

Lodi News-Sentinel

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Lodi Unified trustee Harvey Bills resigns School board will choose replacement

By Jennifer Bonnett
NEWS-SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Lodi Unified School District trustee Harvey Bills Sr. resigned from his position Thursday.

He was encouraged by school board president Richard Jones to permanently step down, partly to guard against future split votes. The board will appoint a replacement.

When reached at home Thursday evening, Bills said it was a pleasure to serve on the board for the last six years.



Harvey Bills

"I was real proud to be a member all this time. I regret that I had to resign. It was not my deepest desire to do so because I enjoyed being with these board members and making decisions," he said, adding that his political days are not over and he plans to attend future meetings as an audience member. "I'm certainly going to miss being on that board," he said.

Bills had taken a voluntary indefinite leave of absence for medical reasons since March.

According to court documents, he has dementia and his personal finances have been turned over to his wife.

Bills, 72, also relinquished his driver's license at a court proceeding earlier this month. Still, he had repeatedly told the News-Sentinel he planned to return to the board in a couple of months.

Trustee Ken Davis, who has been on the board with Bills since 2004, talked to him as recently as this week about resigning.

"He realized, finally, it was in the best interest of the district and himself. He said he'd rather go out on his own terms, and that's eventually what he decided. He wanted us to be able to move on, and I appreciate that," Davis said.

Jones, who considers Bills a friend and not merely a board colleague, declined to elaborate on the resignation or on the letter Bills hand-delivered to him Thursday afternoon, as he had not yet spoken to Superintendent Cathy Nichols-Washer.

It could have been a lengthy process to have Bills removed if he did not resign. That may have involved filing a motion with the California Attorney General's Office, Jones said.

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Fronts for prostitution?

Two Lodi massage businesses targets of federal warrants

By Layla Bohm
NEWS-SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Federal and local investigators descended on two Lodi massage businesses Thursday, searching them a day after two people were indicted on prostitution and money laundering charges.

Prosecutors allege that the businesses are fronts for prostitution and are part of a string of such massage parlors stretching from Lodi to Washington.

Beginning in 2007, the business owners "recruited women from out-of-state to work as prostitutes and arranged for the women to be moved among their businesses, generating substantial profits," investigators said in a news release issued by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The owners, 48-year-old Tham Nguyen and 51-year-old Suong Tran, were arrested Thursday in their home town of Burien, Wash., said Lorie Dankers, an ICE spokeswoman based in Seattle.

At least one other woman was arrested on suspicion of prostitution in Lodi, but local police referred all questions to ICE, whose investigators did not yet have full information to release by Thursday evening.

Lodi business records list Tran as the owner of AAH Spa, 20 N. Cherokee Lane, one of the two locations agents swarmed Thursday around noon.

On March 23, an employee working there "offered to perform a sex act for an undercover detective in exchange for a fee," according to the indictment handed down Wednesday by a federal grand jury in Washington.

Nguyen is also listed as the property owner of a home that was searched simultaneously in the 300 block of East Pine Street.

She also owns the property where the other massage business operates, Valley Spa, 321 N. California St. Business records list a different owner, and the ICE spokeswoman did not know if that person is under investigation.

Nguyen and Tran also own three massage parlors in Washington, one in Sacramento and a legal brothel in Nevada, according to court documents filed in the case.

Until this year, Valley Spa had operated as OK Spa. The ownership changed hands in January, according to business records.

Both businesses have signs offering services such as "body shampoos" to men and women.

They are among about half a dozen



Lodi detectives Carlos Fuentes, left, and Paul Blanford stand in front of a house owned by a woman accused of offering prostitution in local massage parlors.

NEWS-SENTINEL PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN EVANS

Businesses targeted:

- Bamboo Sauna – 14021 Ambaum Blvd. S.W., Burien, Wash.
- Fantasy Health Spa – 11516 124th Ave. N.E., Kirkland, Wash.
- Sauna Relax Station – 1537B Auburn Way North, Auburn, Wash.
- AAH Spa – 20 N. Cherokee Lane, Lodi
- Valley Spa – 321 N. California St., Lodi
- Healthy Living Nails and Spa – 3715 47th Ave., Sacramento
- #1 Geisha – 357 Douglas St. in Elko, Nev.

— Source: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Lodi businesses that have been targeted by police multiple times in recent years, and neighbors talk about the frequent traffic.

A driver passing Valley Spa gave police a thumbs-up sign Thursday. A man who works near AAH Spa said that he's refused propositions from women who work there.

Nguyen and Tran face charges of conspiracy to transport individuals in



The AAH Spa, located at 20 N. Cherokee Lane in Lodi, was one of two local massage parlors raided by Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Thursday.

furtherance of prostitution, and conspiracy to engage in money laundering, according to the news release.

Investigators traced financial records, alleging that the suspects tried to hide the sources of income.

Government prosecutors are seeking forfeiture of any property or proceeds gained from illegal activity.

Both people are being held in a Seattle detention center and are scheduled to be arraigned in court today.

Research finds great teachers help children learn to read faster

By Donna Gordon Blankinship
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

SEATTLE — Genetics play the biggest role in determining how fast a child learns to read, but a good teacher can make a measurable difference as well, according to a study released Thursday.

Florida State University used twins assigned to different classrooms to develop the conclusions.

Researchers studied more than 550 first- and second-grade classrooms with at least one identical twin and more than 1,000 classes with at least one fraternal twin.

Among the identical twins, 42 pairs out of 280 pairs showed significant differences in reading improvement during the year studied, said lead researcher Jeanette Taylor, an associate professor of psychology at Florida State.

In each case, the teachers also had significantly different quality scores. Twins with similarly good teachers got similar scores.

"If you have identical twins, they should do very similarly in school," Taylor said.

Teachers whose students showed the

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DAN EVANS/NEWS-SENTINEL

Chief David Main, center, his wife, Roya, left, and their children, Giana, bottom left, and Jack, bottom right, walk away from the Lodi Police Department to applause after a reception for the retiring chief on Thursday. For video of David Main's farewell, see www.lodinews.com.

'I loved every minute of it' Lodi Police chief signs off for the last time

By Layla Bohm
NEWS-SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

At 3 p.m. Thursday, Lodi Police Chief David Main held a police radio to his mouth.

Using the badge number he was given 28 years earlier when he joined the department, he paused for a moment, took a breath, and signed off duty.

"Ten-four," Dispatcher Jane Randolph replied. "Clear for final release. Good luck, God bless."

Blinking away tears, Main then took his 3-

year-old son's hand and walked away from the police station with his wife and their 15-month-old daughter. For the last time, he got behind the wheel of a patrol car for a ceremonial drive home.

Main's unexpected retirement had been announced just a few weeks earlier. His wife is suffering an illness, and Main decided his family needed him more than the department he'd led for three years.

Looking back on his career, Main said during an earlier interview that police officers had

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DISCREPANCIES IN DRUG WEIGHTS

Ripon lab breach may jeopardize local cases

By Merrill Balassone
THE MODESTO BEE

MODESTO — Thousands of drug cases handled by a crime lab analyst could be in jeopardy after officials found weight discrepancies in drugs sent for analysis at the Central Valley Crime Lab in Ripon.

District attorneys from five counties — Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced, Tuolumne and Calaveras — that use the lab's services announced Thursday that an investigation has been launched by the state Justice Department.

San Joaquin County prosecutors do not know yet how many local cases could be affected.

It will take time to go through records, said Robert Himelblau, a prosecutor and spokesman for the San Joaquin County District Attorney's Office.

Officials said lab management became aware of concerns about the handling and analysis of a methamphetamine evidence sample. After investigating and retesting, more meth samples handled by the same analyst showed lower weights than first reported.

The analyst, who was not identified, has been placed on paid administrative leave.

State Justice Department spokesman Jim Finefrock said seven meth samples were analyzed and found to be "light" as compared to the original reports.

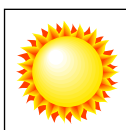
He said the investigation is aimed at determining whether the drugs were stolen or if the reports themselves were inaccurate.

"The question is why," Finefrock said.

Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager said the investigation could affect as many as 4,000 drug cases dating back to 2006. She pledged to begin notifying defendants and defense attorneys in cases involving evidence analyzed by the suspended lab employee.

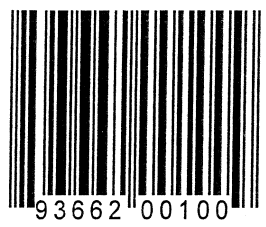
Fladager said identifying affected cases would be a "full-time operation" that could take weeks.

"We all take that ethical obligation seriously," she said. "We're going to do the right thing on these cases."



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