

Great Falls casino murders: what we know

Written by Administrator
Wednesday, 18 December 2019 19:54 -

GREAT FALLS — Three people were killed early Tuesday at the Emerald City Casino on 10th Avenue South in Great Falls. Authorities have not released information about the possible motive for the deaths, such as an attempted robbery or other reasons, and are continuing to investigate.

The victims: Three people, all from the Great Falls area, were killed. Cascade County Sheriff Jesse Slaughter released their names on Wednesday: Cheryl Ann Larson, 53 years old; Wendy Joanne Carlson, 60; and Steve Mitchell Hale, 61. A family member told KRTV that Wendy was an employee on-duty at the time. We do not yet know if the others were employees or customers; we are still working to get more details.

A fourth person, Timothy Edwards, was also shot, and survived. He remains hospitalized at Benefis Health System, and is expected to recover. A family member created a

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, which states: "He is a father of four and a husband. He was shot point blank in the back of the head. He moved his head just in time for the bullet to go through his face!"

The vigil: A public vigil is being planned to remember the victims. The vigil is being organized by Brittney Williams, Michelle Brandt, and Kayla Dutton. It will be at the Amigo Lounge (1200 7th Street South) on Friday, December 20, at 7pm. Williams told KRTV that they are doing this so that "our community can come together and show our respect for those who left us far too soon in such a horrific event."

The suspect: Ricky Lee Gardipee has been identified as the suspect. Petroleum County Coroner RJ Brown released the name on Wednesday morning. Gardipee, 41 years old, was shot by Deputy U.S. Marshals on 26th Street South near 7th Avenue South at about 5:40 a.m. His body was taken to the Montana Crime Lab in Billings for autopsy. According to the Montana Department of Corrections, Gardipee had a lengthy criminal record, with convictions in Cascade County and Lewis & Clark County for robbery, theft, burglary, assault on a peace officer,

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forgery, criminal possession of dangerous drugs, and failure to register as a violent offender.

The crime: A 911 call just after 2 a.m. requested emergency medical assistance at the Emerald Casino at 1701 10th Avenue South; a person was said to be bleeding from his face. When police officers and paramedics arrived, they found three people dead inside. A fourth victim was identified a short time later at Benefis Health System; that person is said to be recovering from a gunshot wound. There is no word yet on when or how he arrived at the hospital. Police immediately began searching for the suspect, and at about 5:45 a.m., they found the suspect in the area of 7th Avenue South and 26th Street; the GFPD said that shots were fired, and the suspect - who was armed - was shot and killed by law enforcement officers. Agencies involved in the hours-long search for the suspect included the Great Falls Police Department, the Cascade County Sheriff's Office, the US Marshals Service, Montana Probation & Parole, and the FBI.

Joshua Copeland said that his family was woken up by sounds of the suspect attempting to enter their home. Copeland said although the situation was intense, he wanted to make sure his family was safe as well. Copeland said, "It was extremely loud and violent. It wasn't a polite knock like somebody was here to visit. And so I got up to see what was going on and started checking the rest of my house to make sure that nobody was in my house and I could hear police sirens throughout the neighborhood going off. So I told my wife to call 911, that whoever they were looking for was trying to get into our house." He continued, "Once we called 911 and realized it was a serious incident and I could hear on the background on the radio that guns were involved and everything, that's when I wanted to move my family to the basement, to the safest spot possible."

The investigation: The Great Falls Police Department is leading the investigation into the murders. The Division of Criminal Investigation (part of the Montana Department of Justice) is handling the investigation into the shooting of Gardipee, which is standard procedure whenever a law enforcement officer kills a suspect. Cascade County Sheriff Jesse Slaughter said that the investigation is complex and will take some time. Fergus County Coroner Dick Brown will conduct the coroner's inquest. Anyone with information about the crime is asked to call the GFPD at 406-455-8519, or visit [P3TIPS.com](https://www.p3tips.com)

Tipsters can remain anonymous.

We will keep you updated as we get more information.

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