

Man facing molestation charges found dead in Key West motel - 12/10/2000

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By TOM WALKER

Citizen Staff Writer

A former school teacher, due to appear in court to answer charges of child molestation in New Mexico, was found dead in a Simonton Street motel room last week of a self-inflicted gun shot wound.

Police say a maintenance person for the Spanish Gardens Motel found Albert Flores, 53, of Albuquerque, N.M., in the shower of a room Tuesday at 11:15 a.m.

He was due to check out that morning, police said.

"He had a handgun between his legs, a bullet casing in the shower and it appeared that he had dried blood all over his head," said officer Robert Winterbottom.

Detectives said Flores died from a single gunshot that entered beneath his chin and exited out the top of his skull. The .45-caliber pistol used by Flores was reported stolen in New Mexico.

A desk clerk said Flores checked in last Sunday. He reportedly arrived in a GMC pickup with New Mexico plates.

Key West police detective Bill Larkin, who coordinated the case with Albuquerque authorities, said Flores did not leave a suicide note.

"I was told he was pretty much a loner," Larkin said. "I spoke with a sister but she said they hadn't seen him in about a month. They had no idea where he was."

Flores was indicted in October for three counts of child molestation that allegedly occurred during 1992-93 in the Albuquerque public school system. A warrant was issued for his arrest when he failed to appear for his Oct. 30 arraignment. He had been on paid leave from his position since May 1999.

The incident allegedly occurred behind Flores' desk and involved a girl in his second-grade class at East San Jose Elementary School, deputy district attorney George Garman said to the Albuquerque Tribune. Flores had been employed with the system since 1975.

The victim, now a teen-ager, alleged Flores touched or applied force to intimate parts of her body on three occasions during the school year.

Flores reportedly had a long history of child-molestation allegations during his tenure as a teacher.

Sources in Albuquerque said the school system has come under fire as a result of the molestation accusations. Officials have been accused of knowing of Flores' reported activities but failed to take action.

"Instead of firing him, they simply moved him into the impoverished schools," the source said. "They figured no one would find out."

The district often waits for employees to be convicted of a crime before firing them. However, on Nov. 17, Flores was finally fired after school officials determined he abandoned his job.

In 1995, Flores was placed on leave for 10 days pending the outcome of another police investigation.

Flores was sued in a civil action that same year in a case involving sexual abuse of several young girls who accused Flores of inappropriately touching them while he was their teacher.

That case was settled without going to trial.

"It's a terrible situation, but a lot of people are relieved the children he molested won't have to be put through the trauma of having to testify against him," Larkin said.

Larkin said he believed Flores had not been in Key West long enough to have claimed any victims.

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