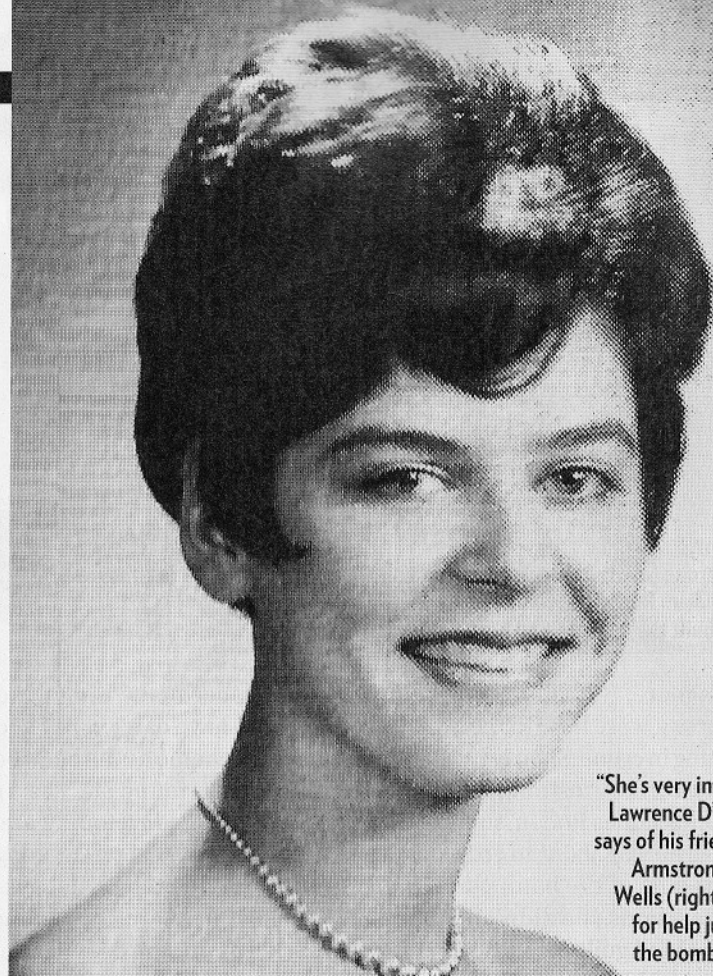
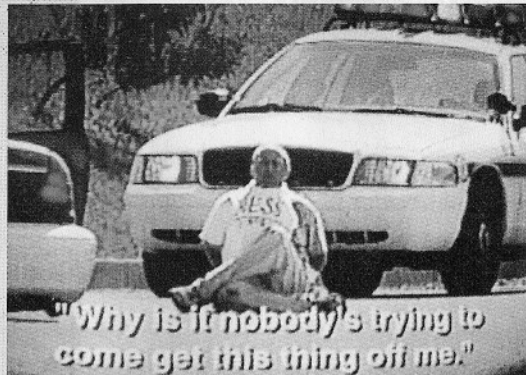


## PIZZA BOMBING UPDATE



"She's very intelligent," Lawrence D'Ambrosio says of his friend Diehl-Armstrong (in '67). Wells (right) pleaded for help just before the bomb went off.

# FROM VALEDICTORIAN TO CRIMINAL MASTERMIND?

Prosecutors claim Marjorie Diehl-Armstrong was behind the infamous bank robbery-bombing that killed pizza delivery man Brian Wells

**S**itting in a parking lot in Erie, Pa., with what he said was a bomb around his neck, Brian Wells pleaded with police to believe his story. Earlier in the day on Aug. 28, 2003, Wells, a 46-year-old pizza delivery man, had walked into a local branch of the PNC Bank and demanded money from a teller. After collecting his loot, he had calmly walked out of the bank and been

cornered by alerted cops. He told them that while making a pizza delivery, he had been jumped by some people who fixed the bomb to his neck and threatened to detonate the device if he didn't deliver the money. As authorities debated what to do—and news cameras captured the bizarre scene—the bomb went off, killing Wells.

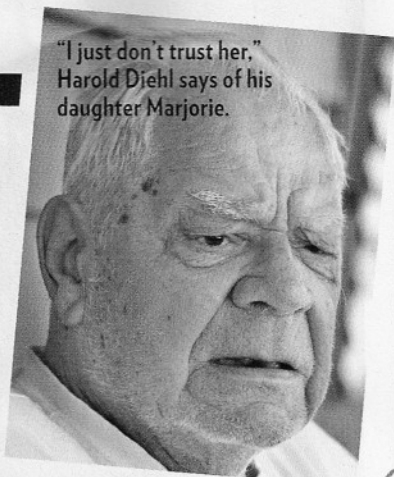
In the four years since the Pizza Bomb Case unfolded, neither of the

key questions have been laid to rest: Who was behind the scheme? And was Wells, an ordinary guy who lived alone in an apartment with his cats, an innocent victim or a part of the plot? On July 11 federal authorities announced that they had at last cracked the case, contending that one of the masterminds was Marjorie Diehl-Armstrong, 58. Described by friends as highly intelligent (she was her high school valedictorian and has a master's degree), she is also afflicted with bipolar disorder. Diehl-Armstrong is already serving a 7- to 20-year sentence after pleading guilty (but mentally ill) in 2005 to killing a boyfriend. According to U.S. Attorney Mary Beth Buchanan, it was Diehl-Armstrong and her friend Kenneth Barnes who "choreographed every aspect" of the bank job, which included other conspirators, including Wells. "We're not exactly sure how much [Wells] knew," said Buchanan. "We know he was involved in a limited extent with the planning of this."

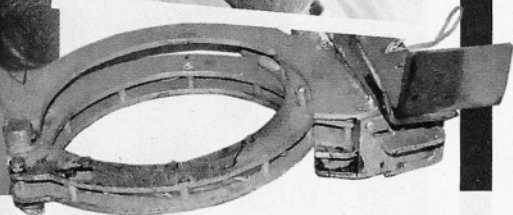
As the feds tell it, the elaborate plot was hatched by Diehl-Armstrong to get money to pay to have her father murdered. (She was allegedly under the mistaken impression that he was wealthy.) A month before the robbery, she supposedly asked Barnes, who allegedly was acquainted with Wells, how to build a pipe bomb. Around that same time, she also gave two egg timers to William Rothstein, a handyman and former boyfriend who may have had the expertise to build the collar bomb.



Supporters say that Diehl-Armstrong (above) is a scapegoat for William Rothstein, who might have built the bomb (below).



"I just don't trust her," Harold Diehl says of his daughter Marjorie.



What's more, Rothstein and Diehl-Armstrong were no strangers to cooperating in crime. Shortly before the robbery, Diehl-Armstrong fatally shot boyfriend James Roden, supposedly because he was about to go to police with details of the bank plan. (She still maintains she didn't do it and only pleaded guilty to avoid a stiffer sentence.) When she needed a place to stash the body, Rothstein supplied his freezer. (Rothstein died of cancer in 2004, insisting to investigators he knew nothing of the bomb caper.)

To those who know Diehl-Armstrong, the allegations apparently did not come as a shock. In an interview earlier this year with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, when her name was being linked to the bank investigation, her father, Harold Diehl, 88, offered something less than a ringing endorsement of her character. "She wouldn't kill me, but she probably would get someone else to do it," he said. "She tends to be greedy." Indeed, misfortune has often befallen the men in Diehl-Armstrong's life. In 1984 she shot a boyfriend to death but claimed she was abused and was acquitted. In 1992 her husband, Richard Armstrong, died as the result of a cerebral hemorrhage, and she won a malpractice settlement from the hospital over his care. One of Diehl-Armstrong's former lawyers, Stephen Hutzelman, says her mental-

health issues make him wonder if she could have carried out such an intricate scheme as the bank bombing. "I always found she has a great deal of trouble developing and following any rational process of going from Step A to Step B," he says.

Meanwhile, Rothstein's supporters tried to put the best light on his murky role. "I know in my heart that he could never participate in killing a living thing," says friend Roni Golden, drawing a distinction between the bomb plot and Rothstein's involvement in hiding Roden's body. The most vehement defense came from Wells's family, who argued that authorities were smearing a man who was an innocent victim. "I have not seen any evidence to suggest that he knew these people in any way other than he might have delivered them a pizza the day before," said Wells's brother John. "The truth will come out." In making her allegation, U.S. Attorney Buchanan acknowledged being sensitive to the feelings of the Wells family, adding there was reason to believe that he might have tried to back out of the plot. "Sadly the plans of these other individuals [were] much more sinister," she said. "Much more sinister."

**By Bill Hewitt. Reported by Sean Scully in Philadelphia and Angela T. Koenig in Erie**