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North Carolina men held as suspects in gay murder NCLYN founder resigns

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

MOBILE, AL—Jamie Ray Tolbert, 24, from Lucedale, MS, was last seen alive at a New Year's Eve celebration at Joey's Inc., a nightclub in Biloxi, MS [a gay club also known as Joey's on the Beach], said Deputy Chad Tucker, a Mobile County Sheriff's Department spokesman. Investigators found his body in Grand Bay, AL nearly two weeks later.

When Tolbert did not return home from celebrating on New Year's Eve, his mother and stepfather came to look for him. They passed out fliers and went door-to-door, looking for people who knew him or may have seen him in Biloxi that night. But when they felt the case was not getting attention from Biloxi police, they went back home to George County to ask for help.

"The family's from here and they couldn't get much help down there," said George County Sheriff George Miller. "So I took it upon myself to send some deputies."

Miller said the key to solving the case came when someone started using Tolbert's credit cards.

Miller's investigators, joined by deputies

from Mobile County, started a 10-day hunt in Biloxi that led them across 18 states — from North Carolina to Yreka, California, where two men were arrested driving Tolbert's truck. One of the suspects told deputies how to find Tolbert's body. Police believe he was killed the morning he disappeared.

California state troopers arrested two North Carolina men — Jeremy Shawn Bentley, 22, from Hickory and Brent David Kabat, 19, from Clayton — in connection with Tolbert's killing. According to District Attorney John Tyson Jr., the men are charged with capital murder pending their extradition to Alabama. It is possible that kidnapping will be added to the charges.

The autopsy revealed that Tolbert died from strangulation and multiple blunt force injuries to the head.

Tucker said investigators believe they know what type of weapon was used, but will not say and they have not yet recovered it.

"We believe the motive was robbery," said Tucker. "At some point, Tolbert was kidnapped."

In 1997, Kabat was convicted in North Carolina of breaking and entering and larceny.

He was convicted of a forgery charge in 1998. Last year, he was convicted of seven counts of conspiracy to commit robbery with a dangerous weapon. He was sentenced to probation for all of the convictions. Bentley was convicted in 1996 of assault with a deadly weapon on a law enforcement officer in Caldwell County near Hickory. He also was sentenced to probation.

Rebecca Allen, 26, said she knew Tolbert from Joey's nightclub. "He was real nice and sweet and would do just about anything for anybody," she said.

Allen said she had known Tolbert for about six months. He was living with his parents while a house he owned in George County was being renovated. He worked offshore as a safety and training specialist and had owned his new 2000 Nissan X-Terra truck for about four months.

Kabat subsequently tried to escape from the Yreka, CA jail, authorities said. He attacked a correctional officer, striking the officer with a weapon fashioned out of game pieces wrapped in a torn bed sheet, knocking the officer to the floor. The officer was able to call for assistance and Kabat was subdued in a housing unit on special watch. ▼

resigns



Hez Norton

DURHAM, NC—Activist Hez Norton, founder and executive director of North Carolina Lambda Youth Network (NCLYN), has resigned her position effective this May.

NCLYN, the first statewide leadership development network led by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied (LGBT) youth, has been training and empowering North Carolina youth ages 13 to 24 since 1996. During the past three years, over 400 young people have been involved with NCLYN programs. Many of these young people have created their own venues for activism to make their surrounding communities safer for all youth.

Norton, who founded NCLYN at age 23 with a grant from Southern Community Partners (a project of the Lyndhurst Foundation), stated, "In the spring of 1996, I had a vision of a statewide leadership network led by LGBT youth; a safe place for them to go, be affirmed in their identities, develop skills to improve their communities, and work for social justice. I was not alone with this vision and I have had the opportunity to work with so many amazing people, youth and adults, who transformed this vision into a reality called North Carolina Lambda Youth Network."

In announcing her departure, Norton said, "I leave NCLYN with full confidence that the organization is strong and ready to take on new challenges. We have a talented staff, a dedicated board of directors, strong programs, and successful funding. With NCLYN's vision and commitment to LGBT youth and social justice, I am sure the organization will grow and succeed with the next executive director."

"Hez's collective work as a resource for LGBT youth, a nonprofit leader, and a catalyst for change speak loudly of the immeasurable energy she has given North Carolina. She will be tremendously missed by the entire board, staff, youth leaders and all the people across the state she has motivated," said Cal Allen, a member of the board of directors.

During Norton's tenure as the first executive director, the organization saw extraordinary growth and development of its programs. Some of the most outstanding achievements include: becoming an independent, non-profit organization; promoting youth leadership and youth involvement through NCLYN's board of directors, conferences and initiatives; expanding the budget from \$25,000 to \$150,000; participating in Equality Begins at Home, a national week of actions designed to promote GLBT issues at the local and state level; increasing the staff to four full-time positions; increasing the visibility and awareness of LGBT youth issues in the mainstream media and education system; receiving the National Youth Advocacy Coalition Award in 1998 for exemplary creativity, passion and vision in the development of a statewide leadership network; organizing two conferences; becoming the first organization of its kind in the country, and serving as a model for youth empowerment and social change.

The board of directors has begun an immediate search for a new executive director. Candidates interested in applying for the position should send a cover letter, their resumé, a one-page statement on LGBT youth and leadership, and three references no later than March 1 to NCLYN ED Search Team, 115 Market Street, Durham, NC 27701. For more information, call (919) 683-3037 or email nclambda@aol.com. ▼

Interstate con man preys on gay media advertisers

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—What would you do if you received a call in the middle of the night from an acquaintance who said he was stranded in California after having been gay-bashed and robbed?

What if he said you were the only person he could reach and begged you to wire him enough money to fly home?

This dilemma faced one of Q-Notes' advertisers recently when a man identifying himself as Jim Yarbrough, the publisher of this newspaper, called with that very story.

The advertiser, who asked that his name not be used, asked the obviously upset man a few questions (such as "Where's [your partner]?") and judged the answers to be credible ("He's visiting his mother in another state. He didn't come with me.")

The caller provided all the details for the transaction. He suggested that a simple description and code word be used to retrieve the money since his identification was stolen. He also noted that the advertiser could use an American Express card to wire money from home and even offered the toll free number for doing so.

Out of concern and a sense of loyalty from their business relationship, the advertiser agreed

to send \$600 to a Western Union branch in Hollywood, CA where "Jim" was waiting.

After receiving the money, he called back to thank the man for his assistance.

The next morning, when the advertiser phoned to see if the caller had gotten home safely, he discovered that the real Jim Yarbrough had been in his own bed all night and the incident was an elaborate swindle.

Because the advertiser had used his American Express card, he was able to reverse the charge and initiate an investigation by the credit card company's fraud department.

Unfortunately, the inquiry uncovered little information. Additionally, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department showed little interest in the case because it occurred outside of their jurisdiction. Due to these circumstances — and the fact that, in the end, the advertiser lost no money — both he and Yarbrough put the matter behind them and moved on.

That is, until an Internet newsletter for GLBT press professionals reported on identical scams targeting gay publications in Arizona and California.

The newsletter, Press Pass Q, stated that in one night several staff members and advertisers of Phoenix-based *Echo* magazine were awakened by a caller claiming to be a staffer. The caller recounted the same scenario from the Q-Notes'

scam, but all the employees saw through it. One advertiser did not, however, and he sent \$500.

Another round of calls occurred the following week and an advertiser was bilked out of \$180. Following this, *Echo* editor Bruce Christian contacted all of the magazine's advertisers and apprised them of the hoax.

This situation played out in San Diego, as well, involving advertisers with the *Gay and Lesbian Times*. There, however, two men were convinced to send \$400 and \$1000 to Houston, TX rather than Los Angeles.

The article reported that local police were investigating in Phoenix and Houston, but not San Diego.

In the following issue of Press Pass Q, readers responded with additional reports. The editor of *The Leather Journal* acknowledged that he had lost \$500 (and other leather community leaders had been targeted, as well) and the editor of the *Wisconsin Light* said that well-known AIDS activists had been the focus of this scam in his area.

Since there have been no arrests for these crimes, advertisers and readers should be wary of any suspicious calls that involve the exchange of money. If you have information on these crimes or have been similarly victimized or targeted, contact Q-Notes publisher Jim Yarbrough at (704) 531-9988. ▼

Great Britain lifts its ban on gays in the military

LONDON, ENGLAND—On January 12, Britain officially lifted its ban on gays in the military. The change had long been rumored since the country was being forced to act by a European court ruling. In its place, the military introduced a code of conduct for sexual behavior regardless of sexual orientation.

"There is no longer a reason to deny homosexuals the opportunity of a career in the armed forces," Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon, Labour Party, told parliament. "Accordingly, we have decided that it is right that the existing ban should be lifted."

"As no primary or secondary legislation is required, with effect from today, homosexuality will no longer be a bar to service in Britain's armed forces," Hoon said.

"This appalling decision will be greeted with dismay among ordinary soldiers in the armed

forces, many of whom joined the services precisely because they wished to turn their back on some of the values of modern society," said Conservative Party lawmaker Gerald Howarth.

Under the new code of conduct, inappropriate sexual behavior between personnel on duty — and not a person's sexual orientation — would be a punishable offense.

The key test will be whether an individual's behavior undermines the "efficiency or operational effectiveness" of the military, Hoon said.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled last September that four gay enlistees were wrongly dismissed from the military after they admitted their sexual orientation to investigators. The judges called the ban a grave interference in private lives.

Personnel dismissed for being gay can apply to rejoin the services and actions against cur-

rent military personnel will be halted.

In the future, the sexual orientation of soldiers, sailors and air force personnel will be "essentially a private matter for the individual," Hoon said.

Unlike the US military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Britain had an outright ban on gays.

Britain is now in line with other European countries that allow gays to serve in the military. Most NATO nations either have strict policies against discrimination or consider it a non-issue and have no policies at all.

Defence Secretary William Cohen defended the US military's policy despite Britain's move. Cohen said, "We believe that the approach we have taken is balanced and appropriate. We believe that this policy has worked and will continue to work. We need to improve upon it as far as the harassment aspect." ▼