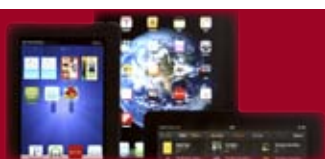


Local: Crowds turn out for two parades. **A19**

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Few lawmakers opt out of care

Only three state legislators report dropping state insurance program.

BY WAYNE GREENE
World Senior Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY — A bill originally designed to allow legislators to opt out of the state health insurance program and save the state money has resulted in only a handful actually doing so. The Tulsa World called, emailed



HB 1062
Rep. Dustin Roberts: His original bill was aimed at allowing legislators to opt out of the state health insurance program.

and used social media in an attempt to determine how many members of the Legislature took advantage of the opt-out provision. Only three legislators — all of whom are retired military employ-

ees who are eligible for federal insurance coverage — said they had opted out. Three lawmakers refused to answer the question and 11 never responded to multiple requests for information over a two-week period. Some 130 lawmakers said they decided to stay on the state health insurance program. As originally written by Rep. Dustin Roberts, R-Durant, House Bill 1062 would allow legislators to opt out of the state health insurance program with the savings going to the state. During the legislative process,

the bill was changed to allow any state employee to opt out of the system if they signed an affidavit that they had health insurance elsewhere. Under the law, those employees will each receive \$150 a month from the state, but the state saves at least \$5,891.76 in actual costs, said Brian King, spokesman for the Oklahoma Employee Benefits Council. A total of 91 state employees opted out, saving the state at least \$532,150, King said. He refused

SEE **FEW** A3

Handgun led police to suspect in killings

BY JERRY WOFFORD
World Staff Writer

The investigation into who shot two girls along a country road near Weleetka involved hundreds of interviews, hundreds of pieces of evidence and thousands of tests, but the key was one handgun and a handful of shell casings.

Agents with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation were able to match the casings found at the scene to a .40-caliber Glock handgun formerly owned by the Baltimore Police Department and sold by an Oklahoma gun dealer to Kevin Sweat, who is now charged in the 2008 deaths of Taylor Paschal-Placker and Skyla Whitaker and Ashley Taylor: Kevin Sweat is charged with killing all three.



SLAIN
Taylor Paschal-Placker, Skyla Whitaker and Ashley Taylor: Kevin Sweat is charged with killing all three.

SEE **TRACE** A12

tulsaworld.com

Read details about the arrest of Kevin Sweat

tulsaworld.com/weleetkaaffidavit

Convicted officers to be monitored for safety

BY OMER GILLHAM
World Staff Writer

Four police officers headed for federal prison will be monitored for safety under a prison program for high-profile inmates, an official said. The convicted officers include three former Tulsa police officers and one former federal agent, who were sentenced to prison Tuesday in U.S. District Court. U.S. District Judge Bruce Black of New Mexico sentenced the officers to the Federal Bureau of Prisons. BOP spokesman Edmond Ross said federal prison has numerous law enforcement inmates who must have their safety needs addressed. "It is not uncommon for law enforcement officers to come into the system but unfortunately, it hap-

SEE **SAFE** A4



Russell Butler and his grandmother, Pat Barrows, question the official ruling that Edwina King, Butler's mother and Barrows' daughter, committed suicide. Photos by JOHN CLANTON/Tulsa World

What happened to Edie?

Edwina King's body was found hanged Oct. 17, 2008. When she died, King possessed a letter detailing sexual abuse of prisoners in the Delaware County jail. Her death was ruled a suicide. Her family doesn't believe it.

BY CARY ASPINWALL
World Staff Writer
AND ZIVA BRANSTETTER
World Enterprise Editor

EUCHA — This was the plan: Greg Williams would drive to Delaware County, call Edwina King and then she would call him back on a pay phone, so they could arrange a secret meeting place. King was holding evidence



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View a video of Edwina King's relatives talking about her life and death, and read the report by the Delaware County Sheriff's Office on her death.

tulsaworld.com/edwinaking

for the Tulsa attorney, proof that women's allegations of sexual abuse at the Delaware

County jail weren't attempts by female inmates to get back at guards.

It was Oct. 16, 2008, and no one believed the women's claims that they were being raped, sexually assaulted and groped by men who worked at the jail in Jay. Save for 40-year-old Edie King, who had been in jail a few days earlier that summer with some of the women. They trusted her, so they wrote a

SEE **KING** A10

Inmates' claims led to \$13.5 million deal

BY CARY ASPINWALL
World Staff Writer
AND ZIVA BRANSTETTER
World Enterprise Editor

A letter written to Edwina King before she died details some of the horrors female in-

mates at the Delaware County jail reportedly endured, the reasons behind a \$13.5 million settlement for the federal civil rights lawsuit against the county. The lawsuit alleges they were raped, sexually assaulted, groped and forced to expose themselves

in the county jail and during transports to medical appointments. The \$13.5 million lawsuit settlement was announced in November, and Sheriff Jay Blackfox resigned two days later. Blackfox maintained he had no knowledge of any sexual mis-

conduct by his staff. He is not accused in the lawsuit of taking part in sexual misconduct but is alleged to have known about abuse and taken no action. Bill Sanders Sr., who died in

SEE **SUIT** A11

Today High 50, Low 34
Cloudy and breezy. **More weather on A18**
Get more weather coverage and check out our weather blog at tulsaworld.com/weather

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What happened? The death of Edwina King

KING

FROM A1

letter and sneaked it out past the guards, asking King for help.

Now Williams was trying to help the women, assembling allegations for a lawsuit — but on that crisp fall afternoon, he realized something had gone terribly wrong.

He drove the winding highway to Delaware County and called King, but she never called back.

“I’m afraid for my life,” King told him repeatedly, in conversations leading up to that day.

Williams called her mother, Pat Barrows, and learned King had been missing for six days. Williams asked Barrows to go to Edie’s house immediately and look for a letter. Barrows found it and mailed it to him late that afternoon.

Hours later, family members found Edie’s lifeless body hanged in a horse tack barn only a few hundred feet away from her trailer home in a rocky, craggy mess of hills the locals call “Rattlesnake Holler.”

She was on her knees in a leopard-print dress, with a horse lead rope as a noose. Authorities ruled it a suicide.

Williams and King’s family have never believed that explanation.

Three days after King was found dead, the Delaware County inmates’ letter arrived at Williams’ law office.

Bad stuff

“Dear Mrs. King,” the letter begins. “I know you probally (sic) don’t remember me, but I was in jail with you in Delaware County. Some bad stuff happened to some of us girls. We were hoping you could help us ...”

The “bad stuff” happening to those girls in the county jail, according to a federal civil rights suit, included rape, sodomy, sexual battery and blackmail by employees of the Delaware County Sheriff’s Office. County officials recently settled the lawsuit for \$13.5 million.

Sheriff Jay Blackfox resigned two days after the lawsuit settlement was announced. He has maintained that he had no knowledge of any sexual misconduct by his staff, but the lawsuit alleges he knew of the abuse and refused to take action. He could not be reached for comment for this story.

After a brief investigation by Blackfox, a volunteer deputy at the center of the women’s complaints, Bill Sanders, was allowed to return to duty and continue transporting female inmates — and continued to sexually assault them, records show. Sanders died of natural causes at age 63 in 2008, about a month after King’s body was found.

Although Sanders drove a patrol car, carried a gun and wore a badge and uniform of the Delaware County Sheriff’s Office, the Sheriff’s Office maintains he was a “transport volunteer” who received no training and had no personnel file.

The women name Sanders specifically in their letter to King:

“It was Bill Sanders. Sometimes he would take us out twice in one day to go to the doctor. He would drive down county roads and do things to us and threatened (sic) us that if we told he would turn it around on us and have us thrown in prison. That Delaware County would back him. He was right and we’re all real scared ... We have no one else please help us.”

Disappearance

The last time Edwina King’s family saw her alive was Oct. 10, 2008.

She was baby-sitting her toddler grandson at her trailer home near Eucha on County Road 445, listening to music and hanging out with her then 19-year-old son, Russell Butler.

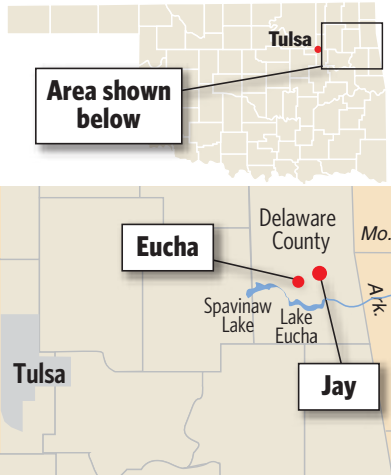
During the months prior, her family had battled its share of legal troubles with the Delaware County Sheriff’s Office, but court records show many of the charges ultimately were dropped.

Edie had a \$50,000 check headed her way, because that summer she broke her leg at her mother’s house, and the homeowner’s insurance company had agreed to pay her a settlement.

Family members say they remember Edie being in a good mood that day, planning dinner at her home for a boyfriend, Gene, who was coming over: steak, macaroni and cheese, fried potatoes and cake. She had called her



Russell Butler holds his son, Russell III, as he talks about the site where his mother disappeared in Eucha. Photos by JOHN CLANTON/Tulsa World



DAVID HOUSH/Tulsa World

sister, Patty, to ask if she wanted to go out dancing with them.

Russell left his mom’s house to go see a girlfriend and didn’t return until later that night.

Edie’s 16-year-old niece, Corrina Buck, was also at the house with a friend. Buck was raised mostly in foster care, but at age 16, her Aunt Edie took her in. Corrina viewed Edie as a mother and called her “Mama.”

Corrina’s friend isn’t mentioned in the sole police report filed on Edie’s death, and there’s no record of attempts by authorities to locate or interview him. He disappeared the day after Edie went missing.

Corrina said she doesn’t suspect her friend had anything to do with the death of her Aunt Edie. But other family members say his behavior that weekend was suspicious.

Edie was a fiery-tempered redhead who could run hot and cold on people. She and her own mother had argued earlier that day, but Edie usually called to apologize.

Corrina also remembers her last conversation with “Mama” was an argument; Edie was mad that Corrina left the house that evening with some older male relatives to buy beer in town.

When Corrina returned, she said her aunt told her to pack her things and get out.

Reportedly, Edie stormed down the steep path to her home in a leopard-print dress and boots and walked down the county road. The land leading up to King’s home is a steep hill of red dirt and rocks, with at least a 30 percent incline, accessible only by foot, horse or



Corrina Buck, who started living with Edwina King when she was 16, said her last conversation with King, her aunt, was an argument on the day that King went missing.

souped-up four-wheel drive.

Edie walked off without her purse, car keys or coat. There was no note.

The next morning, no one had heard from her.

Her family called the Delaware County Sheriff’s Office to file a missing person’s report. Three days would have to pass before a report could officially be filed, authorities said.

An incident report filed Oct. 14, 2008, by Delaware County Sheriff’s Deputy Michael Lanning says that he went to the family’s home to take a missing person’s report from Russell Butler and that Butler said: “Edwina and Pat her mother had got into a argument and screaming match. Edwina started walking down cr. 445 didn’t take any of her Medicare or cloths with Edwina. The family has tried to call Edwina several time Deputy Lanning tried to call Edwina also but have not had no response from Edwina as of 10-14-2008.”

An hour later, the deputy listed Edwina King as a missing person in the National Crime Information Center database, according to the report.

Tempers and tempests

Pat Barrows said she spoke to her youngest daughter several times on Oct. 10, 2008, and Edie was “anything but suicidal.”



Russell Butler walks through the field that once was the site of the home of his mother, Edwina King. King disappeared from her home on Oct. 10, 2008. Her body was found in a shed on her property several days later.

“We were the best of buddies. We talked two to three times a day,” Barrows said. “Why would she kill herself with a \$50,000 check coming her way?”

On Oct. 10, King also paid a visit to the Delaware County courthouse. King had worked at the jail in 2004 and knew the sheriff and many courthouse employees. Reportedly, King was there following up on paperwork related to a relative’s court case.

The incident report on her disappearance and death contain a narrative from Michael Eason, an investigator in the 13th District Attorney’s office, who wrote that King stopped by his office at the courthouse that morning to discuss a separate criminal complaint involving one of her family members.

“During the conversation, Edwina appeared to be normal, was polite and friendly and did say something to the effect that she was getting used to the single life,” Eason wrote in the report (King had divorced several months earlier).

A few months before King was arrested and learned about the female inmates’ sexual abuse allegations, she and her relatives had picketed outside the Delaware County jail, protesting the treatment of some family members in custody there. A summer of various arrests and criminal charges followed for those who participated in the protest, records show.

King and Barrows were arrested in June 2008 on charges of suppression of evidence. They posted bond, and the charges were later dropped.

During the three days she spent in jail, King met some of the women claiming abuse by Delaware County jailers. Her niece, Katherine Buck (Corrina’s older sister) had also been in jail there while on trial for drug charges. Buck knew several of the women and witnessed some of the abuse outlined in the lawsuit, which is part of the reason the female inmates trusted Buck’s aunt to help them, their attorneys say.

Corrina and Katherine Buck knew of the inmates’ letter to their Aunt Edie, and both say it could have played a role in her death. Neither believes Edie’s death was a suicide and recalls her telling them many times that suicide was “a coward’s way out.” “Any more, I can’t really accuse

anybody because I can’t know for sure,” Corrina said. “God’s the only one who knows that.”

Suicide by hanging

This is the description of the investigation into King’s death by a Delaware County Sheriff’s detective, from an official incident report: “The scene was processed and it was determined that King had committed suicide by hanging herself.”

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner’s annual report for 2008 shows that women typically commit suicide by firearms or drugs, rather than hanging. About 38 percent of the female suicides in Oklahoma for 2008 were by firearm, 36 percent were due to drugs/poison. Nineteen percent were hangings.

Because of her broken leg, Edie had access to powerful prescription drugs if she wanted to kill herself, her family said.

The only drugs found in King’s system when she died were an antidepressant, a muscle relaxer and an antihistamine, according to her autopsy. In the official narrative, it lists her as “a 40-year-old American Indian Female with a history of suicidal thoughts and actions.”

The investigator notes two superficial cuts on both wrists, and writes, “According to a family friend, (decedent) had been cutting herself on the wrists earlier during the day” she disappeared. It doesn’t name the family friend and neither does the sheriff’s incident report.

It continues: “There was no foul play suspected. The sheriff’s office and OSBI are comfortable with a suicide.”

Amy Elliott, a spokeswoman for the Medical Examiner’s Office, said their investigators “take all information from law enforcement” at the scene of a death, “review the body and come to our own medical conclusions.”

“The law enforcement investigation is taken into consideration, but we have to find out scientifically why someone has died,” she said. “Absolutely, we will contact the physician for past history and medical conditions.”

The data fields on King’s autopsy that list her physician and medications say “unknown,” and the narrative includes this line from the investigator: “I am unsure what medications the (decedent) was taking or who her doctor is.”

King’s cause of death is listed as hanging, and the manner of death was ruled suicide.

“If some additional medical information becomes available, we will absolutely reconsider any case,” Elliott said.

District Attorney Eddie Wyant authorized King’s autopsy after her body was found.

“It would appear from everything that I have looked at that everything is consistent with a suicide,” he said. “One thing that I have learned in my position is that it is common for the family of the decedent to not accept the fact that one of their loved ones actually killed themselves.”

Greg Williams, the attorney from the lawsuit with whom Edie had shared the letter, called the OSBI’s

SEE KING A11

‘I don’t know why she died. I think she was killed. I think she was disposed of.’ — Pat Barrows, Edwina King’s mother

What happened? The death of Edwina King



Corrina Buck's image reflects in a motel room mirror as she shows a tattoo dedicated to Edwina King. Edwina was Corrina's aunt and adopted mother. Photos by JOHN CLANTON/Tulsa World

KING

FROM A10

Tulsa office after he learned how King had died to tell them her death was suspicious, and they needed to investigate it.

“This ain’t no God d--n suicide,” he told the agents. Two agents listened to his story, said they would be in touch and never got back to him, Williams said.

The Tulsa World sent OSBI a specific list of questions related to King’s death. They declined to answer each individual question and sent a statement: “OSBI agents investigated the case using several methods including but not limited to interviewing numerous individuals, analysis of the crime scene, and information gleaned from an autopsy report. This report indicated that all wounds

on the body were consistent with a suicide, which was determined as the manner of death.”

The statement mentions OSBI agents met with the district attorney’s office in March 2009 to review the case, and “the assistant district attorney assigned the case related he was satisfied with the work investigators performed.”

Under state law, the OSBI cannot reveal details of the investigation, the statement says.

Family members swear the small horse tack barn on King’s property was searched at least twice while she was missing. No one discovered a body in there until Oct. 17, they say.

Several days later, family members asked the sheriff’s office for permission to burn down the horse tack shed because of the upsetting smell and memories. The sheriff’s office told them to go ahead, they said.

The autopsy states King did not have a broken neck or crushed larynx, which also adds to her family’s suspicions.

“I know my mother wouldn’t have killed herself because her grandson was on the property that night,” Butler said. “She wasn’t suicidal. She was having fun and dancing around.”

Her cell phone was found on or next to her body, along with cigarettes and a small knife.

“I don’t know why she died,” Pat Barrows said, her eyes filling with tears. “I think she was killed. I think she was disposed of.”

World Staff Writer Curtis Killman contributed to this story.

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SUIT

FROM A1

November 2008 at age 63, and Lonnie Hunter, former jail administrator, were at the center of most of the allegations in the lawsuit. Hunter was fired the same week the lawsuit settlement was announced.

“We were sexually assaulted by one of the deputy’s (sic),” the women wrote in July 2008 in a letter to King. The letter says the inmates heard that one deputy had been investigated for several months, but that “even after we told Jay Blackfox,” that deputy was still allowed to transport women.

One of the women who wrote the letter reported that she was repeatedly groped and assaulted by Sanders, a volunteer transport deputy, during trips to her doctor’s office.

He told her that his family was in law enforcement in nearby Disney and Langley, and if she said a word, “they would get rid of her.”

During another trip, Sanders groped and kissed a pregnant inmate while trying to shove her hands down his pants, court records allege.

“Sanders told (her) that she could not tell anyone about anything he did, because if she did, he could make her jail time worse and once she got out of jail, he would see to it that (she) got into more trouble,” according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit alleges Sanders sexually assaulted several inmates while they were handcuffed.

Delaware County jailers would reportedly bargain with the female inmates, forcing them to show their breasts in exchange for cigarettes, cupcakes, candy and personal items. Jailers would watch the women coming in and out of the showers, and at night, male employees would come into the cells and grope the female inmates, court records show.

The lawsuit alleges female plaintiffs were threatened to keep quiet or face retaliation by jail employees.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs say an OSBI report based on Blackfox’s investigation concluded that the jail employees did not force themselves on the women, but Oklahoma statutes mandate that any state, federal, county or municipal employee who has sexual intercourse with an inmate is guilty of rape. Inmates can’t legally consent to sexual acts with a jailer.

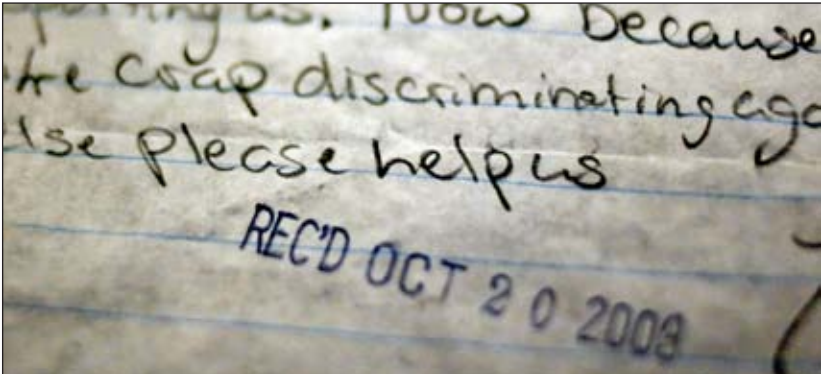
The OSBI report is among many sealed documents in the court file.

District Attorney Eddie Wyant, who did not defend or represent the county in the settlement, has said an OSBI probe into Hunter’s alleged criminal actions is ongoing.

Delaware County officials recently named a new sheriff, Rick Littlefield. Shortly after taking office, he conducted a sweep of the jail, searching for contraband and saying, “it’s part of the cleaning house process.”

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The letter the prisoners in the Delaware County jail sent to Edwina King asking for her help dealing with alleged incidents of sexual assault. The county settled a lawsuit involving the allegations.

“There was no foul play suspected. The Sheriff’s office and OSBI are comfortable with a suicide.”

— From the official incident report detailing Edwina King’s death

Friends: Va. Tech gunman never hinted at violence

RADFORD, Va. (AP) — The man authorities say killed a Virginia Tech police officer before committing suicide had broken up with his girlfriend over the summer and vaguely mentioned some family issues, but he was loyal and never hinted at plans for violence, friends and former classmates said Saturday.

Police say Ross Truett Ashley, 22, stole a car at gunpoint Wednesday from his landlord’s office in what would be a precursor to the events a day later. On Thursday, police say he killed the police officer, then turned the gun

on himself in a parking lot on the campus.

“Ross wasn’t that kind of person. He was friendly, nice,” said Nic Robinson, a 21-year-old history major at Radford University preparing for law school. “Obviously, he had his bad days, but it was the same as anyone else having those days.”

The most notable setback in his life that Robinson knew about was Ashley’s breakup over the summer with his girlfriend. It clearly hurt him, she said, but she never saw him obsess over it.

There were other issues in

Ashley’s life, however, that he wasn’t as forthcoming about, she said.

“We all have our family problems, so the way that he was saying it just made it kind of seem like, just another thing to add to the list,” she said. “He never made anything sound like, ‘This is serious, I need you to sit down.’”

Ashley never talked about guns or weapons, and she said she never knew whether he owned or knew how to use one. He also didn’t use drugs or drink heavily.

Former classmates in his hometown described him as

a hard-nosed football player who had a deep knowledge of the Bible.

J.D. Muller, 22, said he and Ashley kept in touch through social media but hadn’t spoken in person for a couple of years. Ashley never made any suggestions that he might turn violent, Muller said. He said he never recalled Ashley so much as losing his temper or getting upset, and Ashley also seemed to know Scripture well.

“He wasn’t some kind of monster that people are trying to depict him as,” Muller said.

Those who knew Ashley said he could be standoffish and reserved, and one neighbor said he liked to run down the hallways of his building. Ashley lived in an apartment in the college town of Radford and was a part-time student at the university there.

“He was always very nice; I would say that he was reserved, but I wouldn’t call

him a loner,” said 22-year-old Kyle Carlson, who graduated high school with Ashley and had a few advanced-level classes with him.

“Everybody’s just kind of sad. I feel bad for the boy, I feel bad for his family, and I feel bad for the family who lost their father and husband,” said Pat Pickett, a 27-year resident of Partlow.

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