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SPORTS, 1B

Courier News

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Ahmad Khan Rahami is led into court in Elizabeth in 2016. He was convicted Tuesday of the attempted murder of five Linden police officers. AP/PA

Rahami guilty of attempted murder

Convicted of attempting to kill 5 police officers

Business Reporter Central Jersey Courier News USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

ELIZABETH — A city man, who already is serving a federal life prison sentence for the 2016 bombing of a Chelsea neighborhood in Manhattan, has been handed another conviction, this time on state charges for the attempted murder of five Linden police officers.

Besides the attempted murder charges, Ahmad Khan Rahami, 31, also was convicted of multiple counts of aggravated assault, two weapons offenses and possession of a high-capacity magazine, acting Union County Prosecutor Lyndsay V. Ruotolo said in a release.

Rahami had been charged with 30 counts. His sentencing is tentatively scheduled for Nov. 15 at which time Rahami faces a sentence of up to life in state prison.

The verdict was reached after a three-week trial before Superior Court Judge John M. Deitch and jury deliberations over two days in Union County.

Today's verdict, while not unexpected, is a much anticipated conclusion to the Rahami saga

and we are grateful to the Union County Prosecutor's Office for their resolve in holding him accountable for trying to kill these heroes. Their actions on that day will forever inspire us, and this conviction sends a clear message that those who use fear and intimidation to disrupt our way of life will be stopped, and they will be held accountable." Linden Police Chief Dave Hari said in a statement.

"The degree of valor exhibited by these five responding Linden Police Department officers on a rainy Monday morning a little more than three years ago simply cannot be overstated," Ruotolo said. "They rushed into an extraordinarily dangerous and unpredictable scenario without a moment's hesitation, and with only the protection of the public and the apprehension of a violent criminal in mind. Today's verdict is a fitting conclusion to this case, and will stand as a permanent testament to their dedication and bravery."

The charges stem from a Sept. 10, 2016, daytime gun battle along East Elizabeth Avenue in

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NJ balloon festival seeks new title sponsor

Wick Manufacturing Central Jersey Courier News USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

READINGTON — After nearly three decades with Central Jersey's largest summertime festival, QuickChek will depart as title sponsor of the New Jersey Festival of Ballooning.

The balloon festival made the announcement of its search for a new title sponsor on Tuesday as QuickChek begins changing its marketing strategies.

Howard Freeman, executive producer of the festival, said QuickChek has been the title sponsor since his team took over the event 27 years ago — a partnership that he said lasted "three times longer than my first marriage."

"Anytime you break up with something after 27 years it's going to be a bit of an awakening," Freeman said. "All good things come to a middle, that's where we are now, and I'm incredibly energized to meet with some new companies who understand what this opportunity could be to create a new festival with them in their image."

QuickChek will look to remain part of the festival but "is creating an opportunity for the event to continue its growth and search for a new title sponsor," according to a release.

More than 100,000 people annually attend the event, held for the past 27 years on the last full weekend of July.

"The Festival has been a showcase event for us for 27 years," QuickChek CEO Dean Darling said in the release. "It has allowed us to deliver our message of providing restaurant-quality fresh food at a great value, of having the best cup of coffee in the market, and demonstrate the pride and commitment we have in caring for our customers and our communities."

Darling said QuickChek is "proud of the role we've played, but as we focus on our new stores, the time is right for someone else to enjoy the success we've had as its title sponsor."

Freeman said he is looking for a new title sponsor that is "probably New Jersey-based, but it doesn't have to be" and that can reap a benefit of the benefit of being between the markets of New York City and Philadelphia, understands the economic impact the

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Developer sues over denial of Green Brook apartments

Milva Dook Central Jersey Courier News USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

GREEN BROOK — The long-running saga of possible development on the corner of westbound Route 22 and Warrenville Road has taken another twist with the developer of the 14.5-acre property filing a fresh lawsuit against the township.

In its lawsuit filed Sept. 25 in state Superior Court in Somerset County, Green Brook Meadow LLC claims the township land use board's denial of its application to build 202 apartments, 21 of which would be affordable units, on the property is arbitrary.

In recent days, residents have complained about the developer clearing trees on the property. Township officials responded by posting a letter to residents on its website explaining that Green Brook Meadow, before proposing the apartments, had received township approval to build a commercial development, including a health club, on the property.

That township approval came after another legal battle between Green Brook Meadow and the township after the first plan for developing that site, filed in April 2014, was rejected by the land use board. That rejection was reversed in Superior Court and the township reached a compromise with Green Brook Meadow.

That approval was also contested in court by three neighbors, but again the court ruled in favor of Green Brook Meadow. The neighbors — Rajeev Sadana, Abhishek Bhatt and Jack Mohammed — have appealed that court decision.

The latest litigation arises from the June 10 land use board decision to deny a use variance for Green Brook Meadow's apartment application. A use variance is necessary because the property is zoned for commercial development.

Green Brook Meadow had argued before the board that the apartments should be approved because the affordable units would help the township meet its affordable housing quota.

But, the developer's lawsuit alleges, the board "improperly" rejected the proposal based on its "erroneous conclusion" that the township had already met its affordable housing obligation.

According to the board's minutes of the meeting, Richard Roseberry, the board's engineer, testified that not only did the township have a court-approved plan to meet the affordable housing quota, but that Green Brook Meadow had not proven the case for a use variance by failing to show that the site could not be developed commercially.

Several residents also told the board they were

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Nick Muscavage Central Jersey Courier News
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festival has on New Jersey, supports nonprofits and is eager to grow the festival.

The festival has an economic impact of \$52.4 million, according to the release, and has raised more than \$3 million for local charities and nonprofits.

Freeman said the return on investment for the title sponsor is "astronomical."

The festival has grown to become one of the largest summertime hot air balloon and music festivals in North America and featuring up to 100 hot air balloons taking to the skies twice each day and a headlining concert series featuring Grammy Award-winning performers.

The festival attracted 169,500 people in 2019, according to the release.

Anyone interested can contact Freeman at 973-882-5464 or hfreeman@balloonfestival.com.

Staff Writer Nick Muscavage: 908-243-6615; ngmuscavage@gannettnj.com.