

Prosecutors: Ex-Police Chief Took Out Insurance On Victim

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

PIERRE — A former police chief in South Dakota charged with killing his pregnant fiancée in a shooting that long appeared to be a hunting accident helped take out more than \$750,000 in life insurance policies on her months before she died, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutors in Russell Bertram's case want to present evidence of the policies and alleged past insurance fraud during the trial scheduled to begin in February. Bertram, 64, has pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder.

He was indicted in September for the 2009 killing of Leonila Stickney, who was his 26-year-old fiancée. The Gregory County Sheriff's office initially said officials believed Stickney's death was the result of an accidental shooting. State authorities took over the inquiry as a cold case in 2010.

The attorney general's office has been reluctant to discuss the case since announcing the indictment, but court documents filed this month offer a window into the case and what may have led authorities to believe Stickney's death was a homicide, not an accident.

Prosecutors want to introduce evidence that Bertram filed for bankruptcy in late 2008 and bought an insurance policy on Stickney with a \$150,000 accidental death benefit in February 2009. A month earlier, they say he was involved in taking out a \$750,000 life insurance policy on Stickney.

Bertram was the beneficiary on both policies, according to the court document.

Stickney was killed in October 2009 in Gregory County by a close-range gunshot wound to her abdomen from a 12-gauge shotgun. Bertram said at the time that he was putting a gun into a vehicle when it went off and hit Stickney, former Sheriff Charlie Wolf has said. Stickney's death certificate lists it as an accident.

An expert is expected to testify that Stickney was pregnant when she died. Bertram would go on to marry Stickney's sister.

Attorneys for Bertram weren't available for comment on Wednesday. He has declined to speak to The Associated Press from jail.

Bertram served as police chief in Harrisburg until 2004 and previously worked as a police officer. Court documents suggest prosecutors plan on stressing Bertram's knowledge of gun safety and his law enforcement experience.

Prosecutors plan to have two of Bertram's former wives testify about allegations of domestic violence. One is expected to discuss alleged past insurance fraud, and the other is set to talk about "his life insurance purchases."

The prosecution is also seeking to introduce evidence that Bertram paid women for sex and that he had sex with other women when he was engaged to Stickney.

SD Authorities To Perform Drill At Capitol

PIERRE (AP) — State and local authorities will be conducting a training exercise at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.

The Department of Public Safety says the drill will happen on Jan. 6. But officials haven't provided details about exactly what will occur.

Maj. Dana Svendsen, an assistant superintendent of the South Dakota Highway Patrol, says such exercises are a good way to test the security response at the state Capitol.

Hughes County Sheriff Mike Leidholt says the training helps improve communication among different agencies.

Authorities performed a similar exercise in 2014.

Officials are publicizing the drill to make sure residents aren't overly concerned about a significant law enforcement presence at the Capitol on the day of the exercise.

Fatal Collision Blamed On Slick Roadway

BELLEVUE, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say a car passenger died when the vehicle he was in slid into a Sarpy County intersection and was struck broadside by another car.

The accident was reported just before 7:15 a.m. Wednesday on 36th Street, near Bellevue city limits. Lt. Randy Furbee, of the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office, says the westbound car was unable to halt at a stop sign because of the slick pavement. It was struck on the passenger side by a southbound vehicle.

The passenger in the westbound car was pronounced dead at the scene. The westbound car's driver was taken to Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha. The other car's driver was not injured. Their names haven't been released.

Highway Patrol Reveals First New Plates

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota Highway Patrol vehicles will be the first in the state to sport new license plates.

The existing plate design that has been in use since 2006 is being retired, with new plates being issued starting Jan. 1.

The Highway Patrol has worked with the Department of Revenue so trooper vehicles could have the new license plates before Friday. New plates were shipped to the Patrol's offices statewide this month. Troopers will make sure the new plates are installed on their vehicles before they begin duty for the first time in 2016.

The new design is similar to the current Mount Rushmore plate design, with different coloring.

NE Con Gets 10 Years For Similar Crime

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa (AP) — A 29-year-old man already serving time in a Nebraska prison has been given 10 years in an Iowa prison for a similar crime.

Rocky Ontiveros, who court records say lived in Bellevue, Nebraska, on Tuesday was sentenced in Pottawattamie County District Court in Council Bluffs. *The Daily Nonpareil* reports that Ontiveros pleaded guilty to felony sexual abuse after prosecutors lowered the charge.

Iowa court documents say Ontiveros sexually abused two minors from Nov. 1, 2013, to Sept. 19, 2014. Prosecutors dismissed one of two counts because the child involved remained in therapy and was in no position to testify.

In August Ontiveros was sentenced to 30 to 40 years in a Nebraska prison. He'd pleaded guilty to sexual assault of a minor in Nebraska's Douglas County.

Ex-Teacher Appeals Sex Assault Charge

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A former Lincoln teacher convicted of sexually assaulting a student is appealing his sentence.

Online court records say an attorney for 23-year-old Jackson Hedrick on Tuesday filed a notice of appeal with the Nebraska Appeals Court. A hearing date has not been set. Hedrick is claiming that the sentence is excessive.

On Dec. 10 Hedrick was sentenced to 20 to 30 years in prison. He pleaded guilty to sexual assault. Hedrick lost his job in March following allegations of an inappropriate relationship with the 14-year-old student.

Hedrick graduated last year from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a bachelor's degree in education and was hired to teach social studies at Irving Middle School in August 2014.

Developments Bring New Life To Omaha's Little Italy Area

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A redevelopment project would bring 19 new town houses to Omaha's Little Italy neighborhood, an urban corridor where new residences, restaurants and other businesses have replaced unkempt lots and boarded-up structures.

New development now dots the old neighborhood. The changes excite some residents of the old neighborhood, though other longtime

residents aren't so sure.

"You can't imagine how thrilled I am to see my neighborhood come alive again," said Nancy Calinger, who raised a family there and sold the town house parcel to the developer.

Her parents, Salvatore and Maria D'Agosta, migrated from Sicily and joined fellow immigrants in the hilly neighborhood just blocks west of the Missouri River. The newcom-

ers worked for the railroads, ran bakeries and pizzerias, and opened small businesses that catered to their ethnic community.

Across a street from the \$7 million Avanti town house project site is a future public market in an old streetcar barn. The new Blue Barn Theatre sits nearby, as does the Boxcar 10 building, which contains luxury apartments and a pizza parlor.

Charles Aliano, who has lived all his 67 years in Little Italy, told *The Associated Press* on Wednesday that he's come to accept the changes.

"We still can identify with some of the longtime establishments, but the entire neighborhood is not what it once was. I can't say one way or the other whether that's positive," Aliano said.

New GFP Commissioner Takes Buck, Hours After Appointment

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — The governor's choice of Russ Olson means there now are three former legislators in the eight seats on the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission.

Olson, of Wentworth, is chief executive officer for Heartland Consumers Power District at Madison.

"It must have been my lucky day," he said.

Along with the appointment to the commission, he filled his archery deer tag Tuesday evening, taking a big buck that carried five points on the right antler and four on the left.

Olson said he didn't actively seek the seat on the commission. He said two things might have led to the governor's staff reaching out to him.

"I worked with the GFP throughout my legislative service and considered myself 'friendly' to sponsor sensible legislation that benefited hunters in South Dakota," he said.

"I spend as much or more time hunting and fishing than any non-sponsored outdoorsmen in the state. I have always been interested in conservation and habitat, so that may have given the governor some comfort in asking me to serve."

Olson, now 45, will be the youngest member of the commission by about a generation.

He served two years in the state House of Representatives and five years in the state Senate, where he rose to Republican majority leader.

He resigned from the Senate on Sept. 30, 2013, to accept the promotion to Heartland's CEO.

Olson replaces Duane Sather, a Sioux Falls businessman.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard had appointed Sather in January 2012 to replace Jim McMahon, a Sioux Falls lawyer.

"Duane and his wife like to travel to warmer climates and he asked not to be considered for reappointment when his term expires," said Tony Venhuizen, the governor's chief of staff.

"Timing was driven by the term — it expires in early January," Venhuizen said.

The other former legislators previously appointed to the commission are Barry Jensen of White River and Paul Dennert of Columbia. They ranch and farm.

By coincidence another commissioner, Cathy Peterson of Salem, has a son, Kent, who is finishing his first year as a legislator.

Olson said it's too early for a specific goal he'd like to accomplish but wants people to know he plans to represent the interests of all resident sportsmen.

OBITUARIES

Alice Vanorny

Alice Vanorny, age 89, of Yankton, died Tuesday, December 29, 2015, at the Good Samaritan Center in Scotland, South Dakota.

Funeral services are 10 a.m. on Saturday, January 2, 2016 at the Wintz & Ray Funeral Home in Yankton with Reverend Molly Carlson officiating. Burial will be in the Garden of Memories Cemetery in Yankton.

Visitation is from 5 to 7 p.m. on Friday, January 1, at the Wintz & Ray Funeral Home in Yankton. Visitation continues one hour prior to the funeral on Saturday.

Pallbearers will be her grandchildren.

Alice Vanorny was born March 7, 1926 in Geddes, South Dakota, to Edward and Clara (Kortan) Malik. After moving to the Lesterville area, Alice attended Rockland Elementary and Lesterville High School. Later she worked at Musil's Grocery store in Lesterville. Alice married Edwin Vanorny on February 1, 1944. They lived on the family farm near Lesterville for 36 years. They then moved to Yankton



Vanorny

where Alice worked at Sunshine Café for 9½ years and then four years for Dr. Saol.

She was a true farm wife that worked in the fields, milked the cow, and loved to bake and cook. Some of her specialties were sauerkraut and dumplings, kolaches and chicken soup with homemade noodles.

She is survived by her three daughters and one son: Beverly (Tom) Schramm of Yankton, Gloria (Ron) Riherd of Rapid City, SD; Julie (Bill) Trantina of Eden Prairie, MN; and Verlyn (Joy) Vanorny of Lesterville, SD; 11 grandchildren: Paul Schramm of Sioux Falls, SD; Jennifer Schramm of Chaska, MN; Stewart (Lynelle) of Harrisburg, SD; Greg (Abby) Schramm of Byron, MN; Jill (Brent) Deckert of Brandon, SD; Jody (Dennis) Riherd/Corcoran of La Crosse, WI; Scott and Blake Trantina of Eden Prairie, MN; Jeff (Sarah) Vanorny of Harrisburg, SD;

Jeremy (Stacey) Vanorny and Amy Vanorny both of Sioux Falls; 13 great grandchildren: Caden, Jaksen, Kennedy, Braeden, Carson, Beckett, Stella, Elliott, Reece, Treydan, Camden, Chloe, and Brynn; sister, Grace (Don) Diede of Springfield, SD; brother, Hank of Colorado, sister-in-law, Evelyn Bierle of Lesterville and many nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Ed and Clara Malik; husband, Edwin; and in-laws: Laverne Malik, Hon and Vivian Bierle, Dean and Ruby Bierle and Babe Bierle.

To send an online message to the family, please visit www.wintzrayfuneralhome.com.

Yankton Press & Dakotan
December 31, 2015


WINTZ & RAY
FUNERAL HOME and CREMATION SERVICE
Online condolences at: www.wintzrayfuneralhome.com

Eddie Boyd

Eddie Boyd, 57, of Yankton passed away Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2015, at the Avera Sacred Heart Hospital, Yankton.

Arrangements are pending under the care of the Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home and Crematory, Yankton.

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IN REMEMBRANCE

Doreen Henrietta Tim 10:30 AM, Saturday St. John's Lutheran Church Yankton	Evangeline M. Jensen 10:30 AM, Monday, January 4 Calvary Baptist Church Yankton
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Keep Your Sidewalks Clear

With the recent heavy snows, it's more important than ever to keep your sidewalks clear of snow and ice. Snow-free sidewalks are more than a convenience; they are a matter of public safety.


Property owners who have snow or ice covered sidewalks adjacent to their property must make arrangements for snow removal within 24 hours after the end of a snowfall.

Do the neighborly thing and shovel your sidewalks. For more information contact the City of Yankton at 605-668-5251.

Happy Holidays

from the
Doctors and Staff of Willcockson Eye Associates & The Spectacle Shop

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