

Justice league backlash

LEA EMERY

A GOLD Coast woman was almost run off the road in 2016 and a note left in her underwear while she wasn't home.

The same man would go on to hold down, choke and rape another woman two years later.

Both women had to wait until last month – up to five years since the first assault – to finally see justice.

Sadly, they are not alone. Southport lawyers say more victims to be brought before the courts – and it is because of huge workloads, COVID delays and more alleged crimi-

nals waiting to defend charges.

They say it has got to the point where there are no trial dates left in the Southport District Court diary in 2021 and those pleading guilty are having to wait four or five months to get sentenced.

However, the Chief Judge said the Southport court was managing its workload adequately.

Southport lawyers have repeatedly called for the court precinct to be expanded and many have backed a plan to build an additional court building across from the courthouse in Mal Burke Car Park.

"The quicker they build something in the car park the

better," Hannay Lawyers director Chris Hannay said.

The proposal would include an additional permanent District Court judge, Supreme Court, Federal and Family Court facilities and a Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal registry.

Currently, the Southport courthouse has three permanent judges with others from Brisbane visiting occasionally to help with the workload.

"We need another judge," Mr Hannay said.

Five courtrooms in Southport are set up to house juries but there is not enough space to run four jury trials simultaneously. One of the court

rooms with a jury box is regularly used as a magistrates court and as a coroner's court.

In the court diary, each judge is allocated a number one trial. A number of reserve trials will be listed in case the first trial cannot go ahead.

In Southport, all the number one spots for 2021 are taken and the reserve trial dates are few and far between.

"There is not enough room," Mr Hannay said. "We haven't got physical room for trials and jury members and what else to run them, otherwise we could."

Delays mean that victims are waiting longer for justice, witness memories deteriorate with time and those acquitted

may spend longer in custody on remand than necessary.

Recent trials on the Gold Coast were for incidents that occurred in 2018 and Allen & Searing Criminal Lawyers director Jodi Allen said the backlog was "getting worse".

Ms Allen said lawyers and prosecutors were doing what they could to negotiate matters to reduce time in trials or avoid a trial completely.

Potts Lawyers director Bill Potts said law changes increasing the maximum penalties contributing to the delays, because defendants were more likely to challenge the charges.

Chief Judge Brian Devereaux SC said Southport was a

busy court like Brisbane and all regional district courts.

"The Southport District Court is managing its workload adequately and there is no current concern about the volume of court matters," he said.

Judge Devereaux said all law lists were monitored to ensure appropriate resources were deployed: "As at 28 February 2021, the criminal clearance rate was 109 per cent compared to 88.9 per cent as at 28 February 2020. The number of active pending defendants has decreased from 373 to 353 over this time period. Up to 28 February 2021, 23 jury trials have commenced, compared to 24 as at 28 February 2020."

SENDING PETS OUT IN STYLE

EMILY TOXWARD

GRIEVING pet owners are lining up to give their dearly departed a swanky send off in a luxury car, complete with a uniformed chauffeur and white roses.

In what's believed to be an Australian first, Gold Coast business Pet Angel Funerals has launched a luxury service that allows pet owners to give their fur babies one final ride in a high-end Mercedes-Benz fitted with custom leather and timber interior.

Owner and founder Tom Jorgensen recently expanded to open a factory in Brisbane, so his business services the entire southeast region, including northern NSW.

Mr Jorgensen said he created the service to cater for a spike in demand for a more luxurious service from long-term customers wanting something special for their "babies". "So we thought a fitting way would be to use a luxury car such as a Mercedes-Benz," he said. "We have only had Pet 1 and Pet 2 on the road for a few days now and we have been inundated with inquiries.



Pet Angel Funerals GN Scott Gunnell with one of the two new Mercedes Benz luxury hearses. Picture: Jerad Williams

"It's about the finer details like having stunning white roses and special music playing in the Mercedes with your pet. We want pet owners' minds to be at ease, knowing their angel is being taken to the crematorium in a most beautiful way."

After investigating the concept overseas extensively,

especially in the US, Mr Jorgensen said he hadn't found anything of this level. The two station wagons are fitted out in a traditional human hearse method.

"Ours eclipses anything that's available in Australia and possibly the world," he said.

He said the new deluxe

service package started from \$575 and included Australian-made memorial products and collection of pets by a uniformed chauffeur.

The business has also noticed a recent increase in pet owners buying personalised lockets that contain ashes of their pets.

"In this day and age, and

with pet ownership and pet prices and expectations of owners going through the roof, we just have to lift our game and we think we've done that with this luxury transfer service," he said.

"We treat pets with dignity and grace always. We treat them as if they were a human family member, no different."

Festival a chance to connect

ORGANISERS of the Gold Coast Careers Festival are looking for exhibitors to take part in the three-day event from May 6.

The annual event by Study Gold Coast brings together educators, high schools, students, parents, career advisers, prospective students and job seekers in an interactive environment.

This year organisers have added a Saturday to further attract parents, non-school leavers, career changers and the job-seeker markets to the event.

The festival is a major drawcard for anyone wanting to explore their career options and employment opportunities and offers exhibitors a chance to have face-to-face conversations and promote upcoming events and open days.

It's expected more than 60 education and training providers will attend, including Griffith, Bond and Southern Cross universities as well as UQ, QUT, TAFE Queensland and many others.

Visit studygoldcoast.org.au or email events@studygoldcoast.org.au

GOLD COAST

Women OF THE Year

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
Harvey Norman

NOMINATIONS CLOSE MAY 7, 2021

The women of the Gold Coast are formidable – from savvy business leaders to those enriching the cultural fabric of our city and the rising stars making a meaningful impact. We want to recognise and celebrate the inspiring and innovative women making our city a better place.

If you are - or know - a woman making a difference in our city, nominate them today.

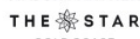
NOMINATIONS CLOSE MAY 7, 2021

NOMINATE NOW AT WOMENOFtheyear.com.au

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MAJOR PARTNER



BRONZE PARTNERS



PRESENTED BY



Nominations open 12:01am Monday 12th April 2021 and close 11:59pm May 7th May 2021 AEST. Finalist determined during judging on 10th May 2021 and published in the Gold Coast Bulletin on Monday 24th May 2021. Winners will be announced at the Gold Coast Women of the Year dinner on Friday 16th July 2021. Open to QLD residents only.