

Murder trial involving N. Tahoe man to begin

By Charlie Brennan, BoulderCamera

On the last full day of his life, Todd Klarkowski stood in his house on Gilbert Street in Boulder and asked his common-law wife whether he should wear his prized and well-worn boots or his sneakers for an overnight business trip to California.

“He was set in his ways. He’d ask what I thought about something, 10 times, but still end up doing whatever it was he originally thought,” MacKensey Klarkowski said.

The two went back and forth, until she thought it had been hashed over enough.

“I finally said, ‘You better just wear those tennis shoes, because you’re going to have to run to catch that plane; you’re going to be late,’” she said.

And so the morning of Feb. 4, Klarkowski laced on his athletic shoes. He took his son to school, and headed for Denver International Airport to board a flight to San Francisco. MacKensey Klarkowski claimed she rarely talked to him about his business affairs, and knew only that he planned to be back the next evening.

Klarkowski, 43, would be dead little more than 24 hours later.

On Feb. 5, three men – including one from Boulder – were killed in Sonoma County in what investigators have alleged was a botched marijuana deal. Three other men are facing murder charges in connection with the killings.

The victims:

Todd Klarkowski, 43, of Boulder, allegedly plotted with two

others the purchase and transfer of 70 to 80 pounds marijuana from Sonoma County to Colorado.

Richard Lewin, 46, of Huntington, N.Y., is alleged to have introduced Klarkowski to the alleged California pot seller, Raleigh Butler.

Raleigh Butler, 24, of North Lake Tahoe was shot and killed along with Klarkowski and Lewin in his mother's rented home in Forestville.

The same day that Klarkowski flew west, Butler, 24, a passionate snowboarder and heavy metal devotee from Sebastopol – who of late had been living in North Lake Tahoe – called his grandmother to wish her happy birthday, just as his mother, Leslie King, had reminded him to do.

“And he did leave a really nice, cheerful loving message for her,” King said. She described the younger of her two sons as “charismatic, magnanimous, kind and generous with everything he did and felt. A real leader in the way of the heart.”

The day after calling his grandmother, Butler would die alongside Klarkowski and another man, 46-year-old Lewin, of Huntington, N.Y. All were shot in the head at close range in a bedroom at the home of Butler's mother – she was away at the time – in Forestville, a small community in Sonoma County.

The three men were killed execution-style in what investigators believe was an alleged plot to move 70 to 80 pounds of pot from California to Colorado.

The crime shocked those who know both the victims and the suspected triggerman, and served as a reminder that even as states such as Colorado and California take steps to legalize marijuana, the illegal drug trade remains robust – and deadly.

Read the whole story