

Questions haunt N.C. town where man was prematurely declared dead

By ALLEN G. BREED
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INGLESIDE, N.C. — Larry Green stepped out of the darkness so suddenly that the car that hit him didn't even leave skid marks. The impact sent his shoes, socks and the unopened beer in his hand flying.

Green came to rest on U.S. 401 alongside a trash-strewn ditch, where he was examined by paramedics and declared dead.

Over the next 2 1/2 hours, the bloody body with a gaping head wound was zipped into a black vinyl bag, taken to the morgue and slid into a stainless-steel refrigerated drawer.

There was just one problem: Green was alive.

Two weeks after that shocking discovery, the 29-year-old Green clings to life in a hospital intensive care unit, paralyzed.

Anguished family members have listened in horror as officials described the many missed signs and miscues that led to the error. They and others in this rural tobacco community northeast of Raleigh are left to wonder how something like this could have happened — and whether it has happened before.

"Something ain't right with that," said T.J. Henderson, a high school classmate of Green's. "I thought they were supposed to try to give mouth to mouth or the shock at least till they got to the emergency room. That's where I thought you were pronounced dead at, not on the scene. ... Not on the street."

On the chilly night of Jan. 24, Green and a pair of friends showed up at the Ingleside Grocery about 8:45 p.m. to pick up a few tall-boy cans of Natural Ice to take back to his trailer down the road. Green never made it.

According to reports from state troopers and the Franklin County attorney's office, 36-year-old Tamuel Jackson did not have time to stop her car before it slammed into Green as he tried to cross the highway in front of his trailer.

Randy Kearney, an off-duty

paramedic, was on the scene at 8:54 p.m. and found no pulse or sign of breathing. Blood had formed a foot-wide corona around Green's skull.

When county paramedics Paul Kilmer and Katherine Lamell arrived moments later, Kearney told them Green was dead, but asked Kilmer to double-check. Kilmer replied that his determination was "good enough for me," according to Kearney and two firefighters. Kilmer told officials he could not remember saying that, but doesn't deny it.

By the time paramedic Pamela Hayes arrived at 9 p.m., Green was covered by a white sheet.

Although the law does not require the medical examiner to go to accident scenes, Dr. J. B. Perdue showed up half an hour later and began examining the body, lifting and twisting Green's broken right leg, rolling him over and inserting a gloved finger into the gash in Green's head.

"That's more than I need to see!" Lamell shouted.

When Perdue opened Green's jacket, several firefighters holding a tarp to shield the body from onlookers noticed what appeared to be an in-and-out movement in Green's chest and abdomen.

"Doc, is he breathing?" the firefighters heard Kearney ask. Perdue told Kearney that it was just air escaping or moving around inside the body.

Paramedics put Green in a body bag and drove him to the morgue in nearby Louisburg. There, Perdue examined the body a second time. He took a blood sample, lifted Green's eyelids and sniffed around the man's mouth for alcohol.

Hayes, who had accompanied the body, thought she noticed twitching in Green's right eyelid. She asked Perdue if he was sure Green was really dead. Perdue responded that the twitching was a spasm, "like a frog leg jumping in a frying pan."

"I don't feel good about this," Hayes told colleagues, according to the county attorney's report. She asked Perdue again if he was sure Green was dead. He reassured her. The body bag was zipped

back up, and Green was placed in the portable morgue unit, where the temperature is kept a few degrees above freezing.

Green probably would have remained in the stainless-steel container had state Trooper Tyrone Hunt not arrived around 11:20 p.m. and asked Perdue to help him determine the direction from which Green had been struck.

This time, Perdue observed slight movement. He could not find a pulse in Green's neck, thigh or wrist, even with a stethoscope. Perdue summoned paramedics and an electrocardiogram, which was able to pick up a faint heart rhythm.

Family members who have kept vigil at Green's bedside say his eyes flutter at times and he shows signs he recognizes those around him. It is unclear whether his paralysis is from the accident, or the handling of his body afterward.

Within days, Kearney, Kilmer, Hayes and Lamell were all suspended with pay. The state's Office of Emergency Medical Services suspended Kearney's and Kilmer's credentials, citing "a lack of competence to practice with a reasonable degree of skill and safety."

Kearney and Kilmer were fired; Hayes and Lamell were ordered to undergo remedial training before coming back to work. Kearney declined an Associated Press request for comment, and the others did not respond to messages.

Dr. John Butts, the state's chief medical examiner, said that Perdue did everything the law required of him and that there are no plans to censure the 34-year veteran.

"He went because he was informed that a man was dead as a result of violence or trauma," Butts said. "He did not come with a doctor's bag and a stethoscope. He came with a pencil and paper to get information."

Perdue told the AP: "I am not in any shape form or fashion responsible for pronouncement of death. ... Obviously, I'm in sympathy with the family. My heart goes out to them, and my prayers are that this person recovers."



GERRY BROOME/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

This is the scene along U.S. 401 last Friday in Ingleside, N.C., where Larry Green was struck by a vehicle in front of his trailer and prematurely declared dead on Jan. 24.

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described passion for change, something he said the Palmetto State lacks, but which he is calling for.

Robbs said the primary focus of his campaign is tuition cost, which he claims is rising too high and should be a primary concern of students.

"The main thing on my platform is tuition," Robbs said. "And I have noticed a significant rise in it. If you go to the governor's website he is proposing a statewide cap on tuition, which is a great idea."

Robbs added that because of exorbitant tuition costs, students are being treated worse financially than convicted criminals. He said South Carolina spends more money per day on inmates than students attending USC.

"Those people behind bars are getting better treatment than you are financially," Robbs said. "They are getting more money a day than I do, and I am following the law."

Robbs, who was released from a local hospital on Saturday after battling an upper respiratory infection, said he was energized by the "fumes" of the campaign trail, but that he wasn't riding a proverbial high-horse either.

"I am not on some power trip, that is not what I am saying," Robbs said. "I know the power is limited, but the

students at USC are like sleeping giants and we can voice our opinion."

Such power, Robbs said, would be necessary for lowering Board of Trustees-mandated tuition at USC.

Ryan Holt

Feeling comfortable after the "showing of a lot of good issues" Tuesday and the support of two-dozen student organizations, Holt said he is excited about finding out whether his campaign annoyed people.

Holt said he has tried to distinguish himself from his opponents by concentrating on his previous work experience in Student Government.

"The greatest reason I am right for the job is because I am the only senator on the ticket," Holt said. "As said in the Student Government Constitution, the role of the vice president is to preside over the senate."

If elected, Holt said, his passion for USC athletics would be evident. He said he would create a larger Athletics committee in the senate and place more emphasis on school spirit, the "Vote for Cockey" campaign and the USC/Clemson lottery.

One idea was to raise funds for a traveling legion of USC football fans to away games, a task that Holt said has received at least preliminary approval from the football coach.

"I proposed the idea to Spurrier at a breakfast earlier this week and he seemed

interested," Holt said. "But maybe he just wanted to finish his breakfast."

Holt said the biggest two issues on his platform are identity security and improving communication between students. He said the communication issue can be solved by tweaking an existing USC system.

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