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Bronze cheetah stolen from outside gallery

By MARY SCHLEY

A THIEF was caught on video surveillance stealing a bronze cheetah sculpture valued at \$24,000 from outside the entrance to the Dawson Cole Fine Art gallery at Lincoln and Sixth in the early morning hours of Jan. 24, and police are hoping someone in town will recognize him.

The bust of the cheetah was sculpted and then cast in bronze by well known local artist Richard MacDonald and was No. 9 of a series of 75, according to Carmel Police Cmdr. Paul Tomasi. A gallery employee noticed it was missing when

he arrived at work around 9:45 a.m. Sunday.

The nook it had been sitting in contained security bars intended to hold the sculpture in place, according to Tomasi. But the day before the theft, surveillance video showed a man, accompanied by a female, looking over the sculpture and then picking it up before quickly putting it back.

Tomasi said a review of surveillance video from Jan. 23 at around 12:30 a.m. shows the suspect and a female in her late 30s looking at the sculpture, and then touching it.

"The suspect and female appeared to be admiring the cheetah sculpture," Tomasi said. "All of the sudden, the suspect removed the sculpture and walked away with it."

Inexplicably, three minutes later, he brought the sculpture back.

Tomasi described the woman as stocky, around 155 lbs., and 5-foot-5 to 5-foot-7. She was wearing an olive-colored coat, tight jeans and tan leather 2-inch-heeled boots. She was carrying a black purse on her right forearm. Meanwhile, the man was described as a white male adult in his 40s or 50s, 5 feet 9 inches to 6 feet tall and weighing 235 to 250 lbs., with a "large girth around his stomach area." He had short brown hair, was wearing a dark grey collared sweatshirt with a zip-down neck, light grey trousers and black tennis shoes. Both were carrying cups or drinking glasses.

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Bixby Bridge jumpers presumed dead, found GoPro tells story

By CHRIS COUNTS

FIVE DAYS after a daredevil jumper captured a leap off the Bixby Bridge in Big Sur with a GoPro camera, police used the same device to learn how two people died.

Although the bodies of the jumpers have not been recovered, Monterey County Sheriff Steve Bernal said at a press conference Monday that footage from the camera indicates they drowned in heavy surf after landing on the beach below the bridge. "We have no evidence to show that either survived," Bernal said.

Bernal identified the woman as Mary Katherine Connell, a 25-year-old from Tennessee who recently moved to Ventura. While police haven't released the name of the second jumper, he has been identified by other sources as Rami Kajala of Finland, a veteran of the thrill-seeking sport known as BASE jumping, which involves using parachutes and other equipment to jump from buildings, bridges and cliffs.

A mysterious car

On Jan. 23, sheriff's deputies began investigating a car that had been parked along the Old Coast Road near the bridge for three days. At first, they suspected it might be tied to a suicide, since Bixby Bridge has been the site of several

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Early-morning surveillance video from Richard MacDonald's gallery shows an unknown man approaching the front entrance, removing a valuable sculpture from a display nook next to the door, and carrying it away.

PG&E whistleblower reveals gas line safety lapses

■ Burnett, Calhoun call S.F. news conference to criticize utility

By MARY SCHLEY

TAKING AN unusual step in the city's battle with PG&E over safety issues, Carmel Mayor Jason Burnett and Police Chief Mike Calhoun held a press conference in San Francisco last week to announce they'd obtained evidence the utility company has failed to take the necessary steps to make its gas distribution system safer than it was when a gas leak caused the destruction of a house at Guadalupe and Third in March 2014.

Burnett said a former PG&E employee, Leslie Banach McNiece, told federal prosecutors the utility company broke laws and did not make recordkeeping a priority following the Carmel blast, or even after the 2010 explosion in San Bruno that killed eight people and destroyed dozens of homes. She

reportedly told them "pushback on any meaningful effort to address recordkeeping deficiencies was 'financially motivated,'" according to a statement issued by Burnett Jan. 19, and she testified that she found records "warning of problems with the pipeline that would later cause the 2010 San Bruno explosion" discarded in a PG&E dumpster.

McNiece was fired shortly after the explosion in Carmel, when bad records led a PG&E crew to punch into a gas line without knowing it had a plastic liner. The gas migrated between the liner and the pipe wall into a nearby house, where it ignited and exploded, destroying the home and damaging nearby houses. Nobody was injured in the blast.

"She had been brought in to help PG&E remedy their deficiencies after the San Bruno tragedy, and she had made recommendations for improvements that were rejected by the president," of PG&E, Burnett told The Pine Cone. "So the company is out there saying they're doing everything they

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PHOTOS/VIMEO, FACEBOOK

Photos posted on social media show Rami Kajala (above) and Katie Connell (right). The two drowned last week after a BASE jump in Big Sur.



While N.Y. was being buried by snow ...



IPHONE PANORAMIC PHOTO BY PAUL MILLER

Last weekend brought significant storms to both coasts – but the record snowfalls that hit the East were a bit worse than what was experienced here. Heavy rains on the Monterey Peninsula early Saturday were followed by a mix of sun and showers, a combination that generated some remarkable rainbows, including this awe-inspiring one over Lovers Point in Pacific Grove Saturday afternoon.

Attorney sues public defender, claims sexual harassment

By KELLY NIX

A FORMER Salinas criminal defense attorney has filed suit against the Monterey County Public Defender's Office, alleging he was the target of ongoing sexual harassment and a hostile work environment because he is gay.

Former deputy public defender Thomas Hughes alleges in a Jan. 19 complaint that his boss, Jim Egar, and assistant public defender Don Landis subjected him to derogatory comments about his sexual orientation, sex life and appearance during the three years he worked in the Salinas office.

Among the things Hughes alleges were said to him is that his facial hair appeared "too metro-sexual" and he was "almost trying to look homosexual;" and that it was "unfortunate"

that Hughes didn't "enjoy" Asian women.

After one of Hughes' family members died, Hughes claims he was told, "If you need a lesbian or someone like you to talk to, just let me know."

According to the suit, on another occasion someone in the office remarked that he didn't think Hughes "did any work around here; I thought you were in San Francisco at all your gay parties."

The comments outlined in the complaint are not specifically attributed to Egar, Landis or anybody else in the public defender's office. Landis, who declined to comment, told The Pine Cone he has not seen the lawsuit.

Egar and county counsel Charles

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