



Suspect arrested for murder, arson in 2018 deaths of couple in Grant County

Authorities say Connery committed double murder before igniting home

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Almost two years after a fire destroyed a home east of Mt. Vernon, a suspect has been arrested on two counts of first-degree murder and arson.

Isaac Connery, 23, was arrested in Bernalillo County, New Mexico, June 26, according to a July 8 press release from the Grant County sheriff and dis-

trict attorney.

Connery is accused of shooting Terry and Sharon Smith July 17, 2018, and setting fire to their home on Nans Rock Road in the Laycock Creek area between Mt. Vernon and John Day, according to the release.

"The Grant County Sheriff's Office has worked for the past two years in solving this crime where we have taken the lead in this case, and our due diligence and hard work never ceased," Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said in the release. "With what we have in a case like this, and as traumatic (as) it has been for the families of Terry and

Sharon Smith, hopefully this will be a step toward understanding what took place the night of July 17, 2018."

The fire totally destroyed the home, but Palmer later discovered partial human remains at the site, which were identified through DNA as belonging to Terry Smith, the release states.

Palmer also discovered other partial remains that could not be identified but have been accepted as belonging to Sharon Smith, according to the release.

Evidence was found, including witness testimony and suspect cellphone locations, that place Connery and his mother, Gabrielle Connery, 46, at the

Smith home at the time of the fire, the release states. The Connerys had been associated with the Smiths, both in Hawaii and Oregon, prior to the incident.

The Smiths' pickup was later discovered abandoned in the Boise, Idaho, area after the fire, and follow-up interviews with witnesses indicated that Isaac Connery took the pickup the night of the fire, the release states. He was indicted June 23 for unlawful use of a motor vehicle, and a nationwide warrant was issued for his arrest.

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Contributed photo
District Attorney Jim Carpenter said the 2018 homicides of Terry and Sharon Smith will be prosecuted as soon as social distancing restrictions are eased and a grand jury can be summoned.

COVID-19

Local physician says there's science to support mask use

Betza: 'Best evidence comes from the real world'

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

While wearing a mask has evolved from a question of personal protection into a politically divisive symbol, the consensus among the medical community is that the science behind wearing face coverings to prevent the spread of viral infection has long been settled.

In March, the Mayo Clinic reported that experts did not yet know the extent to which people with COVID-19 could spread the virus before symptoms appeared early in the pandemic. Additionally, experts did not know that someone who was seemingly asymptomatic could spread the virus.

The medical community has a better understanding of the virus six months into the pandemic than they did early on.

The growing consensus, said Dr. Raffaella Betza, chief of staff at Blue Mountain Hospital, is that COVID-19 is spread when people talk, cough, laugh, sneeze, sing and eject viral particles into the air.

Betza said the epidemiological evidence is "ample." Along with anecdotal data, she said, wearing a mask cuts the spread of COVID-19.

A study published in May in *BMJ Global Health* showed transmission was cut by roughly 80% in households where one person in a family was confirmed to have COVID-19, and the rest of the



Eagle file photo

Blue Mountain Hospital Chief of Medicine Dr. Raffaella Betza in the front lobby of the hospital in May. Betza said there is 'ample' epidemiological data pointing to the effectiveness of face coverings in slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

family wore masks indoors as a precaution.

Raina MacIntyre, a co-author of the study, said the study showed that wearing a mask protected the whole family.

Betza pointed to another instance in Missouri where two hairstylists who had tested positive with the virus came into contact with 140 of their clients, but because both of the stylists wore a mask, none of the clients tested positive.

Different types of masks offer

different levels of protection. Surgical-grade N95 respirators are the most effective in protecting against the coronavirus, Betza said.

She said it is important to remember that they need to be fitted to be maximally effective.

"The way we do this in the health care setting is that you actually put on an N95 and then a hood, and they spray a chemical under the hood that tastes bitter if it makes it past the mask," she said. "If you can taste bitter, then the mask is not fitted."

Conversely, she said, if one cannot taste the bitterness after a minute, then they are cleared to wear the mask when needed.

She said wearing an N95 mask that does not fit properly is no more effective than wearing the lesser protective cloth or surgical masks.

Betza said surgical masks offer more protection than cloth masks. However, she said an actual comparative number between the two is not known.

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Gov. Kate Brown

Face coverings to be required outdoors and indoor gatherings limited

By Gary A. Warner
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

Face masks must be worn outdoors when social distancing is not possible, and private gatherings must be limited to no more than 10 people, Gov. Kate Brown announced Monday.

The new rules to fight the COVID-19 pandemic go into effect July 15, expanding the directive last week that face masks be worn at indoor public places.

In keeping with her long-standing policy, Brown said she was relying on public cooperation rather than any enforcement of the additional rules.

"I am not going to set up the party police," Brown said.

State health officials have said the growth of virus cases in Oregon in recent weeks has been driven by clusters of social gatherings, often involving people who are under 40 years of age.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state's top epidemiologist, said at the same press briefing that the state was on pace to triple the number of new daily

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Clarifying contact tracing and quarantine

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Self-quarantine and contact tracing are two prominent phrases in the conversation about COVID-19 and two points clarified during last week's Grant County Court meeting.

Grant County Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay explained during the meeting on July 8 how contact tracing worked for somebody who tests positive for COVID-19 and who would need to quarantine.

Lindsay said if a person tests positive for COVID-19, the health department begins contact tracing.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Grant County Health Department Administrator Kimberly Lindsay addresses Grant County Court Wednesday.

"We are going to identify any close contacts with them," Lindsay said.

Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of a person who tested positive

for COVID-19 for 15 minutes within the first 48 hours of symptoms for the person who tested positive, Lindsay said.

"If that happens, that person is identified as a close contact, and they're told that they need to self-quarantine or self-isolate," Lindsay said. "If they want to get a test, they can... but they are told to self-quarantine, and if they don't, then there is the public health potential consequences."

Lindsay said, if someone was not identified as a close contact, then it is unlikely that person had a significant risk of exposure.

"If they weren't con-

tacted, they're theoretically, probably OK, but that doesn't mean that they might not want to go get tested," Lindsay said.

When the pandemic began, limited availability for testing meant there were fewer circumstances in which an individual could be tested for COVID-19, but with more tests circulating, individuals who weren't contacted but would like a test can now have that chance.

Lindsay said, when it comes to contact tracing, Grant County is in a good position, thanks to the work of a contact tracer in the

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