



YAVAPAI COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

255 East Gurley Street
Prescott, Arizona 86301
Media Relations Office
(928)771-3275

Media Release

November 9, 2009

UPDATE

Sweat Lodge Investigation Still Underway

Yavapai County Sheriff Steve Waugh would like the public to know the homicide investigation into the deaths of Kirby Brown, James Shore and Liz Neuman continues with diligence. Detectives maintain their efforts to locate and interview everyone involved in the October 8th sweat lodge event, including anyone directly connected to events in the past as participants or organizers. The sheer volume of interviews, estimated in the hundreds, will take time to complete and document as part of the final report to the County Attorney's Office.

The Sheriff's Office is anticipating that during the month of December, 2009, the investigative information up to this time will be forwarded to the Yavapai County Attorney's Office for review. A press conference will be held at this point to update the case status. Until then, the Sheriff's Office will have no further comment on the investigation.

As the investigation remains underway, Sheriff Waugh and the team of detectives appreciate your understanding as they continue pursuing all possible leads and evidence related to this incident.

October 28, 2009 – UPDATE

As of today, the homicide investigation into the sweat lodge deaths is ongoing. Detectives are in the process of completing interviews and in many cases, are still attempting to locate participants from around the country. Additionally, the processing of evidence remains active and includes computer forensic work involving servers and hardware recovered during a search warrant at Mr. Ray's Carlsbad, California office. Autopsy results are another critical aspect of the case and a complete report, including toxicology results, is still pending.

The Sheriff's Office detectives intend to complete a thorough investigation by gathering as much available information as possible from interviews and evidence. Investigators will take whatever time is necessary to complete this task.

Sheriff Waugh will provide any significant updates via the press conference format which will be announced by email alert from the Media Coordinators Office. The Sheriff and investigative staff appreciate your patience as we take the necessary time to determine cause and culpability in the deaths of Kirby Brown, James Shore and Lizbeth Neuman.

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3RD ANGEL VALLEY SWEAT LODGE VICTIM PASSES AWAY

October 17, 2009 - This afternoon, October 17, 2009, the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office was notified that 49-year-old Prior Lake, Minnesota resident Lizbeth Neuman, passed away at the Flagstaff Medical Center. Neuman was hospitalized after participating in a sweat lodge event at the Angel Valley Retreat Center on October 8th hosted by James Arthur Ray. This is the third death from the incident.

There are no other retreat participants remaining hospitalized. The Yavapai County Sheriff's Office has elevated this investigation from an accidental death inquiry to a homicide investigation.

2 Dead, Several Injured Following Incident at Sedona Area Retreat

October 16, 2009 - The following bulleted points are from yesterday's press conference held by Yavapai County Sheriff Steve Waugh in Prescott.

▶ In light of recent information obtained from interviews with participants of the retreat hosted by James Ray, including past participants of these events, the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office has elevated this investigation from an accidental death inquiry to a homicide investigation.

▶ YCSO Detectives continue to actively seek out participants of past events conducted by James Ray who may have had, or be aware of, similar experiences like the circumstances from the October 8th event at the Angel Valley resort. Those persons with such knowledge are urged to contact the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office via email by accessing www.ycsoaz.gov, or calling Yavapai Silent Witness at 1800-932-3232.

▶ On Wednesday, October 14th, 2009, YCSO detectives, along with detectives from the Carlsbad California Police Department, executed a search warrant at the offices of James Ray International. Detectives were searching for medical information on participants of the Spiritual Warrior event of October 8th in which Kirby Brown and James Shore died. Detectives also were trying to locate documentation kept by Ray regarding construction, proper use, and conduct involving sweat lodges. They were also looking for any records which would show that participants had been advised by Ray of the risks associated with the Spiritual Warrior program. Any finally, detectives hoped to locate rosters on those who attended Spiritual Warrior retreats previously.

▶ Because the deaths of James Shore and Kirby Brown were not accidental, a full criminal investigation was initiated and under the circumstances, YCSO plans to use all available resources to uncover the truth about the death of Mr. Shore and Ms. Kirby. Additionally, YCSO will focus not only on Mr. Ray, but any other persons whose actions may have led up to the death of two people.

▶ As of October 16, 2009, one person remains in critical condition at the Flagstaff Medical Center.

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October 10, 2009 - The following bulleted points are from today's press conference held by Yavapai County Sheriff Waugh and Lt. David Rhodes in Prescott.

- ▶ The identity of the deceased include 40-year-old James Shore of Milwaukee, WI and 38-year-old Kirby Brown of Westtown, NY. Mr. Shore is survived by 3 children and their mother and has a brother in Chicago. Ms. Brown is survived by her parents.
- ▶ The participants in this retreat arrived at Angel Valley on October 3, 2009 and checked in at 4 P.M. Sunday through Tuesday afternoon was spent in lectures and seminars. On Tuesday night at approximately 10 P.M., participants are lead into the surrounding canyons to start their "Vision Quest." This part of the program covers a 36 hour period of fasting and spiritual exercises participants complete on their own. Thursday at daybreak, participants are fed breakfast including eggs, fruit and cereal, and encouraged to drink water. Mid-day Thursday is spent attending seminars. At approximately 3 P.M. on Thursday, the "sweat lodge" experience begins.
- ▶ Inside the "sweat lodge" Mr. Ray would lead the group in various forms of spiritual exercise. The initial experience began with 12 cantaloupe sized shaped rocks brought into the lodge and place in a pit. The rocks were then saturated with water to create steam and sandalwood was thrown on the rocks to give the effect of incense. At the end of each designated time period, the dome's door flap was raised and additional rocks were brought inside. Investigators found 58 rocks in the pit. Investigators have not determined the temperature inside the dome at the time of this exercise. Investigators are still in the process of determining how many people were actually inside the dome when at least 2 people, who fell ill, were dragged to the dome's doorway.
- ▶ The sweat dome was constructed for this particular event by personnel on Mr. Ray's staff. The sweat dome experience has taken place on prior retreats under Mr. Ray's direction.
- ▶ Mr. Ray had a nurse on his staff that was present during these events.
- ▶ A search warrant was served yesterday at the retreat property. Several buildings were searched including those belonging Mr. Ray, his staff and retreat personnel.
- ▶ "Sweat lodge" construction – The structure is approximately 415 square feet. The circumference was about 74 feet, 53 inches high at the center and 30 inches high at the outer edge. Because of the material used to make the frame, the structure was not uniform.
- ▶ Autopsies were conducted on October 9, 2009 and the results are still pending. The autopsies were conducted by the Yavapai County Medical Examiner.
- ▶ To help investigate the cause of death investigators have obtained samples of the fabric constructing the roof and also samples of rock, firewood and the wooden dome frame.

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- ▶ Mr Ray was questioned at the scene by detectives and refused to give a statement.
- ▶ Detectives will not be releasing the list of participants as the investigation is ongoing and additional interviews are expected.
- ▶ Detectives plan to complete a report covering their findings which, as a matter of routine, will be submitted to the Yavapai County Attorney for review. NO criminal charges have been alleged at this time. Detectives have released the scene. The property owners are not allowing anyone on their private property without permission.

October 9, 2009 1:30 PM – Just a clarification. The original call regarding this incident came into the YCSO Communications Center from Sedona Fire Dispatch. The call time was 5:26 PM, October 8th. At this time, there is no indication minors were involved in the incident. Verde Valley Medical Center recently released the final patient from their hospital. The condition of those admitted to Flagstaff Medical is not known at this time. A press update from the hospitals is expected today.

This investigation will continue throughout the day, and detectives expect to provide further details about the circumstances and cause by tomorrow's conference.

A press conference regarding the Angel Valley resort incident is scheduled for tomorrow at 10 AM at the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office headquarters in Prescott. The address is 255. E Gurley Street. Phone 928-771-3260. The conference will take place in the main briefing room on the first floor of the building. Sheriff Steve Waugh and Criminal Investigations Commander David Rhodes will be present to provide the latest update.

11:30 AM - Detectives have learned that there were 64 people inside the "sweat dome" when some of the participants became ill. A man, identified as James Ray, hosted this particular group and rented the facility from the owners of the Angel Valley retreat center. Some attendees told detectives they paid up to \$9000.00 for their stay and participation in the program. James Ray was inside the dome when the medical emergencies occurred. James Ray was interviewed by detectives last night and has left the facility.

The dome is located next to an open sided white structure. The dome is covered with blankets and plastic tarps. The investigation will be ongoing throughout the day.



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PRELIMINARY INFORMATION - On October 8, 2009, Yavapai County Sheriff's Office deputies responded to a reported medical emergency at the Angel Valley Resort located off of Highway 89a at Deer Pass Road, Sedona.

Fire and EMS personnel were in the process of treating and transporting several injured persons from the scene. Deputies learned that those injured had been part of a larger group housed in a "sweatbox" type structure located on the property. The structure is framed in a dome like shape and covered with tarps and blankets. Hot rocks are used with water to create steam in the enclosed environment. Approximately 50 people were inside the dome, up to two hours, when several fell ill. An emergency call from the retreat center was made to fire personnel due to concern about the health of these individuals.

Approximately 21 retreat participants were transported by air and ambulance to area hospitals including the Verde Valley and Flagstaff Medical Center. Last night, two of those transported to the Verde Valley Medical Center were pronounced dead shortly after arrival. The two dead were a middle aged man and woman. Identification is pending notification to family members. At least one other remains in critical condition at VVMC. Updates on the status of other patients will be provided later today.

YCSO Detectives from the Criminal Investigations Section arrived on scene last night to begin a death investigation and attempt to ascertain the specific cause of the deaths and injuries. Detectives will remain on scene throughout the day to continue the investigation. As a result, the retreat area is closed to the press and public. Detectives will be consulting with medical examiners and other health officials as the investigation moves forward. Detectives, as of last night, have been interviewing the retreat director, staff and participants regarding the incident. Detectives are also obtaining a search warrant to check for additional evidence within various buildings at the site. Detectives are attempting to determine if there are any criminal actions that may have been a factor in the injuries and deaths.

Updates to follow.....The retreat website is www.angelvalley.org