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Route 46 motels: Crime hot spots known for drugs, prostitution and lodging 9/11 hijackers

Alex Evans | NorthJersey

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A crime scene has been set up around the Knights Inn for a murder suicide at the motel on Route 46, has been confirmed by the South Hackensack Police Chief South Hackensack on Monday morning July 2, 2018.

Tariq Zehawi/NorthJersey.com

A man killed a woman and then himself in an apparent murder-suicide that happened as police arrived at a South Hackensack motel room on Monday morning.

Police found the two bodies inside a motel room at the Knights Inn on Route 46 morning, according to South Hackensack police. Authorities have described the events that led to the couple's death as a domestic kidnapping.

The Knights Inn is part of a strip of hotels, including the Horizon Inn, The Congress Inn, the Stagecoach Motel and the Airport Motel, where weird and troubling events have taken place over the past few years.

Some of the crime reported at the hotels are fairly typical, but they have a flair that isn't often present in most accounts of crimes.

For example, police arrested a South Hackensack motel worker in June 2016 after they discovered that he had allegedly stolen \$7,000 worth of jewelry from an entertainer from Poland who was playing bars in Garfield and Wallington while staying at the motel.

But there are some instances that grab widespread interest. Here are some of those:

September 11, 2001

The Congress Inn on Route 46 in South Hackensack as seen in 2004.

The hotels in South Hackensack also played a role in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Two al-Qaida lieutenants — Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi — rented Room 506 at the Congress Inn and stayed there until September 11 with no indication as to the murderous attack they were about to help carry out.

Prostitution and drugs

In November 2017, a top leader in a prostitution ring that kept a 16-year-old girl from New York in sexual slavery was sentenced to 10 years in state prison. Three others involved in the ring were broken up and were sentenced to state prison terms earlier that year. In 2014, South Hackensack police arrested a 16-year-old girl and another woman, Tonika Williams of North Carolina, at a Route 46 hotel in an undercover investigation into a prostitution ring led by the Bowman family of Newark. Police had seen a photo of the young girl with her breasts exposed in an advertisement. After calling a number on the ad, they were told that they could have “full sex” with her for \$160 at the motel.

In 2017, South Hackensack police chief Joseph Terraccino said that a majority of the department's "Narcansaves," which are instances when first responders use the drug naloxone to reverse the effects of an overdose, took place in motels along Route 46.

In February 2017, a Long Island man was arrested with offenses in connection to human trafficking after South Hackensack police found three girls in a South Hackensack motel who had been taken there as prostitutes. He was part of a larger ring, members of which were arrested weeks earlier. Jamel Griffin pleaded guilty to three counts of human trafficking. In June 2017 he was sentenced to 15 years in state prison, eligible for parole after 9.

The five hotels accounted for up to 75 percent of South Hackensack's arrests in 2014, with two cases, including the ring involving Tonika Williams, involving human trafficking and prostitution. Narcotics arrests rose to 222 from 53 in 2013 as well, including a May 2014 sting operation targeting prostitution and drug dealing in which 14 people were arrested at one of the Route 46 hotels.

In October 2014, Paterson city code enforcement officer Daniel Vergara was accused by authorities of taking a 12-year-old boy to a motel in South Hackensack and arrested and charged with child endangerment. Vergara was accepted into pre-trial intervention, which is similar to probation but after successful completion charges are dismissed.

Sinead O'Connor

An employee of the Travelodge checks the inside of a car Chevy HHR in black that is apparently belonging to singer Sinead O'Connor, photographed at the Travelodge in S. Hackensack on August 8th 2017.

Mitsu Yasukawa/NorthJersey.com

Musician Sinead O'Connor, most famous for her cover of "Nothing Compares 2 U" and for tearing a picture of Pope John Paul II while on "Saturday Night Live" posted a video on Facebook claiming that she was dealing with suicidal thoughts while living at a South Hackensack Travelodge motel.

O'Connor spoke about her struggles with mental illness, and she said she had been living in a South Hackensack motel and pleaded with her family to come rescue her.

"I've walked this earth alone for two years now as punishment for being mentally ill and being angry that nobody would take care of me," O'Connor said in the video. "I'm fighting and fighting like all the millions I know that I'm one of to stay alive every day."

The video, which has garnered international attention, highlighted the vulnerabilities of mentally ill people, who experts say face stigma when they try to seek help and are particularly at risk of becoming homeless.

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