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Woman killed, 2 injured after pickup plows into Hawthorne farmers market [video]

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STAFF WRITERS | THE RECORD

A woman was killed and at least two people were injured Sunday when a pickup truck plowed through a farmers' market, knocking down canopies and tables and scattering crates of fruits and vegetables across the pavement, authorities said.

The name of the dead woman was not immediately released, but Mayor Richard S. Goldberg said she was a local resident. She was dragged for four blocks after the initial impact in the market, and pronounced dead at the scene where the red pickup truck that hit her came to a stop.

The driver, whose identity was not immediately revealed, was taken to St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center in Paterson for evaluation because he was visibly upset, Police Chief Richard McAuliffe said.

"As of right now, he has not been charged," he said.

The mayor said the driver was being tested for alcohol and drug use, but added there was no obvious evidence inside the truck of any alcohol or drugs.

Goldberg said the accident was "something this town will not forget for a long time."

"It's unthinkable that you could drag someone that far and not notice," he added.

McAuliffe said of the farmers' market, "We've never had anyone get injured here – trip, fall," he said. "We've had not even like a medical emergency here in the five years that they had it."

Two people suffered injuries and were taken by ambulance to St. Joseph's and later released, McAuliffe said.

"It could have been worse," the mayor said, noting that the accident happened about 2:15 p.m., after the market's official 2 o'clock closing time. "I can't tell you how distraught I am over this."

There were only a few straggling customers making final purchases from the six or seven vendors still packing up at the end of the day; if the accident had happened any earlier there might have been more than 100 people there, Goldberg said.

Bailey Hildebrant of Hackettstown, an injured vendor who was taken to the hospital by ambulance, said she was hit on the right leg by a table that was knocked over by the truck. Friends followed her to the hospital and brought her back to the market after doctors put a cast on her right foot, she said.

"I really don't know why he didn't stop," the badly shaken Hildebrant said.



TYSON TRISH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Police looking under a truck involved in a fatal accident Sunday at the Hawthorne Farmer's Market. The truck stopped at Lafayette Avenue and Legion Place. The driver was in custody Sunday night.



TYSON TRISH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A view of the farmers' market at Jefferson Place and Grand Avenue after the vehicle drove through.

"I got knocked over and I saw my tomatoes flying in the air." She said she has been a vendor at the market every Sunday for the five years it's been in Hawthorne.

"I saw the person stuck under the tire, and he just took off. He didn't stop," said Blythe Roth of Teaneck, a vendor who had been packing up after selling baked goods from her stall for Tova's All Natural of Dumont. She said the driver was not swerving, but that he drove "straight through" the market and kept going.

"It literally happened just like that," said Ric McCarthy, 61, snapping his fingers. "I heard a noise and saw a blur of color, and the truck," said McCarthy, who was helping pack up equipment for a band that had played at the market. "There was a woman screaming for the truck to stop. It's one of those things that just happen in an instant."

At least three of the seven canopies still upright after closing time were damaged, one knocked over on its side and two others missing support poles. The pavement was strewn with crushed tomatoes and apples, along with crates and buckets. A woman's sandal was left at the scene on Grand Avenue near Jefferson Place, where the market was set up.

The truck finally came to a stop at Lafayette Avenue and Legion Place. Police closed Grand Avenue, Lafayette Avenue and many side streets for more than five hours after the accident. Shortly before 7 p.m., with the market area still littered with crushed tomatoes and blocked off by barricades and yellow police tape, officials finally gave about a dozen remaining vendors permission to pack up what was left of their stalls and leave.

The accident was being investigated by the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, the Passaic County Sheriff's Office and local police.

The incident shook up a town that most residents describe as a quiet suburb, a place where children from other towns come to trick-or-treat on Halloween as their parents wait outside in their cars.

Many borough residents gathered around the market to seek information.

"I was just in shock, because you don't see this happen, any day," said Pete Arroyo, who lives above Andy's Corner on Lafayette Avenue, along the path where the victim's body was dragged.

"There's never been anything like this," said Greg DeLuca, another nearby resident.

McAuliffe said he, along with borough officials, would evaluate whether to continue with a classic car show scheduled for Aug. 24. The show would take place along with the farmers' market, in the parking lot behind Chase Bank on Lafayette Avenue, McAuliffe said.

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Police and crime scene investigators on the scene of the accident Sunday afternoon.

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