

Man accused of kidnapping his mother gets probation; so does ex-sheriff, Ed Pearce, (Mar. 20, 2024)

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RENO, Nev. (KOLO) -The bizarre case of a local man and a former sheriff being charged with kidnapping the man's own mother ended Wednesday with a plea deal and probation.

The complicated case began almost five years ago with a family dispute over responsibility for the care of 80-year-old Susan Hillygus and the disposition of her property. She had been diagnosed as suffering from dementia and was in the care of a Reno Alzheimer's facility. Legal responsibility for her had passed from her son Roger to his sister and they disagreed over the sale of her home to cover the cost of her care.

With the help of former Mineral County Sheriff Stewart Handte, Hillygus took his mother out of the facility to Southern California where police discovered them days later. Roger Hillygus and Handte were arrested and charged with conspiracy and second degree kidnapping. Mrs. Hillygus was returned to Reno but died weeks later.

From there, things got even more complicated as both men fled the area after failing to comply with pre-trial requirements to wear GPS monitors. They were both arrested and returned.

Meanwhile the issues raised by the case and Handte's role in it drew attention elsewhere in the nation prompting wild, unfounded allegations of corruption leveled at local courts and officials.

Through it all, the original legal case remained unresolved, but negotiations in recent months led to a plea agreement trading no contest pleas of guilty to the lesser charge of burglary for no further jail time and that's the deal finalized in Judge Barry Breslow's court Wednesday.

Both received three years probation and time served along with fees and fines. Mental health evaluation and treatment were ordered for Hillygus. Both were ordered to refrain from contact with anyone else involved in the case and to avoid posting or making inflammatory statements.