

THE ISLAND

Man accused of chasing, assaulting girl

By REBECCA CAVANAUGH
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

An 8-year-old girl waiting for a bus to take her to school Wednesday morning was allegedly chased and assaulted by a Mariners Harbor man she knew from the area.

Lakai Gustus, 22, of Roxbury Street, was charged with first-degree sexual abuse for reasons of forcible compulsion; first-degree sexual abuse because the victim was under age 11; second-degree sexual abuse, and endangering the welfare of a child.

According to court papers, Gustus chased the girl on Roxbury Street when she was on her way to school at 7:30 a.m. When he caught the victim, he allegedly grabbed her by her coat and rubbed her genitals.

In a statement included in court papers, Gustus admitted to chasing the girl and touching her buttocks. According to the statement, he recalled the girl saying "no" after he touched her.

According to Marlene Markoe-Boyd,

spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, the victim was on her way to a bus stop. The bus was to take her to Our Lady of Mount Carmel-St. Benedicta elementary school in West Brighton.

The victim and the defendant were not strangers, Ms. Markoe-Boyd said, but were apparently only acquainted with each other through the neighborhood.

During Gustus' arraignment yesterday in Stapleton Criminal Court, his defense lawyer, Howard Rintel, requested a 30-day psychiatric evaluation period for the defendant.

Acting Supreme Court Justice Alan Meyer granted the request, ordering Gustus remanded for evaluation. He will be assessed in Kings County Hospital Center, Brooklyn, according to court officers, and will return to court on Dec. 18.

Shawn Allen, also a resident of Roxbury Street, was surprised to hear that Gustus had been arrested. A former teacher's assistant in Gustus' class when the suspect attended PS 37, Great Kills, Allen maintained a relationship with Gustus, frequently joining him for a game of basketball.

"I've known him almost all his life, he was always a good kid," Allen said. "He wouldn't hurt anyone."

Residents of Roxbury Street reacted with alarm when told of the incident. Several neighbors worried about the safety of the neighborhood, especially for children.

One resident, who preferred to remain anonymous, said a low police presence in the area contributed to the lack of safety. Referring to his own children, he said he never let them walk on the street by themselves, but always made sure an adult was with them.

Although he was concerned about the safety of the neighborhood, he said he had never heard of any similar incidents occurring on the street.

Another Roxbury Street resident, who also requested anonymity, echoed the call for a greater police presence in the area.

"Kids are never safe, nobody's safe. There are crazy people everywhere. We would only be safe if there were a police officer on every corner," she said.

Handwritten note:
1-11-11
to
Mar
11/13