

Grand Island hit-run victim – saved in part by dog – treated for head injury



A photo released by State Police shows the vehicle that they believe struck a Grand Island woman. (New York State Police)

- By [Maki Becker](#) Published Thu, Jun 15, 2017

When troopers found Dana Papaj critically injured on the side of a Grand Island road Tuesday night, after being struck in an apparent hit-and-run collision on East River Road, they couldn't identify her.

She had no ID with her. But her dog, Molly, had gone to find help, according to Papaj's daughter, Brittany Gruttadauria.

Papaj remained at Erie County Medical Center Thursday where she was being treated for a serious head injury.

"She's not awake yet," Gruttadauria said. "She's just starting to open her eyes."

Scans showed that there's some swelling on her brain but she's making progress, her daughter said.

In the meantime, State Police announced that they had located the pickup truck they believe struck Papaj as she was walking Molly.

"It's helpful," Gruttadauria said of the news that the truck had been found. "I would like to see the person take responsibility. To do something that horrible, to leave someone like that. You'd have to be a horrible person."

Papaj's daughter shared what she had learned about what happened Tuesday:

Papaj had just left Gruttadauria's home at about 7:30 p.m. She had been helping Gruttadauria with her newborn baby, Michael, who had just come home from the hospital two days earlier.

"My mom's a first-time grandma," Gruttadauria said.

Papaj, 53, went home to get Molly and was walking the dog on East River Road when she was struck on the west shoulder of the road between Whitehaven Road and Riverwoods Drive shortly after 8 p.m.

A neighbor spotted Molly, a cavalier King Charles spaniel/poodle mix, frantically running around with her leash still on.

Normally, Molly isn't one to approach people but the dog went straight to the neighbor, Gruttadauria said. The neighbor picked up the leash and Molly started pulling her.

"All the way back to my parents' house," Gruttadauria said. "It was quite a distance."

No one was at the home and the neighbor began asking other neighbors if they'd seen Papaj.

A second neighbor figured Molly had gotten loose while Papaj was walking her and took the dog, put her in his car, and began driving around.

That's when he saw the patrol cars and other emergency vehicles on East River Road.

An ambulance was already rushing Papaj to Erie County Medical Center when the neighbor approached troopers at the scene with the dog.

They were then able to figure out Papaj's identity at least in part to her dog's determination.

"The dog went back to the home," said State Police spokesman James O'Callaghan.

Papaj adores her dog and Gruttadauria thinks her mother would love that Molly helped save the day.

"She'd be happy," Gruttadauria said.

Gruttadauria wonders if the dog sensed trouble even before it happened.

In the days before the incident, Gruttadauria said, her mother had noted that Molly was acting strangely.

"My mom said she kept freezing whenever she would want to go to the river," Gruttadauria said. "It's like she knew something."

Police request that anyone with information about the incident call them at (585) 344-6200.