

Correction officer owns truck in Grand Island hit-and-run



The view on East River Parkway on Grand Island, looking north, close to where Dana Papaj was seriously injured by a hit-and-run driver on June 13, 2017. (John Hickey/Buffalo News)

- By [Maki Becker](#) Published Thu, Jun 22, 2017

The pickup truck that State Police investigators believe struck a Grand Island woman in a hit-and-run incident June 13 is registered to a state correction officer, his attorney confirmed to The Buffalo News. The pickup is registered to Edward J. Kuebler III of the Town of Tonawanda, Kuebler's attorney Barry Covert, said Thursday. Kuebler has not been charged.

State police are still investigating who was driving the truck that hit Dana Papaj, who remains hospitalized. The Buffalo News reached Kuebler by phone and he said: "I have a lawyer. You can contact him." Covert said his client provided his pickup truck to the State Police on June 14, the day after the accident on Grand Island.



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

"They still do have his truck," Covert said. "Other than that I do not want to say anything else." State records show Kuebler works at Wende Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in Alden. Lt. Brian Ratajczak of the State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation said Thursday that investigators have seized a pickup truck believed to have been involved in the hit-and-run and are trying to determine who was behind the wheel.

"We're in the process of forensically proving it is the vehicle that was involved," Ratajczak said. The vehicle has "damage that would be consistent" with striking a person, Ratajczak said. Ratajczak would not name the owner of the truck, but he did say that the registered owner "has retained counsel and at this time, they have declined any interview."

Investigators have also located "some subjects that were in the immediate area when the accident happened," Ratajczak said. One of the people called 9-1-1 moments after Papaj was struck.



Dana Papaj and her dog, Molly. (Photo courtesy of the family of Dana Papaj)

Papaj, 53, suffered a serious head injury when she was struck while walking her dog, Molly, on East River Road, on the west shoulder of the road between Whitehaven Road and Riverwoods Drive just after 8 p.m. More than a week after the incident, she remains in the intensive care unit at Erie County Medical Center.

Surveillance footage of the incident shows a pickup truck brake but not come to a full stop before leaving the scene, according to a source. Friends of Papaj have expressed frustration at the pace of the investigation, questioning why no one has been arrested. Ratajczak said his investigators are "putting our fullest attention to this matter." "We are working on it on a daily basis," he said. "... We are building our case which does take some time but we are using all our assets available to do so."

Every day since the incident, investigators have been seen going door to door on East River Road asking questions and following up on leads, witnesses said. State Police are asking anyone who may have witnessed the incident or has information about it to call them at (585) 343-2200.

The Erie County District Attorney's Office also confirmed that the case is being "actively" investigated. "There is an ongoing criminal investigation," said Joanna Pasceri, DA spokeswoman. "They are actively pursuing it. It's not being ignored."

Hit-and-run incidents can be particularly difficult to prosecute. It took three years before [Gabriele Ballowe](#) pleaded guilty last year to leaving the scene of a physical injury incident without reporting it in the hit-and-run death of Evans handyman Barry Moss. And prosecutors were shocked when a jury acquitted [Dr. James Corasanti](#) in 2012 of all felony charges and found him guilty of a single misdemeanor driving while intoxicated charge in the hit-and-run death of Alexandria "Alix" Rice.