

Chief of ‘sham’ tribe arrested

By Geoff Liesik
Salt Lake City Deseret News

VERNAL, Utah — A Uintah County man who had his “tribe” declared a fraud by a federal judge has been charged with helping a fugitive from Iowa elude capture and with possessing child pornography.

Dale Nolen Stevens, 69, was arrested Thursday by Uintah County sheriff’s detectives on a warrant issued for charges of obstruction of justice, sexual exploitation of a minor and forgery.

Stevens is accused of helping Russell Eugene Blessman— an Iowa man wanted for questioning in a child sex abuse investigation — come to Utah in October and of hiding him on his land near Vernal. Investigators also allege that Stevens used his computer to create a fraudulent tribal identity for Blessman.

“Mr. Stevens used his position as the chief of the Wampanoag Tribe to hide Mr. Blessman and give him new identification and a new false birth certificate,” detective Leonard Issacson wrote in an affidavit filed to obtain the warrant for Stevens’ arrest.

Stevens has claimed to be the chief of the Wampanoag Nation, Tribe of Grayhead, Wolf Band. The group — formed in a Provo Arby’s restaurant in 2003 and not related to the federally-recognized Wampanoag Tribe in Massachusetts — was declared “a complete sham” by U.S. District Court Judge Stephen P. Friot in April. The judge’s ruling was related to fraudulent civil judgments levied by Stevens and three other men against officials in Uintah and Duchesne counties.

Blessman was arrested in October by members of the U.S. Marshal’s Service Joint Criminal Apprehension Team and the state Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force following a tip that led them to a motel in Heber City. At the time of his arrest, Blessman had Wampanoag documents in his possession bearing Stevens’ signature, Isaacson said.

During interviews with Blessman following his arrest, Isaacson said investigators were told Stevens had child pornography on his laptop computer. Blessman also told authorities Stevens had expected him to bring his underage daughter to Utah with him so Stevens could marry her, and that Stevens had arranged to marry another underage girl in exchange for half a cooler of energy bars, according to the detective.

Stevens acknowledged the energy bar trade during a Jan. 17 preliminary hearing on charges that he’d burglarized the trailer home where the girl was staying and stood over her in his underwear as she slept.

“That’s the way Indians do things ... if they’re living under their old ways,” he said of the arrangement with the 12-year-old girl’s mother, who also testified about the trade. “I became her guardian, put it that way, I became her guardian.”

In his affidavit, Issacson said a search of Stevens’ laptop revealed several images of child pornography as well as a video showing a prepubescent girl dancing without any clothes on.

“The creation date of the video predates the flight from Iowa and the arrival of Russell Blessman to Utah,” Issacson wrote.

A two-day jury trial on the burglary and attempted lewdness charges against Stevens is set to begin Aug. 12. Stevens has asked to serve as his own attorney in both cases and has challenged the state’s jurisdiction over him, continuing to claim that he is an American Indian and that the alleged crimes happened on tribal ground. He remains in the Uintah County Jail.

Quapaw official gives board casino tour

By Roger McKinney
Joplin Globe

CHEROKEE COUNTY, Kans. — John Berrey, business chairman for the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma, on Monday led the Cherokee County, Kan., commissioners on a tour of the tribe’s new Downstream Casino Resort.

The casino is scheduled to open in less than a month, on July 5. A hotel under construction is scheduled to open in the fall. The price tag on the project is \$301 million. The casino and hotel, just off Interstate 44 where Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas meet, is expected to hire 1,200 workers by the end of the year. The casino and hotel are in Oklahoma, while the parking lot is in Cherokee County.

“We’re just glad to show it off to you guys,” Berrey said.

Berrey said the casino will pay 100 percent of the benefits packages of employees. Each employee will be served a free meal during his or her shift, he said.

Berrey showed the commissioners room-size freezers and refrigerators. Employees use cards to clock in and clock out, for

security purposes.

There are 420 video surveillance cameras on site, and Berrey showed the commissioners the room where security employees would be viewing the video screens.

Berrey said the information technology room contains \$8 million to \$10 million worth of computer servers, stacked floor to ceiling.

He showed the commissioners the counting rooms and poker rooms. He then showed them the gambling floor.

“We tried really hard to make it native and natural, and also pretty classy,” Berrey said of the decor.

The steakhouse seats 97 in its main room and has more seating in a private dining room, Berrey said.

The casino also has a sports bar, a buffet and a performance stage.

“I’ll need to know where the buffet is,” said Cherokee County Counselor Kevin Cure.

The gambling floor contains a large, circular bar in the center that includes what one might describe as a light sculpture reaching to the ceiling. Berrey said bartenders would be on duty all the way around the circle.

Some of the planned 2,000 slot machines are being installed this week.

The tour was not wasted on the commissioners.

“It’s pretty impressive,” said Commissioner Rodney Edmondson. “It’s definitely a high-end entertainment venue.”

“They’ve spared no expense,” said Commissioner Pat Collins. “It’s overwhelming.”

Commissioner Charlie Napier echoed the sentiment of the other two.

“I think it’s grand,” Napier said. “I was kind of overwhelmed by the size of it, especially the gaming part. It’s very impressive.”

Told of the reaction of the commissioners after the tour, Sean Harrison, spokesman for the casino, said: “That’s good. Maybe they’ll be nicer to us.”

Harrison referred to a lawsuit filed by Cherokee County against the U.S. Department of the Interior, alleging that the federal agency didn’t require the tribe to perform necessary environmental assessments before starting construction. The lawsuit also included a motion for an injunction to stop construction.

A federal government attorney has filed a motion

to dismiss the case, but there has been no action on the motion.

The commissioners said after the tour and after leaving the site that while they want to be good neighbors, they also must protect county interests. Napier said he didn’t think anything would come of the lawsuit.

Berrey last month told the commissioners that the tribe would pay to upgrade and maintain County Road 110, which the tribe plans to use for heavy trucks making deliveries. Berrey also told the commissioners that the tribe wanted to widen State-line Road leading to the Tri-State Monument on the casino property.

Cure was asked at the courthouse in Columbus, Kan., if he had made headway on drafting agreements with the tribe about the roads. He said he had been in discussion with David Cooper, the county’s attorney on gambling issues, to determine if the county could get more concessions from the tribe. Cherokee County is reimbursed for Cooper’s fees by Penn National Gaming.

Penn National Gaming plans to build a state-owned casino in Kansas, north of the tribal casino in

Oklahoma, initially investing \$125 million and investing an additional \$100 million over the next several years.

Cure was on hand to make sure that neither the commissioners nor tribal officials discussed any county business during the visit, to ensure that it remained a private meeting rather than a meeting open to the general public. The Kansas open-meetings law defines public meetings as a majority of a quorum of a governmental body that has gathered to discuss matters pertaining to the governmental body. All those elements must be present to constitute a public meeting.

Berrey would not allow a Globe photographer inside the casino, saying that federal regulators were on site to oversee the installation of the slot machines and would not allow photography during the procedure. Two newspaper reporters were allowed along for the tour.

Penn National Gaming last week paid its \$25 million privilege fee to the state of Kansas for its planned \$125 million Hollywood Casino in Cherokee County, north of Downstream Casino Resort.

Reclaiming remains



AP Photo/The New York Times, James Estrlin

Chief Vern Jacks, right, and his wife Cora, of the Northwestern Canadian Tseycum Indian tribe, are pictured at the Museum of Natural History in New York Monday. Members of the Tseycum First Nation were in New York this week to reclaim the remains of ancestors that had been taken from their lands about a century ago and ended up as part of the museum’s vast holdings.

Morgan named gaming commissioner

Ada Evening News

ADA, Okla. — Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby named Matthew L. Morgan as interim Gaming Commissioner for the tribe effective June 2.

“Matthew has the experience, integrity and energy necessary to meet the demands of this position,” said Gov. Anoatubby. “He understands the need for effective regulation and has proven he has the knowledge and sound judgment needed to achieve that goal.”

The Gaming Commissioner serves as the primary regulator of the Chickasaw Nation’s gaming operations. Profits from those operations exceeded \$414 million in FY 2007.

In addition to his employment with the Chickasaw Nation, Mr. Morgan currently serves on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the National Indian Gaming Association. He is Chair of the Indian Law Section of the Oklahoma Bar Association. He is a past Chair of the Chickasaw Bar Association and previously served as president of the American Indian Alumni Society of the University of Oklahoma.

Morgan is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma. He earned his Juris Doctorate from the College of Law and a Bachelor’s of Business Administration degree with a minor in Native American Studies from the Price School of Business.???

He is married to the former Candessa Tehee, and they live in Ada with their three children, Jolie, Kelsey and Lawson Morgan.

Meacham joins outcry against Shawnee casino

By Janice Francis-Smith
The Journal Record

OKLAHOMA CITY — State Treasurer Scott Meacham on Monday added his voice to that of a crowd of state officials who have officially opposed the Shawnee Tribe’s plan to build a casino in Oklahoma City.

Unlike other state officials who have voiced their opposition to the plan, Meacham’s letter to the U.S. Department of the Interior described his personal involvement in crafting the delicate compromise that was State Question 712, and how the Shawnees’ request would throw that plan — and the state’s budget — out of whack.

In 2004, voters approved a plan to allow Remington Park to enhance the size of the horse racing prizes it was able to offer by operating a limited number of electronic gaming machines. Tribe-owned casinos were granted the authority to operate new kinds of machines and table games.

Meacham notes his role as Gov. Brad Henry’s lead negotiator in discussions with Oklahoma’s Indian tribes regarding gaming compacts. The discussions that led to SQ 712 were particularly difficult, he recalls. The Cheyenne-Arapaho, Citizen Band Potawatomi, Absentee Shawnee, Kickapoo, Chickasaw and Sac and Fox tribes all operate casinos in the sur-

rounding communities, but no tribe operates a casino within Oklahoma City limits.

To assuage the neighboring tribes’ concern that granting Remington Park the authority to operate electronic games would harm their market share, the state agreed to several limitations on Remington Park’s operations.

The resulting agreement has worked well, said Meacham. Last year, horse racing provided more than \$10 million for education, \$7.8 million of which came from Remington Park, Meacham wrote. The horse racing industry in Oklahoma pumps \$2.1 billion a year into the state’s economy, he added.

The Shawnee Tribe issued a statement in response to Meacham’s letter on Monday afternoon.

“It is disappointing that anyone would take a stand, particularly at this early stage in a lengthy federal review process, based on pressure from a powerful special interest group rather than waiting to make a careful, informed decision based on the facts,” the statement read. “We will bring thousands of good jobs and significant positive economic impact to OKC, including hundreds of millions of dollars for local government and schools, and we believe our project and Remington Park can be good, successful neighbors.”

The Shawnee Tribe has asked federal officials to place land within Oklahoma City limits in trust, which would allow the tribe to build a casino and resort less than two miles from Remington Park racetrack. Meacham, Gov. Brad Henry, and a handful of state and federal lawmakers representing the area have voiced their opposition to the plan, which they claim would harm Remington Park.

The state is approaching near saturation of gaming as more tribal casinos have opened in just the last few years, Meacham wrote, encouraging federal officials to deny the Shawnees’ request.