

Troy Wade, chairman of the Nevada Test Site Historical Foundation, talks last week about the steel I-beam section from the World Trade Center that will go on display at the Atomic Testing Museum on Feb. 27.



GARY THOMPSON/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

## Trade center I-beam joins Las Vegas museum

Artifact from Sept. 11 attacks part of permanent collection

By KEITH ROGERS

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The steel I-beam stands 6 feet tall and weighs a ton.

Stuck to one side is hardened concrete that oozed through 14 bolt holes as it was attached to the floor of the World Trade Center.

Its rusted sides are dimpled from the tremendous force it endured when the New York towers collapsed on Sept. 11, 2001.

After its jagged, torched edges have been sealed for protection, the I-beam section will be mounted in place at the Atomic Testing Museum in Las Vegas, where visitors will be able to walk up and touch it.

"In the virtual world ... 9/11 in most people's minds is a series of photos that they saw of the airplane hitting the building and the buildings collapsing," said Troy Wade, chairman of the Nevada Test Site Historical Foundation. "And that's as close as they got to it."

"This will allow people to get a step closer, to actually touch a piece of one of the most historic occasions in the history of this country."

The historical foundation will unveil the artifacts Feb. 27 at a public event marking the fifth anniversary of the museum at 755 E. Flamingo Road.

Lee Ielpi, founder of the September 11th Families Association, will speak at the event. His son, Jonathan, a New York City firefighter, died responding to the towers' collapse.

The museum setting should allow visitors to draw the connection from the end of the Cold War to the Sept. 11 attacks,

which launched the nation into the war on terrorism, Wade said last week as he stood by the pallet supporting the I-beam after its journey from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Next to the beam was a 3-foot-long piece of twisted tubular sheet metal from the World Trade Center. It will be preserved in a case next to a hunk of the Berlin Wall, a piece symbolic of the end of the Cold War.

The artifacts will be near the end of the timeline that visitors experience as they walk through the history of the atomic age surrounded by items from the test site, where nuclear weapons were detonated from 1951 to 1992.

Combined, the artifacts represent "a seminal piece in the history of the United States and a big piece in the history of Nevada," Wade said.

"We've always said the test site helped win the Cold War, and now the test site could help win the new war," he said. He was referring to the expanded role of the test site, 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas, for developing counterterrorism techniques and devices.

When it opened, the museum displayed a smaller, 3-foot-long piece of I-beam from the World Trade Center that was on loan from Smithsonian Institution.

The permanent I-beam display will join other items of historical significance at the museum including Albert Einstein's letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt about the once-secret nuclear effort known as the Manhattan Project and President Harry Truman's letter that established the test site as the nation's continental nuclear weapons proving ground.

## California man arrested in death of woman in northwest valley

By MIKE BLASKY

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

A California man was arrested Friday after Las Vegas police said he sexually assaulted and strangled a woman in her northwest valley home.

Las Vegas resident Melodie Walker, 35, was forced to the ground and sexually assaulted by Derrick Valentine, 37, of Pasadena, Calif., according to his arrest report.

Valentine "wanted to perform oral sex on Walker and he knew she would not allow him to," the report says he told police.

During the assault, Walker asked Valentine if she could get a drink of water, the report says. Valentine followed Walker to the kitchen, where she fled down a staircase toward the garage, activating the alarm system.

Valentine caught Walker as the alarm activated. He told police that "he knew when she ran he would have to kill her," the report says.

The home security service was notified by the alarm. Unable to reach anyone by phone, the company sent an employee to check the house on Pearl Cotton Avenue,

near Gilcrease Avenue and Fort Apache Road, about 8:30 p.m.

Upon arrival, the security employee spoke with a man later identified as Valentine, the arrest report says. Valentine told the employee that he was alone in the house and needed an ambulance but asked that she not call police. But when the employee saw Walker's body inside, she called police, the report says.

According to the report, Valentine first told police that a "tall, white male" had hit him over the head and poured chemicals down his throat. He later said that the story was false and that he had killed Walker and tried to hide the evidence using cleaning supplies in her house. When he couldn't scrub out the bloodstains, Valentine drank some of the cleaning products hoping he would die, he told police.

Las Vegas homicide Lt. Lew Roberts said Valentine was possibly the victim's ex-boyfriend or an acquaintance. The Clark County coroner's office listed Walker's death as "asphyxia by strangulation."

Valentine was booked at the Clark County Detention Center for one count of murder and two counts of felony sexual assault.

## NLV police say man's shooting death a homicide

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

A 60-year-old man was found dead from a gunshot wound in a North Las Vegas home Friday afternoon.

North Las Vegas police said Willie Henderson's death was a homicide, but they did not elaborate Monday.

Henderson was found unresponsive in a house on Cattleman Drive, near Decatur Boulevard and Craig Road, at 4:41 p.m.

Police did not release any suspect information. The killing was the first homicide for the department this year.

Anybody with information is urged to call Crime Stoppers at 383-5555.

# Three convicted in 2007 slaying

Man killed during robbery attempt at illegal street race

By FRANCIS MCCABE

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

A Clark County jury Monday convicted three men of second-degree murder and other felonies related to a shooting and attempted robbery at an illegal street race in 2007.

Authorities alleged that Omar Ayala, 20, Angel Perez, 19, and Francisco Cruz, 20, attempted to carjack Michael Pira at an illegal street race at Sunset Road and Valley View Boulevard in the early hours of Feb. 2, 2007. Pira escaped in his car to a group of nearby friends. The three defendants opened fire with handguns in that direction, mortally wounding Nick Gazzano.

Ayala fired the fatal shot, according to testimony.

The three defendants also were found guilty of attempted murder, attempted robbery, conspiracy to commit robbery, assault with a deadly weapon and discharging a firearm from a motor vehicle.

The jury acquitted a fourth co-defendant Jose Covarrubias, 23, of the same charges. The three defendants got into a sport utility vehicle driven by Covarrubias during the shooting.

During the closing arguments of the two-week-long trial, Covarrubias' defense attorney, Michael Sanft, argued his client arrived after the gunfire erupted and didn't know about the attempted robbery. "He just wanted his friends to get out of there," Sanft said.

After the verdict, Sanft said, "It takes a lot of courage for a jury to come back and admit there is a crime, but also admit the state did not show enough evidence to sustain a charge against my client for murder."

Prosecutor Mark DiGiacomo said he understood the jury's acquittal of Covarrubias because some evidence implicating him could not be presented at trial. DiGiacomo was referring to a statement made by Cruz to police, indicating Covarrubias knew about the plan to rob someone at the street race. But the statement could not be used against Covarrubias unless Cruz testified, which he didn't.

DiGiacomo said he was satisfied with the three convictions. "These defendants are not going to see the light of day for a very long time," he said.

Cruz, Perez, and Ayala are scheduled to be sentenced April 6.

Covarrubias and Cruz also face separate battery charges in connection to a jail brawl, according to court records.

Contact reporter Francis McCabe at fmccabe@reviewjournal.com or 702-380-1039.

## Woman's relatives reach settlement in lawsuit against Hard Rock official

By DOUG MCMURDO

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The "hedonistic" lifestyle of former Hard Rock Hotel CEO Walter Edward "Ed" Scheetz won't be put on trial now that a settlement has been reached in a lawsuit alleging Scheetz was responsible for the August 2007 overdose death of 23-year-old Michelle Hatchel.

Hatchel's mother, brother, grandmother and aunt alleged through Las Vegas attorney Michael Amador that Scheetz and Morgans Hotel Group, the Hard Rock's parent company, were responsible for the woman's death. Amador was unavailable for comment.

Terms of the settlement were not disclosed, but Scheetz's New York City attorneys said in a statement that Hatchel's life and death were tragic. Hatchel was a teenager living in Colorado when the 1999 Columbine High School massacre occurred. In court papers, her family said that she lost friends in the rampage and that the resulting trauma made her vulnerable to Scheetz's manipulations.

In a statement released shortly after the lawsuit was dismissed in federal court in Las Vegas, attorneys Stanley Arkin and Peter Pope called the complaint against Scheetz "slanderous and bogus." Still, they said, Scheetz and the hotel group "decided to settle the lawsuit to bring closure to the Hatchel family."

Earlier, Scheetz settled a similar wrongful death lawsuit with Hatchel's father for a reportedly substantial sum.

In the lawsuit, Amador alleged Scheetz flew Hatchel to Las Vegas from New

York on the company jet "for a weekend of cocaine and sex." Her death, Amador alleged, was the "proximate result of the defendants' wrongful and/or negligent acts or omissions."

She died in a Turnberry Towers luxury condominium, a penthouse suite leased by Morgans.

Police investigated and concluded Hatchel's death was not a homicide.

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