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Criminal Case Update

August 2019

Thank you all for your support and efforts in making Plumas County a safe and just place to live, work and play.

As we transition from summer to fall we continue to attack challenging trends involving substance abuse, mental illness, changing California criminal laws and a lack of public safety resources threatening the safety we rightly expect in Plumas County. I continue to be grateful for the efforts of our public safety and criminal justice partners for their continued good work in this fight.

Fall also brings the start of school and our continued efforts with the Truancy Prevention Team (TPT) to help reduce absenteeism throughout Plumas County Schools. New Investigations Assistant Shawn Adams will join with Probation Assistant Joe Lee and Social Worker Ana Mamolejo in working with our schools and offering early intervention designed to identify and correct individual root causes of truancy. While education is the key to success, truancy has been demonstrated to be a gateway to economic hardship, and worse. Truancy has been linked to school dropout and poor academic performance, increases the likelihood youth will engage in drug and alcohol use, fighting, theft and more serious forms of delinquency. Over the long term, adults who were truant as adolescents are more likely to have poorer health outcomes, lower paying jobs, and a greater chance of being incarcerated during their lifetimes. The San Bernardino DA's Office previously reported 78% of prison inmates had truancy as their first entry on their arrest record. Truancy also impacts the truant's classmates. A 2001-2008 study in New York found students with a high attendance rate suffer academically from attending a school with high absenteeism. We look forward to supplementing the excellent work of Plumas County schools in assuring all of our students are in school and receiving an education crucial to the health and welfare of our community.

Below is a sampling of recent cases. Space and resources prevent coverage of all cases but we have tried our best to follow-up on those cases which have previously been covered by Feather Publishing or have been the subject of inquiry by the public.

People v. Joshua Cooper (F19-00433)

On June 21, 2019, Joshua Paul Cooper, age 36 of Quincy, was convicted of felony driving under the influence and sentenced, on August 2, 2019, to five years in state prison. Cooper was arrested on June 6, 2019 after nearly hitting a Sheriff's deputy head on while driving on SR70 near Camp Layman. During the investigation Cooper was found to have a blood alcohol level of .15%. In addition to the dangerous driving putting other motorists at risk, Cooper's case was found to be aggravated as, in 2017, he had previously been convicted of gross vehicular manslaughter and sentenced to state prison. I want to extend my appreciation to Plumas County Deputy Bjorn Berg and CHP Officer Peter Upton for their work in immediately addressing this dangerous situation.

People v. Tonya Heil (F18-00799);

On May 24, 2019, Tonya Katherine Heil, age 54 of Portola, was convicted of vehicular manslaughter and was, on July 26, 2019, sentenced to four years in state prison. Heil was arrested on July 18, 2018 after her vehicle drifted into oncoming traffic on SR70 and hit the victim's car head-on. Heil was found to have a low level of methamphetamine in her system at the time of the collision. I want thank CHP officers Bruno, Upton and Luntey for their diligent work during this investigation and extend our continued condolences to the victim's family and friends for this horrible tragedy.

People v. Daniel Vincent (F18-00168)

On August 14, 2019, Daniel James Vincent, age 51 of Chester, California, was convicted by a jury of felony crimes of possessing methamphetamine while armed with a loaded and operable firearm, transporting methamphetamine for sale, being a felon in possession of a firearm and a misdemeanor count of driving with a suspended license. Vincent is scheduled to be sentenced on September 13, 2019 and faces a possible sentence of up to 6 years and 2 months in state prison. Presiding over the trial was the Honorable Douglas Prouty with Plumas County District Attorney David Hollister representing the People and Taj Gomes representing the defendant. The trial lasted two days and featured 8 witnesses with jury returning a verdict after an hour of deliberating. Vincent was originally arrested on March 4, 2018 for driving on a suspended license. A search of Vincent found over an ounce of methamphetamine hidden in his pants as well as a loaded revolver, scale, cell phone and scanner in a backpack in the truck Vincent was driving. The Plumas County District Attorney's Office wishes to extend its appreciation to Deputy Juan Cervantes and the PCSO Investigations unit for their work on the case as well as the jury for their patience, consideration, and service during the trial.

People v. Vance Terry (F19-00435)

On August 2, 2019, Vance Charles Terry, age 72 of Quincy, California, was convicted of a felony violation of failing to register as a sex offender. Terry is scheduled to return to court on August 30, 2019 when it is expected he will receive a sentence of two years in state prison. Terry had been the subject of numerous “suspicious circumstance” complaints concerning his conduct in Quincy leading to an investigation concerning his actual residence and level of registration compliance. I wish to thank Detective John Fatheree and the numerous law enforcement officers for their efforts during this investigation.

People v. John Butcher (F19-00114)

On August 16, 2019, John Benjamin Butcher Jr., age 39 of Chester, was convicted of residential burglary with a great bodily injury enhancement. Butcher is scheduled to be sentenced on September 27, 2019 when it is expected he will receive a term of 5 years in state prison. Butcher was arrested on February 12, 2019 following an incident the day prior where Butcher forced his way into the residence of his daughter’s 14 year old ex-boyfriend. Butcher then struck the 14 year old before being forced out of the residence by the 14 year old and the 14 year old’s father. Once on the porch the altercation continued culminating with Butcher stabbing the 14 year old’s father in the face with a screwdriver. While not life-threatening the attack caused great bodily injury with the screwdriver plunging nearly 3 inches into the victim’s head - entering below the eye and travelling into the roof of the mouth. I want to thank the victims and the Seneca Hospital staff for their patience and perseverance during this prosecution as well as Deputy Juan Cervantes for his thorough work during the investigation.

Cases of Interest

There are a number of upcoming cases of interest. Some include:

People v. Karen Schwamb (triple homicide DUI incident on Hwy 70; 10/24/19 PX);

People v. Nicholas Phillips (arson/homicide; 9/6/19 PTC).

Thank you, again for your support and efforts. Should you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me at the DA's Office.

Respectfully yours,

David Hollister

District Attorney

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