

Marcellino (R-Syosset), which would make fleeing the scene of an accident resulting in serious injury or death punishable by up to seven years in jail, along with a \$2,500 to \$5,000 fine. Last year, when the Assembly received the bill, Harvey Weisenberg (D-Long Beach) decided to make his own bill, which passed and is now sitting in the Senate. The difference between the bills is that Marcellino's Senate bill calls for a Class D felony across the board—for accidents resulting in death or serious injury—while Weisenberg's Assembly bill calls for a Class D felony for death and only a Class E for serious injury. "Everybody wanted this god-damn bill passed," says Weisenberg, who said he would go Class D across the board if the Senate passes his bill.

"It's just a no-brainer," says Kirk Ives, legislative director for Marcellino. "We do this year after year." After a volley of calls by the *Press* to both politicians, Weisenberg pledged to try and work out a compromise and close the loophole that helps drunk drivers who flee the scene. Weisenberg called Ives and told him he was willing to go Class D across the board. Both offices pledged they would fight to get it done in early 2005.

"Most hit-and-runs are drunk drivers," says Deena Cohen, president of the Long Island Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. "We're basically giving them permission to leave the scene and sober up."

Cohen actually addressed the Assembly last year. "They were all nodding their heads, and still [the bill] sits there."

## JESSICA AND THE SLEEPOVER

Five days before Messiah Lovelady was killed crossing a street in broad daylight, Jessica Savarese was killed crossing a street at night.

Jessica (known as Jayy to her friends) and her two friends, Tiffany Zinnanti, 15, and Melissa Fick, 15, left a pizza parlor close to 11 p.m. on May 7, and were walking along the south side of Hempstead Turnpike. Jessica, a freshman at H. Frank Carey High School in Franklin Square, was going to a sleepover at Melissa's house.

Near Clafin Boulevard, the three girls decided to cross. They got to the double yellow line, when Melissa and Tiffany noticed a car going fast in the westbound lane. They stopped, but Jessica kept walking and broke into a run to try and make it to the curb. Her friends watched in horror as the car struck her. Her body was thrown into the air and landed on the side of the road. The girl with the million



Jessica Savarese, 14, was killed by a hit-and-run driver in May, 2004.

dollar smile, who loved the color purple and planned to go to college in Florida, was most probably killed instantly.

There were no tire marks indicating the car even braked. It just kept going.

Damage at the scene included a broken passenger side headlight assembly directional, common on the Ford Taurus sedan or wagon 1989-91 models. (But those headlights can be retrofitted to other years.) Detective Gary Ferucci of the Nassau Police Department says that based on the significant damage, whoever hit Jessica would know they hit something.

Headed by Ferucci, Nassau police gave flyers to patrol units, fire departments and taxi companies. Anthony Savarese purchased a list of auto body shops within a 30-mile radius of the crash. "I went out and did my own mailing," he says, flooding businesses with fliers to be on the lookout for the car.

In June, Savarese held a press conference near the intersection where Jessica was killed, offering \$30,000 for information along with Crime Stoppers' \$2,000 reward. A new flier included a picture of the type of car in question, along with a mark noting where the damage would be noticeable.

When told of the McAuliffe arrest, based on the tip from the repair shop, Savarese said, "I was hoping for that same kind of luck."

## ALWAYS HOPE

Even though eight months have passed, that doesn't mean Jessica's killer will not be found—in fact, there is even a fresh lead. "Over the last three or four days, we've come upon a vehicle we're looking at," says Ferucci. "It's from out of state.... It's in the ballpark.

"This is not a cold case," he adds, quick to point out the case of Marjorie Cordero, who was killed on a Greenvale street in January 2001. Through dogged police work, detectives, armed with pieces left at the scene, found the car, a Mercury Cougar, and its owner, Glen Cove resident Robert Mikols, more than three months after the accident. (Mikols received six months in jail.)

There's always the chance that guilt will become too much to live with for the driver. Richard Marcus of Coram came forward eight months after striking and killing Jeremy Springer, as the 17-year-old rode his bicycle in Coram in November 2001. (The only charge the prosecution could make stick was leaving the scene of an accident with injuries, a misdemeanor. Marcus received a small fine and was ordered to perform 280 hours of community service.)

Ferucci is putting the finishing touches on a program called SAFE, Shields Against Fatal Emulation, which will attempt to "raise awareness among young drivers—and pedestrians—that the decisions they are making could be catastrophic." The program could launch this year.

This fall, Anthony Savarese had planned to announce he was upping the reward to \$50,000 to catch his daughter's killer, but the ordeal has taken its toll. "Honestly, I'm kind of worn out," he says.

At the intersection of Clafin and Hempstead Turnpike, a purple-drenched memorial to Jessica still stands, over 100 messages from friends written in Magic Marker on a utility pole. Messages like "I

## How Some Hit-and-Run Drivers Have Been Caught

Leslie Jennemann brought her Jeep into the repair shop in November 2002, claiming she had hit a deer the night before while driving on Montauk Highway in Wainscott. She had actually hit migrant worker **Henry Yarrell**, a father of eight. The owner of the body shop had heard police were looking for a silver Jeep or wagon. He called the Southampton Police and Jenneman, who reportedly had been drinking earlier that night, was convicted last year of second-degree manslaughter.

**Raymundo Herrera** of Long Beach was arrested in January of 2004 for leaving the scene after allegedly striking and killing teenage mother **Natalie Guzman**, 18, in Corona, Queens. Bystanders jotted down the license plate number of the 1995 Chevy Suburban Herrera was driving, and DNA found on the car matched that of Guzman.

In October, **Louis Giancontieri**, 20, was returning on his motorcycle from the wake of friend Marine Lance Cpl. Ramon Mateo, who had been killed in Iraq, when he was struck by a Jeep in Central Islip and killed. The driver of the Jeep fled on foot. Police ran the car's plates and **Roberto Vasquez** was arrested at his home in Central Islip later that day. —BJ

# THERE WERE NO TIRE MARKS INDICATING THE CAR EVEN BRAKED. IT JUST KEPT GOING.

know you are watching us," "We will never forget" and "The emptiness inside is killing me."

Around this time Messiah would be playing football and *Yu-gi-oh!* cards and practicing his wrestling moves with brother Christopher.

"He wanted to become a wrestler like me," says Christopher, who is on the Wyandanch wrestling team and had started to teach Messiah moves. "This was going to be his first year." ❏

*If you have any information regarding the death of Messiah Lovelady, call Suffolk Crime Stoppers at 1-800-220-TIPS. All calls are confidential and you do not have to appear in court.*

*If you have any information regarding the death of Jessica Savarese, call Nassau Crime Stoppers at 1-800-244-TIPS. All calls are confidential and you do not have to appear in court. You can also call Det. Ferucci directly at 516-573-7788.*