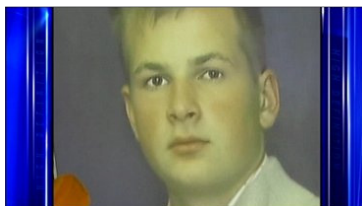


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Homicide charges possible in SageWalk student death

Posted: March 30, 2010 04:23 PM PDT



Sergey Blashchishen

From KTVZ.COM news sources

Officials with the parent company of Redmond's SageWalk Wilderness School could soon be facing homicide charges, for the death of a Portland teen on a class hiking trip last August.

That is, if the Lake County district attorney goes along with the recommendation of the chief investigator in the case.

Below is the full press release from the Lake County Sheriff's office:

"The Lake County Sheriff's Office has concluded its primary investigation into the death of Sergey Blashchishen in northern Lake County on August 28th, 2009. Sergey was attending SageWalk The Wilderness School when he died while participating in his first program hike.

Findings, investigative opinions, and recommendations have been prepared in a criminal investigations report. This report will now shortly be submitted to the Lake County District Attorney. Any recommendations of the report, including any recommendations for prosecution, are not binding on the District Attorney. Due to the size and complexity of the investigation and the report itself, it is not expected that any District Attorney opinion or charging decision will be forthcoming for a period of time.

Although the Department of Human Services Office of Investigations and Training conducted much of their investigation in cooperation with the Lake County Sheriff's Office, the separate investigations have separate responsibilities. The report of the State Medical Examiner has not been released. It is not expected that the findings of either DHS or the ME will be in conflict with the Sheriff's Office conclusions, but that when released, their findings will be based upon the mission and parameters of the respective agency. Additional support was provided during this investigation by the Oregon State Police, the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office, and the United States Bureau of Land Management. The Lake County Sheriff's Office is grateful to all persons, named and unnamed, who have contributed their assistance during this investigation.

Deputy Sheriff Chuck Poré has been the primary case investigator for the Lake County Sheriff's Office and is the report author. This investigation has included interviews of persons who were on the hike with Sergey Blashchishen and witnessed the incident and his death; interview of persons not on the hike but familiar with the program practices and procedures; and review of hundreds of documents from the Aspen Education Group and SageWalk The Wilderness School program. The investigation of the Lake County Sheriff's Office has made a recommendation that the manner of Sergey Blashchishen's death be identified as a homicide.

The prosecution of criminal charges have been recommended for the corporations responsible for the program which resulted in Sergey's death. At the time of his death, Sergey was on a program hike administered by several corporate employees known as field instructors. Although most were medically trained, investigation identified issues which may have brought medical practices into conflict with program practices, and this conflict having a significant impact on Sergey Blashchishen's death.

No recommendation has been made in the cases of the individual field instructors but a District Attorney review has been requested.

The media patience extended during the course of this investigation has been admirable. It is asked that you continue the same courtesy to the Office of the District Attorney as the District Attorney begins this next part of the investigation."

Aspen Education Group statement:

Representatives from SageWalk's parent company, Aspen Education Group, released the following statement to NewsChannel 21 Tuesday afternoon, in response to the Sheriff's Office's findings.

Following is a statement from Mark Dorenfeld, Senior Vice President, Western Division of Aspen Education Group.

March 30, 2010

"SageWalk Wilderness School strongly disagrees with the conclusions of the Sheriff's Office, particularly in the absence of a full report by the State Medical Examiner. We continue to be greatly saddened by this tragic accident and again wish to extend our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of this young man.

Although we do not intend to publicly discuss the specifics of the incident during the ongoing investigation, we can provide assurances that the student was well cared for, appropriately fed, and provided multiple water and rest breaks during the two-hour hike. In addition, he was accompanied on the hike by two Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) trained staff, one of whom never left his side. We are confident that we took every step possible to ensure the safety of this student, as we have done for every student over the course of our 12 year history.

Throughout this investigation, we have cooperated with the investigators and have shared all relevant information with them. We continue to await the results of the State Medical Examiner's report. We expect that, once all the facts are known, they will demonstrate that we acted carefully and responsibly, and we will be fully vindicated."



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