

Elkland woman charged with filing false assault and rape report

(Editor's note: Due to the sensitive nature of the following article, and the possibility that the subject may have, in fact, been a victim of rape and assault, her name is being withheld.) MARSHFIELD—An Elkland woman has been charged with falsifying a statement to law officers, according to Lawrence County Sheriff Doug Senecker.

By Barry Benintende, South County Mail editor Oct 8, 2003

Senecker said charges were filed Sept. 30 against a 22-year-old Elkland woman for making a false report with authorities on June 29, alleging she was attacked and raped in Lawrence County.

The 22-year-old allegedly told sheriff's deputies that she was changing a flat tire in broad daylight south of Mount Vernon, when a man pulled up and offered to help.

According to a report, she declined the aid, and the man shoved her inside the car, pulled a knife out of his pocket, cut off some of her clothing and then raped her inside her station wagon.

"When we got the lab reports back, which took a month and a half, they showed that the cutting of her clothing and undergarments could not have been done in the manner she had indicated," he said.

The woman was still bleeding from several superficial knife wounds on her body when officers arrived. She even provided enough information for a composite sketch of a man wearing a ball cap and a mustache.

Senecker said that the bizarre nature of an attack in broad daylight on a well-traveled road was the first indicator that the story may not have been true.

"We could not say that it was inconceivable. We measured traffic flow and there were periods as long as two minutes when there was no traffic and northbound traffic would have been traveling into the sun," he said.

"We conducted a search for witnesses including a road block. We asked drivers if they had been through on the previous week. We found two witnesses who saw a green pickup that did stop. But it was a totally different from her description. Her descriptions began drifting, we started looking. We subpoenaed her phone records and compared them with radio traffic and 911 records, which took quite a while. We built a timeline and it was totally impossible for the events to have happened as she related them to us," he said.

The probable cause statement said officers received detailed information about the vehicle that she said the man was driving. She was traveling back to her home from a family gathering.

Using that data, Senecker said they were able to trace the woman's steps on June 29. Senecker said it would be impossible for all the events to have happened within six minutes.

After constructing the timeline, Senecker and Prosecuting Attorney Robert George decided to charge the woman for a variety of reasons.

A reenactment was performed that Senecker said cast doubt on the woman's story.

"On Aug. 21, a reenactment of the crime was performed by investigators using the statements made by the woman to reenact her alleged assault. We determined that the events required 14 minutes 28 seconds to complete, rather than six minutes. Also, the attack could not have occurred as she had reported," Senecker said.

Senecker said that his office worked long hours to investigate the case, initially believing her claims to be possible.

"We spent roughly 2,000 man hours on this. We worked straight through holidays, Saturdays and Sundays because the person she described that would be so brazen to attack a woman in broad daylight hours and attack her with a knife ... the possibility of such a person running loose in the community. We had to get on that," Senecker said.

"We worked on that very hard until certain problems appeared. We started a parallel investigation. We continued to work the rape case. As it turns out, we were able to conclude her story was not correct," he said.

Senecker said it is impossible to say what would lead a person to file a false report.

"It is difficult to say what goes on in a person's mind. I think we can safely say she was trying to cover herself. She was expected home earlier. It might have been a number of things she had to cover," he said.

Senecker said that media outlets were alerted with a description of the alleged rapist. A composite drawing of a man described by the woman detailed a red-haired man wearing a cap and a mustache. Senecker said it was widely circulated by the media and in public places.

"That's all been recalled. We sent out news releases to all outlets that we knew we sent them to originally," he said.

Senecker said the initial shock caused to the community was particularly troubling.

"That was the probably the key issue in what lead us to file charges. The fear her report created in the motoring community. The fear it caused in women and parents who didn't know if this mad rapist was going to strike them," he said.

The report of a rape led to a 2,000-hour investigation that cost Lawrence County a substantial amount of money.

Senecker said the woman surrendered on Oct. 30 and was released on \$1,000 bond. Arraignment is scheduled for 9 a.m., Oct. 27. If convicted of the class B misdemeanor, she faces six months in jail and a \$500 fine.

https://bolivarmonews.com/home/elkland-woman-charged-with-filing-false-assault-and-rape-report/article_1ebceb18-e8d1-51e9-8472-e5437538e845.html