

Fruitland boy was buried and moved, police chief indicates

Michael Vaughan, age 5, went missing from his front yard on July 27, 2021

BY MIA MALDONADO
The Idaho Statesman

FRUITLAND, Idaho — Three weeks after excavating property to search for human remains, Fruitland Police Chief JD Huff said Thursday, Dec. 1 that authorities believe Michael Vaughan, who disappeared at age 5 in July 2021, was once buried at the site but then his body was moved.

Huff released some new details related to the boy's case at a press conference, and said that anyone who was involved in Michael's abduction or hindered law enforcement's investigation "will be pursued."

Huff said police received a credible tip that the boy's remains could be found in the backyard of a residence on Redwing Street, not far from where he lived. Police later obtained a search warrant for the residence, serving it Nov. 11.

With the help of Idaho State Police, the Fruitland Fire Department and Mountain Search and Rescue, Fruitland police excavated the yard. After deploying ground-penetrating radar, and removing and sifting 250 yards of dirt, Huff said cadaver dogs at the scene alerted officials to human remains. However, none were found.

"Although the remains of Michael Vaughan were not recovered, we strongly believe based on evidence that Michael was abducted and is deceased, and that his remains were buried and later moved from the property," Huff said. "As of today, the whereabouts of his remains are unknown."

On Friday, Fruitland police plan to use radar in a search in a yard next to the Redwing residence, Huff said. He indicated that police did not obtain a search warrant because the



This backyard in Fruitland, pictured on Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022, was excavated to search for human remains related to the missing child case of Michael Vaughan.



A sign in Fruitland gives information on Michael Vaughan, who disappeared in July 2021.

residents there consented to the search.

Police made one arrest, are looking for 2 men

Fruitland police have made one arrest related to the investigation.

Sarah Wondra, 35, one of the known occupants of the Redwing Street residence — about a half-mile from where Michael lived — was arrested and charged with a felony, failure to report a death. She has since been declared mentally unfit to proceed in court.

Huff said he believes Wondra and her husband, Stacey Wondra, 30, have knowledge of what happened to Michael, and went as far as to say they "were involved in the abduction."

Neither has been charged.

Stacey Wondra is in custody at the Washington County Jail on unrelated charges, Huff said; online records do not indicate what the charges are.

Fruitland police also said Thursday that they are looking for two men who at one time lived with the Wondras, during Michael's disappearance. Police said they think one man is now in North Dakota and the other in Ohio.

They were not named specifically as suspects, but Huff said he thinks they have "first-hand knowledge of Michael's abduction."

Huff said he was urging the two men to reach out to Fruitland detectives "as the window of time for talking in coopera-

tion is coming to a close."

Police named the men and used their photos, but the Idaho Statesman is not naming them because they have not been specifically identified as suspects or charged with a crime.

As investigation continues, police ask public to come forward

Huff said the department has received almost 1,500 tips about Michael's disappearance, and he believes there are others with information who have yet to speak with detectives.

"When we finally reach the conclusion of this investigation, I can assure you, all of those who have knowledge of Michael's disappearance and have failed to report or hindered our investigation will be pursued," he said.

Michael Vaughan went missing from his front yard in Fruitland on July 27, 2021.

The blond-haired, blue-eyed boy weighed about 50 pounds and was 3 feet, 7 inches tall.

Anyone with information on Michael's disappearance is asked to contact Fruitland police at findmichael@fruitland.org or Crime Stoppers at 208-343-COPS (208-343-2677).



Darin Oswald/The Idaho Statesman

More than 150 alumni, staff and friends of the University of Idaho gathered at the U of I Boise Campus for a vigil Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2022, to honor the four students killed in November in Moscow.

Victims' families urge love and kindness as Idaho campus mourns

BY REBECCA BOONE

Associated Press

BOISE — As hundreds of students mourned together inside the University of Idaho's stadium Wednesday night, Nov. 30, family members of four slain classmates urged them to raise their eyes from grief and focus on love and the future.

"The only cure to pain is love — it's the only thing that's going to heal you; it's the only thing that's going to heal you," Steve Goncalves, the father of Kaylee Goncalves, told the crowd gathered at the vigil. "That will make a difference, and that's something they can see where they're at right now: That you changed your life a little bit, that you're a little bit nicer, a little bit kinder."

Some in the crowd held each other and wiped their eyes as they remembered Kaylee Goncalves, 21, of Rathdrum, Idaho; Madison Mogen, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Xana Kernodle, 20, of Post Falls, Idaho; and Kernodle's boyfriend, Ethan Chapin, 20, of Mount Vernon, Washington. The four were stabbed to death Nov. 13 at a rental home near campus in the quiet university town of Moscow, Idaho, and law enforcement has yet to name a person of interest in the case. Fears that the killer could strike again has prompted many students to finish the semester by taking online classes from their hometowns.

As a result, similar scenes played out across the state as simultaneous candlelight vigils were held in multiple cities. In downtown Boise, several hundred people cupped their hands around candle flames outside a University of Idaho's building. High schools in some cities lit up their athletic fields in a sign of solidarity. Homeowners were urged to leave their porch lights on as a gesture of support.

Ben Mogan, Madison's father, told the crowd in Moscow that she was his only child, so "everything she ever did was such a big deal." Talking about "Maddie," was his pride, Mogan said, and the two loved attending music concerts together.

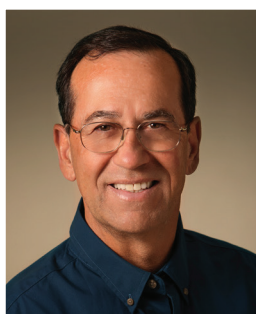
"When I would meet people ever since she was first born, and they would say, 'Tell me about yourself,' the first thing I would say is, 'I have this daughter — here's a picture of her, she's on the dean's list at college, she works hard, she has all these friends at her sorority,'" Mogan said.

Madison's best friend was Kaylee. The girls met as sixth graders, Kaylee's father Goncalves told the crowd, and were inseparable friends from that moment on.

"They went to high school together, then they started looking at colleges, they came here together. They eventually got into the same apartment together," Steve Goncalves said.

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