



Cromwell-Wright girls make it to State
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FOND DU LAC GRIEVES MOTHER, SON



More than 75 friends, family and fellow Fond du Lac band members gathered and marched Monday in memory of Jackie DeFoe and her son. The two were found dead in their home by police on Saturday. A suspect in the deaths, a man known to both victims, is in custody.
Photos by Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News

He helped a family; and likely himself

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It was Christmas Eve and traffic was expectedly heavy on the interstate just north of Minneapolis. David Rice was headed home to Cloquet from a temporary construction job. He wasn't exactly in the holiday spirit. He was going through a divorce and in limbo about his work.

The heaviness was there when a pickup suddenly passed him and then shot into his lane in front of him. The driver overcorrected and the truck left the road and did a barrel roll into the ditch off Interstate 494 in Plymouth.

"I've been in a rollover," Rice said. "I thought, that guy is messed up."

So Rice pulled over to see if there was anything he could do. The pickup was on its passenger side, so maybe the driver was accessible, Rice thought.

Then he heard the wailing of a child. He smelled gas. Instincts kicked in.

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Community tries to heal after deaths

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Two days after Jackie DeFoe and her 20-month-old child were found dead, a crowd of more than 75 friends, family and fellow Fond du Lac band members gathered and marched in her memory. Before starting the trek along Big Lake Road they made a giant circle, prayed, listened to drums and song, and smudged — wafting the smoke from a bowl of burning sage over their bodies to purify the body and soul, and cleanse any negative energy.

The walk started only a block or two away from the house where DeFoe, 27, and her son, Kevin, were discovered by police during a welfare check Saturday, March 7. An autopsy later revealed that DeFoe was 13 weeks pregnant. Her boyfriend, Sheldon James Thompson, 33, was arrested Sunday night following an intense and collaborative search by local law enforcement. He was charged with three counts of second-degree

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murder Tuesday.

News of DeFoe's death rocked the tribal community, many who knew her or Thompson or both.

Only a year older than Jackie, Larissa Bosto said she found out her cousin had been killed on Facebook.

"I couldn't believe it," Bosto said. "It's so hard to believe, especially when it's a family member."

The group walked the same route Jackie did each workday: From the Min-No-Aya Win clinic down a wide asphalt path to the Fond du Lac Tribal Center 1.4 miles away.

As she walked, somber and serious, Bosto held a placard with a photo of Jackie trimmed in red, the official color of the movement that strives to highlight missing



Larissa Bosto found out her cousin had been killed from a post on Facebook. "She had a really loud laugh, a contagious laugh," Bosto said. "I'm gonna miss her and her baby."

and murdered indigenous women.

She remembered her cousin as many things: a great mom, a hard worker, funny.

"She had a really loud laugh, a contagious laugh," Bosto said. "I'm gonna miss her and her baby."

Farther ahead, Erin and Alana Lemieux-DeFoe walked arm in arm, a bright red hand painted diagonally across both their mouths, a startling image that they say is meant to tell the world they can't be silenced about the violence

suffered by indigenous women.

Erin is also Jackie's cousin. Like Bosto, she remembers Jackie as being happy, funny, always laughing. A good mom.

When asked if they've had other family members who could be counted among the missing and murdered, Alana says it goes beyond bloodlines.

"Everyone in our community is basically family," she said.

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David Rice of Cloquet was recently honored for his role in saving a family of three after a pickup rolled into an interstate ditch last Christmas Eve.

Contributed photo



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Walk ...

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“So when any member of a Native American community is missing or hurt, we all hurt.”

John Diver helped organize Monday’s walk as part of the Ho-wah group.

“It gets them together,” he said with eagle feathers in his hand. “Then it’s easy for everyone to grieve, and there’s more community support. It’s sad that something tragic like this has to happen for the community to get together.”

Diver said he also hoped the walk would create awareness of domestic violence and drug use.

“Most of the time, they’re linked,” he said.

When the walkers reached the tribal center, they gathered in a small dining room, again making a circle around the perimeter of the room.

Ashley Diver addressed the crowd. “Thank you all for coming out for Jackie and the babies,” she said. “I know this hit the community pretty hard, but I want everybody to keep both sides of the family in their prayers.”

Taysha Martineau said the Gitchigumi Scouts had been working with Jackie DeFoe.

“We’re not social workers or law enforcement, but we’re here for you as a resource,” she said, adding that the group is buying 30 pepper spray devices they can give to women who want it in honor of Jackie. “It’s all about female empowerment. If you don’t feel safe, please reach out to us.”

Lyz Jaakola was blunt, but encouraging, admitting that she was scolding “like an Auntie.”

“It has to stop and it begins with how we treat each other, how we talk to each other,” she said. “The violence and negativity has to stop.”

She urged people to think how precious life is every day, their own and the lives of those they love.

“Knock it off. We don’t need to bury our young people, our children. ... Make a commitment. It stops today.”

Tribal chairman Kevin DuPuis talked about when his sister was killed violently and he had to identify her body. But he contrasted that with softball games in Sawyer as a kid that drew all kinds of kids and adults having a good time together.

“I had to ID my sister. I took that burden,” he said. “Nobody else needs to take that burden. Respect one another, talk.”

After a half hour or so inside, the group headed back to the clinic and their lives.

“I’m glad the community came together,” Bosto said. “It helps.”



Police found Jackie DeFoe and her son Saturday afternoon after a welfare check was requested. *Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

An alarming assault history

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When she was killed, Jackie DeFoe joined a long list of Native American women who have been victims of violence. A 2016 National Institute of Justice report revealed that four in five American Indian (and Alaskan Native) women have experienced violence in their lifetime, and more than half have experienced physical violence by intimate partners.

It’s an issue that touches everyone, said Cloquet’s Sheila Lamb, who sits on the statewide Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women task force and works with trafficked and at-risk youth at Life House in Duluth.

“This (domestic violence) is not just a Native issue,” Lamb said. “I have seen women of every race going through this.”

A look at Sheldon Thompson’s criminal history reveals a half dozen incidents that included assault and domestic assault charges over the past 14 years.

- In December 2006, at the age of 19, Thompson was charged with attempted second-degree murder and second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon, plus fourth-degree damage to property. In a plea bargain, he pleaded guilty to the second-degree charges and the other charges were dismissed. A five-year prison sentence was stayed and Thompson served a year at the Northeast Regional Corrections Center before being released with five years of probation.

- In February of 2009, Thompson was again charged with second-degree assault, felony domestic assault by strangulation, terroristic threats, misdemeanor domestic assault, obstructing the legal process and fleeing a police officer. He pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor domestic assault and the other charges were dismissed.

- In December of 2013, Thompson was again charged with felony domestic assault by strangulation, interference with an emergency call as well as gross misdemeanor domestic assault. He pleaded guilty to the gross misdemeanor.

- In November of 2015, Thompson was charged with fifth-degree gross misdemeanor assault and criminal damage to property in the third degree. He pleaded guilty to the assault and the other charge was dismissed.

- In Wisconsin in May of 2016 Thompson was charged with second-degree recklessly endangering safety along with battery/domestic abuse and disorderly conduct/domestic abuse. He pleaded guilty to the first charge, and the other

charges were dismissed.

- Back in Carlton County, Thompson faced new charges of third-degree assault and felony domestic assault filed in December 2016. He pleaded guilty to the third-degree charge, and the other charge was dismissed.

- In January of 2017, Thompson was charged with violating a domestic abuse no contact order in Carlton County Court, a felony. He was sentenced to two years in prison, but the sentence was stayed and he served 12 months in the Carlton County jail, then was placed on unsupervised probation for three years.

Lamb said Thompson’s criminal history should have raised red flags.

“There’s a pattern of behavior on both his side and the judicial side that I find alarming,” she said. “There are too many slaps on the wrists, too many paltry charges and plea deals.”

She worries that the judicial system doesn’t take domestic violence seriously enough, and lacks resources to respond.

Jackie DeFoe was also facing charges of domestic violence. On Jan. 22, she was charged with felony domestic assault by strangulation and misdemeanor domestic assault.

According to the criminal complaint in that case, Sheldon Thompson told Fond du Lac police officers that they were arguing when DeFoe grabbed the can of soda he was holding and threw it at him, striking his legs and causing it to spill on him. He also said she grabbed his throat with both hands and made it impossible for him to breathe.

According to the criminal complaint, DeFoe admitted to throwing the pop can and pushing Thompson. DeFoe was arrested and a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order was issued the same day, preventing her from contacting or being near Thompson.

“A lot of chronic abusers have learned how to manipulate the system,” Lamb said. “There are times when our women are charged when in fact they were protecting themselves. This is a classic example of that.”

On Feb. 10, Thompson penned a letter to Judge Robert Macaulay asking that the judge lift the protection order, stating that DeFoe did not choke him and adding that he would testify in court to that effect.

“We are having a child together and I am trying to build a family together,” he wrote to the judge.

On Monday, March 2, Judge Macaulay canceled the order against DeFoe. By that weekend, she was dead.

33-year-old man charged in deaths

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A Cloquet man was charged with killing his girlfriend, Jackie DeFoe, her 20-month-old son, Kevin, and her unborn child in Sixth District Carlton County Court on Tuesday, March 10.

Sheldon James Thompson, 33, faces two charges of second-degree murder and a third count of second-degree murder of an unborn child.

The killings, disclosed Sunday morning by the Cloquet Police Department, rocked the communities of the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation and Cloquet, where the victims and the suspect lived.

Details of the autopsy report released Tuesday indicate that DeFoe was stabbed multiple times and her young son died from blunt force trauma. DeFoe was 13 weeks pregnant.

Sixth District Judge Rebekka Stumme set bail for Thompson at \$1 million Tuesday, with no 10-percent cash option, citing the seriousness of the charges and lengthy prison sentence if he is found guilty. She also pointed to a pre-trial release evaluation that shows he is a flight risk and has a lengthy record of past criminal convictions. Thompson’s criminal record in Minnesota includes convictions for second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon along with third-degree and fifth-degree assaults as well as domestic assault charges.

According to the complaint and prior police press releases:

Fond du Lac police officers responded to a call for service Saturday, March 7, around 1 p.m. from a reporting party who said they had spoken with Thompson the previous day, and that he was acting unusual. When asked what was the matter, Thompson allegedly told the caller that he had killed DeFoe, making a gesture that indicated strangulation. He also allegedly told the caller he had killed her son.

When Fond du Lac officers went to DeFoe’s residence on Locke Lane and knocked on the door, they did not get a response. They couldn’t see inside, but observed damage to the door. A FDL housing worker told them he had performed work at the residence on Friday, March 6, and the house was in disarray, which he stated was unusual. He had not gone into the bedrooms, he told them, because the doors were shut.

After police received a search warrant to enter the home later Saturday, they found DeFoe in a closet with stab wounds to her body and one across the front of her neck. They found her son’s body in another bedroom, with observable bruising around the head. According to the criminal complaint, Thompson allegedly told numerous people that he had killed DeFoe and her child. Attempts to locate Thompson, who had lived there intermittently, were initially unsuccessful. Police got a tip that he was in a vehicle with someone, but when they contacted the person, she said she had picked him up at a home in Cloquet and they’d driven around for a period of time before she dropped him off on the side of the road.

Thompson called 911 and indicated that he wanted to turn himself in, giving them an address. When police arrived, he wasn’t there.

With the assistance of a Minnesota State Patrol helicopter and a K-9 from the Carlton County Sheriff’s Office, he was located in a wooded area off Mission Road in Perch Lake Township and taken into custody Sunday evening.

He was booked into the Carlton County jail at 8:43 p.m. Sunday after being treated at Cloquet Memorial Hospital for temperature-related issues.



Thompson

Help is available

The Fond du Lac Human Services Division is providing supportive services at the Brookston, Cloquet, and Sawyer Community Centers. Behavioral Health, Social Services, and Substance Use Disorder staff will be available to provide support to the community. The Behavioral Health Department is open and taking referrals, call 218-879-1227.

Fond du Lac Social Services Advocacy Program offers caring, culturally-sensitive advocacy for community members in times of crisis. Advocates assist with support, education, networking, court advocacy, self-help groups, and referrals to victims facing domestic abuse, sexual assault, and general crime. The crisis line 218-348-1817 is answered 24 hours a day and staff can assist with reporting a crime to law enforcement, providing orders for protection and harassment orders, obtaining available community resources, and providing support.

Other resources for people affected by domestic violence include

following:

- The American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) Dabino’igan Emergency Domestic Violence Shelter at 218-722-2247.
- The Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse (CASDA) in Superior at 715-392-3136.
- Safe Haven Shelter & Resource Center in Duluth at 218-728-6481.
- Family Pathways, otherwise known as Refuge Network, at crisis line 800-338-7233.
- Cloquet Safe Exchange and Carlton Youth Shelter for young adults who need a safe place to stay. Call 218-879-1527
- Gitchigumi Scouts Facebook page for personal help.
- There will be a smudging walk from the Fond du Lac Gas and Grocery to the Tribal Center on Big Lake Road at 1 p.m. Sunday, March 15, followed by a brunch and talking circle to help Native American people struggling with addiction or other issues.