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St. Peter's music director faces murder charges

Pavone pleads not guilty in death of ex-roommate

By Rita Hoover
Staff writer

A Geneva man who had been the music director at St. Peter Catholic Church since last August was arraigned April 12 in an Erie County, N.Y. courtroom on murder charges in connection with the fatal stabbing of a former roommate in a nature preserve in Buffalo, N.Y. almost five years ago.

Michael Pavone, 58, pleaded not guilty before Erie County Judge Sheila A. Ditullio in the death of 46-year-old Keith Sutherland, according to Erie County District Attorney Frank Clark. He remained in jail April 13 and a bond hearing was set for April 14.

Pavone was charged with second-degree murder, criminal possession of a weapon and criminal mischief, according to Clark.

A press release from the Erie County district attorney's office states that sometime between Oct. 18 and 21, 1999, Pavone stabbed Suther-



Photo courtesy of WKBW-TV, Buffalo, N.Y.

Michael Pavone of Geneva surrendered to authorities April 12, in connection with the 1999 murder of a Buffalo, N.Y. man.

land multiple times. Sutherland's body was found floating in a pond at Tift Farm Nature Preserve Oct. 21, 1999.

Buffalo-based attorney Edward Tocsgrove, who is representing Pavone, said he was contacted by the district attorney's office at the beginning of April about the indictment,

but helped postpone Pavone's arrest until after Easter.

Pavone turned himself over to Erie County authorities without incident April 12.

Rama Canney, communications coordinator at St. Peter's, expressed shock about the arrest. She described Pavone as "a perfectly delightful spirit."

Pavone had served as the Geneva church's music director since Aug. 1, 2003, but was dismissed from his job April 13.

According to a statement released by the church, Pavone was dismissed because he "misrepresented his employment history and lied when questioned about the misrepresentation."

Though only recently charged with the murder, Pavone had been featured on local television news shows in Buffalo and in an ongoing "Crimestoppers" investigation by a Buffalo TV station, which featured the unsolved murder on its Web site.

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Pavone

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It was on this Web site that Geneva resident Howard Clark discovered Pavone's name "about a month ago" while on an Internet search, he said April 13.

Howard Clark, who was the church organist at St. Peter's when Pavone was

hired, said he contacted Crimestoppers "when I saw (on the Web site) they talked about (Sutherland's sister, Donna Rae) and how she said the key to her brother's death was this Michael Pavone, a church musician."

On Tuesday morning, Howard Clark said he received a phone call from a Buffalo television news reporter saying his tip led to Pavone's arrest.

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Officials at the Erie County district attorney's office would not comment on details of the investigation or a motive for the killing.

After learning of Pavone's arrest, Howard Clark described feeling "vindicat-

ed" that his initial reaction toward Pavone was correct. He described Pavone as "arrogant and pompous."

"He had no leadership abilities when he came in," added Howard Clark, who found working for Pavone "intolerable" and quit his position only six weeks after Pavone's arrival.

If convicted, Pavone could face 25 years to life in prison.