

Vest

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Vest's. "And whatever happened in the end, whether it was drugs or a mental breakdown or whatever, his whole life, he was the kind of guy that whenever he got angry, he would go sit quietly by himself. He didn't lash out and get mad. He wasn't like that."

Friends and family

In Paradise, many of Vest's friends affectionately called him "Stevo," likening him to the stunt performer and TV personality by the same name.

"He was always doing something stupid, something funny, something just kind of out there," Baker said. "He was just that kind of person — let's see what happens if I do this. And yeah, sometimes it caused trouble, sometimes it would be funny and sometimes it would be, 'What are you doing, dude?'"

Their core group often consisted of Vest, Baker, Jared and Matt Lindstrom, Hubbard and Mitchel Murphy, but the size would often grow or shrink depending on the day. They goofed around Paradise and spent lots of time outdoors going on hikes and backpacking trips.

"We would do everything outside," Hubbard said. "Pretty much any time we could all spend outside, I

think, is when we were the happiest."

Baker recalled one backpacking trip to Big Bear Lake in the Trinity Alps when Vest had grown so tired from the trek that he retired to his tent and didn't emerge until many hours later.

"I think he slept for like 12 hours, and we started him calling him 'The dude in the tent,'" Baker said. "And that nickname ran forever. It was one of our little backpacking jokes."

Much of their time was spent around nature, though Vest also had an interest in mechanical hobbies, like working on cars and bicycles, hosting friends at his house to hang out and play cards.

Vest didn't have much in the way of family, at least not in his teenage and adult life. His father, William "Bill" Vest died in late 2002 when Stephen was 12 years old. According to an obituary published in The Union, his dad worked as deputy coroner for the Butte County Sheriff's Office before moving to Nevada County.

Stephen lived with his grandfather, William Vest, in Paradise, taking care of him until he died in 2016 at the age of 89. Friends recalled an extended family member or two, who were in and out of jail, occasionally staying at his house, but that was all.

"He had the least amount of family support out of al-

most anybody that I've personally known, especially after his grandfather died," Baker said.

On the streets

In November 2018, the Camp Fire left Vest homeless overnight without a place to go. He didn't have family to fall back on, and many of his friends in Paradise were dealing with their own challenges in the aftermath of the fire.

Baker and his family had evacuated to the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds in Chico and were staying in a trailer. Vest was staying in the dorms at the fairgrounds. The two had lost track, Baker said, but they reunited over a beer and hung out by Baker's trailer.

"He was having a hard time, but he was also looking the best I'd seen him in a couple years," Baker said. "He'd gained some weight back and he was looking a little less pale. ... He was looking really good, even my wife noticed how good he was looking at the time, and we were thinking things were going to pick up."

Still, Jared Lindstrom said they were worried that he could "fall through the cracks" without any real support system. He saw Vest a couple of months after the fire and recognized something was off with his friend. Lindstrom said Vest was waving at things that weren't there, talking to himself and laughing to

himself. When Lindstrom suggested he was having an episode, Vest laughed it off. "That told me that he's struggling right now," Lindstrom said.

A year later, during the winter months of 2019 into 2020, Vest, still homeless, sought refuge at SafeSpace Chico, a low-barrier emergency shelter that operates during the coldest months of the year. Siana Sonoquie, shelter operations manager, said Vest stayed there for most of the 12 weeks they were open as he continued to get help and seek out services.

"Stephen was always super gentle, really kind, very quiet, kind of kept to himself and polite," Sonoquie said. "He was struggling with mental illness and he was often trying to get help and hitting barriers. Not having a phone, not being able to make appointments without transportation, those types of things. But even when he was frustrated, he was always very calm and kind."

Sonoquie said Vest was struggling with the bureaucracy around getting help in the county — meeting with a clinician, getting medication — all while not having stable housing, income, or food sources. Sonoquie said this is part of the challenge in Chico and Butte County for addressing homelessness and mental illness.

"The city of Chico has kind of siloed themselves

into only addressing mental illness in an enforcement capacity when it comes to police," Sonoquie said. "What we see is this very broken system of people that are trying to get services from the county, ... but because those services aren't accessible for them in a way that's effective, their condition worsens."

As the shelter closed in February, Vest moved back to the streets. On March 6, he was arrested after police said he assaulted a woman close to the same area on East 20th Street. While attempting to apprehend Vest, police said he was taken to the ground and bit an officer in the leg.

He was on probation for the arrest at the time he was shot and killed.

"Everybody has their own opinions on what's going on with the police," Hubbard said. "For me, I've been a firefighter for six years and I have a lot of good friends who are police officers. I see it from their side too. It's just hard because you don't think it will happen to someone you know. Whether they were in the right or in the wrong, in the end one of our friends died, and that's hard."

About a week before the shooting, Jared Lindstrom said Vest messaged him via Facebook and heard Vest had recently been released from jail. Vest told him he had been staying in shelters and was actively looking for jobs.

"He sounded like he had a plan," Lindstrom said.

Remembering Vest

On Saturday, a group will reunite at Bille Park in Paradise to host a memorial for Vest, play some of his favorite music and have a potluck. Afterward, they plan to hike on a trail they used to frequent with Vest leading to a look-out point and a dwelling cave.

They still want to get to the bottom of what happened, and await the results of the autopsy and toxicology reports — to be released in the coming weeks — and the body-worn camera footage, which Ramsey said will be made public at the conclusion of the investigation.

"There has to be something that could explain his behavior," Lindstrom said. "He's not like that, at all."

Vest's friends have pushed back against the initial local media and law enforcement reports that only portray him as a criminal. They hope he will be remembered beyond what happened in the last moments of his life.

"Stevo wasn't a druggie, he was just a person who needed help," Baker said. "He was a person, who, even though he needed help, if you asked him he would still help you. Even if it got him nothing, even it hurt him, Stevo was there. He was always there."

Contact reporter Will Denner at 530-896-7774.

Chico

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Funding homelessness strategies

After hearing a special proposal from city staff and multiple non profits Sept. 22, at last the council heard the revised Quality of Life plan proposing using nearly 2 million for addressing homelessness in Chico.

City Manager Mark Orme said not all plans can meet the challenge of homelessness in the city, but local government has to with limited resources. He announced he will enact an emergency order to use public land to allow temporary emergency camping, using land on the west side of the Chico airport which has been used for camping before.

This campsite would cost about \$700,000 for 90 days. The city is considering

buying a vehicle for use to shuttle people to the campground and possibly other resources, through Butte County Association of Governments as Safe Space Winter Shelter did. The site will have restrooms available, and the city is hoping to acquire showers and a tent for cooling or warming.

People will choose between the temporary, socially distanced campground or shelter with True North Housing Alliance. Orme said he hopes the latest the temporary campground would be open until is Jan 31, with security and set rules.

The plan is designed to enforce no more camping in parks, offering either a shelter or an emergency campground as alternatives for each individual to choose from to stay. Those who refuse to choose either alternative will be cited and asked to move within 48 hours, Assistant City Manager Chris Constantin said.

There was no voiced council support of the airport location for this plan, with varying amounts of concern about its many parts.

Morgan said the survey put out to get necessary public engagement on homelessness and the city's quality of life plan was unprofessional and "not necessary." He moved for staff to continue drafting strategies for the Quality of Life plan.

Huber moved to approve all of the funding proposals other than \$700,000 for the campsite, to wait until "a workable spot" can be found, using \$100,000 to assess the current BMX location.

After hearing more from Joy Amaro of True North about pending funding from the state during COVID-19, the council chose to unanimously approve Huber's motion.

Housing

The housing commit-

tee's set of recommendations had been stalled for over six months in part due to COVID-19. Stone, Huber and Ory presented the exhaustive report prepared by Ory, on addressing what Stone called the city's "affordable housing crisis."

Ory said he recommends at the next meeting to consider whether upcoming special projects "will lead to greater inequities in our housing market" and revising the city's general plan given a high unexpected city population.

Huber added while many housing projects are underway, the real problem is if any affordable housing will also materialize — "frankly I couldn't afford to live here, if I was just starting out."

"We have a responsibility to encourage developments to build housing that's affordable," Stone said. "I think the revenue is there ... but there's no pledge to do so."

Schwab agreed that inclusionary zoning could be done in a variety of ways.

Councilor Kasey Reynolds disagreed with inclusionary zoning as being a viable solution. Morgan disapproved of the motion entirely, mostly due to disagreeing with the idea of inclusionary zoning. In his view affordable housing is impossible to achieve in Chico "because we're in California," he said.

The motion to approve the report, bring inclusionary zoning to the planning commission staff and see if incentives can be considered and used, passed 5-2, with Reynolds and Morgan voting against.

Other business

The council also approved:

- Using a surplus from the 2019-2020 budget to allocate \$5,693,815 to the Emergency Reserve and the Compensated Absence Reserve;

- Revising intent to terminate the lease with Silver Dollar BMX at Silver Dollar Fairgrounds to an extended month to month termination basis;

- A modification to the supplemental budget for 2020-2021 (funding Police Crisis Intervention Team training and an increase of Waste Hauler Franchise Fees) with a recommendation to amend the appendix modifying full-time allocations for the City Manager's office;

- To extend an agreement between Chico and Downtown Chico Property Based Business Improvement District for implementing a Management District Plan which would provide \$17,467 to the district.

The next regular meeting will take place 6 p.m. Nov. 3 in the City Council Chambers at 421 Main St. in Chico.

Contact reporter Natalie Hanson at 530-896-7763.

Oroville

FROM PAGE 1

"The notion that this program is going to save the citizens of Oroville money

and deliver power at a better price because the government can engage in the private sector and buy it smarter than PG&E is foolhardy and, in my opinion, a sham. Not true. Will not happen. You can add a

whole layer of bureaucracy and then turn around and sell it to make it cheaper. I don't see that happening" he said.

Councilor David Pittman saw things differently.

"I look at this as kind of a joint powers agreement to buy things. If we can buy this power, that's great," he said. "Anytime we can

modulate the cost of power, that's a big deal. The difficulty we have now is we're at the mercy of PG&E completely. Whatever they decide to do, that's what we're gonna do. We have no authority to change anything.

At least in this venue, given the concerns, at least we have the authority to buy a better product in the world

of electricity."

Vice Mayor Scott Thomson agreed with Smith.

"I'm not against options. I love options, but it really cross grains me fundamentally as far as my view of what the government should and shouldn't do. I'm siding with Eric. I think his points are pretty valid. The fundamental concept

of the government coming in and competing with the private sector cross grains me deep," he said.

Despite Smith and Thomson's concerns, the council voted to authorize the implementation of the community choice aggregation program.

The program allows cities to buy or generate its own electricity and sell it to residents and businesses, according to Butte County. PG&E will continue to deliver the electricity and provide meter reading, billing and maintenance services.

"This is a brand new startup. There's a lot of cost in getting this thing off the floor. And that's what this seed money, in part, is all about. And at the end of the day, I don't see it working," Smith said. "Fundamentally, from a business model standpoint, I'm struggling. I feel like we're gonna spend a lot of money and at the end of the day not be able to deliver. In fact, there's a whole lot of bailout clauses in this thing if you read through it. It's full of challenges."

After that divided vote, the council made unanimous decisions.

On Feb. 5, 2019, because of the Camp Fire, councilors voted to allow recreational vehicles and other forms of mobile housing on private properties with a permit. Now, because so many homes were lost in the North Complex fire, they voted to extend this courtesy ordinance.

The council then voted to purchase one slide in the Compressed Air Foam Systems unit for newly replaced aircraft rescue and firefighting equipment, along with associated emergency response equipment for two recently purchased vehicles for a total of about \$75,000.

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