

Area News

# New Suspect in Rape Is Charged

## After 32 Years and a Wrongful Conviction

By **SHAUN HITTLE**  
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 AND **CLIFTON ADCOCK**

Update, July 16: Gilbert Duane Harris has been arrested and is being held in the Harrison County Jail in Gulfport, Miss. The Harrison County Sheriff's Office describes Harris' jailing as, "Hold for Oklahoma. Refused to waive extradition," meaning he has refused to sign a waiver of extradition; the signed waiver would result in his being returned immediately to Oklahoma on charges of rape and forcible sodomy.

The Cleveland County District Attorney's Office has charged a suspect in a 32-year-old case of rape for which another man was wrongfully convicted and spent more than 13 years in prison.

The suspect, Gilbert Duane Harris, 58, of Biloxi, Miss., was identified after an Oklahoma Watch inquiry last year caused the Norman Police Department to request a national DNA database check related to the 1982 rape of a University of Oklahoma student. That check, sought by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, matched Harris' DNA

with DNA evidence from the rape, but authorities say it took months to verify and follow up.

\$64,000 question." Cleveland County First Assistant District Attorney Susan Cas-

pursue charges in a rape case that occurred 32 years ago. The statute of limitations for rape is 12 years, but various factors, such as the involvement of DNA, whether a suspect left the state and which year's version of the statute of limitations should be used, can come into play.

Caswell said her office was convinced it could prosecute the case despite the passage of time. "We feel confident we can proceed with the case with the statutes of limitations as we're aware of them," she said.

The case points to a national issue regarding what happens after people who are wrongfully convicted are later exonerated, often because of DNA testing. In more than half the 316 DNA exoneration cases nationwide over the past two decades, the real perpetrator has not been convicted or identified. In some cases, authorities neglected to follow up; in others they chose not to pursue the case for legal reasons or because they still felt the exonerated person was guilty, legal experts say.



### Wrongful Conviction Cases Remain Unsolved

Norman police told Oklahoma Watch that DNA evidence from the rape had also been linked to Harris' DNA in 2006 after Louisiana authorities encountered Harris and entered his DNA in the national database. The match was reported to Oklahoma authorities but for some reason the Cleveland County District Attorney's Office did not take further steps to pursue charges.

"That information was reported by the state of Louisiana to OSBI, which in turn reported it not to the Norman Police Department as best as we can tell, but to the District Attorney's Office. It's at that point in 2006 that the case appears to end," said Norman Police Capt. Tom Easley. Asked whether he knew what happened, Easley said, "Don't know, can't explain it ... That is the

well said her staff began pursuing the case actively after being notified sometime last year about a new DNA match linking Harris to the 1982 crime.

She said she could not comment on what happened after the initial match in 2006 because neither she nor District Attorney Greg Mashburn was working in the Cleveland County office at the time.

"Once we got information and the [Norman] Police Department got information, they began their investigation," Caswell said. "We ultimately determined that we had sufficient information to file charges."

Harris, 58, is charged with first-degree rape and forcible sodomy. He has not yet been arrested in Mississippi. He denied involvement in the rape to a Norman detective.

It's unclear why authorities believe they can

# State Teacher Of The Year Finalists Named

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet Barresi has revealed the 12 finalists for the title of 2015 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year, which includes both a teacher from Sallisaw and Tahlequah. She made the announcement at the Vision 2020 education conference being held in downtown Oklahoma City.

"Announcing the finalist in the Oklaho-

ma Teacher of the Year competition is one of my favorite things to do," Superintendent Barresi said. "These teachers bring creativity, skill and passion into their classrooms every day, and their students and colleagues take note. It is uplifting to be able to tell the state about these exceptional educators. I congratulate them, and I'm looking forward to learning more

about them in the coming months."

A panel of Oklahoma educators selected two finalists from each of six regions of the state. Each finalist is a current teacher of the year in his or her school district.

Local finalists are: Jennifer Luttmr, who teaches second grade at Liberty Elementary School in Sallisaw Public Schools and Jason Scott Proctor, who teaches Ge-

ometry, Algebra II, Pre-Calculus and AP Calculus at Tahlequah High School.

An independent panel of fellow educators and civic leaders will select the 2015 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year from these 12 finalists. The ceremony will be held in the fall. For more information about each finalist, visit: <http://www.ok.gov/sde/oklahoma-teacher-year>.

# Community Calender

### Tenkiller Boat Poker Run

Beta Sigma Phi Mu Omega announces the Tenkiller Boat Poker Run that will begin and end at Cookson Marina on Lake Tenkiller. First poker hand will be sold at noon and the last at 4 p.m. Card stations will be open until 5 p.m.; winners and door prizes will be announced at 6 p.m. on the Cookson Marina dock. Each poker hand is \$10 and players are welcome to play multiples. For more info, contact the service group at [muomegatahlehquah@gmail.com](mailto:muomegatahlehquah@gmail.com).

### Dutch Oven Workshop at Tenkiller

The Dutch Oven Workshop at Tenkiller State Park is a hands-on event where the participants will be doing the cooking for themselves and fellow workshop participants. For more info, call the Park at 918-489-5641 or 918-489-5643.

### VHS Class of 89 Reunion

The Vian High School class of 1989 will be holding their 25-year class reunion September 19 and 20. Questions or comments: Amie (Cato) Remer, 918-773-8000 or by email at [amieinok@yahoo.com](mailto:amieinok@yahoo.com), or Brandon Hamilton, 918-207-6714. To keep up with updates, join the VHS Class of 89 Facebook page.

### Spraying for Mosquitoes

The Town of Vian will be spraying for mosquitoes on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 6:00 and 8:00.

### Vian Peace Center

The Vian Peace Center is open the second and fourth Tuesday and Thursday of every month, from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, and from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday. The Center is located at 408 Schley St. in Vian.

### CGE Music Barn

The CGE Music Barn/Family Center, located at 2701 West Cherokee, Hwy 64, Sallisaw will be having a gospel singing every first and third Saturday starting at 7 pm. There will be no charge. For more info. call Sissy at (918) 775-8714.

### Timekiller Band

The Showtime Event Center, located at 303 Com. St. in Webbers Falls will be hosting The Timekiller Band on the first and third Saturday night of every month. Come out and enjoy homemade pecan pies, soft drinks, friends and country music.

### Movie Night at VBC

Vian Baptist Church is hosting 'Movie Night' every second Saturday of the month. The church is located on the corner of Hwys. 64 West and Old 82. For more info. call 918-773-5226.

### Bizzy Beez Volunteers

Peters Agency Bizzy Beez volunteers meet at Peters Agency Care Management in Sallisaw, located at 926 E. Cherokee Ave. each Thursday from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. For more info, contact Belinda Scoggins-Kokendoffer, volunteer coordinator, at (888) 516-6555 or (918) 208-3004.

### Blackgum Community Center

The Blackgum Community Center, which is also used for training for the Volunteer Fire Department, is available for rent. It will seat up to 250. Domestic daily rent is \$150 plus \$150 cleaning deposit. Call (918) 489-5367 for more info.

# Respite Vouchers Available For Caregivers

Are you caring for someone 60 years or older that needs assistance with bathing, dressing, eating, transferring, or toileting? Do you assist someone with Alzheimer's or Dementia? Do you need a break? Eastern Oklahoma Development District (EODD) Area Agency on Aging serves Adair, Cherokee, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okmulgee, Sequoyah and Wagoner counties.

The respite vouchers are in the amount of \$300 every three months for the caregiver to hire someone of their choosing to give them a much needed break. There are no income guidelines for this program.

For more info contact Stacy Williamson, Caregiver Director or Kimberly McCollough, Caregiver Coordinator at 918-682-7891.

# Emerson ODOT's Division One Employee of the Quarter

Johnny Emerson was recently named Employee of the Quarter for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Division One, which is headquartered in Muskogee. Emerson has been with the agency for more than a year and is a Fleet Specialist III at Sallisaw Interstate Maintenance. He



Johnny Emerson (submitted photo)

worker.

"His good nature, patience and positive outlook are contagious," the anonymous coworker who nominated Emerson said.

Being somewhat restricted in resources, Emerson generally works on older field equipment that is well past its prime, but you do not hear complaints from him.

"He is ODOT's modern day MacGyver," the coworker said. "His name could not be more appropriate because he is 'Johnny on the Spot.'"

Emerson lives in Sallisaw with his wife, Candace, and their son, Jace. He is a member of the First Baptist Church in Sallisaw and enjoys woodworking, hunting

and fishing.

The "Employee of the Quarter" is an internal award recognizing dedication and hard work and is given to exceptional employees who consistently exhibit the highest standards in job performance.

Division One includes all of Adair, Cherokee, Haskell, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okmulgee, Sequoyah and Wagoner counties.

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# Rainbow Fleet Introduces Statewide Child Care Line

Oklahoma parents can now access a statewide program designed to provide resources and referrals for services across Oklahoma.

Rainbow Fleet, a non-profit child care resource and referral agency, recently established a statewide resource and referral service designed to help parents locate quality child care options and resources in their area. The service is offered at no cost to callers.

The statewide, toll-free resource and referral telephone number is 800-438-0008. The re-

source and referral line is staffed by experienced, knowledgeable specialists with access to a variety of programs, care centers and resources all across Oklahoma.

"The agency previously provided this service in Oklahoma and Cleveland Counties," said Carrie Bullard, Rainbow Fleet's executive director, "but a new grant from the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association lets us offer this resource to parents in all 77 counties. This will allow us to help parents all across our state

identify quality child care options in there area as well as resources like educational activities for their children."

For more than 40 years, Rainbow Fleet has provided innovative child development programs to families and child care service providers. Rainbow Fleet helps families locate quality child care options and assists child care providers with a multitude of services including licensing and financial assistance as well as age-appropriate activities and curriculum.