

Plot to Kill Judge Fails, But Leaves Aftershocks

Painesville, Ohio, municipal judge Michael Cicconetti expected many new experiences during his year as president of the American Judges Association. One he did not anticipate came to light in April—a serious plot to kill him.

On April 9, 2006, two residents in his jurisdiction were arrested on federal charges of violation of explosives statutes. The two, Joseph Sands, 40, and Dawn Holin, 34, were charged June 17 with 14 felony charges, including four counts of conspiracy to commit aggravated murder. The intended victims were Cicconetti, North Perry (Ohio) Village mayor Thomas Williams, North Perry police chief Denise Mercsak, and lawyer Joseph Gurley.

Sands had a relatively minor misdemeanor case pending in Cicconetti's court for failure to file business income-tax returns with North Perry Village, which had a local income tax. Sands and Holin ran a car repair business there. Sands had been found guilty of the misde-

meanor offense, with sentencing before Cicconetti set for April 20. The maximum sentence for the offense would be 60 days in jail.

Apparently motivated by a belief that village officials were picking on them and their business, Sands and Holin set out on a plan for "street justice" by tossing pipe bombs into the homes of their intended victims.

Fortunately, Sands and Holin decided to ask a third person to help them. And that person, perhaps motivated by a desire for a plea agreement on an unrelated felony, told police about the plot and became a confidential informant.

Court affidavits present chilling details both of the plan and of steps actually taken to carry it out. Sands and the informant spent several days getting the parts needed to make four pipe bombs, including gun powder, pipes, end caps, and wicks. Arrests were made shortly after Sands purchased the last item needed—a cannon fuse.

Sands had located the homes of the intended victims and driven the route he would use in carrying out the planned nighttime bombing raid. He planned to strike at about 2:00 a.m., armed with a police scanner and a powerful firearm in case police showed up.

Law-enforcement officials recorded several of Sands's conversations with the informant. According to affidavits, Sands said he wanted to use a wick that would take about a minute to burn so that the intended victim would have time to wake up, come downstairs to check the noise, and then be killed by the bomb. Sands also said he didn't know whether children lived with the intended victims, but that they would be "casualties of the situation" if they were there.

After the informant brought the plot to the attention of police, a joint task force involving federal ATF agents, FBI agents, and local law enforcement worked the case. The FBI established round-the-clock surveillance. Meanwhile, Cicconetti and his family—notification about the plot—left their home and stayed with relatives.

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Annual Meeting Notice

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Article V, Section 1, of the bylaws of the American Judges Association that the 2006 annual meeting will be held October 8 to 13 at the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans, Louisiana. The annual membership meeting will be held Thursday, October 12 at 8:00 a.m.

Notice is hereby given that the 2006 annual meeting of the American Judges Foundation will be held Tuesday, October 10, at noon at the Hotel Monteleone. 

