

Hate crime trial begins today in '07 attack at El Dorado Beach

By Kathryn Reed

The trial for a former South Lake Tahoe couple charged with a federal hate crime starts today in Sacramento.

Joseph, 56, and Georgia, 52, Silva were residents of the South Shore when they were arrested in July 2007 on charges of physically assaulting and yelling racial slurs at Vishal Wadhwa and his wife, Ayesha Wadhwa.

The Bay Area victims are Indian American. The suspects are Caucasian.



El Dorado Beach in South Lake Tahoe became a crime scene in summer 2007.

The victims were in Tahoe visiting, enjoying popular El Dorado Beach when the attack occurred. All of their wounds are not completely healed, sources told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The U.S. Department of Justice in March 2009 issued a press release after the suspects were indicted. It says, "The two-

count indictment alleges that on the evening of July 14, 2007, Joseph and Georgia Silva committed a bias-motivated assault on another couple at a public beach in South Lake Tahoe, Calif. The Silvas allegedly first verbally confronted the Indian-American couple using derogatory racial and ethnic slurs. The Silvas then allegedly assaulted the couple, including striking one of the victims with a shoe and tackling and striking the other repeatedly on the head. One victim suffered significant facial injuries including fractured facial bones.”

The incident occurred at El Dorado Beach. At the time, the Silvas had houses in South Lake and Fairfield. They now call Fairfield home. Georgia Silva worked for Barton Memorial Hospital at the time, while her husband wasn't employed.

Charges related to their finances might be filed in the future, according to sources close to the case.

If convicted of both federal counts, the Silvas could each spend the next 20 years in prison and be fined up to a half million dollars each.

Both have already spent some time behind bars related to this case. In September 2008, Georgia Silva was sentenced to one year in El Dorado County Jail and Joseph Silva six months. They had pleaded no contest to misdemeanor assault charges.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury dropped the hate crime enhancement at the state level. The FBI and then Justice Department disagreed with that decision and subsequently leveled the federal charges against the Silvas.

Jury selection begins today, with testimony expected as well. It's possible all the witnesses could be called before the end of the week.

The prosecution has 20 witnesses – including the people who broke up the fight, witnesses to the fight, South Lake Tahoe police officers, a doctor and others.