

## Crash kills Jamul tribe chairman

By Onell R. Soto  
San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — A short ride for Jamul Tribal Chairman William C. “Bill” Mesa and his daughter-in-law on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle turned deadly Saturday afternoon.

Mesa, 57, lost control of his bike on Lyons Valley Road a quarter-mile east of Skyline Truck Trail, hit a power pole shortly before 5 p.m. and was killed, said California Highway Patrol Officer Rob Sanchez.

Crystal Roberts-Mesa, 29, who married Mesa’s son, Robert, less than a year ago, also died in the crash.

A CHP spokesman said yesterday that investigators are still looking into the case but suspect alcohol was a factor.

Family members said a car, animal or other obstruction on the road may have caused William Mesa to swerve.

“It would be unlike him to lose control,” said Cheryl Mesa, his wife of 31 years. “He was an excellent driver.”

She said Mesa and his daughter-in-law had “a few beers” during a family gathering but weren’t intoxicated.

The county Medical Examiner’s Office doesn’t expect to provide toxicology results for six to eight weeks.

Mesa, a retired police officer, was elected chairman of the Jamul Indian Village a year ago and was on the forefront of the 50-member tribe’s efforts to build a casino on its six-acre reservation.

Before becoming chairman, Mesa served as gaming commissioner, police chief, and councilman, making him a lighting rod for criticism from opponents of the casino.

“He told me that when he took on this casino issue, he lost a lot of friends,” said Carlene Chamberlain, who has served on the tribe’s executive committee for more than 15 years.

Mesa led the March 2006 eviction of three Indians who had lived for years on the reservation but weren’t enrolled members of the tribe.

As the tribe’s police chief, he directed hired security guards who used batons and pepper spray on neighbors protesting the evictions.

The protesters said the guards used excessive force. Mesa said the casino opponents had trespassed onto tribal property and assaulted the guards. The district attorney declined to press charges.

Mesa said he was enforcing the tribe’s right to decide how to use its land.

“He knew how poor we were, he knew how impoverished his tribe was,” Chamberlain said.

Mesa often clashed verbally with county Supervisor Dianne Jacob.

“We were adversaries on the casino issue, but it cannot be said that he didn’t work tirelessly for what he believed in and what he felt was best for the village,” Jacob said in a prepared statement.

Mesa also worked on repatriating ancestral remains to Indian lands, Chamberlain said.

Mesa retired from the El Cajon Police Department in 2000 after a 20-year career that included being named Officer of the Year in 1988.

His daughter-in-law, Roberts-Mesa, was a lifelong East County resident. She had recently earned a master’s degree in public health from San Diego State University.

She worked at the University of California San Diego with a program to recruit science students from disadvantaged households.

“She was trying to get her foot in the door as far as sciences go,” said her husband, Robert Mesa.

She had just convinced her father-in-law, who had an associate degree, to attend San Diego State, he said.

# Answering the call to serve

*Menominee Nation’s Gathering of Warriors honors Native American veterans*

By Phillip O’Connor  
and Kevin Crowe  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

KESHENA, Wis. — Two dozen military veterans enter the powwow grounds to the sound of a drum’s rhythmic thump and the chants of songs passed down from their ancestors.

They dance clockwise, a slow stutter step on lush grass, as sunlight dapples through the surrounding forest. Several are squeezed into old dress uniforms or camouflage fatigues. Many sport caps from which an eagle feather dangles; graying ponytails spill out the backs. A few wear traditional headdresses, breechcloths and leggings.

Vince Crow, 17, soaks in the spectacle of the Menominee Nation’s Gathering of Warriors. His grandfather served in World War II, his uncle in Desert Storm. Crow thinks he, too, may enlist.

“It’s a way to show pride,” Crow says. “Pride for your family. Pride for your heritage. Pride for your nation. It just kind of goes along with our ancestry. Instead of protecting a village, you’re protecting a country.”

Five years into a grinding, unpopular war, there are few places in the United States where commitment to military service is as strong as in Menominee County, population 4,562. Almost 90 percent of the residents are members of the Menominee tribe, which trans-

lates as “people of the wild rice.”

On a per-capita basis, Menominee County provided more soldiers to the Army over the last four years than any other county in the nation without a major Army installation, according to an analysis by the Post-Dispatch. The newspaper’s ranking excluded the 1 percent of U.S. counties that have a population under 1,000.

The newspaper reviewed Department of Defense data for every active-duty, Reserve and National Guard recruit, who by far represent the majority of forces serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The analysis found that rural America continues to be fertile ground for recruiters, including in Missouri and Illinois, where many young people see the armed forces as a way to escape poverty or the lack of opportunity in their hometowns.

It’s also the case in Menominee, one of the poorest counties in the nation. The unemployment rate is more than twice the national average.

But many here view the armed forces as not just a chance to better themselves. More important, they say, is the chance to live their warrior tradition.

Crow, his hair shaved close, wears a colorful beaded choker. A medicine pouch filled with tobacco dangles from his neck. He says he grew up listening to the tales of forefathers who

found honor in battle.

“It goes with our heritage,” he says. “Warriors, you know?”

Menominee County was second in the nation in per-capita Army recruiting from 2004 to last year, exceeded only by Geary County in Kansas, home to Fort Riley and the 1st Infantry Division. Four of the top 10 counties in the United States were home to large Army posts.

Residents of such areas tend to have more familiarity and interaction with the military and are more receptive to the idea of military service, the Army says. Installations host activities open to the public and are active in civic life. In addition, many military retirees and families congregate in such areas.

Geary County, situated amid the Flint Hills in northeastern Kansas, is home to about 25,000 residents, as well as 16,000 soldiers based at Fort Riley. Almost 22 percent of those in the county over the age of 18 are veterans, well above the national average of almost 14 percent.

“You’ve got a community that’s already predisposed to supporting the military,” said Army Recruiting spokesman S. Douglas Smith.

Major Mike Johnson commands a recruiting company in Manhattan, Kan., near Fort Riley. He is amazed at how little most civilians know about the Army and how it works. That makes a place such as

Geary far more attractive for the military because it’s usually easier to recruit someone who already understands the lifestyle and commitment, he said.

And yet, even if potential recruits don’t know much about the military, there can still be opportunities when trying to get them to sign, said Sgt. 1st Class Shaun Keithline, who recruits in Geary County.

“(For) people who’ve never been around it, there’s that curiosity,” Keithline said.

Still, Keithline said, many of his recruits are the children of military personnel now reaching retirement age. For many of those families, he said, “the questions are not if you’re going to serve but, ‘Are you serving before or after you go to college?’ They expect to do it.”

Like his own son, who is 13.

“He’s already trying to figure out what he’s going to do within the armed forces,” Keithline said.

Keithline said he believed potential recruits also might be influenced by the presence of soldiers around town, many of whom have returned from overseas with money to burn.

“Let’s face it: Almost every soldier is going to drive a nice car,” Keithline said. “They’re going to wear nice clothes, and they’re always going to have some cash. And that’s what kids see. And that’s what they’re attracted to — the shiny bling-bling.”

For three years, until his retirement in November, Allen McCann, 44, served as the Army recruiter for the region that included Menominee County. In the hallways of Menominee High School, he was known simply as “Sarge.”

Whereas schools in some of the more affluent counties limited his access to students, McCann was always welcome at Menominee High.

Almost daily, he visited the school, which sits just a few miles from the powwow grounds down the twisting two-lane highway that cuts through the center of town. He made classroom presentations and chatted to students in the hallways and lunchroom.

Often, McCann was recruiting someone whose father, grandfather, uncle or brother had served. The tribe’s website lists 81 members in the military, including 19 deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.

“We maybe feel it more, take it more personally,” said Rebecca Alegria, a tribal researcher who has nephews who are serving. “It’s hard not to when it’s family.”

And in a community in which veterans are revered, McCann said, many young people long for that same respect.

“I didn’t have to use the old generalized pitch I did everywhere else,” he said. “There was no stigma to joining the Army. ... In a lot of ways, it’s like a rite of passage.”

## Chairman calls ‘war on suicide’

By Steve Young  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, S.D. — A tribe staggered by a crush of youth suicides opened a two-day summit Tuesday bent on finding solutions.

As a family buried their 19-year-old son in Rosebud - the seventh suicide on the Rosebud Reservation this year - tribal Chairman Rodney Bordeaux asked state, federal and tribal officials to help fight the epidemic.

“We need to put a stop to this,” Bordeaux told those gathered on the Sinte Gleska University campus. “We need to begin to do something to get our youth to declare a war on suicide.”

Officials at the conference talked of problems youth face on a reservation mired in unemployment, alcoholism and dysfunction in families where children miss school to look after siblings or incapacitated parents.

Part of their hopelessness was highlighted by numbers from Todd County High School showing that of 256 freshmen who began in the school four years ago, only 56 graduated in May.

## Survivor’s tale



Associated Press

Susan Stronberg of Yellow Bay, Mont., recounts a horrific 14-hour struggle to survive a hiking accident in June, on a remote trail in the Mission Mountains, Tuesday, July 1, in Kalispell Regional Medical Center in Kalispell, Mont. Stronberg credits Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Ranger Brian Ducharm, Lake County Sheriff’s Office, Lake County and Swan Search and Rescue teams as well as her husband Michael Stronberg for her rescue.

# Friends, family honor Browning Hot Shot

By Mallory Nelson  
Great Falls Tribune

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — MacDonald, who was killed June 29 in a helicopter collision, is the first firefighter from the Chief Mountain Hot Shots to die in the line of duty. Hundreds of family members and friends gathered at Browning High School on Saturday to say their final farewells to the 26-year-old.

CeCe Corcoran, MacDonald’s partner for three years, said he always warned her about the danger of his job, but she never expected the warnings to become reality. Corcoran is expected to deliver MacDonald’s son on Aug. 6, and the couple was looking forward to a new

stage of their life together.

“I still have a piece of him coming,” said Corcoran on how she is coping with MacDonald’s death.

A tragic cycle will be repeating itself when Corcoran gives birth to Sean Taylor MacDonald. MacDonald’s father died two weeks before he was born in September of 1981.

“It kind of made him angry that he never got the chance to meet his dad,” Corcoran said. “His baby would have a dad. That was the most important thing to him.”

But Corcoran said firefighting was MacDonald’s passion, and he died doing something that he loved. Corcoran explained that summer firefighting was one reason why MacDonald pursued a

career in education. MacDonald just graduated from Blackfeet Community College with a degree in physical education and coaching. He also attended school at Montana State-Northern and the University of Montana.

Laurie Hall, MacDonald’s mother, said she knew her son would be a firefighter by the time he was 13 years old. She recalled him running to the fire station when he heard there was a fire, and she said one family friend found MacDonald stubbornly sitting in the car, trying to firefight.

As the family remembers episodes of MacDonald’s life, Hall said the memories are also a healing process.

“He prepared us for this journey,” Hall said.

MacDonald became a fire-

fighter when he turned 18, and he was a member of the elite Hot Shots for three years. He shared his passion for the job by recruiting friends, and he recruited Kayla LaPier for the Hot Shot crew in 2006. LaPier said his death is a major loss for the group, which she called a family away from family.

“The danger of it gives you a big rush, but I never thought it could actually be this dangerous,” LaPier said. “But don’t let that scare you. Mike would have wanted us to go back out.”

Joe Fisher, a rookie on the Hot Shot team this year, was not only mourning the loss of a fellow firefighter but the loss of his best friend. Fisher, who knew MacDonald for 20

years, said his friend insisted on making others laugh, and he wouldn’t have wanted loved ones crying.

“We’re all one big family. It’s very very traumatic and shocking. It feels like it’s a movie sometimes,” Fisher said. “But there’s still another day.”

Fisher and MacDonald played together on Browning’s state championship basketball team in 2001, and Fisher said the championship is a source of pride for the entire community. Many community members came to the funeral to pay tribute to a man who was a hero on the basketball court, too.

“When you do something like win titles, for example, people know who you are,” Fisher said.