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Skull found near Hixon

by KAREN KWAN
Citizen Staff

RCMP are investigating after a hunter discovered what's believed to be a human skull in the Hixon area this week.

Police said they don't believe they're dealing with a homicide at this point. "No foul play is suspected at this time. The police are assisting the coroner," said Const. Gary Godwin.

The coroner decided to send the skull to an anthropologist to determine things like age, gender, and how long the person has been dead, he said.

No other bones or items were believed to have been found at the scene, Godwin said. He said he doesn't know whether there were signs of trauma to the skull. Although the remains were found Wednesday, he said police weren't able to retrieve it until the following day because of the late hour and remote location.

Police aren't saying if the skull could belong to any of the people missing from the Prince George area, he said. "I don't think there's been any speculation made on that yet, pending the (findings of the) anthropologist," Godwin said.

Over the years, other people have vanished from the area under mysterious circumstances and are still missing:

■ Nicole Hoar, 25, of Red Deer, Alta., disappeared June 21, 2002 while hitchhiking along Highway 16 west of Prince George, near Gauthier Road, on her way to Smithers. Despite a four-day search and intense media focus, there have been no tangible clues into her disappearance, although police have received more than 1,400 tips from the public.

■ RCMP are still looking for Curry William Casey, then 47, who was last seen in the city on Nov. 9, 2001. His vehicle was found abandoned downtown.

His family said he's gone missing for periods of time, but never for this long.

■ Dwayne Rideout, then 23, was last seen at the Generator Cabaret on Third Avenue on the night of Sept. 24, 1999.

■ Kriss Roberts, then 24, of Smithers was last seen near the Prince George Airport on July 29, 1996.

■ There's been no trace of Prince George substitute teacher Wendy Ratte since she disappeared on Aug. 18, 1997. Ratte, then 44, and her husband drove downtown that day and split up to do errands. The couple arranged to meet at a coffee shop, but she never showed up.

■ The Jack family mysteriously disappeared on Aug. 2, 1989. The day they went missing, Ronald and Doreen Jack were planning to leave for work at a logging camp or ranch in the Bednesti-Cluculz Lake area, with their young sons Ryan and Russell.

Man guilty in beating death

by KAREN KWAN
Citizen staff

A Prince George man attacked and killed a transgender prostitute in a fury after discovering the hooker was a male, a judge decided Friday in B.C. Supreme Court.

Justice Peter Rogers found Dale Eliason guilty of manslaughter in the beating death of Fabian (Faye) Paquette in February 2002. "His beating of her was not done in self-defence, but rather was done out of his rage against her," Rogers said.

During a trial in B.C. Supreme Court this month, Eliason testified Paquette turned on him with a knife in an unprovoked attack, after he discovered the prostitute's gender, and that he feared for his life. But Rogers dismissed his claim, saying Eliason "was the aggressor throughout," and that Paquette only used the weapon to defend herself.

Crown counsel Carl Gustafson said he would be asking for a lengthy jail sentence at a hearing Nov. 24. A pre-sentence report with a psychological assessment has been ordered, and Eliason remains in custody after his bail was revoked following the verdict.

Eliason picked up Paquette on a city street in the early hours of Feb. 5, 2002, and brought her back to B.C. Alignment, an auto-fabrication shop on First Avenue where he worked as a welding sub-contractor. Paquette, who was born male but was in the middle of a sex-change process, was found wrapped in plastic sheeting and stuffed in a partially-constructed van in the back lot of the shop.

On the stand, Eliason repeatedly insisted he could not re-



PAQUETTE

Rogers said Eliason's attempt to cover up the crime by mopping the floor and hiding the body also point to guilt. "They are) all relevant post-event conduct that tend to show the accused knew what he had done was wrong," he said.

Clutching a hawk feather — a Native symbol for luck — Paquette's sister Roxanne Paquette, burst into tears during the hearing Friday and left the courtroom before the judge delivered his verdict. Outside the courthouse, a sobbing Paquette, who is also a transgendered person, and another sister, Darlene Paquette, said they're relieved at the outcome. "I thank God with all my heart that the truth be known," Roxanne said, adding she hopes Eliason will be jailed for at least 12 years. She said the death of her sister — with whom she lived and was extremely close — has left a huge void in her life and has forced her to seek counselling. "It's been hell," she said.

member some details of the incident, yet recalled other things. "There are too many gaps in his memory. Those gaps are too convenient for the accused. His memory is too much at odds with what he told family members," the judge said.

The morning after the killing, Eliason told his mother he became enraged when he felt the prostitute had a penis, telling her "I just went wild," court heard. He also warned his mother not to tell anyone she had picked him up at the shop early that morning, the judge said.



Citizen photo by Dave Milne

School district staff load up the remnants of the Lakewood elementary playground after it was vandalized.

Vandals hit school

by PAUL STRICKLAND
Citizen staff

Vandals recently caused \$25,000 to \$40,000 in damage to playground equipment at the closed Lakewood elementary school and tried to burn down the school itself, says Bryan Mix, secretary-treasurer of the Prince George school district.

District personnel started removing the partly burned equipment Friday.

The equipment, which included an adventure playground made primarily of wood, was out of date, Mix said. It would not be replaced even if the school district had money to do so because that type of equipment would no longer meet Canadian Standards Association specifications.

"They set fire to it," he said. "Parts of it are beyond use. You can't just use part of it. It's now a health and safety risk."

It was during the Thanksgiving weekend that the vandals struck. They also tried to set fire to the school, blackening

a rear wall in the attempt, Mix said. "The back of the school is charred," he said.

The cost to the district from this damage is minimal because the school structure itself did not actually catch fire.

"Just as with graffiti, when painters paint over the graffiti, we'll wash off that area and repaint it so that the paint blends in," Mix said. "There's not much expense to the district from that."

Mix said the greatest damage from the incident is to the community around the closed school, which had enjoyed access to the playground equipment as a kind of community playground.

"This is the time of year when vandals are active, and the school district is a prime target of vandals," he said. "In the Halloween period it's especially important that people keep an eye out for public buildings."

RCMP did not have any information on the progress of the investigation.



Submitted photo

Const. Rob Robertson, left, and Const. Pierre Charlebois received the RCMP Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery.

Officers receive bravery award

Daring rescue in blazing house

by KAREN KWAN
Citizen staff

Three RCMP officers have been recognized for their extraordinary bravery in the line of duty in Prince George last year.

Prince George Constables Pierre Charlebois, Rob Robertson and Greg Cox, who has since been transferred, were awarded the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery for their "courage, bravery and tenacity" while rescuing an unconscious man from a burning house in February 2002.

RCMP Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli this week presented commendations to 20 RCMP officers and three civilians in a ceremony at RCMP headquarters in Vancouver. The Commendation for Bravery is awarded to a member who has "demonstrated outstanding courage and bravery in the face of very dangerous and volatile circumstances, not commonly encountered in routine police work, that possess an immediate threat of grievous harm, personal injury or death."

The three local RCMP officers previously received a commendation from Supt. Steve Leach, who was the commander of the Prince George detachment at the time.

"It was surprising. You sort of put it behind you," Const. Robertson said of receiving the national recognition.

On Feb. 7, 2002, Robertson said he was in his police cruiser patrolling the city when he was called to a house fire on Kelly Street South around 3:20 a.m., along with the two other officers, who were in separate cruisers.

"There was smoke billowing out

of the eaves and through the door. Every place that smoke could get out, there was smoke coming out," he said.

Unable to get in through the front of the house where the fire was raging, Robertson said the officers went around to the rear of the home where they found a man who had escaped the fire.

The man told them his stepfather was trapped upstairs.

"The smoke was very overwhelming, very toxic smoke," Robertson said.

He said he and his colleagues took turns running up the stairs that accessed the top floor, and had to force open the door that led into the kitchen, because the unconscious man had passed out on the other side.

Without any protective gear or breathing apparatus, the three officers managed to drag the man to safety.

Robertson said he'll never forget what it felt like inside the smoke-filled house.

"It's very dark, very hard to see through, very hard to breathe," he said. "We couldn't all go in together. We took turns going in, then we'd run back out and get some fresh air," he said. Firefighters didn't arrive until the officers had rescued the man.

Robertson said the incident brought home the dangers involved in police work, but downplayed the notion of heroism.

"I don't think it was anything that wouldn't be done by anyone else who was there. We just happened to be on the road working and were right in the vicinity," he said.

Move clocks backward

At 2 a.m. Sunday Oct. 26 standard time returns. Set your clock back one hour before going to bed tonight.



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