

White supremacist faces charges - Berwyn man accused of destroying videos

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A Berwyn man who is trying to organize a rally for white supremacists in a local park has been charged with destroying Holocaust-related videotapes in the Riverside Public Library, authorities said Wednesday.

Richard Mayers, 33, of the 3700 block of Wisconsin Avenue admitted in a written statement to ruining five VHS tapes in the library July 5, including "Anne Frank Remembered" and a documentary about Kristallnacht, said Riverside Assistant Police Chief Thomas Weitzel.

In a lengthy statement to police, Mayers, who is unemployed and has long time ties to hate groups, wrote that he pulled the videotape out of all five cassettes and left them on the floor for librarians to find because he believes the films are full of lies, Weitzel said.

An investigation led police to Mayers, arrested Tuesday at the Berwyn home he shares with his parents. He was charged with one count of misdemeanor criminal damage to property, Weitzel said. He posted a \$100 bail and was released the same day.

Because Mayers did not threaten or assault anyone, police were unable to charge him with a hate crime, Weitzel said.

Last month, Mayers, a regular fringe candidate for elected office, showed up at a Berwyn City Council meeting and announced plans to hold a political rally for the White Aryan Supremacist Party in Berwyn's Proksa Park.

The announcement came just days after Nazi graffiti, including SS symbols and swastikas, were spray-painted on a monument inside Proksa Park, 3001 Wisconsin Ave.

Berwyn police were notified of the graffiti but have not identified possible suspects, said Chief Carl Dobbs. "We do not have any information that could be used as evidence" to identify a suspect, Dobbs said.

Mayers has yet to apply to City Hall or to Berwyn Park District officials for a permit for his rally, but he met earlier this month with Dobbs to discuss receiving one.

In a recent interview, Mayers said he hoped to attract "a few hundred" people to the rally in support of the White Aryan Supremacist Party, an otherwise unknown group that he says advocates "a new world order."

Mayers is a one-time follower of imprisoned white supremacist Matthew Hale's defunct World Church of the Creator. He was charged in 1999 under a Berwyn ordinance for distributing one of the group's pamphlets without a permit.

Devin Burghart, who monitors hate groups for the Oak Park-based Center for New Community, said Mayers "is a known white supremacist ... going back to the 1990s."

"He's always been kind of a peripheral figure. He never had a leadership position," Burghart said. "I sincerely doubt he's got a lot of respect within the movement or whether he's got any contacts. I would be surprised [if] more than a dozen people would get involved" in the rally.

Dobbs last week sent a memo to Berwyn Mayor Michael O'Connor urging that the city not issue a permit due to concerns over the cost of providing adequate police protection to both rally participants and protesters.

O'Connor on Wednesday said he opposes Mayers' beliefs but is unsure what steps the city can take to block the proposed rally, if Mayers makes the necessary applications.

"It's a free speech issue," O'Connor said. "I'm certainly not in favor of his thinking, but [this] is America and we all have the right to free speech, even if we don't all agree on it."

But O'Connor said the city would likely require Mayers to put up a substantial cash escrow to cover costs related to policing the rally prior to approving any permits.

And the Berwyn Park District Board also would need to approve a rally on Park District property, O'Connor said.

Park District Executive Director Jeffrey Janda on Wednesday said Mayers had not contacted the district seeking permission to hold a rally inside Proksa Park.

Janda said the Park District routinely requires large groups to provide liability insurance coverage and to pay for extra police while holding events on park land.

A Wisconsin-based Ku Klux Klan member organized a rally in Berwyn in 2003 that drew about five supporters and 150 protesters to the city's Janura Park. The event lasted about 35 minutes and ended with protesters roughing up one Klan supporter on a softball field.

About 200 police in riot equipment, including officers from Berwyn, the Cook County sheriff's police and Illinois State Police, were assigned to that May 2003 event at which eight protesters were arrested.

O'Connor said he has known Mayers, who once challenged O'Connor for an aldermanic seat and who worked as a local election judge in April, for about 12 years.

"He's a very different young man," O'Connor said. "He calls me a Zionist pig."

Saying the decision to provide approval for the rally was ultimately up to the City Council, O'Connor said he would seek to block the event if Mayers cannot pay for extra police.

"I'm certainly not in favor of letting him do it without footing the bill," O'Connor said.

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