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Media Release - SHERIFF 090529 - SERGEY BLASHCHISHEN - Sheriff recommends death be identified a homicide at Sagewalk (OR, Sagewalk)

MONDAY, MARCH 29 2010 | DEPUTY SHERIFF CHUCK PORE

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.

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Jon Martin-Crawford, Former Program Participant at the Family Foundation School in Hancock, NY, testifies at a U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor hearing concerning child abuse and deceptive marketing by residential programs for teens on April 24, 2008.

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