

Police think man killed fiancée in Mississippi

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The fiancé of a 21-year-old Kinzers woman reported missing nearly a year ago was arrested Wednesday for allegedly dumping her dead body into a Mississippi lake before fleeing to Lancaster. State police tracked James Arthur Fannings Jr., 24, to an apartment at a Lancaster city housing project Wednesday, a day after Bolivar County, Miss., authorities charged him with the murder of Stacey Lynn Hazelton. Fannings, who has had several run-ins with the law since 2000, surrendered to police at 7:30 a.m. Wednesday inside 39 Garden Court, Apt. 6., where he was staying with a woman. "It's just a shame," state police Cpl. Patrick Quigley said in a published report. "Stacey fell in love with the wrong guy. "She comes from a good family, and from all reports she was a decent person who always believed in the good of people. ... She made a mistake." Hazelton, a former Pequea Valley High School student, was reported missing Jan. 24, 2005, and police had been monitoring her relationship with Fannings since 2004. Hazelton's parents, Natalie and Bruce Hazelton of Kinzers, contacted authorities after losing contact with her that summer. The search took police to the Mississippi Delta. Police tracked Hazelton to Alligator, Miss., where she was living with Fannings and Chavon Pierre Mack, 23, also a Lancaster native. Bolivar County Deputy Sheriff Charles Griffin found Hazelton, Fannings and Mack in May 2004. Hazelton told Griffin she was not being held against her will and that she wanted to remain in Mississippi. She called her parents and promised to stay in touch. Months passed, and the Hazeltons did not hear from their daughter. In August, Fannings and Mack, who has been arrested four times in Lancaster County since 2001, drove Hazelton's Chevrolet Blazer back to Pennsylvania. The men were arrested for robbery later that month. While being interviewed about the robbery, Mack told police Fannings shot Hazelton in their apartment in 2004, and they tossed the body off a bridge into Alligator Lake. Quigley and state police Cpl. Tom Waters took the information and spent a week in Alligator, Miss., searching unsuccessfully for Hazelton. The body still has not been found. Without enough evidence to hold Fannings and Mack for the slaying, police released them. The case went cold until Dec. 11, when duck hunters found bedsheets in Alligator Lake; the sheets contained blood and human hair. A blood-stained bra and red jacket belonging to Hazelton also were found in the lake. The discovery prompted police to search the apartment where Hazelton, Fannings and Mack lived. Traces of blood were found. The blood is being analyzed at the Mississippi Crime Laboratory, as are the sheets and clothing. Natalie Hazelton said Thursday she was against her daughter dating Fannings. The couple applied for a marriage license in October 2003. "We tried everything to discourage the relationship," she said. Fannings had a friend in Mississippi and convinced Hazelton to move there. "She wanted to move to Mississippi and make a life for herself and make a new start," Hazelton said. "They went down there to live, kind of get away." Fannings is being held in Lancaster County Prison as a fugitive from justice. He will be extradited to Mississippi, but an extradition date has not been scheduled.

Stacey Lynn Hazelton's mother knew something was wrong. Their family disapproved of the young man their daughter was seeing, but the 21-year-old was determined to be independent and make a new life for herself. Eventually, Stacey Hazelton moved out of their Kinzer home. But her mother, Natalie, said she always stayed in touch and frequently called home. In May 2004, the calls ended. By the time Christmas came that year and there was still no word, Mrs. Hazelton and her husband, Bruce, were frantic. They went to the police about their missing daughter. Stacey had been traced to Mississippi, to a remote town called Alligator, where detectives learned she had gone of her own free will. And where, police now say, she was murdered. On Wednesday, Hazelton's boyfriend, James Arthur Fanning Jr., 24, was picked up at the home of his current girlfriend at Garden Court Apartments in Lancaster City on murder charges from Mississippi. "It's just a shame," Pennsylvania State Police Cpl. Pat Quigley said. "Stacey fell in love with the wrong guy." "She comes from a good family and from all reports, she was a decent person who always believed in the good of people...she made a mistake." Fanning, who is not employed, was taken into custody without incident by state police and committed to Lancaster County Prison, where he will remain, without bail, pending extradition to Mississippi. According to reports in the Bolivar Commercial newspaper in Mississippi, police said witnesses told them Fanning shot Hazelton in the head at their apartment in Alligator in 2004. Fanning then allegedly took her body to a field where he tried to burn her remains, police said they learned. When that didn't work, he allegedly threw her body over a bridge into Alligator Lake. But police have found no trace of Hazelton. In August 2005, Quigley and Cpl. Tom Waters, members of the Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Investigative Assessment Unit, went to Mississippi and spent a week helping police look for any trace of the missing woman. Police didn't see any alligators in the lake, just snakes, they said. Then last month, according to a report in the Commercial, three duck hunters came across bed sheets and blood-stained clothing. Police immediately searched the apartment where Hazelton had been living with Fanning, the newspaper reported, and found traces of blood. The evidence has been taken to a Mississippi crime laboratory for processing. Warrants for Fanning's arrest were issued and troopers, members of the state police fugitive unit, along with city police and county detectives took Fanning into custody. To Hazelton's family, though, Fanning's arrest is part of a never-ending nightmare in the disappearance of their daughter. "She wouldn't hurt a fly," Mrs. Hazelton said today, but added that her daughter "was independent in her ways. She wanted to be on her own and show that she could do it." "She was headstrong," Mrs. Hazelton said, "but she didn't see bad in anybody...If she saw someone in need, she would help them." Mrs. Hazelton said she and her husband moved to Kinzer from the Wellsboro area when Stacey and their son, Christopher, were young. Later, they had another daughter, Amanda. Their children grew up, attended Pequea Valley High School, and all stayed in the Lancaster County area. Stacey, she said, took a job at a local truck stop. "She liked to draw but she wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life, so she worked odd jobs until she decided. We said that was fine." Mrs. Hazelton said all the members of her family had a good relationship with Stacey, and she knew they would help her in any way they could, but she also knew they didn't approve of her relationship with Fanning. "We tried everything," Mrs. Hazelton said, to discourage the relationship, although she declined to say why they disliked the young man. According to Lancaster County Court records, Fanning had a number of prior arrests on such charges as

false identification to law enforcement, disorderly conduct, theft and a marijuana offense. Also according to newspaper records, the young couple applied for a marriage license in October 2003, but Mrs. Hazelton said her daughter and Fanning were never married. In the spring of 2004, Mrs. Hazelton said Stacey told them that she wanted to move to Mississippi "and make a life for herself and make a new start." "Someone he used to know lived in Mississippi," Quigley said. "They went down there to live, kind of to get away." Alligator, Quigley explained, is about one and one-half hours south of Memphis, Tenn. "There's nothing but farm fields," Quigley said, a few trailers and an apartment building at the end of a dirt and gravel road. "It's a very impoverished area." Bolivar County Sheriff's Department in Cleveland, Miss., filed the warrant for Fanning's arrest this week. In newspaper accounts there, Bolivar County Sheriff H.M. Grimmett said, "We need to try and do right by this girl and her family."

A witness testified during the trial that Hazelton's body was burned and buried in woods near a creek in Duncan, Miss. Despite several police searches, the remains were never found. Burned bone fragments were recovered but a DNA match was impossible. The Hazeltons are desperate for the closure that the discovery of her remains would bring. We can't leave her down there, Mrs. Hazelton said. That's like leaving her behind. She needs to be home. I wish there was a different way, but still she needs to be home. (Lancaster On-Line)

Since Stacey has gone missing, her ex-boyfriend James Arthur Fanning, Jr was found guilty of her murder. However, the fact remains that Stacey Hazelton's body has never been recovered. Tim Miller and Texas EquuSearch will be going to Mississippi this week to help in the search. Their efforts have been hampered by weather; however, they will be joining the efforts to help bring home Stacey Hazelton to her family. See the family sight, www.staceyhazelton.org.
