

Latah sheriff takes heat over suicide

Sister of deceased Pullman man says deputy's Facebook posts were harassment

Brandon Macz/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Andrew Cain's sister said she doesn't hold the Latah County Sheriff's Office responsible for her brother's suicide on Sunday.

Still, she wants an apology from a deputy she claims harassed the 19-year-old Pullman man across the state line using the department's Facebook page.

Cain had been wanted by the sheriff's office since a bench warrant was issued for his arrest when he didn't appear in court for a probation violation in April, said Latah County Prosecutor Bill Thompson.

He said Cain likely was facing some local jail time before being placed back on probation.

But the sheriff's Facebook page made a bigger deal out of Cain's eluding justice, said his sister, Alise Smith of Pullman.

"We have decided that Andrew Cain is no longer the Wanted Person of the Week," stated a Thursday comment to a Tuesday wanted post on the sheriff's page, "... he is the Wanted Person for the Month of June. Congratulations!"

"Saying, 'Congratulations,' is bad, yeah," Smith said. "But there are other ones. ... The same sheriff's (deputy) that posted that sent Andrew a Facebook message saying, 'If you turn yourself in, I'll give you a copy of the wanted poster.' ... That's what was upsetting was that they were privately messaging him and harassing him."

KREM in Spokane reported Smith said strangers began sending her brother online messages about the Facebook comment and said that Smith believes the messages became too much for Cain.

"It's like he couldn't escape it for five minutes 'cause everyone around him shared it and was bringing it up," KREM quoted Smith as saying.

Cain committed suicide by shooting himself Sunday evening at his Pullman home, said Whitman County Coroner Pete Martin.

Latah County Sheriff Wayne Rausch told the Daily News on Tuesday afternoon he would provide the paper with a copy of a written statement he'd prepared, but he did not send it before press time. He said he had trouble finding a staff member who could send it because his public information officer is on vacation. He declined to answer any further questions.

KREM reported Rausch stated he gave Cain's family his condolences.

"I want (the deputy) to apologize because he's the one who wrote it. No one should apologize for him. He should apologize for himself," Smith said, adding, "I never said this is why Andy killed himself."

Cain had been sentenced to two years in prison for unlawful entry and petit theft in 2012, but the sentence was suspended in lieu of probation, Thompson said. He added that Cain had served 60 days of a sentence for a previous violation.

"He still had the remainder of two years hanging over his head," Thompson said. "In reality, I don't know if I've ever heard of a judge imposing two years on a person facing a probation violation."

Martin said Cain suffered from depression and "a number of problems," but couldn't point to any one cause for the Pullman man's suicide.

"When somebody is depressed and they're given issues of warrants and Facebook posts as policy of the county, you have to assume that caused him some frustration," Martin said. "Generally, it is not one thing that causes a person to take their life, but I'm sure it was upsetting to him. It's reasonable to ask the questions."

He said he is still actively working with Cain's family and law enforcement and expects to make a formal news release by Friday.

"It's a tragedy," Martin said. "When you have a 19-year-old take their life for any reason, it's a tragedy."

An obituary for Andrew Cain appears on Page 4A of today's Daily News.

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