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POLITICS

## N.J. State Police trooper suspended for allegedly punching man outside lounge

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By Christopher Baxter | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com



**Lucas K. Murray/Gloucester County Times**

TRENTON — A State Police trooper once accused of wrongly shooting a couple's dog has been suspended after allegedly punching a man near La Costa lounge in Sea Isle City, The Star-Ledger has learned.

Ernest Lucarini, 32, of Deptford, who has been on the force eight years, was charged Aug. 29 by Sea Isle City police for allegedly punching Jarrod Linn of Gettysburg, Pa., in the right eye, cutting him above and below the eye, Sea Isle City Municipal Court records show.

Lucarini was charged with simple assault and threatening a police officer, court records show. A spokesman for the State Police, Acting Sgt. 1st Class Brian Polite, said Lucarini was suspended without pay the same day he was charged pending the outcome of the criminal case.

A witness, George McDevitt of Delran, said in a statement to police that around 2 a.m., Lucarini and someone else were talking trash and threatening to beat them up. McDevitt said Linn called Lucarini a "clown" and walked away, but Lucarini ran up behind them and threw a punch.

Police records show McDevitt and Linn were each charged about a month later with simple assault, though it was unclear what prompted the charges. The police department declined to release its full report on the incident, citing an ongoing investigation.

All three cases are pending. Lucarini, McDevitt and Linn could not be reached for comment.

In 2008, Lucarini shot a dog three times after it charged him while he was investigating an ongoing battle about a roadside memorial for an Estell Manor teen who had been struck by a vehicle and killed the year prior, according to federal court records.

The dog, a German shepherd named Trooper, was taken to the veterinarian and survived. Its owners, George Lopez and Susan Pettit, sued in 2009 in state court seeking damages for Lucarini's actions. The case was transferred to U.S. District Court in Camden and was dismissed last year.

The judge found Lucarini used reasonable force to subdue the dog when it appeared ready to jump at him. Lucarini said he feared for his safety and worried the dog was about to attack him.

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