

Too close to home: Fruitland area girl abducted, murdered near Shiprock monument

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 06 May 2016 03:52



Gallup holds vigil in Ashlynnne Mike's memory

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A Waterflow, N.M., man was arrested May 3 in connection with the abduction and death of 11-year-old Ashlynne Mike.

Tom Begaye, 27, appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge B. Paul Briones in Farmington on Wednesday. According to the U.S. District Court criminal complaint, Begaye faces the following charges: crime on an Indian reservation, murder, and kidnapping charges.

Ashlynne's body was found the morning of May 3, approximately 6 miles south of the Shiprock monument. She had been abducted in the Fruitland area Monday afternoon.

The FBI is investigating this case with the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, New Mexico State Police, San Juan County Sheriff's Office, Farmington Police Department and the U.S. Marshals Service.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye issued a statement Tuesday evening following the arrest of Tom Begaye.

"Our Nation has just gone through a tragic event," he said. "I am pleased to know that both Navajo and outside law enforcement were able to work together and share information. This led to the arrest of an individual who is believed to have caused a horrendous crime on one of our Navajo children."

Begaye said the Navajo Nation does have an Amber Alert system in place that works in conjunction with area law enforcement.

"I'd like to praise all our law enforcement officers from the county, state, federal and Navajo Nation for doing a great job," he said. "We appreciate their effort and the long hours they commit to putting their lives on the line. We thank them for protecting us."

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“I express my deepest appreciation to law enforcement officials, and I would also like to again extend my condolences to the family of Ashlynne Mike,” Begaye added.

But according to media reports, the reservation has no official Amber Alert system in place. This was penned in a press release by Shiprock Police District Capt. Ivan G. Tsosie. He said the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety received funding from the Federal Government under the Adam Walsh Act as well as from the Sexual Offenders Registration and Notification Act in the early 2000s, but the project fell flat.

President Begaye hasn't responded to this statement as of press time.

TIMELINE

It was reported on May 2 that Ashlynne and her younger brother Ian, age 9, were lured into Begaye's maroon van just north of Mile Marker 13 on Navajo Route 36 near the community of San Juan sometime after they were dropped off at their bus stop at 2:30 pm.

They were playing at the bus stop and Ashlynne reportedly had hurt her ankle. Begaye asked her if she wanted to go see a movie, and she said yes then hopped in the van. Ian reluctantly joined his sister.

Ashlynne's family filed a missing person report with the Shiprock Police Department at approximately 6:53 pm.

At 7:15 pm, it was reported that a motorist heading eastbound on Navajo Route 13, near the Shiprock pinnacle, picked up Ian Mike as he was walking along the highway. The motorist took the boy to the Shiprock Police Department.

At about 2:30 am May 3 an Amber Alert was issued, more than seven hours after Ashlynne's reported disappearance.

THE STORY

Ian Mike told investigators that the driver took them near the Shiprock pinnacle where he came upon a dead end road. It was the last time he would see his sister alive. Begaye took his sister to a location out of Ian's sight.

The abductor returned to the vehicle without Ashlynnne, and after reportedly driving a short distance, Begaye told the young boy to exit the vehicle and go home.

According to the Shiprock Police Department, Ashlynnne Mike was found deceased at 11:30 am May 3 near the Shiprock pinnacle.

In the criminal complaint, Begaye admitted to striking Ashlynnne in the head twice with a tire iron after sexually assaulting her. He claims that she was moving when he left her alone, and for dead. He also said that he picked her up exclusively to have intercourse with her, but denied to investigators that occurred.

A description of Begaye and the maroon van was sent out May 3, and he was nabbed by law enforcement that evening at a gas station in Farmington.

THE AFTERMATH

As the shockwave of grief and disbelief reverberate across the Navajo Nation and Four Corners region, communities are coming together to hold candlelight vigils. Gallup held a vigil May 4 at the Courthouse Square, led by Mayor Jackie McKinney.

Gary Mike, Ashlynnne's grief-stricken father, had some touching words to say to parents in a video that has now gone viral on social media: "...What I want to say to you out there ... is to

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take care of your children. Watch them. Love them. And above all hug them every day of (sic) life. They're precious."