

Lee Police Chief explains lack of charges in laundromat crash

By AARON SANBORN

asanborn@fosters.com

asanborn@fosters.com

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LEE — Police Chief Chet Murch said officers could have charged a South Portland, Maine, woman who crashed her van through a laundromat on Mast Road Saturday morning while she was talking on her cell phone.

Under state law, police can charge a driver if they find that any distracting activity caused an accident. Murch said charges were considered but in the end Sgt. Thomas Dronsfield at his discretion decided against them.

Murch said Dronsfield looked at the incident as a whole and determined it was an accident.

The accident happened around 10 a.m. when a silver Chevrolet Venture driven by Heather Boettner, 42, struck a wall that had a large glass window, going straight into the building.

Boettner was on her way to a campground to visit her father and was having a hard time finding the campground.

While driving in the area her father called to give her directions. Not wanting to talk on the phone and drive at the same time, Boettner pulled into Lee Laundromat to take the call, Murch said.

"She did the correct thing by pulling into the laundromat and stopping before answering the phone," he said. "She was trying to do the right thing."

Murch said Boettner didn't put the vehicle in park and instead kept her foot on the brake. She had three children in the van with her and at some point during the call turned around to address an issue with them.

While doing this Boettner's foot slowly slipped off the brake and the vehicle started to roll slightly, according to Murch. Boettner felt the vehicle roll and meant to slam her foot down on the brake but instead hit the gas and her van went into the laundromat.

"This truly was an accident," Murch said. "She was trying to do the right thing and it truly backfired on her."

Other factors that were considered were the fact no one was injured and Boettner was insured, according to Murch.

While no one was injured, Lee resident John Osambo was loading his clothes into one of the machines when he narrowly escaped being struck by the vehicle by jumping out of the way.