Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Anonymous tip leads officers

McKinley County Sheriff James Maiorano III and two Navajo Nation deputies from the Window Rock division recently acted on a bench warrant and were able to arrest Duane Yazzie after he failed to comply with his conditions of release. Yazzie, 45, was originally arrested after he crashed into a motorcycle with his car on Sept. 19, 2020, killing one person and injuring another.

On that day, McKinley County Sheriff's deputies were dispatched to Sagebrush Liquor, 452 State Hwy. 264A in Yahtahey, around 6 pm after a car crash was reported.

When Deputy Dwayne Holder arrived at the scene, he reportedly found Yazzie lying on the median in the center of the road as he talked to other officers.

Yazzie's blue 2009 Hyundai Sonata was facing north across the median. According to Holder's report, there was "heavy front end damage to the vehicle and the airbags had deployed."

The other vehicle involved in the crash was a black 2020 Harley Davidson motorcycle, which had been traveling westbound on State Highway 264A. The motorcycle riders were identified as Samson and Janella Bryant.

Janella was declared deceased at the scene. Samson reportedly had very serious injuries from

the crash. He was airlifted from the scene and transported to a local hospital.

When Holder spoke to Yazzie, Yazzie said his back hurt. He confirmed that he had been the one driving. In his report, Holder noted that Yazzie spoke in a low, soft voice and that he was slurring his words.

While McKinley County Fire personnel were checking on Yazzie, Holder did a pat search on him to check for weapons. He reportedly felt a large bulge on Yazzie's right leg near his ankle, and when he lifted Yazzie's pant leg, he found a bottle of Vitali vodka stuffed in his sock.

He also discovered a bottle of Dark Eyes vodka stuffed in the sock on his left leg.

Both bottles had been opened, and the Dark Eyes vodka was almost empty while the Vitali bottle was only partly empty.

Yazzie was put on a gurney and transported to a local hospital.

Holder met with Yazzie inside the hospital, and that's when Yazzie agreed to a blood draw so that Holder could see if he had been driving while intoxicated.

Holder drove Yazzie to the McKinley County Adult Detention Center around 1 am.

Now, Yazzie is facing more legal trouble after he failed to comply with the conditions of his release.

"Back in March 2022 the judge out of district court issued a bench warrant for his arrest for violating or failure to comply with his conditions of release. Part of his conditions of his release was he was supposed to have attended a competency evaluation," Maiorano explained.

After the bench warrant was filed, MCSO posted about Yazzie on their Facebook page. Maiorano said they did get some calls from the post, but they didn't lead to anything.

On Jan. 22, the motorcycle group Endless Riders, a group that Janella was a part of, posted a $1,000 reward on their Facebook page for anybody who had information leading to Yazzie's arrest.

Endless Riders Club President Troy "Hammer" Essary spoke warmly of Janelle, calling her a "great person" that will be missed. Endless Riders is based out of Gallup.

Meanwhile, the anonymous tip led MCSO to believe that Yazzie was living on the Navajo Nation, so Maiorano wrote a letter to Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren asking him if MCSO could get help from the Navajo Nation Police.

The warrant was signed on Feb. 15, and two days later Maiorano and two Navajo Nation deputies from the Window Rock division showed up at Yazzie's door. He was taken into custody without incident.

After an extradition hearing in Navajo court, Yazzie was taken back to state land and booked into the McKinley County Adult Detention Center.

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