

FEDS HAVE PAUSED EXECUTIONS BUT NOT DEATH PENALTY TRIALS

Bowers jury has more decisions it must make

By Megan Guza
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Jurors in the trial of convicted Pittsburgh synagogue shooter Robert Bowers likely will decide this week whether he will join a long list of condemned men awaiting execution.

It is the first of potentially two death-related decisions the jury will make.

The jurors — seven men and five women — convicted Bowers June

SYNAGOGUE SHOOTING TRIAL

16 of all 63 federal charges filed against him in connection with the Oct. 27, 2018, shooting.

The synagogue he targeted housed three congregations: Tree of Life, Dor Hadash and New Light. Eleven people were killed: Richard Gottfried, Joyce Fienberg, Rose Mallinger, Jerry Rabinowitz, Cecil

and David Rosenthal, Bernice and Sylvan Simon, Daniel Stein, Melvin Wax, and Irving Younger.

On June 26, the trial moved into the penalty phase, which consists of two stages: Eligibility and sentence selection. In the eligibility stage, jurors are hearing evidence to determine whether Bowers is, in fact, eligible for the death penalty. Prosecutors must convince jurors that Bowers was able to form the intent to kill, and the crimes included at least one aggravating factor.

If jurors find that prosecutors proved their case, the trial moves

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Dave Klug

Jurors could decide this week whether synagogue shooter Robert Bowers is eligible to receive the death penalty. This sketch of Bowers is from a court appearance in 2018.



Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette

U.S. Army veteran and National Senior Games recumbent trike athlete Rodger Reddish, 75, lifts his trike from his hitch rack Saturday in the parking lot at Highmark Stadium in Station Square. Mr. Reddish is a stroke survivor who also uses oxygen. He says he regularly cycles around 20 miles on his trike. He plans to compete in the 5K, 10K and 20K races.

UPMC McKeesport ends care for the most serious heart attacks

As city fades, a hospital cuts

By Kris B. Mamula
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

City parking garages stuffed with cars and stores thriving up and down the block is Mike Kostyzak's memory of McKeesport when he was a child.

"McKeesport was no joke," said Mr. Kostyzak, 62, who grew up in Glassport, a neighboring mill town three miles away.

Today, McKeesport is a husk of what it was, with more than one out of four residents living in poverty and an ongoing campaign to demolish boarded up storefronts in the once bustling downtown.

As the city faded over the past 10 years, UPMC McKeesport Hospital cut its workforce and medical services, shrinking its role as an economic pillar in the struggling Monongahela Valley town.

"Buddy, as much as I hate to say it, it's all about the money," said Mr. Kostyzak, 62, who opened Zak's Bicycle Shop in 2009 on a main drag in McKeesport after getting laid off from a radiator shop. He said he can't afford health insurance. "It's the sad reality."

In recent years, McKeesport Hospital, located 15 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, closed its two-bed intensive care unit, referring critically ill patients to other hospitals.

The hospital has also ended emergency care for the most serious heart attacks, called ST Elevation Myocardial Infarction or STEMI, which mostly tend to be more severe and dangerous. About 40% of heart attacks are STEMI, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

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They bear down

2023 National Senior Games highlight athletes' enduring competitive spirit

By Michael Korsh
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

As the 7 a.m. sunlight shone down on Highmark Stadium, dozens of women ages 50 and older lined up along the inflatable starting line for the 5-kilometer race. Clad in neon workout gear — each with a bib across her chest — the women took off on their 5-kilometer race, while the men stretched their legs in the parking lot.

But unlike the fervent sprinting of traditional track and field events, these racers had a key difference: Their feet never left the ground.

The rules of competitive race and power walking are stringent; according to the U.S. Power Walking Association, a racer must maintain one foot on the ground at all times, and steps must be taken heel-to-toe.

And among older athletes, the sport has become a mainstay in recent years: Almost 500 athletes are competing in the race and power walking events at the 2023 National Senior Games, this year held in Pittsburgh.

Saturday's finals of the men's and women's race walk marked one of the first

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Benjamin B. Braun/Post-Gazette

Mayor Ed Gainey speaks to workers from the Department of Public Works on Wednesday during a City In The Streets event in Garfield. That department now reports to the mayor's newly created Office of Neighborhood Services. He has moved to put more offices under his direct control.

The administration has been restructuring city departments to put more functions under the mayor's direct control

Gainey is tightening his grip

By Hallie Lauer and Adam Smeltz
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Mayor Ed Gainey's office took control of Pittsburgh's 311 call center. The same with the city's public access cable TV channel. It has added new public relations positions to the mayor's office and moved existing ones there from other departments.

And it's all added up to a mayor's office far bigger than in previous administrations.

Mr. Gainey and his top aides have been restructuring city departments since he became mayor last year to put more functions

under his direct control. The administration is especially tightening its grip on how and when Pittsburghers hear from city government — frustrating some current and former officials who see a political power grab rooted in the mayor's re-election hopes.

By moving these specific functions into the mayor's office, government insiders say, Mr. Gainey has effectively consolidated control over the information and messages that the city shares with residents.

The moves took shape over the past year. This article is based on conversations with several current and former Pittsburgh officials.

"The mayor's office really wants

to control information that's shared because sharing the truth is not always the sound bite that's good for re-election," said a former government official familiar with the office.

In the most high-profile move — and the most hotly contested one — the city's cable bureau was moved into the mayor's office. That followed a fight between the Gainey administration and City Council over the issue during budget negotiations last year. Council members have to approve the city's budget, and can reject specific line items within it.

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Trike athlete Rodger Reddish, 75, shows how his recumbent trike works on the Allegheny Heritage Trail near Highmark Stadium.

GAMES, FROM C-1

days of competitive events in this year's Senior Games, which have brought more than 11,000 participants ages 50 and up to the Steel City. From July 7 to 18, athletes will compete for medals in 19 different sports, from classic competitive sports (like tennis and swimming) to more senior-friendly events, such as pickleball, power walking and cornhole.

Rodger Reddish, of Colorado Springs, Colo., has taken on an intense practice regimen since 2017 — including daily rides and cutting out processed foods — to prepare for this year's events, including a 5K time trial and a triathlon relay. He uses an app called Strava to track his cycling times, including a recent race at the National Veterans Golden Age Games. He was at Highmark on Saturday volunteering to help with the race walks.

"Once a person becomes competitive — beyond the recreational, around-the-city-block rider — it usually takes three to five years for them to condition their body to where it's competitive to other people who are competitive," he said.

A stroke survivor and military veteran, Mr. Reddish competes in cycling events using a recumbent trike — not tricycle, he's quick to clarify.

"Tricycles relate more to 5-year-olds," said Mr. Reddish, 75. "But this is quite different."

While the National Games requires athletes to qualify at one of 52 state-level tournaments, Mr. Reddish has earned medals in multiple state races before arriving in Pittsburgh. His participation in this year's games is being sponsored by GetSetUp, an online learning platform geared toward older adults.

Mr. Reddish was serving in the Army in Germany in 1986 when a driver ran a stop sign and struck him while riding his bike. He has persevered through a number of medical challenges since then — including a stroke in 2005 that has affected his balance, coordination and speech.

But 37 years later — armed with two recumbent trikes, oxygen and a knee brace — Mr. Reddish has

arrived in Pittsburgh, more determined to earn a national medal than ever.

"This isn't a Sandlot event," he said. "This is the Super Bowl of senior Olympics."

Held every other year starting in 1987, the National Senior Games have grown to become the largest qualified multisport event in the world for athletes ages 50 and over. The 2019 Senior Games, held in Albuquerque, N.M., saw a record attendance of nearly 14,000 participants; the 2022 Games (rescheduled in light of the COVID-19 pandemic) saw just over 12,000.

This year marks the second time Pittsburgh has hosted the National Senior Games, the first being in 2005.

The event, governed by the National Senior Games Association (NSGA), aims to highlight the importance of health and wellness for those over the age of 50. A study in the British Journal of Sports Medicine found that just 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise a week can reduce older adults' risk of mortality by 28%.

"You have people that are 20-something, and you have people who are 70-something who do nothing but watch TV, or claim to do something, and their exercise is walking around the grocery store looking for food. They just exist," said Mr. Reddish.

As more athletes arrived to warm up, Mr. Reddish waved to a woman walking past, joining the scurry of athletes pacing back and forth — carefully ensuring their feet remain on the ground.

"Where are you from?" he asked. "Florida!" she waved back.

Mr. Reddish said he has found a camaraderie within the Senior Games' community of athletes, all of whom share his competitive spirit — including within events like power walking.

"Everybody has a story: replaced hips, replaced knees, ankles, cancers, kidney problems, you name it. Very few people who have reached the age of the seniors have been free of medical issues," he said. "But the only thing missing from that sight is the dust."

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Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette photos

Julie Irizarry, 61, of Florida, leads a group of women competing in the National Senior Games 5K run-walk outside Highmark Stadium. Saturday's finals of the men's and women's race walk marked one of the first days of competitive events in this year's Senior Games, which have brought more than 11,000 participants ages 50 and older to Pittsburgh.

Competitive spirit Games' hallmark



Connecticut team member Spencer Parrish, 87, left, and Pennsylvania Team member Kenneth Klouda, 81, compete in the National Senior Games 5K run-walk on Saturday.

WEST

Man accused of fatally shooting mother, aunt found dead in Beaver County Jail

The man who allegedly shot and killed his mother and aunt in New Sewickley last month was found dead in his jail cell.

According to Post-Gazette news partner KDKA, 43-year-old Benjamin Selby's body was discovered early Friday in the Beaver County Jail.

Beaver County District Attorney David Lozier told KDKA that Selby was in an isolation cell and being checked on every 15 minutes by jail personnel.

Selby was found slumped over in a wheelchair that he used as a result of a motorcycle accident, Mr. Lozier said.

"At about 8:30 in the morning, he was noticed to be slumped in the wheelchair and there were fluids under his wheelchair," said Mr. Lozier. "He was sleeping in the wheelchair. So him sitting in the wheelchair was not unusual. Him appearing to be sleeping in the wheelchair was not unusual."

An autopsy is planned, KDKA reported, but results aren't expected for six weeks.

Selby was charged in the June 24 deaths of his mother and aunt. Police said Selby's cousin called 911 and said he had heard at least 15 shots fired in the family home on Klein Road.

First responders forced their way into the home and took Selby into custody.

Police said the bodies of 71-year-old Delores Selby, Selby's mother, and 65-year-old Mary Lihosit, his aunt, were found inside the home.

New Sewickley police said they also found guns, ammunition and narcotics inside the home during a search.

NORTH

County officials confirm human remains were from Indigenous burial site in Sharpsburg

Human remains that a utility work crew inadvertently dug up in Sharpsburg last month came from the burial site of Indigenous people, Allegheny County officials said Friday.

In a news release, the county said that determination was made after the medical examiner's office consulted with "an expert in the field."

"The proper parties have been contacted and remains will be released to the appropriate ancestors for repatriation," the news release said.

After the remains were discovered June 21, county police and the medical examiner launched an investigation, which now has been resolved and closed, the news release said.

A utility work crew uncovered bones while doing work on private property along Short Canal Street. The medical examiner's office then "reached out to an anthropologic and archaeological expert for consultation. The expert came to Allegheny County this week and confirmed the findings," the county news release said.

Proposal made for ranked choice voting in Pennsylvania

By Lauren Jessop
The Center Square

HARRISBURG — Primary election candidates sometimes win by slim margins in Pennsylvania, prompting some state lawmakers to find new ways to ensure winners secure broader support from voters.

Rep. Christopher Rabb, D-Philadelphia, has recently introduced several pieces of election-related legislation — one of which would institute ranked choice voting at the municipal level.

Ranked choice voting, or RCV, is an electoral system in which voters rank candidates in order of preference on their ballots. The system kicks in if no candidate wins a majority of first-preference votes.

In the absence of a majority winner, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated, lifting the next-preference choices on the ballot. A new tally is conducted to determine whether any candidate has won a majority of adjusted votes. The process is repeated until a candidate wins an outright majority.

Mr. Rabb told The Center Square he thinks the pros of ranked choice voting strongly outweigh the cons.

He said there is a lack of public dialogue about the structure of elections and how they can improve, "versus just talking about the problems with parties — whether it's Democrats or Republicans — and issues on the ballot."

Mr. Rabb said discussing a different process could "very well create a level of interest and engagement that addresses the things that I think imperil our democracy and civic engagement."

In Philadelphia, where eight out of 10 voters are Democrats, Mr. Rabb said over seven out of 10 did not show up to vote in the recent primary to elect its next mayor.

While there was not enough support for the Republican candidate to win, it wasn't a done deal, he said. There were over a half dozen Democrats running, "but the vast majority of folks in Philly didn't come out to vote."

The issue is not bipartisan — in general, Democrats lean in favor of RCV and Republicans oppose it.

Proponents say RCV allows candidates to be elected with broader support. They also claim it discourages polarized candidates from playing to their base and that it deters negative campaigning. Other pros they cite include giving voters more choices, and that it saves time, money, and resources by not requiring separate runoff elections.

In contrast, critics claim the system is complex and confusing — and when voters are confused, they run the risk of incorrectly completed ballots being invalidated, or becoming disengaged from the process entirely. They also argue that RCV decreases voter turnout and increases costs and tabulation time.

Additionally, they say while the

process theoretically encourages positive campaigning and produces candidates with broad support, in practice it enables candidates with only marginal support to prevail.

In response to the criticisms, Mr. Rabb says, "If you can play the lottery and select a number of choices to get the ticket you want," you can fill out a ballot with multiple choices.

He said there are certain elements of what we do now that are not necessarily easy to understand, but we need to invest in voter literacy.

The use of RCV, Mr. Rabb said, would better gauge how voters feel on issues by comparing their second and third preference candidates' platforms and "create a standard of accountability that we can directly relate to the demographics of the folks who got them to the finish line."

"That gives us a lot of data that helps every sector of society in ways that do not exist right now. And that's really good for democracy, it's good for campaigning, and it informs good policies," he added.

As The Center Square previously reported, the Forward Party — which has included Pennsylvania as one of the battleground states it will focus on making inroads into — is also advocating its use.

Ranked choice voting is currently prohibited in five states — 17 have adopted it on either the state or local level.