

BREAKING NEWS UPDATE: Prominent Modesto defense attorney Frank Carson arrested on suspicion of murder, 3 CHP officers also arrested in connection with case

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Prominent Modesto criminal defense attorney Frank Carson has been arrested on suspicion of first-degree murder in the death of Korey Kauffman, a Turlock man found dead in Mariposa County a year and a half after he went missing.

A 326-page arrest affidavit details an alleged conspiracy, with Carson identified as its ringleader. The defense attorney, who last year ran for district attorney, is described as a vengeful property owner seeking to send a message against people allegedly stealing scrap metal and antiques from his property in Turlock.

The Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department has released the [arrest affidavit](#), which lists nine people arrested, including Carson's wife, two Turlock business owners and three California Highway Patrol officers.

Along with the murder charge, the defense attorney faces charges of criminal conspiracy, false imprisonment and two counts of soliciting a crime. Those charged with murder also face an enhancement for the use of gun in the homicide and a special circumstance allegation of lying in wait.

Carson has said that any suggestion he's involved in Kauffman's death is absurd. Until Friday, officials involved in the investigation had refused to say whether Carson is a suspect in the murder, saying it would be inappropriate to comment on the pending case.

As part of the Kauffman investigation, authorities searched Carson's property not long after Kauffman went missing in 2012.

Percy Martinez, Carson's attorney, told The Modesto Bee on Friday that he and his client have been waiting for more than a year for authorities to make their allegations public, instead of investigators frequently bringing up Carson's name while questioning witnesses and suspects in the Kauffman case. Martinez said they look forward to fighting the allegations in court and clearing Carson's name.

The defense attorney's wife, Georgia Geanette Defilippo, faces charges of first-degree murder, criminal conspiracy and false imprisonment. Her daughter Cristina Anne Defilippo was arrested on suspicion of criminal conspiracy and being an accessory.

Baljit Athwal and his brother Daljit Atwal, who spell their last names differently, have been arrested on suspicion of first-degree murder, criminal conspiracy and false imprisonment.

The brothers, who own the Pop-N-Cork Liquor stores in Turlock, have claimed repeated harassment by law enforcement officials involved in the Kauffman murder investigation and organized protests outside the Stanislaus County District Attorney's Office in downtown Modesto. They also have filed a federal lawsuit against members of a local investigative task force looking into the murder.

California Highway Patrol officers Walter Wesley Wells, Scott J. McFarlane and Eduardo Quintanar Jr. also have been arrested in connection with the Turlock man's murder. During a press conference on Friday CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow said Wells was let go from employment and McFarlane and Quintanar were put on administrative leave following their arrest.

"I am here saddened by this news," Farrow said during the press conference, "The California Highway Patrol is a very proud organization that values integrity ... to hear news like this is devastating."

Robert Lee Woody is listed as an arrestee in the affidavit, charged with first-degree murder, criminal conspiracy and false imprisonment. But Woody has been in custody since last year and was the only person charged with murder in Kauffman's death until this week. Authorities had not publicly identified Woody's alleged co-conspirators.

During Woody's arraignment last year, Kauffman's father, Tony Kauffman, said the suspect was just a "small fry" in the extensive investigation, which took years and was investigated by a task force of detectives from the Sheriff's Department, District Attorney's Office and Modesto Police Department.

"I didn't know the quantity but I knew there was going to be a few more (people arrested) than just Woody," Tony Kauffman said Friday. "It feels pretty good, we've come a long way and it's only just beginning. ... We have a long road ahead of us."

Carson has been an outspoken critic of Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager and her office while making arguments in court and during his unsuccessful run for district attorney last year.

He has challenged the District Attorney's Office on several fronts in recent years, including filing a civil lawsuit against the county and a prosecution investigator accused of harassing Carson in a courthouse hallway. The civil trial was scheduled to start this week, but it was suddenly postponed and hasn't been rescheduled. Carson said Tuesday that he had no idea why the civil trial was postponed.

Martinez said he's not surprised by the timing of the arrests, considering the civil trial that was supposed to start this week. "Whenever Mr. Carson shakes their tree, they (law enforcement officials) turn around and shake tree."

Carson also has pushed for contempt charges against the prosecution investigator and a chief prosecutor who also is handling the Kauffman murder case.

Investigator Steve Jacobson is accused of questioning an alternate juror while the jury was deliberating in the trial of one of Carson's clients. Chief Deputy District Attorney Dave Harris is accused of failing to promptly notify the court that Jacobson had improper contact with an alternate juror. The contempt of court hearing was put on hold pending an appellate court decision on whether Carson is allowed to participate in that court proceeding.

Carson's attorney suggested that authorities arrested his client on a Friday so he would have to wait all weekend in the county before making his first court appearance early next week. Authorities have 72 hours to bring a defendant before a judge for his arraignment, when the defendant can ask for his bail amount to be set. On Friday afternoon, Carson was being held without bail.

"We anticipated it would go down like this," Martinez said.

Kauffman's father was reading arrest affidavit that chronicles the evidence gathered in his son's slaying. He'd only just begun Friday morning but said he already was surprised by some of the information, like the arrest of CHP officer McFarlane.

The officer lived next door to Korey Kauffman, so Tony Kauffman sought him for guidance about the intricacies of missing persons investigations. "I am old school, I look up to police officers," he said. "You don't expect them to be involved in the murder of your child, that's for damn sure."

Kauffman, who sold scrap metal, some of which was stolen, went missing in late March 2012. His body was discovered by hunters in an isolated area of Mariposa County in August 2013.

"The whole scrapper life, I didn't approve of it. You know how fathers are with their sons we tend to be harder on them," Tony Kauffman said. "But he chose his own path. He was a good kid with a good heart and he didn't deserve what he

got.”

As part of the Kauffman investigation, authorities searched Carson’s property not long after Kauffman went missing in 2012.

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KAUFMANN MURDER INVESTIGATION TIMELINE

January 2012: Carson represents Robert Lee Woody when he is accused of receiving stolen property. The charge was eventually dropped.

March 2012: Korey Kauffman left a friends house on Lander Avenue in Turlock and went missing.

October 16, 2013: A body found in August 2013 in the Stanislaus National Forest is that of a Korey Kauffman. Detectives term his death "suspicious" and are appealing for help from the public to determine what happened to him. Two hunters found the human remains and alerted authorities.

December 3, 2013: Preveen Singh (aka Prajeer Singh), a Modesto bail agent accused of using his position to solicit gang members to commit violent crimes is named as a person of interest in the slaying of a Korey Kauffman. Singh, also has been employed by criminal defense attorney and district attorney candidate Frank Carson. Carson, Singh's attorney, says Singh "has done work for us" as a private investigator.

March 6, 2014: After a seven-month, five-agency investigation into the death of a Korey Kaufmann, Robert Lee Woody, 38, is arrested on the charges of murder, conspiracy and a special enhancement for lying in wait. The criminal complaint against Woody also shows the conspiracy charge is supported by four allegations of involvement with three co-conspirators, who are listed only as B, C and D.

March 15, 2014: Robert Lee Woody, 38, pleaded not guilty on charges of murder and conspiracy and denied a special enhancement for lying in wait.

March 19, 2014: Superior Court Judge Ricardo Córdova doesn't reveal why he would recuse himself from Robert Lee Woody's case, but he did say that the rest of the judges in the courthouse, likely would recuse themselves if the three other people are charged. That could be an indication that the three people have some connection to the courthouse or people who work there.

March 22, 2014: Modesto defense attorney Frank Carson speaks to a group of licensed private investigators about his run to become the next Stanislaus County district attorney. He emphatically denies any involvement in an alleged criminal conspiracy linked to the death of Korey Kaufmann. "That notion is absurd," Carson says in a meeting of the local chapter of the California Association of Licensed Investigators.

April 11, 2014: Murder suspect Robert Lee Woody makes a brief appearance for a pretrial hearing. Hearing was continued to later in the month and prosecutor Dave Harris told the judge that the District Attorney's Office had not made a decision about the penalty that will be pursued against the defendant.

July 18, 2014: Defendant Robert Lee Woody, accused of murder and conspiracy to obstruct justice in the death of Korey Kauffman appears in court for a pretrial hearing. Chief Deputy District Attorney Dave Harris told the judge the Stanislaus County District Attorney's Office would not be seeking the death penalty against Woody.

Aug. 2, 2014: Praveen Singh, Modesto bail agent facing criminal charges, files a claim against Stanislaus County seeking \$20 million in damages, asserting he has been harassed repeatedly by investigators from the District Attorney's Office. Praveen Singh alleges that investigators have abused their power, trying to pressure him into providing information that links well-known Modesto defense attorney Frank Carson to the death of Korey Kauffman.

Aug. 30, 2014: Two brothers, Baljit Athwal and his brother Daljit Atwal, who spells his last name differently, owners of the Pop-N-Cork Liquor stores in Turlock file a claim against the cities of Modesto, Turlock and Ceres and Stanislaus County saying they have been repeatedly harassed by law enforcement involved in the Korey Kauffman murder investigation. The brothers claim the police falsely arrested them, inflicted emotional distress, caused physical injury and violated their civil rights during searches of their homes and businesses in March 2014.

June 3, 2014: Frank Carson is defeated by incumbent Birgit Fladager in the race for Stanislaus County District Attorney.

June 27, 2015: Praveen Singh, 36, and his girlfriend, Jyoteshna Karan, 43, are arrested. Singh, who filed a civil rights lawsuit against local law enforcement officials, also faces local criminal charges for allegedly asking inmates to commit crimes for him. Singh said he has been, since early 2013, the subject of an erroneous and malicious investigation into the murder of Korey Kauffman, according to the lawsuit filed by Singh's Southern California-based attorney, Alex Herrera. The lawsuit alleges that investigators have abused their power, arresting Singh three times, and none of the charges are linked to the murder investigation.

Aug. 13, 2015: Frank Clifford Carson, Georgia Geanette Defilippo, Daljit Singh Atwal, Baljit Singh Athwal, Walter Wesley Wells and Robert Lee Woody are arrested and charged with first degree murder, lying in wait, firearm enhancement, conspiracy to commit a crime and false imprisonment. Christina Anne Defilippo, Scott J. McFarlane, and Eduardo Quintanar Jr. are arrested on charges of conspiracy to commit a crime and accessory.

Compiled by Karen Aiello