

Pennsylvania - New Jersey - New York - Nationwide



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By SARA GANIM

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Penn State pines for normalcy amid sex abuse scandal

STATE COLLEGE -- It's been 25 days, even though it seems like so much longer.

Twenty-five days since Jerry Sandusky was charged with abusing eight boys he'd met through The Second Mile, his children's charity.

Penn State students came back Monday from Thanksgiving break, and there is an unnatural, forced and uncomfortable push for normalcy here.

Sit at the round stone bench — a gift from the class of 1915 — at the foot of Old Main lawn, and it won't be long before you realize what's going on in Happy Valley.

"Go home," a man in a Penn State sweatshirt, hanging his head out of a car window, yells at an out-of-town reporter. Two horns start honking.

But answers are far away. And no matter how hard they try, there is no returning to the Happy Valley since the eruption of a scandal that has led to the firing of Joe Paterno and the resignation of Penn State President Graham Spanier.

- Search committee formed to find new football coach

Today, the U.S. Department of Education begins to sift through 13 years of reports made to Penn State police. A team of officers spent Monday gathering thousands of pages of documents and interviewing officials about the university's compliance with the Clery Act — the federal law that

requires colleges to report crimes and warn of ongoing threats to public safety. Investigators expect to be on the ground for weeks.

Agents with the state attorney general's office began a new week of ferreting out new allegations of abuse by Sandusky, including one from an inmate in Oklahoma who penned a letter from his cell.

Police got no holiday break to escape. They've been taking calls made directly into the tipline set up for this case.

Children and Youth Services has opened two cases of alleged child sex abuse against Sandusky. Both cases involve alleged abuse against victims who are still children — one of them is reportedly a family member of Sandusky. The other cases involve adults who say they were abused as children.

Sandusky has launched an investigation. His attorney, Joe Amendola, said they're working with a private investigator as part of his defense.

Sandusky, the longtime defensive coach for Penn State's football team, denies any wrongdoing. He says he never molested children and flat out denies the abuse alleged over many years. Sandusky has acknowledged showering with boys, but says nothing inappropriate occurred.

Former FBI director Louis Freeh is eight days into an internal investigation of Penn State policies.

The NCAA has given Penn State until Dec. 16 to answer questions about compliance.

And one of the most respected prosecutors in the state, former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham, has been hired to take a look at The Second Mile. The charity and Penn State were so entangled, it's no surprise that they've been swept up in the cover-up allegations.

That totals seven investigations, all stemming from that arrest 25 days ago.

Seven. And that doesn't include informal investigations being conducted by several civil attorneys representing victims, organizations and others who might bring lawsuits.

Lawyers for The Second Mile are asking a judge to throw out a request to preserve the assets of the charity in anticipation of lawsuits.

Each investigation has a slightly different track. Ultimately, the answers will give the Nittany Nation — and the rest of the world — a big-picture view of what happened and how to make sure it never happens again.

Having so many parallel inquiries has advantages and disadvantages.

“The benefits are that the more people that are examining the matter, the more likely it is that we will all get to the truth,” said **Shanin Specter**, a Philadelphia attorney whose firm is involved in this case and has participated in other large investigations.

“Sometimes one investigator will have an idea that won’t occur to another investigator,” he said. “By having the first person involved, it makes up for the shortcomings of the second.”

But there has been some impatience here.

“Here’s what I think happens, and this is in every story of great weight: Everybody’s going off in 12 different directions,” Abraham said. “You can’t prevent [that], and sometimes that’s beneficial. Other times that may not be because sometimes judgments are formed before facts are here.”

And even though each inquest has a slightly different agenda, there are bound to be overlaps. That can open people up to scrutiny.

“If there are more investigations, and the same people give a repetitive number of statements, then small variances between statements can be magnified by somebody seeking to poke holes in the witness statements,” Specter said.

But in the meantime, students have class. Some professors have said they’re using the scandal as a teachable moment. A lesson.

Students packing their bags for the Thanksgiving break were hoping to return without news trucks outside Old Main. A week off was going to be a welcomed relief from the constant black cloud.

“We’ve got to step back and let the common nature of the passage of time provide context, and that’s going to take a while, but I think it will happen,” Specter said. “Perhaps by next Thanksgiving we’ll be well on the road to healing. That’s a realistic time range.”

But investigations don’t follow the 24-hour news cycle. Criminal justice can be a daunting and lengthy ordeal.

