

# Woman's screams save her from attack

By Bill Murphy  
*Eagle-Tribune Writer*

LAWRENCE — A 20-year-old man was charged with trying to rape a 33-year-old woman after he dragged her behind bushes into an empty lot on Exchange Street early yesterday morning.

The woman screamed for help, and police came quickly and arrested Antonio Melendez, 37 Eutaw St., on charges of kidnapping, assault with intent to rape and indecent assault and battery.

A prosecutor says Mr. Melendez was holding the woman's arm when officers pulled up, but ran before they could get out of their cruisers.

He was caught a short distance away.

During his arraignment at the Fenton Judicial Center, his lawyer, Michael J. Kostyla, said, "Mr. Melendez steadfastly denies the charges of the victim."

Mr. Melendez and a friend offered the woman a ride from the Hispanic Festival on Camagnone Common, said prosecutor Murat Erkan.

Mr. Melendez' friend, he said, drove, and the friend dropped Mr. Melendez and the woman off near Park and Exchange streets about 2 p.m.

After the car drove off, Mr. Melendez dragged her behind bushes at 68 Exchange St. and pulled down her pants and underwear, Mr. Erkan said.

He had no weapon, the prosecutor said, and she resisted and screamed.

Although the woman accepted a ride from the men, the incident was not comparable to a date rape because the woman was pulled

off unwillingly into the lot, authorities said.

Assault with intent to rape carries a maximum sentence of 20 years, kidnapping a maximum sentence of 10 years and indecent assault and battery five years, Mr. Erkan said.

Mr. Kostyla said Mr. Melendez' side of the story will come out over time and will show he is innocent.

Mr. Kostyla says the woman asked Mr. Melendez to buy her some drugs while they were at the Hispanic Festival, but he refused.

Mr. Kostyla vaguely referred to a conversation the woman and Mr. Melendez had about sex while at the festival. But outside the after the arraignment, Mr. Kostyla would not describe this conversation.

Mr. Melendez has a long rap sheet. While still a juvenile, he was convicted of assault and battery and assault with a dangerous weapon, Mr. Erkan said.

As an adult, he was convicted of assault and battery on a household member and assault and battery on a police officer.

He has been arrested numerous other times. Fourteen default warrants were issued for him as a juvenile, eight as an adult, Mr. Erkan said.

Default warrants are issued when a defendant does not appear in court to answer charges.

Mr. Melendez is awaiting to be tried on a marijuana charge, Mr. Erkan said.

For being charged with a serious crime after he was released on the marijuana charge, Lawrence District Court Judge Allen J. Jarasitis ordered Mr. Melendez held 60 days without bail.