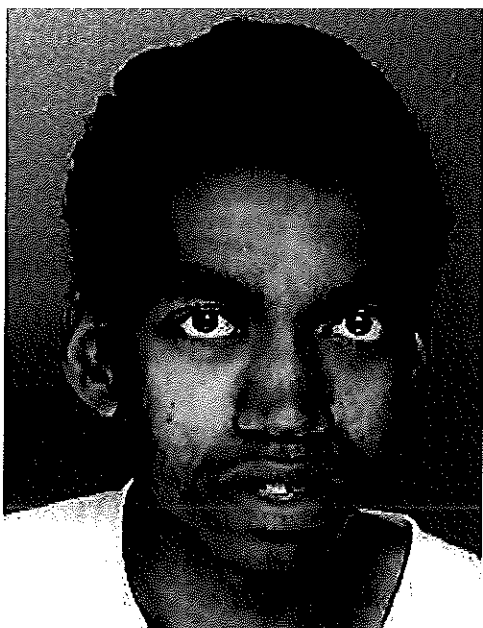


The Delaware County Daily Times (<http://www.delcotimes.com>)

Philly man nets prison term for bank robbery

By Alex Rose, Delaware County Daily Times

Thursday, January 22, 2015



MEDIA COURTHOUSE >> A 23-year-old Philadelphia man who robbed a bank in August to fuel his scratch-off lottery ticket addiction was sentenced to 19 to 38 months in a state correctional facility Thursday.

Joshua Duren, of the 200 block of North Horton Street, entered open guilty pleas in November to two counts of robbery — one threatening immediate serious injury and the other to demanding money from a financial institution.

Duren was busted for the Aug. 18 robbery of the PNC Bank in the 5000 block of State Road in Upper Darby when Lansdowne Police Officer Tina Selimis spotted the getaway car stuck in traffic on Baltimore Avenue later that afternoon.

Selimis parked her unmarked car and walked up to the driver's side of the maroon, four-door Ford Focus, where she saw Duren inside counting money, according to an affidavit of probable cause.

The officer grabbed Duren through the open window as Officer Christopher Schiazza arrived. The defendant was ordered out of the vehicle and placed under arrest. Police saw a screwdriver on the seat underneath his right leg.

The bank robbery took place at about 4:40 p.m., when Duren handed a teller a note indicating no one would get hurt if he was given money without dye packs or GPS tracking devices.

Duren pulled out a screwdriver and pointed it at the teller, who handed over about \$800, according to police. Duren then drove off in the Focus. A description of the suspect and vehicle went out over police radio.

About 30 minutes later, a man fitting Duren's description walked into the Coast Gas and Wash on East Baltimore Avenue in Clifton Heights. He handed the clerk the same demand note and again pulled out a screwdriver, police said.

The clerk yelled for police, however, prompting the would-be robber to flee. Details of the attempted robbery again went out over police radio and Selimis spotted Duren in traffic shortly afterward.

Defense attorney Charles Peruto Jr. told Judge George Pagano Thursday that his client suffered from a severe addiction to scratch-off lottery tickets and had sold all of his possessions to feed that addiction.

“At one time, he had two shoeboxes and a trash can full of lottery tickets that he lost,” said Peruto. “I’ve never seen anything like it. I’ve never heard of anything like this.”

Peruto said his client had sought treatment while incarcerated at the county jail in Concord and was poised to graduate from a three-month course Friday. He added that the robberies were out of character for Duren, who had no prior contact with the law, and asked for a mitigated sentence.

Assistant District Attorney Sandra Urban asked that the judge sentence within the standard guidelines of 12 to 20 months for the first offense and 31 to 45 months for the second, noting that both victims told police they were in fear for their lives and the safety of others.

She said this was not a “spur of the moment” robbery, which included a demand note and some level of planning. Despite Peruto’s assertion that Duren would not have harmed anyone, Urban noted he threatened both the victims and other people, allegedly smacking the screwdriver into his hand during the second robbery.

In addition to the prison sentence, Judge Pagano ordered Duren to serve seven years of probation and to continue with addiction counseling. He said the defendant’s age and the apparent “total aberration” from a previously law-abiding life contributed to the mitigated sentence, but warned Duren not to come before him again.

“You’ve taken steps towards getting your life back together and I want to applaud you for that,” Pagano said. “But it’s sort of a carrot-and-a-stick — keep doing well, because there are consequences if you don’t.”

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