



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

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Anniversary of 9/11 Terrorist Attacks Brings a Reminder: If You See Something Suspicious, Say Something

Until federal agents took Colleen LaRose into custody in 2009, neighbors in Pennsburg, a quiet, manicured community in Montgomery County, dismissed her as the “weird lady” down the street.

Of course, authorities say she is so much more: a blond, blue-eyed, homegrown terrorist who calls herself “Jihad Jane” and who left an electronic paper trail that clued them into her plan to wage a violent jihad, or holy war.

LaRose’s case is remarkable for a couple of reasons. She’s one of only a handful of women to be charged with terrorist offenses in the United States. And everything about her — from her appearance to where she lived — shattered conventional ideas about who terrorists are and where they come from. Even more troubling: LaRose’s murderous plot was literally hatched on a Main Street in Pennsylvania.

J. Patrick Rowan, former chief of the U.S. Justice Department’s national security division, told *The Washington Post* that the LaRose indictment is “another indication of how the threats come from all directions.”

Indeed, they do, and no township, no hometown, is immune. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when hijacked planes crashed in New York



Experts contend that every township should develop a cohesive troop of many eyes and ears that work together to fight, report, and eradicate existing and potential dangers lurking within its borders.

City, near Washington, D.C., and in a grassy field right here in Pennsylvania, proved that.

And as the nation marks the 10th anniversary of that mind-numbing day, we, as Pennsylvanians, still need to keep a vigilant eye on the sky, but the reality is, the more sinister public-safety threats are lurking in our very own backyards. Some wear their gang colors with pride, but others, like quiet terrorist Jihad Jane, aren’t as easy to detect.

All of them, however, spell trouble.

And it’s these people, the lawbreakers next

door, across the hall, and down the street, who represent the real threat in townships today, and there's one very effective way to combat them: with talk.

"I can't tell you the number of times a case broke because someone saw something and reported it," a Pennsylvania State Police trooper said recently. "It might be that one piece of the puzzle that brings it all together."

'Times are different now'

On a cold, blustery day this past January, a group of neighbors was up in arms. A string of break-ins in their housing development had everyone on edge and ready to take action. More than 100 gathered to organize a crime watch.

In between talk about suspicious people and security systems, one attendee stood up and issued a warning. "Times are different now," he said. "You might have left your doors open all day back then. You can't do that now ... our community has changed."

The man, of course, was talking to his neighbors, but his words have an even broader meaning for all Pennsylvanians.

Times really are different now. More to the point, the Pennsylvania of the '50s, '60s, and '70s isn't the Pennsylvania of today. The high-profile case of Jihad Jane in Montgomery County, the methamphetamine breakout in Bradford County, and the brutal slayings of school children at a Lancaster County Amish school make this abundantly clear.

Of course, to some, Pennsylvania will always be "Pennsylvucky," a patchwork of rural and suburban communities flanked by their slicker, urban cousins, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. It's a word that conjures up images of sleepy towns populated with hardware stores and barbershops. In this world, crime is almost nonexistent.

Sure, communities like that still exist. Unfortunately, though, they're getting harder and harder to find because just like neighboring New York, New Jersey, and Ohio, Pennsylvania has its share of problems, too. And they're spreading.

Gangs, terrorists, and hate groups, representing a rainbow of races and causes, and drug traffickers and dealers are taking up residence — sometimes temporarily, other times permanently — in rural and suburban townships and bringing crime, hard-core narcotics, weapons, violence, and hostility with them.

The city, no doubt, is trickling into the country.

Still, there is an effective way to combat crime and criminals. Experts say that vigilance and information sharing are solid public safety weapons.

In fact, they contend that every township

should develop a cohesive troop of many eyes and ears that work together to fight and eradicate existing and potential dangers lurking within its borders.

Neighbor helping neighbor

This more modern-day version of neighbor helping neighbor for the greater good of the community was born in the smoky aftermath of September 11, 2001. People realized then that public safety starts at home.

Township officials, their fellow first responders, and the public are on the front lines, and when problems arise — whether it's a tornado that wipes out a stretch of homes and businesses or a rash of burglaries — they're in it together.

And vigilance — better yet, hyper-vigilance — is essential, says Glenn Cannon, director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. How do you know, for instance, when that lawn service or pool supply truck hooked up to a hydrant is pumping water out — and not pumping something else in?

When witnessing this and other activity, he says, neighbors should stop and ask questions.

And that's just one example of how a man-made disaster could strike locally. Cannon is an advocate of the "see something, say something" philosophy — now the name of a proposal in the U.S. Senate — to get Pennsylvanians to report anything that just doesn't look right.

"It may not seem like something to you," he says, "but it does to someone investigating who has seen the same thing six other times."

Therefore, if you see something that doesn't seem quite right, here's who you should contact:

In an emergency: If you think a life is in danger or a serious crime is about to be committed, call 9-1-1.

For a nonemergency: If it is not an emergency, but you think that the person or situation should be investigated, do NOT tie up the 9-1-1 emergency number. Most local police departments and all State Police barracks and 9-1-1 centers have non-emergency numbers. Take the time now to look it up and record it in a handy place.

To give a tip: Perhaps you notice suspicious activity that doesn't warrant immediate attention, or a past incident or person is still on your mind. You can pass that information along to authorities using these tip lines:

- **Pennsylvania State Police**

Email: sp-intelligence@pa.gov

Toll-free phone: (888) 292-1919

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation:** <https://tips.fbi.gov>

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