

COLONIES CORRUPTION TRIAL

NOT GUILTY

DEVELOPER, TWO FORMER OFFICIALS ARE ACQUITTED IN YEARSLONG CASE

By Joe Nelson and Richard K. De Atley
Southern California News Group

Three of the four defendants in the San Bernardino County-Colonies corruption case were found not guilty of all charges Monday, after a marathon trial that lasted nearly eight months.

Rancho Cucamonga developer Jeff Burum and two former county officials — former Supervisor Paul Biane and Mark Kirk, former chief of staff for then-county Supervisor Gary Ovitt — were charged with bribery, conflict of interest and improper influence in an alleged scheme to get county approval of a \$102 million court settlement in favor of the developer.

“I’m grateful to the jury,” Burum said after. “The jury gave up part of their careers and lives for eight months. I’m grateful to my friends and family for sticking by me in the belief this would be over eventually. Nobody should have to go through seven years of waiting to defend themselves. Nobody.”

The verdicts were read in the packed San Bernardino courtroom of Judge Michael A. Smith. Jurors for the three began deliberations late Wednesday afternoon, met all day Thursday and had Friday off. Word came that verdicts had been reached by midmorning Monday.

“Jury, this finally concludes your service. Normally I’d just say thank you — you deserve more than that,” Smith told the jury, to applause in the courtroom. “That’s not for your verdict; that’s for your service. We knew this would be a long trial. We told you July; it’s now end of August. We’ve had jurors have a birth in the family, a

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- A look at the nine felony charges against the defendants in the Colonies case. **NEWS 5**
- “It was all unanimous from the beginning,” says one of the jurors who spoke after the verdict. **NEWS 5**
- Timeline of events from 1999 to Monday’s verdict. **NEWS 6**



PHOTOS: RACHEL LUNA — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Developer Jeff Burum, center, and attorneys Jennifer Keller and Stephen Larson react as Burum is found not guilty of all charges in the Colonies corruption case Monday in San Bernardino Superior Court. A separate trial for a fourth Colonies defendant, Jim Erwin, remains to be concluded.

Mark Kirk, left, the former chief of staff for San Bernardino County Supervisor Gary Ovitt, and his defense attorney Peter Scalisi react after Kirk is found not guilty of all charges.



Former San Bernardino County Supervisor Paul Biane, right, shakes hands with defense attorney Stephen Larson after being exonerated.

CRIME

Online sleuths point wrong fingers



PHOTOS: RIVERSIDE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Police released these shots of suspects in a Riverside attack and asked for tips, but some people stated suspicions publicly.

Fatal attack prompts social media posts that lead to death threats against innocent man, police say

By Brian Rokos
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When Riverside police shared photographs of two possible attackers in a fatal fight Aug. 12 outside the Hideaway Cafe and asked the public to phone in tips, generally well-intentioned online sleuths set about publicly pointing fingers at suspects of their choosing instead of discreetly contacting detectives with their suspicions.

As a result, an innocent man re-

ceived death threats, police had to spend time deleting posts from their Facebook page and, an attorney said, the amateur detectives may have set themselves up for expensive defamation lawsuits.

“We appreciate our community doing their own detective work, but we’d appreciate them, instead of telling everyone about the detective work they did ... tell the detective working on the case,” Riverside police Officer Ryan Railsback said. Adam Valles, 29, of Bloomington

SLEUTHS » PAGE 2

INSIDE

Winds ease, rain continues



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A truck is flipped over in Port Aransas, Texas.

Powerful winds have abated but torrential rain continues to wreak havoc along the Gulf Coast. **NEWS 3**

Pot commerce considered

Marijuana businesses could be allowed in unincorporated areas of Riverside County, and voters may consider a tax. **LOCAL 1**

A pumpkin for Groot?

The new Guardians of the Galaxy ride at Disney California Adventure will get a Halloween makeover in its first scary season. **LOCAL 4**

WEATHER

Southern California cranks up the heat

Even as Lake Elsinore hits 114, forecasters say the worst is yet to come. Seniors and those in poor health are urged to take precautions

By Brian Rokos
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An afternoon of extreme weather in parts of Southern California on Monday brought record-setting temperatures, isolated thunderstorms that dropped up to 2 inches of rain and winds strong enough to topple trees.

The dangerous temperatures, which prompted warnings that people could risk heat-related ill-

ness if they don’t limit their outdoor activity, are expected to peak today or Wednesday. People who don’t have a good place to cool off can take advantage of cooling centers — places like libraries and community centers that welcome the public to use their air conditioning during intense heat waves.

Lake Elsinore hit 114 degrees on Monday, breaking the record of 110 set in 1998, and Riverside’s high of 109 was one de-

HEAT » PAGE 2



WATCHARA PHOMICINDA — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Bella Aguirre and cousin Levi Aguilar cool off on the splash pad at Rancho Jurupa Park in Riverside, which reached 109 Monday.

WEATHER

108 / 77
Riverside

Temecula: 108/74 Desert: 114/89 Mountains: 90/65

Full weather forecast » **NEWS 8**

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