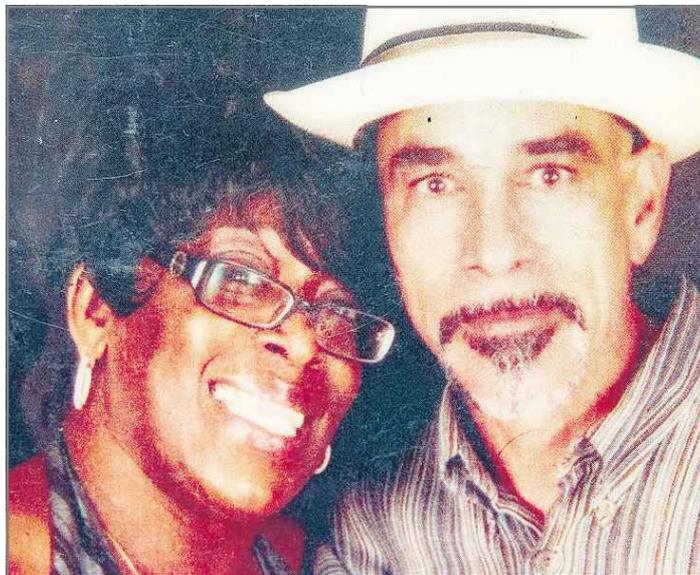
Jurors convicted a motorist on aggravated vehicular homicide charges yesterday in the 2015 deaths of a couple whose car prosecutors said he rammed at a red light in Lynbrook while speeding and high on marijuana.

Now Island Park native John Aniano, 27, is facing up to 8 and 1/3 to 25 years in prison in connection with the Jan. 12, 2015, crash.

The Sunrise Highway wreck killed Lynbrook residents Sharon Rene Long, 53, and John Jones, 54, and happened after prosecutors said Aniano blew past red lights in a 2004 Mercedes-Benz before slamming into the back of the victims' 2005 Toyota Avalon while it was stopped at another light. The impact pushed the Toyota into oncoming traffic before it hit another car.

Prosecutor Katie Zizza told jurors during the Nassau County Court trial that Aniano drove so fast and recklessly, with marijuana impairment fueling his desire to speed, that death was "inevitable."

But defense attorney Joseph Lo Piccolo had argued the crash wasn't criminal, but an accident brought on by a mental health



HOWARD SCHNAPP

episode his client suffered and not his marijuana use. The Garden City lawyer said Aniano's mental health issues caused him to "decompensate" after he hadn't taken prescribed medication for about two days before the crash. He added that tests also showed later Aniano's prescribed dosage level wasn't enough to treat him. Aniano's father previously has said that his son suffers from bipolar disorder.

Lo Piccolo said he will file a motion to overturn the verdict based

on insufficient evidence and that Aniano will appeal the conviction. The jury also found Aniano guilty of manslaughter, vehicular manslaughter and both drug-impaired and reckless driving.

At the defense's request, acting state Supreme Court Justice Meryl Berkowitz ordered Aniano to be put on suicide watch at Nassau's jail as he awaits sentencing.

David Jones, the brother of victim John Jones, said he was pleased by the verdict but believed the crash could have been



LOU MINUTOLO

Sharon Rene Long and John Jones, of Lynbrook, were killed in a crash when driver John Aniano, of Island Park, slammed into the back of their car at a stoplight in Lynbrook on Jan. 12, 2015.

avoided if Aniano had stayed on his medication and not smoked marijuana.

"Everybody lost in this situation, not just my family and Sharon Long's family. His family lost in this situation too," said Jones, 57, of Massapequa.

Long's sister Pamela Duncan, 48, of East Orange, New Jersey, said justice had been served, before adding: "But at the same time, maybe this young man can really get the help he needs to get."

The victims were longtime companions who had an apartment close to the site of the

crash, which happened on their way home from a grocery store, family said. The prosecution said Jones, the Toyota's driver, and Long, his passenger, had marijuana in their blood too, but that it didn't change that they were victims in this case.

Several jurors declined to comment while leaving court. Nassau District Attorney Madeline Singas said in a statement that Jones and Long "were random, innocent victims of a driver who had no regard for anyone's life," and local residents "should not have to fear for their lives on our roads."

Officials: Cesspools in state parks to close

BY JOAN GRALLA
joan.gralla@newsday.com

Cesspools in New York State parks, including 36 on Long Island, will be closed by 2019, 14 years after a federal deadline, prosecutors and regulators said yesterday.

New York State agreed to the closures and a \$150,000 civil penalty in a consent decree filed the same day it was sued by the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District and the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Public parks and water pollution don't go together," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck.

The state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation now has a total of 54 illegal cesspools.

All should have been shut in 2005 because they violate the

Safe Drinking Water Act, Enck and Robert L. Capers, the federal prosecutor, said in a joint statement.

The shutdowns will cost about \$8.8 million; more than \$1 million will be spent on extra steps at seven parks in Suffolk County.

Cesspools leak nitrogen, mainly produced by people, into the groundwater. This has caused toxic algae blooms in Long Island's waterways since 1985.

Environmentalists blame nitrogen for the Island's water crisis, especially in Suffolk, where 70 percent of the homes are not tied to sewers.

State parks in Suffolk have all but three of the Island's banned cesspools.

The parks department said it investigated all its parks in 2013 after the Peconic Baykeeper sued it for violating sewage discharge regulations. Court

records show an ongoing lawsuit; another action against Stony Brook University was dismissed.

The parks agency agreed to close only 24 of its 78 cesspools in a 2013 consent decree with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the federal complaint said.

"The United States brought this action to remedy longstanding violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act and to protect New York's drinking water from harmful nutrient pollution that poses a risk both to public health and the natural environment," Capers said.

All of the Island state park cesspools sit atop the aquifer. All must be shut in 2018, a year earlier than in the rest of the state.

Only one Nassau park is affected: Planting Fields Arbore-

tum in Oyster Bay.

The cesspools also lie in some of Suffolk's most popular parks: Bayard Cutting Arboretum State Park in Great River, Bethpage State Park, Caleb Smith State Park Preserve in Smithtown, Connetquot River State Park Preserve in North Great River, Hither Hills State Park in Montauk, Montauk Downs State Park, Orient Beach State Park, and the Sag Harbor State Golf Course.

The parks agency said it had earmarked \$15 million to correct the problems.

"State Parks worked aggressively to identify and upgrade outdated septic systems and have already completed upgrades at six state parks," its statement said.

"There has been no evidence the systems led to any impact on drinking water or the envi-

ronment," the agency said.

Some of the extra nitrogen-combatting projects slated for Suffolk state parks include methods used in Europe since the 1990s, the federal complaint said.

Because urine is a primary source of nitrogen, Robert Moses State Park in Babylon, Sunken Meadow State Park in Kings Park, Wildwood State Park in Wading River and Caumsett State Historic Park in Lloyd Harbor, will get "separation systems" so that it is treated, not discharged into the ground.

Connetquot River State Park Preserve and Hallock State Park in Wading River will gain nitrogen-reducing alternative septic systems.

At Captree State Park in Babylon, an artificial wetland will be built, and storm-water systems will be improved.