

## Local

## Upper Darby cops have no reason to celebrate

**R**uminations and ruminations.... part VIII  
What is it about Ricky Jackson that makes some people want to open up other people's wallets and shower him with money?

Well, the first thing about him is that he appears to be a gentle soul, who wouldn't hurt a flea, let alone commit murder.

The second thing is that he's a real victim.

He spent two years in prison for a murder he (more and more obviously) didn't commit. It was only thanks to the heroic work of his attorney Mike Malloy and the open mind of former Delaware County D.A. (now U.S. Attorney) Pat Meenan that Jackson is a free man today.

Lesser lawyers might have allowed Jackson to rot away in prison for the rest of his life. These two men made sure this injustice did not stand.

What landed Jackson in trouble in the first place was a smudged fingerprint found in the apartment of murder victim Alvin Davis. Upper Darby Police Lt. Anthony Paparo judged the print to be Jackson's.

At Jackson's murder trial, the jury discounted the testimony of two FBI fingerprint experts who denied a match and convicted the poor schlub.

To this day, Paparo claims to believe the print to be Ricky Jackson's. This despite the testimony of dozens of other experts who find no match between

Jackson's prints and the smudge.

Wednesday, a federal jury in Ricky Jackson's civil rights suit cleared Paparo of legal wrongdoing. No, the jury said, Paparo did not recklessly disregard the truth or make knowingly false statements in identifying the prints as Jackson's.

But what is pretty clear is that Paparo did make a big mistake in doing so, a mistake Paparo and his superiors continue to this day to deny.

In these kinds of civil cases, the burden of proof on the plaintiff is extremely high, as well it should be. (We in the press can appreciate this, because when it comes to libeling someone the same standard applies: reckless disregard for the truth. We like that.)

But it seems to me that convicting someone of murder ought to be done on a pretty high burden of proof too. Certainly, it should be done on better evidence than smudged fingerprints.

The good news is while our local legal system did its best to chew Ricky Jackson up at least it spit him out.

It does, however, make you wonder how many other innocent men and women are sitting in jail today. At least, it should.

For our part, this newspaper spoke

too soon when we suggested the township would be smart to settle this case for "seven figures" before the jury had a chance to determine it.

Upper Darby officials have every reason to be relieved how this civil suit turned out. But they have no reason to be proud of the work their officers did in the murder investigation that caused it to be filed in the first place.



By Gil  
**SPENCER**

Delaware County Redevelopment Authority Special Counsel Joe Fioravanti said yesterday he's "ready to roll" with his investigation into the state harness racing commission mess.

The DCRA is looking into potentially criminal interference with the commission's hearings process concerning the application of Chester Downs.

The first of Fioravanti's subpoenas are heading out to David Sanko, former Gov. Mark Schweiker's Chief of Staff, state Agriculture Secretary Sam Hayes, and Deputy Agriculture Secretary Russ Reading. They're all asked to appear at the end of the month to help shed a little light on why Chester Downs' application was shelved by the commission and at who's urging.

"We're not trying to cause any individ-

uals heartburn," Fioravanti told me. But just in case, these three might want to bring along a couple rolls of Tums anyway.

And to the anonymous tipster who called to inform me that Chris Lohr, son of Lance, was not a member of the U.S. infantry (see Wednesday's column)... eehhhhhh! Wrong.

Lance tells me Chris is a high school senior but he is also a member of the 11th Infantry National Guard ("the same unit his grandfather belonged to").

Lance, a teacher at Archbishop Carroll, says he doesn't want to see Chris put in harm's way to depose Saddam Hussein. He also said that I remind him of his wife.

"She's the interventionist," he says. "I'm the isolationist."

He also tells me his daughter, Katie, in California in the Navy, training to be an anti-terrorism specialist.

Good for her.

I read that poets from around count have been invited to weigh in poetically against military intervention in Iraq. I'm not much of a poet but I've been inspired by this father of six.

*Here's to short wars*

*Without any Lohrs*

*Lance, you like?*

*Gil Spencer's column appears Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. E-mail gspencer@del*