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Tribune Herald



Friday, July 15, 2022

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Ex-county worker charged

Feds: Almost \$2M in bribes, kickbacks accepted to influence housing projects

By **NANCY COOK LAUER**
West Hawaii Today

A former employee of the county Office of Housing and Community Development is set to enter a plea Monday in federal court on charges

he took almost \$2 million in bribes and kickbacks to influence affordable housing projects in West Hawaii.

Alan Scott Rudo, a housing community development specialist from 2006 to 2018, is set to appear before

Magistrate Judge Rom Trader in Honolulu for initial appearance, waiver of indictment, arraignment and plea to the felony information provided by federal prosecutors, according to court records. Prosecutors charge that



RUDO

Rudo worked with two attorneys and one other individual to create three limited liability companies to benefit from fraudulently putting the companies forward as developers of affordable housing. Those three companies, as well as at least two other limited liability companies and two trusts, were used to distribute affordable housing credits, land and

money. The companies are not named in the federal information document filed in court.

The scheme netted at least \$10.9 million in affordable housing credits and a land conveyance, which were then sold, with the proceeds distributed among the conspirators, with Rudo's share of

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Courtesy photo

Algae Technician Kelsi Clarke monitors *Asparagopsis taxiformis* seaweed at Blue Ocean Barns' growing facility in NELHA.

From surf to turf

Kona-grown seaweed helping to reduce cattle methane emissions

By **LAURA RUMINSKI**
West Hawaii Today

An agricultural technology company located at the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority is growing seaweed in an effort to reduce cattle methane emissions around the world.

The all-natural seaweed *Asparagopsis taxiformis*, locally known

as limu kohu, has been shown in published research and on-farm trials to safely eliminate more than 80% of cows' methane production without changing the taste of milk or meat.

The seaweed supplement is added to cattle feed in tiny daily amounts, and the natural remedy then stops the formation of methane in

See **CATTLE** Page A6



LAURA RUMINSKI/West Hawaii Today file photo

A cow grazes in North Kona.

Survey IDs deficiencies in Big Isle health care

Community First report will be used to help guide potential reforms

By **GRANT PHILLIPS**
Hawaii Tribune-Herald

Psychiatry and mental health counseling are the Big Island's two most needed types of health care, according to an islandwide survey completed in March by Community First Hawaii, a nonprofit with a goal of improving access to health care throughout the state.

The survey polled more than 2,248 community members and health care professionals from Hawaii County, revealing staffing shortages and low morale within the medical community. The results are intended to help expand access and guide potential improvements for the Big Island's health care industry.

"The takeaway is that the time for talk is long past," Community First Hawaii Executive Director Randy Kurohara said about the results. "Our community is calling for urgent action to improve access to care for all of us."

Roughly 76% of health care professionals believed there was a short supply of mental health counseling, and 70% reported an ongoing need for psychiatrists.

"It's an imbalance that is deeply troubling," said Kurohara. "Especially as the need for services continues to grow in the fallout of the unprecedented strain and trauma of the pandemic that many experienced."

The survey also addressed medical staffing shortages, with 76% of those polled believing a lack of physicians was the biggest barrier when



KUROHARA

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KAMAHELE

Suspect allegedly told police he assaulted man over bet

By **JOHN BURNETT**
Hawaii Tribune-Herald

A 27-year-old man facing assault and robbery charges for a violent midday attack Sunday in downtown Hilo that hospitalized a 68-year-old man said the victim "got what he deserved," according to court documents filed by police. Documents state Chad

Armitage Jr. told officers he knew the victim, Dennis Irvine Kamahale, and that Kamahale owed him money from a bet.

Armitage allegedly said told police Kamahale slapped him in the face, "talked s—t" to him, and insulted his baseball team.



ARMITAGE

Armitage said he got mad, "judo flipped" Kamahale to the ground, and collected \$5 that was next to Kamahale, and told police that Kamahale owed him \$15 more, according to documents.

Police responding to the report of an assault fronting 166 Keawe St. at about 12:43 p.m. found Kamahale unresponsive with head injuries and bleeding

from the right side of his head, documents state. According to documents, Kamahale's wallet was on the ground next to him, as was a Visa gift card.

Documents state Dr. Douglas Calvert at Hilo Medical Center reported Kamahale's injuries were a subdural hematoma — a serious condition in which

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LOCAL

Police jurisdiction challenge rejected again

By **MICHAEL BRESTOVANSKY**
Hawaii Tribune-Herald

A lawsuit claiming that the chiefs of police for the Big Island, Maui and Honolulu violated the law during the 2019 Thirty Meter Telescope protests has been dismissed once again, this time by the Hawaii Supreme Court.

Big Island resident E. Kalani Flores filed a lawsuit in the Third

Circuit Court against Hawaii County Police Chief Paul Ferreira, then-Honolulu Police Chief Susan Ballard, and then-Maui Police Chief Tivoli Faaumu in 2019, arguing that their involvement in the protests violated state laws governing county police jurisdictions.

The lawsuit contended that, by sending approximately 60 Honolulu officers and 27

Maui officers to assist Big Island police in managing the protests on the Maunakea Access Road, the chiefs violated a law that stipulates officers can only be brought to a neighboring island if they are pursuing an investigation that commenced within their own jurisdiction.

That lawsuit was dismissed on a technicality, but was appealed to the state Intermediate Court

of Appeals, which ruled in favor of the chiefs last year. Despite this, the case was appealed again last August to state Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday published an opinion concluding that the Third Circuit Court was correct in dismissing the suit, finding not only that the chiefs did not violate the jurisdictional statute, but also that Flores did

not have the legal basis to sue the chiefs even if they had violated it.

“Allowing a private individual to sue police chiefs (for violation of the statute) would interfere with the ability of police from different jurisdictions to cooperate and provide continuity to police investigations,” the ruling read in part.

The ruling also determined that the statute in question does

not delineate the only possible scenario in which a police officer may exercise authority on a neighbor island, with other statutes supporting other scenarios. Furthermore, other statutes expressly allow for mutual aid between county services including police.

With a unanimous verdict, the Supreme Court dismissed the suit for the third time.



Big Island Report

Citizens arrested and charged

Big Island police arrested and charged the following individuals:

- Leslie Shoji Onodera, 36, of Waimea with three counts of violating terms of release.
- Hokuakakaiiikiokalani K.C.B. Brandt, 43, of Ocean View with contempt of court.
- Shannon Kainoa Ryser, 31, of Captain Cook with failure to appear.
- Michael Stephen Kobayashi, 73, of Hilo with contempt of court and failure to appear.
- Tiarre Rei Misha Kuualoha Kobayashi, 23, of Hilo with three counts of violating terms of release.
- William D. Medeiros, 57, of Mountain View with contempt of court.
- Christy C. Ettley, 52, of Ocean View with failure to appear.
- Hodji Aryonne Cordeiro, 55, of Kurtistown with contempt of court.
- James Edward Forrest, 52, of Kailua-Kona with contempt of court.
- Kawehionalani Faye Thomas, 24, of Hilo with contempt of court.
- Kyle Jacob Bauman, 33, of Hilo with assault.
- Robert J. Pihi, 48, of Kailua-Kona with failure to appear.
- Santiago Sandoval Santana, 22, of Volcano with failure to appear and two counts of contempt of court.
- Steven Charles Jackson, 26, of Ocean View with methamphetamine possession, drug paraphernalia and trespassing.
- Nicholas Alexander Taylor, 45, of Hilo with trespassing.
- Lynden T. Cooper, 61, of Pahoa with failure to appear.
- Kendrick Lee Ioane Kealii A.E. Sanders, 37, of Holualoa with contempt of court.
- Dalton Dale Kamawana Lemmon, 23, of Kapaau with unlawful imprisonment and three counts of domestic abuse.
- Cisco Keola Alconcel, 30, of Keaau with contempt of court and failure to appear.
- Thomas Michael McCormick, 54, of Honokaa with contempt of court.
- Eddie Emile Faafia, 38, of Hilo with violating terms of release and contempt of court.
- Kalaiona Higa, 19, of Hilo with DUI.
- Junior Wabol, 19, of Ocean View with DUI and driving without a license.
- Byron Wyatt Kahalelauokalani Mattos, 43, of Pahoa with violating probation.
- Ryan Michael Sisson, 50, of Kailua-Kona with failure to appear.
- Bernard Kahiahiwa Lancaster, 41, of Hilo with burglary, methamphetamine possession and drug paraphernalia.
- Krzysztof Snarski, 54, of Pahoa with misuse of 911.
- Jason Troy Kawika Delatorre, 40, of Captain Cook with theft and fraudulent use of a credit card and habitual property crime.
- Charlin Decoito, 45, of Kurtistown with contempt of court.
- Yuniar Antonio Valencia Santana, 36, of Waimea with two counts of failure to appear.
- Kawika Clayton Nobriga, 39, of Pahoa with two counts of methamphetamine possession.
- Darlene Ann Pabre, 61, of Kealakekua with domestic abuse.
- Alexander Lewis Randall, 26, of Kailua-Kona with failure to appear.
- Eric C. Dukes, 42, of Kailua-Kona with violating terms of release.
- Rocky Matthew Kekoa Cusmano, 23, of Volcano with contempt of court.
- Jacob Quinn Marciel, 30, of Hilo with two probation violations.
- Rodney Nalani Kahele, 56, of Kailua-Kona with failure to appear.
- Erica Kurokawa, 34, of Pepepeko with theft and violating probation.
- David Anthony Crawford, 48, of Kailua-Kona with contempt of court.

Contempt of court typically means failing to comply with a judge's order, such as paying a fine or appearing at a court proceeding. Failure to appear means not showing up in court on the date written on a traffic citation.

SUSPECT

From the front page

blood collects between the skull and the brain — an intercranial hemorrhage, right-side skull fracture and fractured right eye socket. Kamahele was flown to The Queen's Medical Center for further treatment and remained there on a ventilator, according to documents.

A married couple reportedly witnessed the attack, and the wife told officers she saw the suspect standing over Kamahele and punching him in the stomach and face before stomping on the elderly man's face. As the couple approached Armitage, he fled in the Puna direction toward Subway and Downtown

Laundry Express, according to documents.

An off-duty police officer, Lt. Bobbie-Jo Sagon, was walking Hamakua-bound on Keawe and approaching the area where Kamahele was assaulted, documents state.

The husband of the married couple pointed out Armitage to Sagon, but Armitage initially escaped capture by police. Surveillance video from Downtown Laundry Express provided a tentative identification of Armitage, and Sagon positively identified him from a photo lineup, according to documents.

Armitage later was spotted at about 5:18

p.m. in front of a building on the 400 block of Kilauea Avenue and taken into custody after a short foot chase by officers, police said.

Armitage is charged with two counts of first-degree assault and a single account of second-degree robbery. All are Class B felonies that normally carry a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment upon conviction. Prosecutors, however, allege Armitage is subject to extended terms of imprisonment and mandatory sentencing as a repeat offender and an offender against the elderly.

At Armitage's initial court appearance

Wednesday, he pleaded not guilty to all charges. Hilo District Judge Bruce Larson maintained Armitage's bail at \$75,000 and ordered him to return to court today for a preliminary hearing.

According to documents, Armitage has three prior felony convictions, including first-degree assault in 2019 for an attack on a 48-year-old male acquaintance that sent the victim to the hospital. Armitage was sentenced to four years of probation for that assault, but his probation was revoked in May.

Email John Burnett at jburnett@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

SURVEY

From the front page

accessing health care services.

“The physician shortage is a tremendous problem, and one of the highest priorities for us to address as a community,” Kurohara said. “It's particularly acute on the neighbor islands and in rural communities, which is also where folks have the biggest barriers around transportation.”

The staffing shortage impacted patients, with just 21% reporting they could see a provider “when wanted,” as opposed to waiting for available appointments, openings or having to travel off-island.

Community First Hawaii plans to use the results from the survey to take a holistic approach to improving the statewide health care system.

“But that's no small task,” Kurohara said.

Initial plans include addressing legislation and the health system to expand the state's preceptor tax credit, which could support more clinical training and expand the overall workforce. Additional goals include

The report stated roughly 49% of health care providers considered reducing their hours, 47% considered leaving medicine altogether, and 44% considered moving to the mainland.

establishing a loan repayment and loan forgiveness program for primary care providers and specialists, eliminating the general excise tax on health care services, and increasing the Medicare.

“Hawaii is the only state in the nation that taxes health care,” Kurohara said. “Hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers do not pay GET, and it is an unfair burden to tax solo and small health care practices with this.”

Staffing shortages could worsen in the coming years due to the number of health care providers expressing a desire to leave their field — and the island. The report stated roughly 49% of health care providers considered reducing their

hours, 47% considered leaving medicine altogether, and 44% considered moving to the mainland.

“Health care professionals find it hard to look at the high cost of living here compared to other places,” Kurohara said. “With the rates of compensation being lower than the mainland, the economic picture doesn't always make sense. We knew that was the case, but we didn't understand what a big percentage of our health care providers are close to the edge of leaving medicine or leaving Hawaii.”

An additional statewide report will be released on July 26, where Community First will partner with the Hawaii State Rural Health Association. Together, the groups plan to unite leaders in health care, social services, government and community based organizations, which Kurohara believes will help “identify and implement solutions to some of these complex issues that can only be solved by working together.”

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CATTLE

From the front page

the cow's rumen, or first stomach, nearly eliminating the emission of the potent greenhouse gas associated with climate change. A year of cow burps is equivalent to the greenhouse gases emitted by a gasoline-engine passenger car.

Blue Ocean Barns started at NELHA in March 2020 on a half-acre parcel. CEO Joan Salwen said the company that produces Brominata got started in California when she and her co-founder were at Stanford University.

“We discovered a particular seaweed had strong potential based on limited research in Australia to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from cattle,” she said. “While at Stanford, we worked collaboratively with other universities such as UC Davis, which is livestock focused to test whether a seaweed that had been found to reduce methane gas in one lab could be replicated.”

The duo raised money from family foundations and the federal government to prove that the

seaweed could serve as a digestive aid for cattle, shutting down the process of methane burps.

“We had done two years of research that was published in journals. It really became clear that this particular seaweed was good for this purpose and needed to be grown at scale,” said Salwen. “That's when we started to look to Hawaii because California doesn't have anything like NELHA, a ready-made infrastructure that is perfectly tailored to people using ocean water for business, academic or research purposes.”

By growing the limu kohu seaweed at NELHA, Blue Ocean Barns is complementing the natural ecosystem rather than introducing a species that doesn't belong in Hawaii.

The company is initially focusing on dairy cows, providing the milkers with the seaweed supplement to their feed.

“We are using the dairy industry to help us learn how best to serve ranchers and feed

lot operators,” said Salwen.

Currently, Blue Ocean Barns is growing and harvesting the limu to feed 1,000 cows with over a dozen employees in Kona. The company plans to expand the operation to 14 acres at NELHA with projections to feed one million cows by 2026, and then 100 million cows by the end of the decade.

Among the companies that have become Blue Ocean Barns partners are Ben & Jerry's, Clover Sonoma, and Straus Family Creamery.

“We are growing it for a very unique and special purpose, one that is going to place Hawaii in a position of leadership with climate change and averting the impact of our food system on our planet. Hawaii will stand to be very proud of what this land and the people that are working here are doing on behalf of the entire planet,” she said.

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