

For Immediate Release
January 4, 2012

**JEMEZ PUEBLO MAN ARRESTED ON FEDERAL SEXUAL
ASSAULT RESULTING IN DEATH CHARGE**

ALBUQUERQUE -- Yesterday afternoon, FBI special agents arrested **Gavin Yepa**, 26, a member and resident of Jemez Pueblo, on a criminal complaint alleging a sexual assault resulting in death charge. If convicted of this offense, Yepa faces a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Yepa made his initial appearance in federal court in Albuquerque this morning, and is temporarily detained pending a detention hearing scheduled for 9:30 a.m. on January 5, 2012. At that time, a U.S. Magistrate Judge also will conduct a preliminary hearing to determine whether there is probable cause to support the charge against Yepa.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Yepa is charged with killing Lynette Becenti, a 38-year-old Navajo woman, during a sexual assault that took place at Yepa's Jemez Pueblo residence on the night of December 29, 2011. According to the criminal complaint, Yepa allegedly met Ms. Becenti in San Ysidro, N.M., earlier that evening, and drove her to his residence with the hope of having sex with her. Shortly before midnight, Yepa allegedly flagged down tribal officials and reported that there was a woman in his home who was not breathing. When Yepa escorted the officers into his residence, the officers observed a large amount of blood on the floor extending through several rooms, including a bedroom where they observed Ms. Becenti's nude body that was smeared with blood from head to toe.

Upon discovery of Ms. Becenti's body, the tribal officials notified the FBI and it initiated an investigation into Ms. Becenti's death. The complaint alleges that Yepa was examined and was found to have a substance that appeared to be blood on his hands, feet and clothing.

Although Yepa had numerous scratches and abrasions on his arms, torso and legs, none of these injuries appeared to be the source of the blood-like substance.

The complaint further alleges that an examination of Ms. Becenti's body revealed that she had been bleeding from the vagina and/or anus. A shovel allegedly was located near Ms. Becenti's body and approximately 15 inches of the shovel handle was stained and coated with a substance that appeared to be blood. According to the complaint, a witness went to Yepa's residence at approximately 10:30 p.m. on December 29, 2011, and allegedly observed Yepa inserting the handle of the shovel and another object into Ms. Becenti's vagina or anus.

The complaint alleges that preliminary findings of an autopsy performed on December 30, 2011 revealed that Ms. Becenti died due to excessive internal hemorrhaging caused by approximately 15 inches of vaginal penetration that extended from the opening of the vagina to the diaphragm. The autopsy also allegedly confirmed trauma to the anus and rectum.

Yepa was arrested on tribal charges on December 29, 2011, and was in tribal custody until his arrest yesterday on federal charges.

This case was investigated by the FBI with assistance from the Pueblo of Jemez Police Department, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack E. Burkhead.

Charges in criminal complaints, indictments and informations are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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