



Panicked 911 call causes police standoff

Photos



Jim Walker

Suspect, later learned to be Hillel Neuer, executive director of UN Watch, led out of Stone Hearth Pizza on Great Plain Avenue at approximately 3:45 p.m., Friday, Nov. 2.

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By **Debra Filcman, Steven Ryan, Neal Simpson**
GateHouse News Service

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Needham — He was guilty only of being hungry at the wrong time and at the wrong place.

Panicked that a killer might be loose on the streets of Needham, workers at a downtown pizza shop placed an unsuspecting visitor into a terrifying situation last Friday as television viewers across the country watched.

Needham Police and a SWAT team descended on downtown Needham Nov. 2 after they received frantic calls from Stone Hearth Pizza reporting a gunman was in the restaurant — an apparent misunderstanding coming just over two hours after a murder on Elmwood Road.

Stone Hearth Pizza employees Gledis Potesta, a server, and Marina Paranagua, a manager, called police, saying a man with a gun was causing a disturbance at the Stone Hearth Pizza and the CVS next door. During one call, Potesta could be heard hysterically screaming, “Oh, my God, he has a gun!”

No gun was found after the brief standoff between police, who surrounded the pizzeria with guns trained, and a man, later identified as Hillel Neuer, 37, who was thought to be holding an employee hostage in the Great Plain Avenue restaurant.

Neuer is the executive director of the human rights group UN Watch, based in Geneva, Switzerland.

The standoff took place shortly after 3 p.m., as police were scouring the area for a man, later identified as William Dunn of Norwood, who allegedly beat Robert Moore Sr., 78, to death in the basement of his Elmwood Road home, and sent his daughter-in-law, Nancy Moore, to the hospital with serious injuries.

“This was not a woman prone to overreaction,” said Jonathan Schwarz, co-owner of Stone Hearth Pizza, in reference to Potesta. “The

community was clearly in a heightened state of awareness, based on what was going.”

After the murder, police placed all schools in Needham, as well as the public library, under lockdown. During the standoff, town workers also barricaded streets around Town Hall while helicopters buzzed overhead.

Melissa Klein, the operations and finance director for Stone Hearth Pizza, said a teenage employee, who was stuck at the high school due to the lockdown, called saying he was going to be late for work.

“Then a guy came in acting very weird, changed his clothes, asking for a cab,” Klein said, relating what employees told her. “He had a bundle under his arm. One of the staff thought he had a gun. He acted like he had one with his motioning.”

Employees told police at the scene that Neuer, who dove under a table when officers arrived, was holding another employee hostage with a gun. No gun was found. When asked if Neuer said anything about having a gun, Klein shook her head.

“The whole thing was just crazy timing,” Klein said. “Normally, police would come and tell him to leave ... the phone call was made, “The man in the restroom is acting strangely, changed his clothes, we’re leaving.”

The manager, Paranagua, also called the police and told employees and three or four customers in the pizzeria to leave, according to Chris Robbins, co-owner of Stone Hearth Pizza.

“The way I look at it, our manager acted in complete integrity and heads-up fashion; it just happened to be poor timing,” Robbins said, noting he doesn’t believe police overreacted. “If [police] thought it had some affiliation to what happened down the street, I think [the reaction] was pretty impressive.”

Neuer told the Boston Herald that he had no idea what was happening.

“I called 911 twice while I was on the floor. You’ll hear me speaking quietly saying, ‘I’m on the floor of this pizza shop and what should I do here?’” he said.

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"It was not until I left the scene that it sort of dawned on me that the entire police action was because someone had called for me. I never had a clue."

At a press conference on Nov. 2, Police Chief Tom Leary said police responding to the Great Plan Avenue incident did not know whether the man inside was related to the homicide on Elmwood Road. Neuer was arrested for disorderly conduct but was never formally charged.

"[Neuer] was released from custody after a short time, and a subsequent review of all of the witness statements and police reports led a clerk magistrate and a justice at the Dedham District court to conclude that, under the circumstances, there was no probable cause to issue any complaint against Mr. Neuer," said Sgt. Chris Baker, of the Needham Police, in a written statement on Nov. 5.

But Leary said his staff — which includes 49 sworn officers, nine civilian staff and 13 crossing supervisors — acted appropriately given the information they had and the stress of the two simultaneous incidents.

"I think I'm going to leave the determination of whether it was appropriate to those folks who listened to the telephone calls," which were released to the media Nov. 5.

Neuer's attorney, David Eisenstadt, said his client was "traumatized" and "almost killed."

"This clearly shows that Hillel Neuer was innocent and victimized in this matter," Eisenstadt said outside the courthouse after the charges were dropped. "Why certain individuals in Needham acted in a reckless manner requires further examination."

"I hold nothing against the people of Needham," Neuer told the Herald. "There were people who acted recklessly and they should reflect."

Neuer was in town to give a speech for a UN Watch affiliate, the American Jewish Committee.

Erin Clossy and Jim Walker contributed to this report.

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Comments (7)

bill 2 years ago  Report Abuse

disorderly conduct is a misdemeanor and must be committed in the officers presence to be arrestable. the only thing neuer did in the officers presence was exit the pizza shop with his hands raised. doesn't seem disorderly to me. false arrest all the way. even if his conduct in the restaurant was disorderly, it was in the past, the police never witnessed it, no right of arrest.

legal dave 2 years ago  Report Abuse

sorry bill but you're way off on this one. Neuer in the pizza shop with the officers outside is 'in presence' Had the officers been notified of the incident after he was already gone that wouldn't be 'in presence' obviously. In presence doesn't mean the time they observed him with their eyes. In presence means 'in presence' and that's what everybody was.....in each others presence.

bjp01@mac.com 2 years ago  Report Abuse

I couldn't understand the woman making the 911 call. I wonder if she has a 'Green Card'?

bill 2 years ago  Report Abuse

sorry legal dave, i am 100% correct which is why the court dismissed the charges. npd had no probable cause because to make the arrest in the first place. the officers must witness the offense (disorderly conduct). the only thing they witnessed was a guy alone in a pizza shop. they did not observe his behavior prior to arrival & while they were there any breach of the peace was over. inexperienced cops in over their heads who compounded a mistake. fortunately court saw through this and dismissed the charges. if they cops were right, the case would still be going forward. 'case dismissed, case closed' let the civil suit for false imprisonment begin

dave 2 years ago  Report Abuse

bill while i respect your opinion it's obvious you're just out to degrade the police in needham. have you heard these 911 tapes? there were multiple calls from atleast 2 different stores about neuer's behavior. the witnesses said he had a gun and was holding a hostage. i didn't mention anything about probable cause or the arrest. i was just pointing out your confusion about the term 'in presence'.....no one was shot or hurt. the cops did what they were trained to do. i think neuer has a good case against the pizza shop and the other store employee who made the 911 calls but nothing against the cops in needham. there was no maliciousness or gross neglect committed on their part. but i'm sure you already knew that.

bill 2 years ago  Report Abuse

dave, please read what i'm writing. 1: disorderly conduct is a misdemeanor and it must be committed in the officers presence to be arrestable. basically, they must observe with their own eyes the person creating the disturbance while he is creating it. in this case, they responded to the call and the disturbance was over when they arrived. read the reports on line in the herald, they never articulate they (police) observed neuer causing a disturbance. when the police arrived he was alone in the pizza shop. everything had already happened (in the past). they never saw him walk to cvs & ask for a cab, they never saw him change his clothes in the restroom, they never saw him 'not eat his pizza.' the gun was made up by caller. a little investigating & you let the man with 3 law degrees go, you do not arrest him. needham pd had 'no lawful authority' to arrest him and that is why the court threw the case out. please forget everything 911 caller said about this man, it gives cause to investigate, but alone it is not enough to arrest him. let it go dave, npd was wrong. both the court and the massachusetts general laws say so. what they did was arrest for a past misdemeanor not committed in there presence. THE POLICE CANNOT DO THAT.

Russ 2 years ago  Report Abuse


lots of legal bs here between you guys.
Obviously what the PD in your town CANNOT do is arrest illegal aliens 'cause that place is crawling with them.
Also, isn't there somethinf wrong when you scream o my god he has a gun and haven't seen one. WTF?

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