

# TRAGIC BREAKDOWNS

## 'I've gotta quit this'

Friend says Dana Papst feared his struggle with alcoholism would destroy him

By David Collins  
For The New Mexican

Tesuque resident Dana Papst told a friend he knew he would die in a motor vehicle.

The longtime Colorado friend said Papst's death in the early hours of Nov. 12 after driving the wrong way on Interstate 25 was the end of a battle against alcoholism Papst long feared losing. Whatever help Papst found in his battle turned out to be too little and too late. His final moments were no exception.

Police were scrambling to stop a reported wrong-way driver on I-25 the evening of Nov. 11 when Papst drove headlong into a Las Vegas, N.M., family of six, killing all in the 2004 Honda Odyssey minivan except 15-year-old Arissa Garcia.

Among Papst's final publicly reported words were an admission. He told paramedics at the crash scene he had been drinking.

Blood tests later confirmed he had four times the amount of alcohol in his blood allowed by law for New Mexico drivers. An inexperienced drinker could not have functioned with so much alcohol in his system, experts said.

A flood of witnesses called police in the moments before the crash. A man and woman headed to Las Vegas later said they saw a vehicle make a U-turn from the northbound lanes and head back toward Santa Fe into oncoming traffic.

Pamela Case of Golden, Colo., said she saw Papst's truck emerge from the median before he sideswiped the rented van she was driving to visit her mother in Las Vegas. She was not injured, but the van was damaged beyond repair.

Little is known so far about where Papst obtained the alcohol that fatally clouded his judgment. Passengers on US Airways Flight 206 from Phoenix say flight attendants served him two single-serving containers of Jack Daniels whiskey.

The flight was on time for the scheduled 5:13 p.m. arrival at Albuquerque International Sunport, an airline spokesman said. Passengers said Papst was among the last passengers served before turbulence put an end to beverage service.

Flight attendants told him to "drink it quickly because he couldn't have it on the ground," said Sondra Adams, director of technology for the Bloomfield School District, who sat near the back of the Boeing 737 in seat 22D, across the aisle from Papst.

When sheriff's investigators searched the wreckage of Papst's 5,120-pound 2005 Dodge pickup, they found three cans of beer and a plastic ring that once held a six-pack.

The drinks Papst was known to have consumed in his final hours doesn't begin to account for the amount of alcohol in his blood at the time of the crash. A person of Papst's build, about 170 pounds, would typically have an extremely high blood-alcohol content of 0.265 if he drank 12 drinks in one hour, according to a widely circulated chart based on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data. Blood tests found that 0.32 percent of the liquid in Papst's veins after the crash was ethyl alcohol.

Airport shuttle personnel in Albuquerque don't recall seeing Papst after he disembarked from Flight 206 in the hours before the crash.

"He might have parked directly at the airport," Sunport Shuttle office manager Mary Long suggested.

Accident investigators haven't visited her in the week since the accident, Long said. After seeing Papst's face on television, employees of the shuttle asked one another if they recalled driving him to his truck, but no one did. An owner and employees of other shuttle services offered similar answers.

During the flight, Papst told Adams "he thought he should have come home the day before," she said.

Papst had been in Sacramento, Calif., according to Liz Kellogg, human-resources director for the Santa Fe Opera, where Papst worked as a computer-network administrator. Kellogg said Papst's work-related training had ended Thursday, and he had then taken some vacation time.

From Sacramento, Papst mailed a card to his 100-year-old grandfather in Iowa.

"Any time I was with him, he was gentleman and a friend," Joseph Papst said from his home in Neola, Iowa, where the retired farmer and laborer sat alone in the week following his grandson's death. "He was always ready to help somebody."

Papst told Adams the excursion after his work-related training was his first visit to Reno, Nev. He was not impressed with Reno, she said, and was eager to get home to his wife and his dogs.

Adams and her co-worker on Flight 206 thought someone

in control of the flight would attend to Papst, who she said was obviously drunk when he boarded and started chatting with her.

When the jet started rocking in turbulent air, Papst had disobeyed orders to buckle up, Adams said. "He had gotten his laptop (from an overhead luggage bay) and had slung it over his shoulder and was headed out," Adams said.

Flight attendants repeatedly told him to sit down.

As the mother of two teenage daughters, Adams said her experience with Papst in the hours before his death changed the way she will handle any similar event in the future.

"People assume that someone else is going to act on it. That's not an assumption I'm going to make anymore," she said.

Flight attendants asked Papst if he had a ride home, Adams said. He told them he did.

He could have had a ride rather than choosing to drive.

"We go to Tesuque; we usually take them right to the market," said Robert Noga, owner of Twin Hearts Express, which runs long-distance shuttles from the Sunport to cities north of Albuquerque.

A clerk at the Tesuque Village Market remembered Papst, who often stopped in for a breakfast burrito at the store near his home. Several others who visited the village market this week recognized Papst from news reports.

A neighbor who lives across the street from Papst's newly built home on MacGregor Lane in Tesuque remembered him and Stephanie Papst, his wife of 20 years, as conscientious neighbors.

"I just didn't see signs that he was engaged in the kind of behavior they are talking about," said neighbor Mark Sardella.

Sardella recalled a party at the home around the time of Papst's birthday. Some of Papst's friends, neighbors and co-workers attended. Alcohol was served.

Sardella, a licensed engineer and nationally recognized local-energy advocate, doesn't recall the drinking as excessive; he described it as "adult."

Since building the home on MacGregor Lane, Sardella said, Papst had installed a 10 mph speed-limit sign near the end of the driveway. He said Papst campaigned to slow traffic on the dirt road.

Conversations with Papst's family, friends, co-workers and

### 100 attend funeral for Papst



Dana Papst

family members who died when the truck Papst was driving collided with their minivan.

Unconditional love and forgiveness are the answers, Lutz said. He remembered Papst as a man who was always helpful in his job as an opera computer-network administrator.

Papst was somewhat of a joker who loved the outdoors, cooking, his pets and his friends, Lutz said.

Opera production director Paul Horpedahl read a passage from Kahlil Gibran's book *The Prophet*. Guests sat quietly as music from the rock band .38 Special played on the sound system.

Guests occasionally laughed together as Lutz recalled Papst's role in their lives. Papst's body lay in an open casket among photos and memorabilia as his wife tearfully read an account of the day they met nearly 20 years ago.

An obituary asked that contributions in Papst's memory be donated to a charity of the giver's choice.

— David Collins

even the strangers he encountered in his final hours all indicate that Papst was an affable, intelligent man.

He moved to New Mexico from Colorado, where he spent most of his life. Colorado records reveal a troubled past.

Papst was convicted of auto theft in 1984 and of driving while intoxicated four times — in Adams County in 1982, in Westminster in 1987, in Adams County in 1990 and in Eagle County in 1991. His license has been suspended numerous times for other driving offenses; he was cited 12 times for speeding, driving with a suspended license and equipment violations, among other things.

Exactly when he moved to New Mexico is unclear. In Tesuque, he built a house on the street where his wife grew up. Searches of address records and conversations with associates indicate the move followed his bankruptcy filings of 1993 in Albuquerque and 1997 in Colorado.

In those actions, he reported debts to the Internal Revenue Service, to state tax agencies, to law firms, to an automotive credit company, a mortgage company and to a student loan fund, among other creditors. The 1997 bankruptcy freed him and his wife of more than \$102,652 in debts.

That same year, he enrolled in Parks College, now Everest College, in Thornton, Colo.

There, he earned a two-year degree in computer science.

Obituary information provided by a funeral home said he held a bachelor's degree in business administration and computer science.

Papst had friends. Ed Kokai, a custom-home builder in the Denver area, considered Papst his best friend for many years. Papst was best man at Kokai's wedding.

Kokai recalls Papst as a sort of genius, filled with compassion. He recalled when Papst took his ailing mother home from the hospital in the early 1990s and cared for her until her death.

"If you did not know Dana, and you did not know he had been drinking, you would not know he had a problem," Kokai said. "As I got to know Dana, I realized he had some issues."

Kokai said he tried to help Papst. He was not the only one.

"Everybody just preached and preached to him and said, 'You've gotta knock this stuff off,'" Kokai said.

Kokai worked for a while with Papst at a potato plant owned by his father, Dennis Papst. The two camped, rode all-terrain vehicles and traveled together.

After Papst's drunken-driving conviction in 1991, Kokai said

he picked his friend up from jail daily to take him to work. He recalled taking Papst to court and that Papst attended alcoholism rehabilitation.

Papst's fourth Colorado drunken-driving arrest happened after he rolled a Chevrolet Blazer on a mountain road. Papst summoned Kokai to his house and opened the garage door to show his friend the damaged truck.

"He had these great big tears in his eyes and said, 'Ed, I screwed up again,'" Kokai said.

Papst lost his license as a result of that incident. It was reinstated in 1994.

"All I can say, out of respect to Dana, he never got caught after that," Kokai said.

Even if the justice system never stopped him again, Papst never escaped the disease that killed him. "He had a demon inside of him, and it was alcohol," Kokai said.

Kokai declined to tell most of the personal stories a close friend of a longtime alcoholic accumulates. He did recount how Papst had one night tried to come to his home in a drunken stupor, only to be taken into custody by police when he knocked on the wrong door. Inexplicably, Papst had tossed another neighbor's lawn ornaments on a roof.

Kokai recalled that Papst saw the tragic direction his life was taking but couldn't seem to stop.

"He always told me, 'I've gotta quit this; I'm gonna lose my family,'" Kokai said.

Kokai thought the long lull in Papst's often out-of-control battle with alcohol following the crash in the early 1990s had taught Papst a lesson. Papst had a darker vision of his future.

"Dana always did tell me he truly believed he was going to die in a vehicle," Kokai said.

Kokai lost touch with his friend after Papst moved to New Mexico. The annual Christmas cards eventually stopped. Kokai hoped it meant Papst had made a fresh start and won his struggle with alcohol. The end proved otherwise.

In New Mexico, Papst found a good job working for the Santa Fe Opera. He borrowed \$32,000 to buy a truck — the fourth vehicle he purchased in New Mexico.

When the bill came due for his life of drinking, Papst paid with his 44-year-old life and the lives of five others.

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### REFORM

# Fatal crash could spur tougher DWI laws

By David Miles  
The New Mexican

Proposals to combat drunken driving in the 2007 legislative session likely will range from more money for treatment of alcohol abuse to allowing judges to order young convicts to install ignition-interlock devices in their cars.

Also expect a proposal to count out-of-state DWI convictions for the purposes of a New Mexico law requiring the use of ignition interlocks.

Existing law requires all New Mexicans convicted of drunken driving to install an ignition-interlock device starting with their first conviction. Under a proposal from Gov. Bill Richardson, all driver's-license applicants in New Mexico would have to install an ignition interlock if they had a DWI conviction in another state since 2005.

A Nov. 11 highway crash resulting in six deaths has brought renewed attention to New Mexico's DWI problem. Law-enforcement officials say Dana Papst of Tesuque had a blood-alcohol level four times greater than the legal limit for driving and was headed the wrong way on Interstate 25 when his pickup smashed into a minivan near Santa Fe. Papst had flown into Albuquerque earlier that day and reportedly was drinking during the flight.

While DWI-related fatalities in New Mexico dropped more than 11 percent from 2004 to 2005, the state typically ranks among those with the nation's highest rates

of alcohol-related traffic deaths.

"I think we've made a lot of progress, but we still have a ways to go," Richardson spokesman Gilbert Gallegos said last week.

The governor on Tuesday said he was naming a DWI Strike Force to make recommendations by Dec. 22 for cracking down on drunken driving. The group's first meeting is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Tuesday in Room 315 of the Capitol.

Richardson has directed the strike force to focus on his ignition-interlock proposal and the following initiatives:

- ◆ Requiring people who move to New Mexico and apply for a driver's license to provide the Motor Vehicle Division with a certified copy of their out-of-state driving record. Papst had prior DWI convictions in Colorado, but his Colorado license was reinstated in 1994. He received a New Mexico driver's license earlier this year.

- ◆ Installing hazard-elimination devices on highways, such as spikes to flatten tires of cars that are headed the wrong way on ramps.

- ◆ Encouraging federal aviation agencies to require airlines to report suspected intoxicated passengers to local law-enforcement officials. The strike force would help develop a plan for screening such passengers at airports.

- ◆ Sharing information with other states about suspected drunken airline passengers.

- ◆ Expanding anti-DWI public-relations campaigns.

Gallegos said the ignition-interlock proposal and funding for the hazard-elimination devices probably would require legislation, while other initiatives might be achieved administratively. Lawmakers will convene a 60-day legislative session Jan. 16.

Gary Kilpatric, a lobbyist for Anheuser-Busch, said he hadn't seen Richardson's proposals but doubted the beer maker would oppose them. Anheuser-Busch, he said, had backed the state's ignition-interlock law and other measures aimed at reducing drunken driving.

"It bothers us as much as it bothers everybody else," Kilpatric said.

Sen. Kent Cravens, R-Albuquerque, said he would push legislation next session to allow judges to order juvenile offenders to install ignition-interlock devices even if their crimes were unrelated to drunken driving.

As of June, 5,264 court-ordered ignition-interlock devices were installed in vehicles across the state, Gallegos said. But Terry Huertaz, executive director of Mothers Against Drunk Driving in New Mexico, said many New Mexicans convicted of DWI tell judges they don't own a vehicle to avoid the ignition-interlock requirement. MADD's legislative goals include addressing that problem.

"We believe that some people are using it as a loophole," Huertaz said.

Cravens' brother, Paul Cravens, survived a car crash on Christmas Eve 1992 that killed his wife, Melanie, and her three

daughters from a previous marriage. Gordon House, who later admitted he drank seven beers before getting behind the wheel, was driving the wrong way on Interstate 40 west of Albuquerque when he crashed into the Cravens family's car.

Sen. Cisco McSorley, an Albuquerque Democrat and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the problem isn't with New Mexico's DWI laws, which he said are among the strongest in the country.

In recent years, lawmakers and Richardson have worked to approve tougher penalties for repeat DWI offenders and legislation requiring ignition-interlock devices after the first conviction. Other efforts include doubling the number of DWI "superblitzes," hiring more police officers, expanding a public-relations campaign against drunken driving and adopting stricter penalties against bars and restaurants that serve alcohol to minors or intoxicated adults.

But McSorley said there have been problems with implementing DWI laws, and he said the state continues to short-change treatment programs for alcohol and drug abuse. "If you don't treat the problem, you're going to just defer the consequences," McSorley said.

While Cravens said he's committed to pushing more DWI measures through the Legislature, he also wondered whether any law could have stopped Papst from getting behind the wheel. "I don't know what we could have done to prevent the tragic events of the last weekend," Cravens said.

117

DWI dismissals, Santa Fe County (2005)

6

Where New Mexico ranks among states in DWI fatalities (2004)

173

Citations for serving intoxicated people in the past year

529

Citations against liquor-license holders

6,000

Interlocks currently installed in New Mexico

13,000

Interlocks installed since 2003