

Bond set for man charged in death

By Roxana Hegeman
The Associated Press

WICHITA (AP) — Bond was set at \$2 million Thursday for a man charged with murder in the 2003 death of a Kansas woman whose drowning was initially ruled an accident, along with several other charges including rape and child sexual exploitation.

Daniel U. Perez, 52, appeared in court via video hookup from the Sedgwick County jail on 39 criminal counts, including premeditated murder in the death of Patricia Hughes. Court documents indicate that both were living with a group of people in central Kansas now linked to several deaths, and Hughes' death was reclassified as a homicide amid evidence that the group was living off life insurance policies.

Investigators initially believed the 26-year-old mother accidentally drowned while trying to rescue her 2-year-old daughter from a residential pool at a home in Valley Center, a city just north of Wichita where the group was living at the time. The group was reclassified her death as a homicide in September.

Two criminal complaints unsealed Thursday show that Perez is facing numerous charges, including one count of sexual exploitation of an 8-year-old child and 11 counts each of rape and sodomy. He also is charged with making a criminal threat as well as several counts each of aggravated assault involving a rifle and making false statements to obtain credit from a Wichita car dealership.

He also is accused of making false statements on life insurance applications in 2006.

Sedgwick County District Judge Warren Wilbert set bond at \$2 million pending a preliminary hearing Feb. 2. The charges were initially filed in September but had been kept under seal while Perez finished serving a federal sentence for identity theft in Oklahoma before being extradited to Kansas to face the state charges.

Perez's court-appointed attorney,

Alice Osburn, did not immediately return a call from the Associated Press for comment.

The group of people lived together in at least three different states, either in one large home or in houses in close proximity, and was living in Valley Center at the time of Hughes' death, according to Martin Bauer, the attorney for Hughes' parents, who were recently granted legal guardianship of their now 11-year-old granddaughter.

Hughes' death is among at least 10 deaths linked to the group, according to court documents in the guardianship case. The girl's father, Brian Hughes, was killed in 2006 while changing a tire, and two years later the girl's guardian, Jennifer Hutson, was killed in a traffic accident.

The girl's maternal grandparents won custody in 2010, after federal and state investigators alerted them that the child could be in "imminent danger."

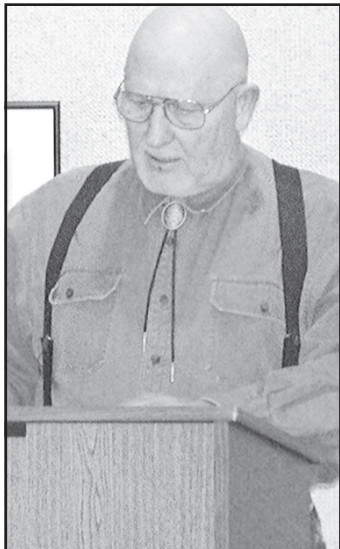
"There is a pattern that members of a group associated with the person using the name of Lou Castro have followed of insuring members of the group and then living off the proceeds of the life insurance policies when one of them dies," Bauer wrote in a July 2010 filing seeking custody for the grandparents.

The judge found that the girl was in "imminent danger" and granted the maternal grandparents guardianship.

Filings in that guardianship case in Kansas indicate detectives told the grandparents in 2010 that the man they knew as Lou Castro was in fact Perez, who had been charged in 1997 with multiple counts in several cases with felony indecency with a child-sexual contact and had fled before sentencing.

Investigators also told the grandparents about the federal case filed against Perez in Kansas for aggravated identity theft. In that case, he listed the same Tennessee address where their granddaughter was residing at the time.

Kickin' back, not working on railroad



Vera Saddler (center in left photo) and her husband Don (to her right) were greeted by a friend at a luncheon preceding the Food for Thought program Thursday at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Larry Dilts (above), author of "Colby's Railroads: A Local History," spoke about area railroads to an overflow crowd. The museum provides a light lunch for the monthly free program, but the crowd ate up all of the soup prepared this week.
KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Utah man gets lost class ring back 45 years later

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A Utah man who lost his class ring six months after he bought it is getting the keepsake back 45 years later, thanks to some Facebook detective work.

Brent Aguirre said his mother was disappointed when the 1966 Bonneville High School graduate lost the ring, which is gold toned with a deep blue stone.

"It's a beautiful ring," he told KSL-TV (<http://bit.ly/zT8f9o>). "I remember mom and dad forked out pretty good money for it."

He assumed the ring was at the bottom of Pineview Reservoir, not far from the Great Salt Lake, and wrote it off when he left to fight

in Vietnam.

The military service turned into an Air Force career that led him through nine different moves across the world and finally back to his hometown of Ogden. It wasn't until the fall that Aguirre received a Facebook message from a couple in nearby Sandy, saying they wanted to get in touch with him.

He brushed it off, but they contacted him again, telling him they'd found a ring with his name inscribed in cursive script.

The couple still isn't sure where the ring came from. The husband said he can't remember where he originally found it, and the wife

said the keepsake turned up when she was cleaning out a desk drawer.

"It was unbelievable," Aguirre said. "I had written it off, and it was hard to believe they actually had my ring."

Aguirre met up with the couple just after Christmas. More than four decades older, the ring no longer fits on his ring finger, but Aguirre said he's happy to have it on his pinky.

He said he only has one regret: That his mother, once upset that her teenage son lost the valuable so quickly, was not around to see that he'd found it at last.

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U.S. Department of Transportation

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