

Murderer of Union Township woman sentenced to 30 years

The man who earlier this year admitted to the brutal 2010 murder of Union Township woman Diane Zaleski has been sentenced to 30 years in state prison without parole, acting Union County Prosecutor Grace H. Park announced.

Arnell Yearwood, 28, was sentenced Friday morning before state Superior Court Judge Joseph P. Donohue, who summarized the long term as necessary “to (voice) society’s outrage” about the crime.

Union County Assistant Prosecutor Caroline Lawlor, who prosecuted the case, described in court how Zaleski’s elderly parents discovered the body of the 54-year-old victim at the bottom of a staircase leading to the basement of her Laurana Road home on November 18, 2010. An autopsy by the Union County Medical Examiner’s Office revealed the cause of death to be dozens of blunt-force and lacerative injuries to the head and neck.

The Union County Homicide Task Force immediately launched a prolonged investigation spearheaded by task force Detective Robert Henderson; authorities conducted more than 100 interviews, yet few legitimate leads emerged during the months following Zaleski’s death. But on the one-year anniversary of the murder, investigators released additional details about the crime to the media in an effort to bring the case back into the public eye.

Shortly thereafter, a person who lives out of the state encountered a news article about Zaleski online, with some of the details in the article matching details previously relayed to the person by Yearwood during an online conversation hosted via Facebook. The person contacted authorities in New Jersey,

leading to Yearwood's arrest on Vauxhall Road in Union on April 7, 2012.

The investigation ultimately determined that Yearwood killed Zaleski following a brief argument, then took efforts to conceal the crime.

Donohue gave Yearwood the opportunity to speak in court Friday morning, but he declined. Lawlor read two letters from Zaleski's family aloud, describing the devastation experienced by the victim's parents after discovering their daughter's body and noting that both died shortly thereafter.

Yearwood pleaded guilty in March. He is expected to be deported to his native Trinidad after serving his sentence.