


Brittany Beach

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Police: Stella Park Worker Arrested for Gruesome Amusement Park Slaying

By Salma Muhammad

BRITTANY BEACH—Police have arrested a local man, Theodore Pallis, in connection with the murder of a fellow amusement park worker.

According to the Brittany Beach Police Department, Pallis was apprehended at his mother's home on Thursday for the slaying of Stella Park employee Katherine Dunn. Pallis's arrest ends the BBPD's lengthy investigation into the murder.

On Nov. 22, Dunn's body was discovered inside Scream-a-Rama, the park's horror-themed dark ride. She had been stabbed multiple times.

According to BBPD documents, Pallis called police to the scene shortly after 11 a.m., claiming to have found Dunn's remains during a routine safety check. Pallis told officers the back door to the attraction had been open when he arrived for work that morning.

The Essex County Medical Examiner's Office later determined that Dunn had died around 6 p.m. the previous day.

While the BBPD initially pursued other leads, the investigation led back to Pallis, who was in a romantic relationship with Dunn. The couple was seen arguing outside Scream-a-Rama on the day of the murder, according to police.

Pallis was previously convicted of juvenile assault with a deadly weapon in 2017. The charge stemmed from an altercation with Rocco Pereira, another Stella Park worker, in which Pallis attacked Pereira with a knife.



Katherine Dunn was found murdered inside the Scream-a-Rama dark ride at Stella Park. Photo courtesy of Vincent Stella, Jr.

According to the Essex County District Attorney's Office, Pallis served the entirety of his eight-month sentence at Rogers House, a young adult rehabilitative services detention center.

Similarities between the Pereira case and Dunn's murder tipped off police to Pallis's possible involvement, stated BBPD Sgt. Thomas Scheyler.

"Teo Pallis has a history of violence and was close to the victim," Scheyler said outside police headquarters on Thursday. "While the evidence originally suggested a break-in by a party unaffiliated with Stella Park, we are now confident that Ms. Dunn was lured to Scream-a-Rama and murdered by a person she knew well—and we believe that person is Mr. Pallis."

After multiple rounds of question-

ing, Pallis was arrested by BBPD and is currently being held without bail.

"The Brittany Beach Police Department is proud to take the first step in bringing closure to the Dunn family," Scheyler stated. "We trust that justice will be served."

Dunn is remembered as a thoughtful and optimistic person who loved spending time on the boardwalk with her co-workers and friends. In addition to working the register at one of Stella Park's souvenir shops, she was a computer science major at Atlantic Coast State University and a regular volunteer with Brittany Beach Harvesters, a local food bank.

"The community of Stella Park mourns the passing of one of our most beloved members," said her uncle, Vincent Stella, Jr. "Katie was an angel. She will be greatly missed."

OPINION: Trouble in Paradise

By Alan Prentice III

The shocking murder of an employee may spell the end for a local amusement park that calls itself a "paradise by the sea." But while the details of this vicious crime alone are shocking, the event is also the latest chapter in a decades-long decline.

Popular throughout much of the twentieth century, Stella Park—a beachside carnival-style amusement park—was founded in the 1920s by local entrepreneur Rosario Stella. Its current struggles can be traced back to the 1980s, when the crime rate of the surrounding neighborhood rose exponentially. At the same time, Stella Park began facing the threat of competition from the sleek, corporate-backed theme parks that were expanding across the country. Combined, these issues created a recipe for disaster, and the park's financial situation has only grown worse over time.

During the past decade, changes in management—specifically the shift of power from the park's beloved second owner, Vincent Stella, Sr., to his reportedly less benevolent son, Vincent Stella, Jr.—have also contributed to the park's decline, according to several of the park's workers.

While the park's reputation may be tarnished, Stella Park's owner-operators are fighting to maintain their livelihood. Some of the attractions have been open since the 1920s, changing hands from one family member to another over several generations. For many at Stella Park, the amusement park business is the only business they know.

Unsurprisingly, many in the park's eccentric cast of characters seem like holdovers from a different era. These workers, several of whom came to

Stella Park after years on the road, belong to a fading carnival culture that is becoming rarer by the year.

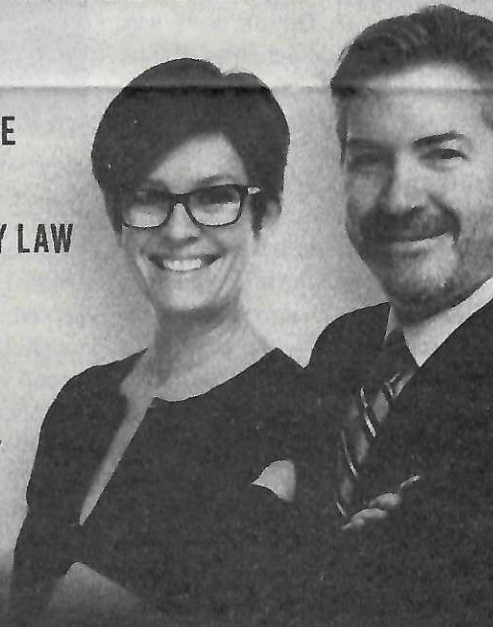
Even today, park-goers might catch the odd phrase in Ciazarn, an old-fashioned carnival cant that uses nonsense syllables inserted into words as a way to disguise meaning. This "secret language" was originally created to keep communication secret from customers and is one of many charming-if-outdated customs at this colorful institution.

Hoping to preserve their way of life by keeping Stella Park in business, the park's tight-knit community soldiers on despite rising crime rates and falling ticket sales.

However, as the park's famous Madame Oracle fortune-telling machine might say, "the future remains unclear." As the world waits for this "paradise by the sea" to sink, these old-timers are desperately counting on Stella Park to stay afloat.

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