

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Marijuana Used By Minors Was Brought To Camp By AZ Academy Employee, Camp Director Reveals At Meeting

Crime / **Published On July 24, 2017 10:09 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- The marijuana that was used at the Big Island Adventure Camp getaway at North Side Valley, where at least two of the AZ Academy employees smoked the drug with minor campers, was brought to the camp by an AZ Academy employee, said AZ Academy Teacher and Camp Director Julie Landreneau, who revealed the information to concerned parents at a meeting held on Thursday evening at the school.

"I'm going to tell you that there was drugs, there was alcohol, there was sex, there was lap dancing going on, pretending that we're at a sex bar or whatever. I don't know what it

was... I think the lap dancing, the truth or dare was going on with my staff. Certainly not the example that I teach," Ms. Landreneau said.

Ms. Landreneau also said that the marijuana was not given to the minors. "One of my staff members brought it. They did not give it kids... but they smoked pot... one night. Yeah," she said.

But later in the same meeting, one of the minors, who had received a lap dance from a teenage girl at the camp, said he could not remember all what took place because he was high on marijuana. Asked where he got it from, the minor pointed to 19-year-old AZ Academy employee KD Perez. Mr. Perez was also said to have received a lap dance from one of the teens, but it was not clear whether the teen was one of the older Counselor in Training (CIT) employees, at 18-years-old, or a minor. The lap dancing, however, was performed in the presence of the minors, according to one of the minors in the room, who also said that she had given a lap dance to a male teen.

The information shared in this story comes directly from an audio recording of the Thursday meeting at AZ Academy, parts of which was shared with The Consortium by a concerned parent whose own child was a victim of the incident that occurred at North Side Valley during the weekend of July 7-9. The incident has devastated the family, who saw the AZ Academy Big Island Adventure Camp as a safe haven for their children, where adequate supervision was expected.

But the supervision, especially during the night, was highly inadequate. There was no parent chaperons, and only two persons over the age of 18 -- Mr. Perez, and a 26-year-old whose first name is Addison. Someone who manages the North Side Valley property, called "Ginger" during the meeting -- an adult female whose age was not revealed -- came occasionally to check on the teenagers. The negligence turned what was supposed to be an experience with children that would help them grow and learn new skills, into a damaging exposure to sex, drugs and alcohol for the teenagers, leaving parents -- most of whom learned what took place only on Thursday -- in shock.

At one point during a night on the weekend, the teens were playing truth or dare, which is where the lap dancing took place. It was also where Mr. Perez received the lap dance, according to a female teen at the meeting, who herself gave a lap dance to male minor teen. Kissing also took place during the truth or dare game, but a male teen, who was pressed to provide more information during the meeting, said he could not remember all the details of the incident because he was high on marijuana.

"The reason why I can't remember most of it is because before that happened, we were smoking," he said. Asked by a parent where were the adults while the teens were smoking, Addison, the 26-year-old Caucasian male, said, "I was smoking with them, actually."

The names of all teenagers below the age of 18 involved in this incident will not be named in this or any other related story published by The Consortium, unless given the explicit permission of their parents or guardians.

AZ Academy [issued a statement late Saturday](#) stating that it had investigated the "alleged" irresponsible behavior of staff, and that it had retained attorney Gordon Rhea,

"to ensure that AZ's investigation is as thorough and well guided as possible." The statement was credited to AZ Academy Executive Director Paula Heller, who was also present at the Thursday meeting.

"We blew it. I can tell you that my staff blew it," Ms. Landreneau said. She then started calling the names of staff members present at the meeting -- she named 7 -- asking them, "Do you know better?" They all answered yes.

She added, "I believe some of the responsibility.... I'm going to take all of it, but when are we ever going to hold young people responsible...?" Ms. Landreneau was immediately rebuked by a parent.

The North Side Valley, located on the north shore of Frederiksted past the V.I. National Guard facility, is a maze of cabins on a highly secluded, hilly estate. The estate's expansive grounds, dotted with mango trees, palm trees, grass and bushes, appear to be perfect for a getaway that frees its guests from the outside world; there is no cellphone reception in the area. Livid parents said AZ Academy should have had more adult supervision, people older than 17, 18, and 19 years old. Ms. Landreneau herself would leave the camp at about 9:00 p.m. every night.

"All I could say is I'm sorry. I don't even know what to say to you; all I can say is that I am sorry that your children, on my watch, were not taken care of, and that my staff that I trusted did not handle themselves appropriately, and maybe I expected too much," Ms. Landreneau said. Weapons were also said to be at the weekend adventure, including a gun and a knife

The incident has caused concern among residents and law enforcement officials alike, with the Department of Justice following the case closely, and V.I.P.D. and Dept. of Human Services conducting investigations.

But by Saturday night, the school had changed its talk. In a release issued to the families of CITs, Ms. Landreneau started referring to the incident as accusations, even after some of the CITs staff and teen campers openly admitted at the meeting to what had happened.

"All of our administrative staff have been working diligently with all parties involved along with the Department of Human Services and our legal counsel, Gordon Rhea, esquire, to address these *accusations and uncover the truth*," reads the message to CIT families.

The school apologized to the families for informing them late about the incident, stating, "It is with a very heavy heart to us that many of you found out through other means and not directly from us. Our sincerest apology."

At least one parent, whose 14-year-old was exposed to the behavior — with one of the male teenagers initially bragging about having sex with the child, only to change his version of what happened as the pressure intensified — reported the matter in detail to the V.I.P.D. as well as the Dept. of Human Services, Child Care and Regulatory Services division.

D.H.S. Public Relations Officer, Carol Burke, told The Consortium on Friday that a thorough investigation would be conducted and appropriate action taken.

“Know that the department itself [D.H.S.], in conjunction with the V.I.P.D., will conduct a complete investigation into the matter and make a determination as to the licensing of the Academy as a summer camp for children, as well as any other related issues that we have to take up,” Ms. Burke said. “We’re not going to sit on our hands, look at it and not do anything.”

She added, “The department is committed to any investigation that needs to be done in regards to what our children [are] being exposed to at a summer camp, and what happened in terms of their safety.” She said once the investigation is completed, “know that the commissioner [of D.H.S.] will be prepared to do what is necessary to deal with the license, or any other related [matter]. The well-being and welfare of our children are equally important issues to deal with the camp moving forward.”

Police Commissioner Delroy Richards told The Consortium on Saturday that once the force’s investigation is completed, the findings will be presented to the Department of Justice.

Whether there were other lewd behavior at the camp remains unknown, as some of those involved admitted to being high on marijuana and alcohol with little recollection of some of the things that took place. Furthermore, not all parents of children involved- — roughly 15 — were at the meeting, leaving open the question whether all parents knew what took place.

The school will not be taking any questions, however. Instead, all inquiries for comment have been directed to Mr. Rhea.