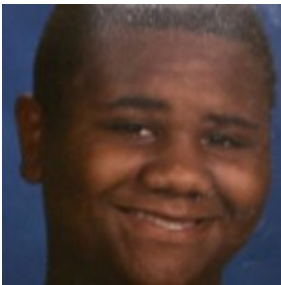


STHS student died from blunt force trauma

By Kathryn Reed

An autopsy of 14-year-old Dejon Smith ruled the cause of death blunt force trauma.

The South Tahoe High School freshman died immediately, according to the Dec. 18 forensic autopsy conducted in Sacramento.



Dejon Smith

The results came hours before family and friends gathered Thursday night near the site where he died. A tree struck Smith during last week's powerful windstorm.

While there is no question about how Smith died, there are plenty of unknowns about what led up to the tragedy and who might have more information.

"As in any kind of death investigation, we want to piece together the last hours of what happened," Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Even if someone had seen the tree fall on Smith, no crime would have been committed by not reporting what happened. Civil charges could be a different situation.

Police said in the last week a friend of Smith's admitted the

two were "checking out houses" prior to the tragedy. No burglaries were reported.

"We are not sure what exactly was about to happen. There is no indication of other crimes in the area," Uhler said.

Smith went out Dec. 11, knowing the next day had been deemed a snow day so there would be no school. But he didn't come back and his parents reported him missing.

As is protocol, his information was entered into the Missing Unidentified Persons System because nearly one-quarter of the juveniles who run away from South Lake Tahoe are located in other jurisdictions. Police searched his neighborhood to no avail.

On Dec. 12 the boy's parents received a call telling them about someone who may have information. Police say this is the youth who was with Smith looking at the houses for what are still unknown reasons.

"The juvenile described hearing a very loud crash, but denied seeing a tree fall. He was frightened and ran away. He believed Dejon likely did the same, but he had not seen him since," a police press release states.

Searchers eventually found the body Dec. 13 under a large pine tree, almost completely concealed by branches. The pine tree was approximately 4 feet in diameter at its base. Firefighters had to use chain saws to section the tree into pieces to remove the body.

The investigation is not over. Officers have a list of people they intend to question. Tips may be called into the SLTPD at 530.542.6100 or to Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.