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SANCHEZ TO SIGN FIVE-YEAR DEAL WITH TIGERS

SPORTS, B1



CONNECTICUT SHOOTING

SCHOOL MASSACRE

MAN KILLS 26 AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, INCLUDING 20 CHILDREN

Witt pleads guilty to slaying

BY REX HALL JR.
RHALL2@MLIVE.COM

ALLEGAN — A Plainwell man who was to stand trial next month for strangling his girlfriend inside their home has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder.

Jeffery Witt, 45, entered the plea Thursday in front of Allegan County Circuit Judge Margaret Bakker according to Witt's attorney, Michael Hills.

The charges against Witt stemmed from the April 11 death of his girlfriend, Amy Hartman, inside the couple's home at 223 W. Grant St. in Plainwell.

According to testimony at a probable-cause hearing for Witt in June in Allegan County District Court, police found Jeffery Robert Witt Hartman with two black eyes and blood coming from her mouth. She also had scratches and gouge marks on her neck.

Hartman was pronounced dead at the scene. A forensic pathologist testified in June that she died from asphyxiation by strangling.

Hills said Thursday that in addition to second-degree murder, Witt also pleaded guilty to one count of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Hills said that under terms of a plea agreement, one count each of open murder, felony murder and second-degree criminal sexual conduct are to be dismissed at the time that Witt is sentenced.

In a statement he issued Thursday night, Hills said pleading guilty in the case was "a difficult decision" for his client.

"Although there were a number of considerations, one of the major reasons for accepting this plea agreement was Ms. Hartman's children and family," Hills said.

"He did not want to put Amy's children and family through the pain of a trial."

Witt is scheduled to be back in court Jan. 22 for sentencing, Hills said.



Parents leave a staging area after being reunited with their children following a shooting Friday at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., about 60 miles northeast of New York. An official with knowledge of Friday's shooting said 27 people were dead, including 20 children.

BY JOHN CHRISTOFFERSEN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEWTOWN, Conn. — A man opened fire Friday inside the Connecticut elementary school where his mother worked as a teacher, killing 26 people, including 20 children, as youngsters covered in their classrooms and trembled helplessly to the sound of gunfire reverberating through the building.

The killer, armed with two handguns, committed suicide and another person was found dead at a second scene, bringing the toll to 28, authorities said.

Police shed no light on the motive for the attack.

The rampage, coming less than two weeks before Christmas, was the nation's second-deadliest school shooting in recent years, exceeded by the

Virginia Tech massacre that left 33 people dead in 2007.

Panicked parents looking for their children raced to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, a community of about 27,000 residents 60 miles northeast of New York. Youngsters at the kindergarten-through-fourth-grade school were told to close their eyes by police as they were led from the building.

Schoolchildren — some crying, others looking frightened — were escorted through a parking lot in a line, hands on each other's shoulders.

"Our hearts are broken today," a tearful President Barack Obama, struggling to maintain composure, said at the White House. He called for "meaningful action" to prevent such shootings.

Youngsters and their



A woman waits to hear about her sister, a teacher, following a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

SEE SHOOTING, A2

Richard Perry, Portage Public Schools superintendent, listens during a board meeting earlier this year. Perry was suspended with pay on Friday.



MLIVE.COM FILE

Board suspends Portage schools superintendent

BY TOM HAROLDSON
FOR MLIVE.COM

PORTAGE — The Portage Public Schools Board of Education has suspended Superintendent Ric Perry with pay, and appointed Assistant Superintendent Rob Olsen as acting superintendent while it begins a national search for a new head of the district.

The board's decision, which involved four separate motions, all approved by a 7-0 vote, came

following a special 36-minute closed-door meeting Friday afternoon with the board's legal representative, Lisa Swem, of the Thrun Law Firm in Lansing.

The district's legal firm has been investigating since September accusations that Perry engaged in an inappropriate personal relationship with an employee of the district. The board has declined to name the employee said to be involved in the relationship.

The board has declined to

release the results of the report involving statements from several "witnesses" interviewed, but said Perry was being suspended as a result of what was found in the investigation.

"The investigative report received by the board confirmed these reports and established facts to demonstrate by a preponderance of the evidence that Dr. Perry has violated board policy and is in material breach of his contract," board President Bo Snyder said in

a statement from the board after the votes.

"Based on these findings, attorneys for the board of education and Dr. Perry have worked unsuccessfully to negotiate a mutual separation agreement. The board is in full agreement that the time for these negotiations has passed and that, in the best interests of the district, Dr. Perry is suspended with pay effective immediately, and will be provided,

SEE SUPERINTENDENT, A2



ADVICE	A9	NATION/WORLD	A5
CLASSIFIED ADS	B5	OBITUARIES	A4
COMICS	A10	OPINION	A8
LOTTERY	A2	REGION	A3

SPORTS	B1
STOCKS	A7
TV	A12
WEATHER	A12

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