

Probe into fatal bike crash in Santa Cruz continues, cyclist remembered as 'high-spirited'™

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The investigation into the Mission Street collision Tuesday that left a Santa Cruz cyclist dead will be completed early next week, police said Thursday.

The final crash report, which will indicate who was responsible for the accident and if anyone should face criminal charges, should be done no later than Tuesday, Santa Cruz police Lt. Rudy Escalante said.

Also, the coroner will perform an autopsy on Christopher Evan Rock, 40, by the end of the week, the Sheriff's Office reported. Rock died at the scene of the crash, which occurred on Mission and Bay streets.

He "suffered a severe head injury," sheriff's Sgt. Fred Plageman said.

Rock was pedaling a black beach cruiser toward downtown when the trailer of a quarry truck struck him around 12:30 p.m. Tuesday. The driver, who works for Hildebrand Trucking, didn't notice the collision and continued driving until police stopped him on Highway 1 near River Street. Police said the man has a clean driving record.

Friends who had known Rock since high school said Thursday they were surprised by his death. Although he was deaf, friends said they never worried about Rock's safety when he rode his bike.

They said he was a "high-spirited" man who aspired to be a competitive cyclist.

"He was great. He was always smiling," said Shylynn Barlow of Aptos. "He was funny, had a good sense of humor, had a wonderful attitude about everything."

Barlow met Rock when both were students at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont. When they both ended up in Santa Cruz County, they attended events sponsored by the deaf community and mentored others together. She said Rock was a good communicator who was always willing to help others or lend them money.

"He had a wonderful attitude and a smile," said Valerie Reid of Sacramento, another high school friend. "He was always really friendly and great all day."

Rock rode his bike daily and dreamed of becoming a professional cyclist, Barlow said.

"His goal was to travel to L.A. with a group of cyclists," Barlow said. "It's sad that his goal is gone."

Rock couldn't drive because of a brain injury he suffered in a car accident about 15 years ago, so he walked or rode his bike everywhere.

"He's just a big showoff with his bike," Barlow said, explaining Rock would routinely point out the thousands of miles he had cycled. "He shows everybody and brags."

Like many local cyclists, Barlow said she would like the city to improve bike access on Mission Street. In separate accidents in August, a Pacific Collegiate School teacher riding his bike died and female cyclist suffered serious leg injuries in collisions with big rig trucks in the same intersection where Rock died.

"Really, they just need to change the narrow part of the street," Barlow said. "I believe they just need to make a change and make the street better."

More than a hundred cyclists turned out Wednesday night to participate in a memorial ride for Rock that started at the Town Clock and finished at Mission and Bay streets. They installed a "ghost bike" -- an old bicycle painted white -- in the spot where Rock died.

Friends are working with Rock's parents, who live in San Jose, to plan a memorial service. Details have yet to be announced.

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