



## Lower Township Police Department

405 Breakwater Road  
Erma, NJ 08204  
609-886-1619

### **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **MAN CHARGED WITH DWI AFTER DRIVING INTO A HOUSE CAUSING THE STRUCTURE TO BE CONDEMED**

On Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, at approximately 10:40 am, the Lower Township Police Department received numerous 9-1-1 calls reporting that a vehicle had just smashed into the side of a home at 102 East Atlantic Avenue in the Villas Section of the township.

Police and Rescue Units immediately responded to the scene.

Once on scene, police officers and rescue personnel were able to remove the driver from the vehicle. Police officers then requested the Fire Department respond with the Jaws Unit to extricate a female passenger who was still trapped in the vehicle.

The Villas and Erma Fire Departments responded for the Jaws assignment.

Driver of the vehicle was identified as Bernard Ruckhardt, age 55, of 35 East Atlantic Avenue, Villas, New Jersey.

Witnesses reported that the vehicle, a green 2003 Mercury Grand Marquis was traveling westbound on East Atlantic Avenue at a high rate of speed when it crossed into the eastbound lane of travel, then left the roadway driving through a white picket fence at 100 East Atlantic Avenue, proceeded across the lawn of that property, then went through a chain link fence before impacting the side of 102 East Atlantic Avenue.

The vehicle hit the house with enough force to knock the house approximately three (3) feet off of its foundation and cracked the foundation as well.

Officers notified the Township Construction Official, Gary Playford, who responded to the scene and determined that the damage to the residence was so substantial that the residence will have to be condemned and torn down.

The Electric Company also responded and cut power to the home as a precaution.

The home is a summer residence and it's owners were notified of the situation by Lower Township Police Chief, Edward Donohue, who was also at the scene.

Chief Donohue reported that the home owner, Mr. Owen McGovern, of Philadelphia Pennsylvania advised him that the home had been in the McGovern Family since 1932.



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Construction and Fire Officials are taking precautions to sure up the home before removing the vehicle, as officials feared the house may collapse upon pulling the vehicle out.

The driver of the vehicle, Bernard Ruckhardt, signed a Refusal to Treat Form from the Lower Township Rescue Squad and was then arrested by Lower Township Patrol Officer, Robert Fessler, for Driving While Intoxicated.

The female passenger, Mrs. Michelle Ruckhardt, age 52, being the wife of the driver, was removed from the vehicle with an extrication device by Fire and Rescue Personnel and then transported to the County Airport by Lower Township Rescue Squad after which she was airlifted to the Trauma Unit of the Atlantic Care Medical Center in Atlantic City where she was listed in stable condition with facial and hip injuries.

Bernard Ruckhardt was processed at the police department and charged with the following offenses:

**Driving While Intoxicated**  
**Reckless Driving**  
**Assault by Auto, being a 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree Crime**

Ruckhardt was transported to the Cape May County Jail with bail set at \$10,000 by Municipal Court Judge, George Neidig.

Press Release Prepared By:

Detective Lieutenant Thomas Keywood

Photos available upon request – 609-886-1619 ext. 109