

Calif. authorities say 1981 triple murder was hit job

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California authorities believe an unsolved 1981 triple murder at the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians was a hit job orchestrated by a tribal casino director, financial adviser and others to cover up illegal activity, and state officials are seeking to have the main suspect extradited to California.

James "Jimmy" Hughes, the founder of a Miami-based Christian ministry, was arrested last month at Miami International Airport on a fugitive warrant and was being held in Miami, where he is fighting extradition to California.

Hughes, 52, faces three counts of murder in the execution-style shootings of Cabazon tribal official Alfred Alvarez and his friends Patricia Castro and Ralph Boger and one count of conspiracy to commit a crime, according to a felony complaint for extradition filed Thursday.

It wasn't immediately clear if Hughes had retained an attorney. His ministry spokeswoman and his wife did not reply to e-mails sent late Thursday. The complaint alleges that Hughes

conspired with non-Indian tribal financial consultant John Philip Nichols, Nichols' son John Paul Nichols, and others in the days immediately before the murders to "prevent Fred Alvarez from exposing illegal activities of John Philip Nichols, occurring at the Cabazon Indian Reservation."

The reservation is located near Indio, in a rural area of Riverside County about 130 miles southeast of Los Angeles. A message left at the tribal administration offices was not immediately returned.

The elder Nichols died in 2001 after pleading no contest to two counts of murder solicitation and serving 18 months in prison in another murder-for-hire plot. At the time, investigators said they couldn't tie him to the unsolved 1981 slayings.

The arrest warrant for Hughes was issued in August by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department after a joint investigation with the state attorney general's office, said Evan Westrup, a spokesman for the state attorney general. The state is taking the lead in prosecuting the case because Riverside

The bizarre killings were dubbed the "octopus murders" by detectives because of the complexity and mystery surrounding them.

County District Attorney Rod Pacheco is a distant cousin of Hughes.

Westrup declined to say what prompted authorities to issue the warrant 28 years after the crime.

State officials are seeking to have Hughes extradited to California by a special governor's warrant, a process that could take a month or more, Westrup said. Westrup said the investigation is ongoing and added that an affidavit in support of Hughes' arrest warrant was sealed by a judge in August.

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surrounding them.

For years, numerous local and state investigations turned up no suspects, despite rampant rumors, pressure from the victims' families, and the apparent suicide in 1991 of a freelance reporter who was probing the matter.

Alvarez was vice chairman of the Cabazon Tribal Council and security chief of the tribe's poker casino. Hughes was security director of the tribe's casino and bingo operations for four years, until 1984.

The elder Nichols was an outside financial guru hired by the 24-member tribe in 1978 and was considered a pioneer in Indian gaming.

In a 1985 article about the elder Nichols' arrest in the murder-for-hire plot, the Los Angeles Times reported that Alvarez told the Indio Daily News shortly before his murder that he feared for his life. The article also said Alvarez's sister said her brother believed the non-Indians running the casino were skimming gambling profits.

Alvarez's sister, Linda Alvarez, told the AP on Thursday that her brother was afraid for his life because his mail-

box had been shot out and his motorcycle had many unexplained breakdowns and missing parts.

"You wouldn't think he'd be afraid of anybody because he (was) a big guy, but he was concerned," she said.

In 1984, Hughes, then 27, told authorities he had been a payoff man in the Alvarez case.

He said in the summer of 1981, he had been instructed in the presence of the elder Nichols to take \$25,000 to the mountain community of Idyllwild and give it to a man as a partial payment for the Alvarez killings, according to the 1985 Times article.

Hughes left California after renewed investigations turned up nothing.

He resurfaced in 1995, when he founded the Jimmy Hughes Ministries, which provides services in Central America to battered women, drug addicts and others, according to its Web site.

Calls to listings for the younger Nichols in New York City and at an Indio golf course on Cabazon property rang unanswered.

Skokomish Lucky Dog Casino closing

SHELTON, Wash. (AP) — The general manager of the Skokomish Tribe's Lucky Dog Casino north of Shelton says it will close for the winter due to the recession.

Nick Phillips said Wednesday was the casino's last day. It planned to lay off 120 employees, including 80 full-time workers.

He says about 10 percent of the staff was American Indian; many workers commuted from cities such as Olympia and Belfair.

The Olympian reports the casino will honor its remaining financial obligations by redeeming valid slot tickets and outstanding gaming chips through Oct. 30.

Phillips says casino workers personally knew customers who have lost jobs as well as senior citizens who have become more careful with discretionary income.

He says no date has been set for the casino to reopen.

In 2006, the Lucky Dog underwent a \$4 million expansion.

3 new highway markers to commemorate Va. Indians

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — The Department of Historic Resources has approved three new highway markers commemorating the history of Virginia Indians.

One sign will be installed along the Chickahominy River between New Kent and Charles City counties. It recounts the destruction of Chickahominy Indian towns by English colonists in 1645.

Another marker to be installed in Williamsburg notes the imprisonment of about 40 Nazattico Indians in 1704.

The third marker will be installed in King and Queen County. It recalls the 1676 insurrection led by colonist Nathaniel Bacon, whose sympathizers drove Pamunkey Indians from their main town on the Pamunkey River.

Hopi, Navajo say environmentalists not welcome on their reservations

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The leader of the country's largest Indian reservation is throwing his support behind the neighboring Hopi Tribe, whose lawmakers declared environmental groups unwelcome on the reservation.

Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. and Hopi lawmakers say environmentalists'

efforts could hurt the tribes' struggling economies by slowing or stopping coal mining.

Shirley said Wednesday he will stand in solidarity with the Hopi Tribe.

He also joined Hopi lawmakers in encouraging other tribes to re-evaluate their relationships with environmentalists.

Andy Bessler of the Sierra Club says the group respects tribal sovereignty and understands the need for tribes to develop their economies. But unless tribes can prevent carbon dioxide or air pollution from leaving the reservation, he said environmental groups will continue to address the issues that extend beyond tribal boundaries.

Standing Rock Sioux to appeal grant denial

FORT YATES, N.D. (AP) — Officials of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe say they are appealing the denial of a \$1.5 million suicide prevention grant that would help keep five workers on the job in communities along the North Dakota-South Dakota border.

The grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration had been approved for the tribe for the past three years.

Standing Rock Chairman Ron His

Horse Is Thunder said the tribe's application this year was not ranked high enough to continue the money. He says he will challenge the decision.

His Horse Is Thunder said at least 20 clients have been served with the grant through transportation programs that get them to counseling or other medical help. The money also helps grieving families of suicide victims.

Officials of the grant program said they could not comment on specific requests.

Native corporations defend contracts

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Five Alaska Native corporations have launched a public relations campaign to fight congressional attacks on government contracting.

The Anchorage Daily News says the corporations organized after Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri raised concerns about possible waste, fraud and abuse in the Small Business Administration's program for minority-owned, socially disadvantaged companies.

Without competitive bidding, Native companies landed nearly \$24 billion in work over the past eight years. Contracts include catering services and security guards at military bases and database management for large federal agencies.

The Native corporations say their revenue growth is a sign that the program is working.

The PR campaign was started by Afognak Native Corp., Chenega Corp., Chugach Alaska Corp., Koniag Inc. and NANA Regional Corp. The coalition lists about 40 members, including many Native corporation or tribal-owned companies that specialize in government contracting.

The campaign is publishing

video clips on the Internet and sending Alaska Native executives to public events around the state.

The coalition contends success in contracting has allowed companies to boost their shareholder dividends, create new scholarships and provide jobs for thousands of Alaskans.

The contracting privileges were inserted by former Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens, and they are also available to qualified Lower 48 tribes and Native Hawaiian companies, but not any other minority groups.

Fifteen Native corporations employ 12,000 Alaskans and another 40,000 people worldwide, said Clyde Gooden, a former NANA subsidiary executive, who spoke at Monday's Anchorage Chamber of Commerce luncheon.

The coalition has hired MSI Communications, an Anchorage public relations firm, to run the "Native 8(a) Works" campaign.

McCaskill is still working on the Native contracting issue.

"Reform in this area is going to happen. It's not a matter of if, but a matter of when," press secretary Maria Speiser said.



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