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Local News

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Roloff assault cases dropped

Judge dismisses charges after witnesses do not appear in court

By Dan Parker
Caller-Times

A judge on Wednesday dismissed misdemeanor assault charges against four men who had been accused of mistreating residents at People's Baptist Church and Ministries, also known as the Roloff homes.

A felony charge of unlawful restraint is pending in another court against one of the men, Allen Lee Smith.

Nueces County Justice of the Peace Henry Santana dismissed Class C misdemeanor charges of assault by physical contact against Smith, Wiley Cameron Jr., Jason Langford and Jason Tackett, who were helping run a home for troubled young adults at the time the allegations were made.

Santana said he dismissed the charges because prosecution witnesses, who live outside Texas, were not present for trials on Wednesday for Smith, Cameron and Langford and were not expected to be present today for the trial of Tackett and a second trial for Cameron. Santana also said prosecutors did not request a postponement in a timely way.

Prosecutor Lance Kutnick said the men who said they were assaulted were needed to testify, but they did not arrange to travel to Texas because they were confused about the dates they were supposed to be in court.

Jeremy Gullick, 21, of Memphis, Tenn., said he indeed was confused about the date. But he also said he could not have left Shelby County, Tenn., because he was on probation. He would not say why he was on probation.

Gullick said that he was assaulted, but he also said he

was not upset that the charges were dismissed.

"The fact of the matter is, they put their hands on me," Gullick said. "But the law is all screwed up. The law won't do anything."

Gullick said he lost confidence in law enforcement in general after he recently was beaten up in Tennessee. He said police were not aggressive enough in investigating the case.

Justin Simons of Georgia, the other man who said he was assaulted, could not be reached for comment.

A group of People's Baptist Church supporters in Santana's courtroom applauded when Santana dismissed the charges.

Smith said he was innocent of all the charges and felt vindicated by the dismissals.

"I feel really relieved," said Smith, who now works at the People's Baptist's wastewater treatment plants and regularly takes Lighthouse residents fishing in the Laguna Madre. "This has been a really stressful thing for my family."

Gullick and Simons are former residents of a People's Baptist Church and Ministries home called The Lighthouse, a home for troubled men ages 17 to 25.

At the time of the allegations in April, Smith was superintendent of the Lighthouse and Langford, was a Lighthouse employee.

Cameron was a trustee of People's Baptist Church. He is the son of Wiley Cameron Sr., pastor of the church and head of ministries.

Tackett was a team leader at the Lighthouse. Team leaders are residents who have done well in the Lighthouse program and have been selected by ministry officials to mentor other residents.

Simons said Tackett hit him in the back of the head around March 28 and that Wiley Cameron Jr. punched him in the chest around March 14.

Gullick said Smith hit him in the head with a broom and kicked him in the stomach between March 20 and 22. Gullick said Langford punched and slapped him in the face in February. He said Wiley Cameron Jr. kicked him in the leg and hit him in the face, back and chest on Feb. 5.

The complaints were Class C misdemeanors punishable by a fine of as much as $500 and no jail time, which is similar to a traffic ticket.

Smith still faces a felony charge of unlawful restraint. A trial has been scheduled for Feb. 12.

The felony charge came after Simons told investigators Smith punished him because he thought Simons was planning to run away.

Simons accused Smith of forcing him to run through thorny scrub brush without shoes, hitting him with a stick and ordering him to dig in a 15-foot pit. Simons said he was not allowed to take a break unless he jumped across the pit. When he tried, he said, he fell and suffered sprained ankles.

Smith's attorney, Grant Jones, has said Smith will be exonerated.

People's Baptist Church and Ministries operates a number of homes for troubled children and adults on a 557-acre piece of land on Old Brownsville Road. The facilities also are known as the Roloff Homes, named after

the late evangelist Lester Roloff, who founded the homes.



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