

**Zanesville Times Recorder: Prosecutor plans to try mother of baby bitten by rodents as an adult; Charges still not served on 17-year-old**

*By Jona Ison*

*July 25, 2009*

WAVERLY -- Further information about charges against three Idaho, Ohio, residents accused of neglecting a 6-week-old suffering from multiple rat bites is expected Monday.

Pike County Prosecutor Rob Junk said he could not discuss cases before the Pike County grand jury until those indicted are served and the paperwork is filed.

Todd C. Trent, 18, Joseph Gunter, 33, and Tina Gunter, 29, were charged with two counts each of child endangerment and have pleaded not guilty.

The mother of the child is 17 and is expected to be charged in juvenile court. Since she is a minor, Junk said he did not want to release further information about her or possible charges unless approved by the judge.

"Obviously, if she is charged, we would look very seriously that she be bound over as an adult," Junk said.

The Pike County Sheriff's Office responded to 2209 Red Bridge Road in western Pike County on Sunday after receiving an anonymous tip about the child.

Upon arrival, the baby was discovered to have several bite marks. The child was taken to Children's Hospital in Columbus, where doctors said the injuries were consistent with rodent bites and appeared to have occurred during a lengthy period of time.

A 2-year-old and an adolescent also were removed from the home and put in the care of Children's Services.

Junk said he is not aware of any abuse allegations concerning the other children. However, investigators are combining records to see if any of those charged, including the mother, have been part of a household reported for possible abuse, Junk said.

The infant was in fair condition Friday.

A pre-trial hearing has been set for 1 p.m. Wednesday for the three who have been charged.

## **WHIO-TV (Dayton): Children's Mother Vows To Get Them Back**

*July 27, 2009*

DAYTON, Ohio -- The mother of the two children found in a trash bin Monday morning is speaking out and she said Tommie Johnson Jr. should go to jail for a long time.

However, police said both parents have had problems in the past and Children's Services have taken custody of the two children.

Alisha Whitehead admits her family has had a troubled past from drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and even an arrest last year for solicitation.

On Monday, just hours after her two children were found alive in a trash bin in Dayton, Whitehead told News Center 7 that she is turning over a new leaf and will fight to get her children back.

"My kids was filthy and just hurt," said Whitehead.

Thirteen hours after her children disappeared with Tommie Johnson Jr., Whitehead described the bittersweet reunion with them. "My daughter wouldn't let go for nothing. My son wouldn't let me go," said Whitehead.

Officers found 2-year-old Ashonti, and 8-month-old Tommie, III, stuffed in a trash bin Thursday morning.

Whitehead said she tried to stop Tommie from leaving with her children Sunday night, but said he abused her and them. "My kids had marks on them, my daughter a black eye, marks on her face a bit."

Ann Stevens from Children's Services said, "That's part of the investigation, the circumstances of how they got injured."

Children Services is opening a case on the Johnson children who are now in protective custody. As it turned out, this is not the first time Alisha Whitehead's children have been removed from her care.

The last time Children's Services had contact with this family was in 2005, concerning two other children of this mother," said Stevens.

Alisha said she was told that she could not keep custody of her other children as long as she was living with Tommie Johnson.

This time, Whitehead vows that she is not going back to Johnson, and said she has been given a second chance with her two angels. Whitehead said, "My kids are in good hands til we get back on our feet, and I get my kids back."

### **Dayton Daily News: 2 kids found in trash bin now in foster care**

*By Lucas Sullivan and James Cummings*

*July 28, 2009*

DAYTON — Two young children found in a trash bin behind a local business have been taken away from their mother by Montgomery County Children's Services and put in foster care.

Ashonti Johnson, 23 months old, and her 8-month-old brother Tommie Johnson III were found about 8:30 a.m. Monday, July 27, by an electrician arriving for work.

They had been in the heavy-duty, green plastic bin for as long as 13 hours, Dayton Police Chief Richard Biehl said.

The empty but dirty bin was sitting in the sun at 902 E. Second St. [MAP]

About an hour after the children were found, Ashonti's father, Tommie Lee Johnson Jr., 39, confessed to dumping them in the trash bin, Sgt. Tom Flanders said.

Baron Bates, 23, of Beavercreek, said he heard Ashonti crying, opened the lid of the trash bin and found the children covered in stinky mud and soaking wet from sweat.

"(Ashonti) was crying and reached out and I couldn't believe it," Bates said.

Bates and his boss Dale Felty gave the kids water and Little Debbie treats until paramedics arrived.

The lack of airflow, combined with sunlight quickly turned the 4-foot-tall bin into a virtual oven, Flanders said.

Detectives said the children had literally "hours" to live.

The children's mother, Alisha Whitehead, 27, said Johnson tried to choke her during a fight and then took the children from their home about 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

Whitehead said Johnson, her boyfriend, had consumed six 40-ounce bottles of beer and some of her prescription medication before leaving with the kids. He was not going to let her have them, she said.

"I never knew he would do something like this," Whitehead said.

Police did not issue an Amber Alert because there was no evidence the children had been abducted or harmed, Flanders said.

Johnson Jr. said he dumped his biological daughter and her infant brother in a trash bin because he wanted them to go to "a better place."

A handcuffed Johnson then said he had a lapse "in judgment" as he was led to Montgomery County Jail about 10:30 a.m. Monday.

Johnson had just confessed to police after 12 hours of interrogation that he dumped his 23-month-old daughter, Ashonti Johnson, and her 8-month-old brother, Tommie Johnson III, in an empty city-issued bin, officials said.

Two electricians found the children soaked in mud inside the 4-foot bin behind Felty Electric, 902 E. Second St.

Police believe the children were in the bin the entire 12 hours Johnson was being questioned.

Johnson, who is not the biological father of the infant, first said he took the children from their mother's house, in the 400 block of N. Cherrywood Ave., about 7:30 p.m.

Whitehead, 27, said Monday "friends" threw Johnson out of her house.

Johnson reportedly said he walked with them to a baby sitter's house and returned to Whitehead's place without the children.

That turned out to be the first of many bogus stories Johnson told Sunday night and into Monday morning, Flanders said.

Establishing a "bull's-eye"

Dayton police, along with area law-enforcement agencies, combed East Dayton all night, while detectives continued to question Tommie L. Johnson Jr. at police headquarters.

U.S. Marshals offered their services in the search, along with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office.

"We were going door-to-door, after establishing a bull's-eye (the center of the search) and branched out," Lt. Patrick Welsh said. "We put out a broadcast to all local law-enforcement groups and gave a description of the children."

Welsh said the children's mother could not provide a picture of the children, making the search more difficult.

Despite many discussions about issuing an Amber Alert, none was issued.

"Right away there was a discussion about issuing an Amber Alert," Welsh said. "It isn't 'are we OK with not issuing an Amber Alert.' We didn't meet the criteria to issue one."

Johnson was arrested at 1:52 a.m. on felony charges of domestic violence, child endangering and inducing panic, according to jail records.

In handcuffs, Johnson still refused to tell a detective the whereabouts of the children.

Flanders said since the children were found hours later inside a sun-baked trash bin turned plastic oven, he will push "more serious charges" against Johnson.

Flanders is expected to meet with Montgomery County Prosecutor's today.

On again, off again

Alisha Whitehead described her relationship with Tommie L. Johnson Jr. as on-again, off-again.

Police said the couple are boyfriend and girlfriend involved in a relationship plagued by alcohol and drugs.

Johnson has a 2004 conviction for domestic violence and numerous convictions for public intoxication and disorderly conduct.

Montgomery County Jail records show he has been arrested eight times since 2003.

County court records show Whitehead has no criminal record.

Montgomery County Children's Services has a previous case involving Whitehead.

In 2005, two other daughters, now 4 and 5, were removed from her custody and placed with a relative, spokeswoman Ann Stevens said.

Stevens would not elaborate on that investigation.

Stevens said caseworkers will try to place Ashonti and Tommie Johnson III in the care of a relative, but if a suitable home is not found, they will remain in foster care.

## **Port Clinton News Herald: Two people facing drug, endangerment charges**

*Staff Report*

*July 28, 2009*

Two people face charges after police say they found drugs in an apartment with a 3-month-old baby.

A report from the Port Clinton Police Department shows Nicole Snively, 25, of 225 Buckeye Boulevard, and Jeremiah Mincer, 31, of 8385 W. Ohio 163, Oak Harbor, are both charged with endangering children, drug paraphernalia and possessing marijuana.

The Web site for the Ottawa County Municipal Court shows both are to appear on Wednesday.

According to the report, Mincer called police to the Buckeye Boulevard apartment at 2:57 a.m. Friday because Snively had locked him out of the apartment.

An officer stated Mincer told them the two had been at bars drinking and later argued, and Snively pushed him into the hallway in his underwear and refused to let him back inside.

He told police another person had watched the baby while the pair were at the bars, but their baby was inside the apartment when police arrived.

The report shows police knocked several times, then called the apartment manager to let them into the apartment. An officer stated he smelled burnt marijuana and could see smoke lingering in the apartment.

Officers found Snively in the back bedroom holding the baby.

Snively took a portable breath test which showed she was intoxicated, the report shows.

She reportedly told police she did not know who had been smoking marijuana in her apartment. An officer stated he saw several burnt marijuana cigarettes and a tray which contained a grinder and rolling papers in the apartment.

Neither Snively nor Mincer claimed ownership of the items.

Mincer was then given a portable breath test and was also found to be intoxicated.

Police contacted children's services and a family member picked up the child.

Once Mincer was arrested and put into a cruiser, Snively reportedly told police a bag of marijuana could be found in his pants in the bedroom. The report shows an officer found the marijuana.

Snively was later arrested, and both were taken to the Ottawa County Detention Facility.

### **Dayton Daily News: Kids found in trash now in foster care; charges filed against father**

*By Otis Gowens, Lucas Sullivan and Steve Bennish*

*July 28, 2009*

DAYTON — A half-century in prison is the potential penalty for a father who confessed to dumping two children in a trash bin, according to charges filed Tuesday, July 28, by the Montgomery County Prosecutor's Office.

Tommie L. Johnson Jr., 39, faces 52 years of imprisonment on 11 counts: four felony kidnapping, three counts of domestic violence, two counts of endangering children and one count each of inducing panic and tampering with evidence.

Johnson's daughter, 23-month-old Ashonti Johnson, and her 8-month-old brother, Tommie Johnson III, were found alive by two electricians inside a city-issued trash bin Monday morning behind a building at 902 E. Second St.

The children had been in the closed bin for about 13 hours, police said. They were treated at Dayton Children's Medical Center and were said to be hungry, but in good health. They're now in the custody of Children Services, and will remain there, according to Juvenile Court.

Their mother, Alicia Whitehead, said after the hearing that she believes Johnson wanted to kill the children.

"He started drinking and doing bad things," she said. "Then he ran off with my kids."

Whitehead added that she's comfortable with Juvenile Court Judge Nick Kuntz's decision to keep the children in the care of Children's Services, although she said she'd eventually like to have custody.

First, she said, she intended to complete programs for drug abuse and domestic violence.

"My babies will be safe now," she said.

Johnson said while being led to the Montgomery County Jail on Monday that he put the kids in the bin, but intended to retrieve them.

Police said he took the kids Sunday night from a home at 420 N. Cherrywood Ave. after a domestic dispute with Whitehead.

It wasn't the first time Johnson had left with the kids. In December, Whitehead, 27, called police to report a domestic violence incident and said Johnson left with the children.

Johnson walked the children to his wife's house, according to a police report. He was arrested the next day on charges of public intoxication.

Johnson has been arrested at least eight times since 2003 on charges related to domestic violence, public intoxication and assault.

Whitehead was arrested in June after she offered to perform a sex act on an undercover officer for \$20, police said. Whitehead told the officer she did not prostitute often, but needed money to feed her children.

She pleaded guilty July 7 to a prostitution charge in Dayton Municipal Court .

### **Columbus Dispatch: Mom charged in possible rat-bite case**

*By Randy Ludlow*

*July 30, 2009*

A 17-year-old Pike County mother has been charged with neglecting an infant daughter who lost two toes to suspected rat bites.

Prosecutor Rob Junk said he will seek to try Katrina Lowe as an adult for the injuries suffered by her 6-week-old daughter, Leanne.

The young mother appeared in Pike County Juvenile Court on Tuesday and was released after being charged with two delinquency counts of child endangering,

Authorities say the baby was repeatedly bitten by rats in her family's mobile home west of Piketon. "Nobody did anything" while the infant was being injured over an extended period, Junk said.

Three other residents of the mobile home -- Todd C. Trent, 18, the mother's boyfriend; Joseph Gunter, 33; and Tina Gunter, 29 -- previously were arrested for child endangering.

They are scheduled to be arraigned today after being indicted by a grand jury this week. They remain in jail in lieu of posting \$210,000 bail.

The baby was discovered injured following an anonymous tip to authorities and was taken to Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus on July 19.

The infant, who suffered extensive bites to her left foot and back, has improved and might be released this week to Pike County Children Services, Junk said.

The agency is seeking emergency custody of the baby, as well as Lowe's 2-year-old son, the prosecutor said.

## **Dayton Daily News: Death of 6-month-old being treated as homicide**

*By Kyle Nagel*

*July 29, 2009*

DAYTON — The death of a 6-month-old boy found Wednesday, July 29, on the front steps of his great-uncle's apartment building is being investigated as a homicide, police said.

Detectives from the department's Special Victims Unit and Homicide Squad were dispatched to 208 N. Irwin St. after medical and police first responders found the dead child about 1:05 p.m.

The 911 call, received from inside the apartment, said the baby was not breathing.

Neighbors said the baby's mother and her uncle were hysterical when police and medical personnel arrived and that the baby's skin was already blue.

The mother and her uncle, along with several others, were taken in for questioning, Dayton Sgt. Gary White said. Investigators would not release the names of the mother, her uncle or the child.

An autopsy is scheduled to be performed today, July 30, according to the Montgomery County Coroner's Office.

According to White, the mother, who has several Dayton addresses connected to her, arrived at the North Irwin Street building to stay with her uncle on Tuesday.

The death "will be treated as a homicide and investigated as such," Sgt. Tom Flanders said.

Police were attempting to interview two other people who had been in the apartment Wednesday morning, White said, and they had not located the baby's father by Wednesday afternoon, White said.

Investigators could not immediately say how long the baby had been dead when medics arrived.

## **Canton Repository: Children Services levy likely headed for the ballot**

*By Kelli Young*

*July 29, 2009*

CANTON — Voters likely will be asked in November to renew a property tax that helps protect abused and neglected children in Stark County.

County commissioners Wednesday started the process of placing a 1.4-mill renewal levy for Stark County Children Services on the November ballot. They approved a resolution that asks the county auditor to certify how much revenue the renewal would generate for the children services division of the Stark County Department of Job and Family Services.

Commissioners next must pass a resolution to put the renewal on the ballot.

The existing 1.4-mill levy generates \$10.3 million a year for the division, which is responsible for protecting Stark County's children from abuse or neglect. The levy, which expires in 2010, makes up about roughly 40 percent of the division's revenue.

"Without this funding in place, we would have devastating cuts that would impact children," said Julie Barnes, director of Job and Family Services.

Barnes said the agency may eventually come back to commissioners to ask for an additional levy, but chose to pursue the renewal at this time because the agency still needs to sort out how recent state funding cuts — a 33 percent reduction for the children services division — impacts operations.

"We recognize that the community is struggling as well," Barnes said.

In other business, commissionrs

- Scheduled a public hearing for 7 p.m. Sept. 29 to consider whether the St. Nicholas Romanian Orthodox Church at 1621 Sawburg Ave. S in Lexington Township should be annexed to Alliance. The hearing will be held at the Alliance City Council Chamber.
- Approved the annexation of 51 acres from Lexington Township to Alliance, following a court order from Stark County Common Pleas Judge John G. Haas. The properties to be annexed are south of Beeson Street NE, north of W. Main Street and east of Sawburg Avenue. In August 2007, then-Commissioner Jane Vignos supported the annexation, Commissioner Tom Harmon opposed it and Commissioner Todd Bosley abstained. Without two votes in favor, the petition was denied. Haas later upheld the denial, but an appeals court reversed the ruling.
- Approved increasing the funding level for the Stark Council of Governments, an umbrella organization for all county political subdivisions that oversees the Stark County Metropolitan Narcotics Unit, the Canton-Stark County Crime Lab and the creation of the new countywide dispatch center. Without new funds, SCOG faces a deficit in 2011. Currently, SCOG receives 7.5 percent of local government funds. That's up to \$1.27 million this year. Next year, if Canton also approves the increase, SCOG would receive 9 percent of local government funds.
- Approved a tax advance that frees additional cash so the county auditor can pay bills that the office had been holding due to a cash flow problem.
- Set a public hearing for 1 p.m. Aug. 12 at Stark County Job and Family Services for the Ohio Division of Liquor Control to consider whether to grant North Canton Travel Center at 4450 Portage St. NW a liquor permit that would allow the truck stop to provide beer carryout. Jackson Township trustees had requested the hearing.

### **Chillicothe Gazette: Area camp provides at-risk kids with fun, education**

*By Jona Ison*

*July 31, 2009*

Over the past four years, area agencies have come together to provide services and fun to at-risk children in the community.

Fast Camp, conducted at Roweton Family Complex, has about 95 campers this year receiving mental health education and social opportunities. The camp began in 2005 and is a collaborative effort of the Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center, Ross County Job and Family Services, Integrated Services and Discovery Tree Family Resources.

"For a lot of these children who are at risk, there's nothing for them during the summer," said Brian Bethel, outpatient services director at Scioto Paint Valley.

The camp provides staff more time with the children they serve and consequently more opportunity to observe behaviors and try different techniques in addressing those behaviors. As a result, Kim Dement, program director of Integrated Services, said staff are able to pass along those techniques to schools and family members.

"We'll see a lot of social changes in the kids," she said.

For example, last year, a camper had pica disorder, which causes sufferers to have an insatiable appetite for substances such as paper or even food ingredients. At camp, Dement said staff was able to discover methods that discourage the behaviors caused by pica, such as ignoring the behavior or redirecting the child, and were able to share those with others who interact with the child.

Sunshine Butcher is extremely pleased with the camp and what she sees it doing for her son, Brandin Sarlo, and her niece and nephew.

"I think it's amazing. The staff here work with my kids great," she said.

Her son has anger issues; the camp brings him in contact with other children who have similar issues, and they learn different ways to handle that anger. Each week, one day of camp focuses on mental health education such as conflict resolution and preparing for school, while the other day focuses on putting those new skills to work during activities.

Butcher also enjoys being included in activities such as family day or on trips to places such as the Columbus Zoo, which Sarlo said are his favorite aspects of camp.

The camp is free for attendees who are referred by agencies and sometimes schools. The camp is broken into age groups, with two weeks for ages 13 and 14; eight weeks for ages 6-9 and two weeks for ages 5 and 6. Funding is provided via donations and the Paint Valley ADAMH board.

## **WHIO-Radio (Dayton): Serious Charges Against Man Who Left Kids In Trash Bin**

*By Nick Zeigler*

*July 30, 2009*

DAYTON, Ohio -- A man accused of dumping two young children in a trash bin earlier this week is now charged with attempted murder, among other things.

Tommie Johnson Jr., 39, is facing a slew of other charges including attempted assault, kidnapping, inducing panic, child endangering, and domestic violence. Ashonti Johnson, 2, and her 8-month-old brother Tommie Johnson III spent as long as 12 hours in a trash bin before someone heard their cries.

Police said Tommy Johnson Jr. had gotten into an argument Sunday, July 26, with his girlfriend, 27-year-old Alicia Whitehead, at her home in the 400 block of N. Cherrywood Avenue. Johnson allegedly attacked Whitehead before leaving with the couple's children around 7:30 p.m.

Johnson, 39, was alone when he was taken into custody shortly afterward -- police questioned him for hours, but he never said where the children were. It wasn't until after the kids were found near a business in the 900 block of E. Second Street that police said he admitted to dumping them in the trash can.

Surveillance video from a nearby business also shows Johnson dumping a stroller into a dumpster.

According to jail records, Johnson has been arrested several times in the past for charges including assault, domestic violence, and public intoxication.

Johnson will be back in court Aug. 5.

Officials with Montgomery County Children's Services placed the two children in foster care. Whitehead already has two other daughters, 4 and 5, who were removed from her custody in 2005.

## **Cleveland Plain Dealer: LETTER; Strickland's elimination of the Early Learning Initiative will hurt children**

*By Debora Ford*

*July 31, 2009*

I read the article ("Strickland signs budget but vetoes 61 provisions," July 18) about Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland signing the state budget bill but using the line-item veto 61 times. I am very upset because he decided to veto a program that pertains to children with learning disabilities and children who need a head start in life.

These children are our future. If parents, educators and legislators don't care about our children, the future will be going down the drain.

Has Ohio decided that helping young people isn't important? Teachers' and parents' hands are tied when Strickland cancels programs like the Early Learning Initiative.

The Early Learning Initiative provides programs to meet the needs of children with disabilities. It allows these children to interact with other children to strengthen their social, emotional and developmental skills.

In 2007, it served 23,455 3- to 5-year-olds. ELI classrooms have an 8:4 ratio of typically developing students to students with special needs.

As a student entering the early childhood education profession, I feel that my hands will be tied because eliminating ELI closes many doors for youth to be able to learn, develop and have fun.

The governor has put education on the back burner for low-income families and families of children with special needs, not realizing that these children will be our future.