

# Chronicle - Independent

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## Man accused in Rabon killing waives bond

By GARY PHILLIPS  
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Stephen Ross Kelly, 21, charged with kidnapping, sexually assaulting and strangling 18-year-old Briana Nicole Rabon to death will apparently remain in jail until his trial. Monday, Kelly waived his right to a bond hearing. Also, attorney Bob Mobley Cook of Kershaw, confirmed he is representing Kelly in the case.

According to online court records, Cook acted as Kelly's attorney in July 2013 when Kershaw County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) investigators arrested Kelly for allegedly stealing a pick-up truck and leaving it at approximately the same spot where several teenagers found Rabon's body.



Kelly

During a press conference Saturday morning, Sheriff Jim Matthews said that the stolen truck case indicates Kelly's prior knowledge of the area.

Rabon pleaded guilty in November to charges of receiving stolen property with a value of \$10,000 or more. A circuit court judge sentenced him to five years in prison, but suspended the sentence upon the 133 days he had already spent in jail, three years' probation and \$1,000 in restitution.

KCSO investigators arrested Kelly on Friday night after investigators found evidence Sheriff Jim Matthews said tied him to Rabon's murder. The teenagers found Rabon's body on the afternoon of Feb. 26 in a secluded area north of Haigs Creek subdivision, which is located south of Elgin near I-20.

During a press conference Saturday morning, Matthews said his team of investigators, along with the S.C. State Law Enforcement

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## Suttle discusses leadership with UWKC, other agencies

By HALEY ATKINSON  
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Earl Suttle, an author and motivational speaker with Leadership Success International, shared various ways leaders can improve the overall atmosphere in their workplace during a mentoring training/workshop hosted by the United Way of Kershaw County (UWKC) on Monday. Suttle's topic, "Enjoying Excellence: Becoming the greatest you can be," focused on creating "happiness in the workplace." He explained that a happier atmosphere provides employees with more energy and focus to complete their jobs. The training/workshop took place at the historic Robert Mills Courthouse.

Audience members -- made up of UWKC board members, members of UWKC partner agencies and members of

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C-I photo by Haley Atkinson

Earl Suttle (center), an author and motivational speaker, sits in front of United Way of Kershaw County board members, members of partner agencies and Kershaw County IMPACT during a training/workshop at the Robert Mills Courthouse. Suttle discussed how effective leaders breed happiness in the workplace.

## Man sentenced to 18 years for sexually assaulting girls

An Elgin man arrested twice for separate instances of sexually assaulting young girls will spend the next 18 years behind bars.

Monday, Circuit Court Judge R. Ferrell Cothran sentenced Ronald Linwood Christmas, 44, of Silicate Way, Elgin, to 18 years in prison following a negotiated plea agreement between his attorney and the 5th Circuit Solicitor's Office. Christmas faced a maximum sentence of between 25 years and up to life in prison on each of two first-degree criminal sexual conduct charges. He also faced 15 years in jail for an additional charge of committing a lewd act on a minor under the age of 16.

Kershaw County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) investigators first arrested Christmas in September 2011, charging him with first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor



Ronald Christmas

under the age of 11. Investigators alleged Christmas sexually assaulted his stepdaughter multiple times when she was between 5 and 8 years old. During a subsequent court hearing, the solicitor's office revealed the KCSO had served

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## Friday to be regular KCSO school day

Due to recent inclement weather, Friday will be a regular school day for Kershaw County School District (KCSO) students. The 2013-14 KCSO calendar approved in December of 2012 originally indicated that Friday would be a professional development day for teachers unless needed as an inclement weather make up day.

"We have missed five school days due to the two recent winter storms," KCSO Superintendent Dr. Frank Morgan said. "Using (Friday) as a regular school day will allow us to gain one of those days back, which is especially critical with upcoming state testing."

Morgan said the district is waiting for the outcome of any

legislation that may be passed by the General Assembly in terms of forgiving lost time due to the winter storms before any other decisions are made.

"We hope to know something soon in terms of possible forgiveness for these days from the state. As soon as we have that information and make a determination, we will let parents know," Morgan said.

Morgan also said that he does not foresee changing any of the time off for Spring break.

"Many families have already made travel plans that involve purchasing tickets that cannot be refunded," he said. "I will not recommend altering spring break."

## LF-R chief gets prepared for disasters at conference

Emergency managers from across South Carolina are meeting this week at the annual S.C. Emergency Management Association Conference in Myrtle Beach. Among those training for disaster preparedness is Lugoff Fire-Rescue (LF-R) Chief Dennis Ray, who also serves as the public information officer for Kershaw County Emergency Management.

"Preparedness and training are the keys to all we do in emergency services regardless of the area of responsibility. Disasters begin local and end local, even if the extent of the disaster stretches to state and federal levels," Ray said in a press release. "As a fire chief of

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Lugoff Fire-Rescue Lt. Michael Stanfield and Eng. Gavine Locklear confer with CSX Railroad Police Agent Dave Thomerson during a portion of this week's disaster preparedness training in Myrtle Beach.



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### DEATHS

Sarah P. Drakeford, Camden

Margie Horton, Camden



inpatient care  
outpatient care  
emergency services  
urgent care  
long term care  
cardiovascular services  
community outreach & wellness  
diabetes management

gastroenterology  
home health  
hospice  
imaging  
laboratory  
orthopedics  
oncology  
pediatrics

primary care  
pulmonology  
rehab services  
sleep diagnostics  
surgical services  
urology  
women's health



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# Jump Rope for the Heart at Blaney Elementary



C-I photos by Tenell Felder

Kim Allen, Blaney Elementary School (BES) Nurse, educates students about heart health at one of the stations at Jump Rope for the Heart. Jump Rope for the Heart is a community service project that teaches students the importance of exercising and eating healthy. BES students exceeded their goal to raise \$1000 for the Heart Association through the event.



Aleasha Kolmansberger and Connor Mitsada practice hitting a gym bag with BES Physical Education teacher Scott Lewis at one of the Jump Rope for the Heart stations.



First grader Shawn Hunger leads the way for his class-mates at the Bunny Hop station at Blaney Elementary School's Jump Rope for the Heart held last Friday.



Eric Maldonado shows off his jump roping skills at Jump Rope for the Heart's jump rope station.

## Lugoff

From Front Page

a local government agency in Lugoff, I must do all I can to prepare our agency for many types of disasters that include terrorist attacks, chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive attacks, local infectious disease outbreaks, transportation disasters involving trains, planes and commercial vehicles and

weather-related disasters such as tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, and winter-weather issues.”

Ray said February’s winter storm is a prime example of how quickly local resources can be challenged to meet statewide response demands.

“For a local official, these issues can be very overwhelming; which makes the information from this training conference of such value for me and my fellow emergency managers,” he said.

Ray said partnerships and solid working relationships between local officials, such as the LF-R and state agencies during a disaster, are paramount to the success of agencies meeting the needs of the public. He emphasized that emergency management agencies work well together in South Carolina from the local to the federal level before, during and after disasters occur.

“Our Kershaw County Office of Emergency Manage-

ment provides us continuous updates and information when we face disaster situations. That office is closely connected the South Carolina Emergency Management Division (SCEMD) to make sure the state agencies are informed of what we are facing or needing on the local level,” he said.

Ray said the state office, in turn, stays connected to federal agencies, such as the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“Our SCEMD Office does a

tremendous job of coordinating large-scale events while keeping the local officials advised of current and future response needs,” Ray said. “Having direct contact with state and local emergency management officials before a disaster is a key area in preparation for what may lie ahead for us statewide. Knowing faces and having cell phone numbers now before an event is invaluable.”

Local, state, and federal officials are conducting the

training for the emergency managers this week from all over the nation, covering a vast array of topics for disaster preparation. After-action reports from various disasters will also be reviewed to provide guidance to emergency managers for future event preparation.

Ray said Kershaw Count Fire Marshal and Emergency Management Director Gene Faulkenberry is also undergoing the emergency training.

## UWKC

From Front Page

Kershaw County IMPACT -- expressed great interest in Suttle’s remarks and learning how to become more motivated and dynamic leaders.

Suttle also encouraged audience members to read more leadership materials. He stated that he tries to read

one motivational text or attend one workshop a month in an effort to remain motivated and energized professionally.

Along with lecturing and presenting, Suttle worked interactively with attendees, asking questions of individuals and asking volunteers to participate in self-reflective thinking activities. One activity asked each person in the audience to tell another

person about something he or she used to enjoy doing, but have since given up.

Audience members shared such examples as cooking, coaching tennis and being more involved in church. Suttle asked those in attendance to think about why they had decided to give up doing something they enjoyed and if their life had benefitted from giving it up. He then encouraged participants to re-

claim the activities they love and enjoy.

Suttle’s main point was to show that a person who can find joy in his or her work will be exponentially more productive than someone who can’t. He encouraged attendees to embrace the changing dynamics of the workplace.

“As professionals,” he said, “we need to laugh more. We connect with other people when we smile. A great smile

tells others to approach you.”

The program concluded with Suttle asking each attendee to stand up and read aloud from an affirmation card, sharing such statements as “I am brilliant,” or “I am a wonderful parent.” He reminded the audience that positive affirmations were statements such as these that each person should be reciting to himself or herself throughout the day in order

to keep their attitude upbeat and their energy at a high level. Upon leaving, many attendees stopped to thank Suttle, saying the workshop had helped them become more motivated and focused.

Ahead of Suttle’s presentation, UWKC Mentoring Director Margaret Lawhorn shared information about the agency’s mentoring program and facilitated several training opportunities.

## Murder

From Front Page

Division worked feverishly from the time Rabon’s body was discovered until Kelly’s arrest and were still gathering evidence in the case. He said Kelly voluntarily went

to the sheriff’s office for an interview Friday, but kept changing his story as to where he was Tuesday night, when it is thought Rabon died.

Matthews said investigators found evidence tying Kelly to the murder in both his and Rabon’s cars, and arrested him. On the day her

body was discovered, investigators located Rabon’s car at a restaurant at the Lugoff I-20/U.S. 601 interchange. Matthew said surveillance footage and other evidence determined Kelly and Rabon met in the restaurant’s parking lot.

What exactly happened after that remains a mystery

for now.

According to online court records, deputies also arrested Kelly in June 2013 for malicious injury to personal property between \$2,000 and \$10,000 in value and for a first offense of criminal domestic violence. The malicious injury charge was dismissed. Kelly asked for a

jury trial on the criminal domestic violence charge, which is still pending. A magistrate released him at that time on \$5,000 bond.

A further search of online court records also revealed a first-offense marijuana charge in Darlington County from March 2012. A Harts-ville magistrate later found

him guilty at a bench trial, fining him \$620. Richland County deputies charged Kelly with speeding between 10 and 15 miles per hour over the speed limit in January 2013.

Kelly appears to have paid a \$133 fine in that case.

(Editor Martin L. Cahn contributed to this report.)

## Sentence

From Front Page

Christmas with a second warrant of committing a lewd act

on a minor under 16. Christmas allegedly fondled his ex-wife’s step-niece when she was 11 years old.

In May 2013, deputies charged Christmas yet again, this time on a second

charge of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor under 11.

Investigators alleged that Christmas engaged in inappropriate behavior with a girl between the ages of 7 and 8

between 2005 and 2007.

As part of Monday’s plea agreement, Christmas pled guilty to all three charges with the sentences to run concurrent for a total of 18 years’ incarceration in a S.C.

Department of Corrections prison.

“Although the children that Mr. Christmas assaulted will forever be affected by his actions, there is some consolation for them and

their families knowing that he is being sent to prison for a long time where he cannot hurt any other children,” Kershaw County Sheriff Jim Matthews said in a press release.

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