

Local news

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Local 503

Murder suspect testifies

by KEN BERNSOHN
Citizen Staff

Jerry Smaaslet, accused of killing Donna Mae Charlie, 22, said at his first-degree murder trial Monday her death wasn't murder at all.

The 30-year-old Fort Ware resident told a B.C. Supreme Court jury Charlie died of unknown causes while the two were drinking after having used drugs. He said he didn't call the police or ambulance because he panicked.

The two had been staying at the Sportsmen's Motel on Queensway for a few days, Smaaslet testified, and spent much of their time drinking and using drugs — marijuana and "magic mushrooms."

On the day of Charlie's death (in September, 1990), Smaaslet testified, they checked out of the motel, then went into some bushes behind the motel to drink beer and rum, "because I didn't want to walk around with an open case of beer."

Before leaving the room they each had a "hit" of mushrooms, he said.

Charlie complained her throat was bothering her, but Smaaslet said he figured it was due to the combination of drugs and rum.

"We were both high and stoned. I told her I'd get us some hot coffee to sober us up at the AM-PM (convenience store). (When) I came back Donna was lying on her side. . . ."

"She looked like she was asleep. I put my coat under her head as a pillow and I noticed she was all blue and foam was coming out of the corner of her mouth. She wasn't breathing.

"I did CPR on her which was to tilt her head back a little, plug her nose and blow air upon her and she never responded.

"Being smoking dope and stuff, my mind was playing games on me. I didn't know whether to call the cops or ambulance and I panicked.

"I didn't know what to do. I was crying. I phoned my cousin Sheryl and told her about it and she told me to meet her. . . ."

Under cross-examination later Monday, Smaaslet said he panicked because he had a court hearing coming up.

"You were thinking more of yourself — your court case — than this woman's life," said prosecutor Alan Bate.

"No."

Smaaslet said he covered the body with cardboard he found, then met Sheryl Giroir.

After staying overnight at Sheryl's mother's home, Smaaslet said he and a young male cousin went back to where Charlie's body was, and dragged it to an empty lot across from the Ingledew Street playground, where they buried it.

Under cross-examination from prosecutor Alan Bate, Smaaslet said he lied to the police when making a statement, and denied the testimony of previous witnesses who said he had boasted of killing Charlie.

He also denied the testimony of Richard Hunter, who managed the motel when Smaaslet and Charlie were there.

When again recalling the events of the day Charlie died, Smaaslet said the two had been drinking beer and rum for about two hours before he left.

"I went to get mix. When I came back I thought she was sleeping."

Smaaslet was unable to recall how many days after Charlie's death the body was buried.

"When was the shovel (used to bury the body) put there?" Bate asked.

"I don't know. I knew it was too late to say anything."

Under questioning by Bate, Smaaslet described how he and the male cousin dragged the body through the bush, not noticing until they were ready to bury it that the head had fallen off.

"You didn't see that there was no head?" Bate asked.

"No I never."

Bate questioned why Smaaslet had told his cousin not to look at the head.

"I didn't want him to have some bad nightmares," Smaaslet replied.

Then Smaaslet described burying the head, which still has not been found, on Connaught Hill.

The trial continued today with three defence witnesses scheduled.

FEBRUARY 'HERITAGE' HOLIDAY REJECTED

The idea of a new statutory holiday between New Year's Day and Easter was narrowly defeated Monday in the House of Commons.

Sponsored by Brian Gardiner, Prince George-Bulkley Valley NDP MP, a bill titled An Act Respecting Heritage Day was defeated 55-52 on a motion to give it second reading and refer it to committee.

"It was a squeaker," Gardiner said today from Ottawa.

Introduced last June, Bill C-236 would have made the third Monday in February a holiday called

National Heritage Day. If the bill had been in effect, Monday would have been Heritage Day this year, and Feb. 15 would have been the holiday's date next year.

Gardiner's fellow New Democrats voted for the measure, as did all the Liberals present in the House except Ottawa MP Don Boudria.

The Conservatives who were there voted against it with three exceptions: Defence Minister Marcel Masse, John Bosley and Geoff Scott. It was a free vote; there was no government party line on the bill.

The only possibility that the idea of Heritage Day would be revived would be for the government to reintroduce it as part of a pre-election legislative package, he said.

In the late 1980s Alberta passed legislation giving workers the third Monday in February off as Family Day. "Alberta has taken a leadership role in this issue," Gardiner said.

In the U.S. the third Monday in February is a holiday called President's Day — a day to recognize the birthdays of U.S.

presidents George Washington (Feb. 22) and Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12), he added.

In Canada the purpose of Heritage Day would be to "have a grassroots celebration of our environment, architecture and culture."

It would be different from Canada Day, which is a celebration of the flag and the political concept of Confederation, Gardiner explained.

"Secondly, it's a long haul from Jan. 1 to Easter."

EMPLOYMENT FOR DISABLED

Job agency's record cheered

by BERNICE TRICK
Citizen Staff

Prince George's Employment Action agency has more than doubled the national rate of finding work for the disabled during its first year of operation.

Statistics quoted at city council Monday show 52 people were placed in permanent jobs and 22 in temporary positions since its doors opened last February.

Based on a national benchmark rate for finding jobs for the disabled, Prince George would expect to place 20 to 25 individuals annually. The city fell short of that figure before the establishment of Employment Action, directed by Lorna Dittmar, former executive director of AIMHI (Association for Individuals with Mental Handicaps).

President Doug Walls says the feat is even more remarkable con-

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sidering this was done during a "difficult economic climate."

Of the 52 jobs, only eight required a subsidy while 44 didn't involve a government payment or subsidy of any kind.

This is a far cry from the past when the only jobs provided for the disabled came with significant government subsidies, said Walls.

Martin Winkelaar of Employment Canada maintains the achievement of Employment Action stands alone in the province.

"You couldn't find another agency in B.C. with this kind of success. Employment Action stands out when measured against any other project of this type in any other jurisdiction."

The agency, which works for all types of the disabled who have

lived here a full year, dealt with more than 200 people, and is adding about 20 to its caseload each month.

Employment Action is the brainchild of city council's special needs advisory committee, which determined five years ago that employment was the biggest issue among the disabled.

After a consulting firm identified the issues and barriers of employment in this area, the committee concluded that an umbrella agency, with a mandate dedicated to employment, was needed.

A board of directors was given the responsibility of finding government financing and getting the service off the ground.

Today the agency receives operating money totalling about \$150,000 annually from Employment Canada and about \$70,000 from the provincial government.

Council was hesitant at first to

become involved for fear it would be left holding the bag if the two major financing partners, the federal and provincial governments, pulled out of the program.

But without council's support, the project would never have got off the ground, said Walls.

It was this involvement that allowed recruitment of board members representing a cross-section of employers, pursuit of government financing and the maintaining of the agency during its fledgling season.

The city's special needs advisory committee was established after B.C. wheelchair athlete Rick Hansen visited here in 1986 during his global Man In Motion tour in a wheelchair.

Prince George was among the first B.C. communities to take up his challenge that disabled persons can contribute a lot if given the opportunity.

BURNS LAKE WOMAN WOUNDED

Youth held in stabbing

Burns Lake RCMP report arresting a 17-year-old male after a woman was stabbed and seriously wounded.

The incident happened about 2:10 p.m. Monday, during an armed robbery at Bill's Guns, on Francois Lake Drive.

Kay Macereth, the owner's wife, was flown by air ambulance to Vancouver.

The youth was arrested about 5 p.m., on the CN tracks. A knife and gun stolen from the business were recovered.

The youth is in custody, awaiting a bail hearing.

Police say a warning was issued to the community. Lakes District

Secondary School students were released to go home at 2:30 p.m.

Michael Russell Schab, 41, was arrested Friday and charged with 18 counts of possession of stolen property, report Prince George RCMP.

Using a search warrant, the RCMP seized stolen property Dec. 28 and 30 from an Uplands Street residence and a business on First Avenue.

Schab is to appear in court Feb. 26.

Police warn local residents of a fraud attempted Monday.

They report a caller told an un-

named resident of winning a car and other prizes. The caller then asked for the resident's charge card number, but was refused.

Police warn against divulging a Visa number to any strange caller. They also say any papers containing name and charge number should be destroyed, not merely thrown in the garbage where they might be picked up.

In Quesnel, police report 16 tires were slashed overnight at the Quesnel Foreign Car Centre.

The incident is still under investigation.

An unlicensed orange utility trailer was reported stolen from an Arbutus Road resident in the Red Bluff area near Dragon Lake.

Native carver creates special mace for UNBC

Native carver Ron Sebastian will present the University of Northern British Columbia's governing council with the UNBC ceremonial mace Saturday in Prince Rupert.

The mace is the symbol of authority for the university, playing a major role in ceremonies and convocations. Only in its presence can degrees be conferred.

The UNBC mace is unique in that it combines ancient European tradition with the native tradition of the "talking stick."

Sebastian's mace is five feet, four inches long, carved in yellow cedar and painted with abalone inlays. Carvings include 13 traditional Indian crests, which represent all the tribes and clans of Northern British Columbia.

In European history, the mace-bearer was the formal protector of the king, baron or bishop. Originally the mace was a formidable

weapon, but over time has evolved into a symbol of authority.

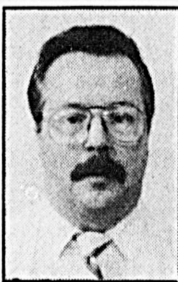
Sebastian is completing the carving of the two ceremonial chairs for UNBC's president and

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