

CITY | STATE

Showers of celebration



Brett Coomer / Staff photographer

YES Prep graduating seniors Monserrat Espinoza, from left, Alexa Fernandez and C.J. Garcia cheer on their classmates as they announce their college choices during Sunday’s annual signing ceremony at Rice Stadium. A record number of seniors — more than 1,400 — took to the stage despite the rain.

Woman says her ex didn’t set deadly fire

By Peggy O’Hare
STAFF WRITER

A Medina County man has lived under a cloud for months since he was accused by attorneys in a civil lawsuit of igniting a deadly San Marcos apartment fire. Ryon Wayne Castro, 32, has not been criminally charged in the arson fire that killed five young adults at Iconic Village Apartments near Texas State University in 2018. The deaths were ruled homicides, but a lead investigator said months ago that Castro was not a focus of the probe, which so far has produced no arrests.

But the lawyers accusing Castro aren’t backing down.

“Our concerns about Mr. Castro’s role in this event have not been alleviated and will remain a focus of our ongoing discovery efforts,” one of the lawyers, Dan Byrne of Austin, said in an email Thursday.

Byrne, who represents two of the parties being sued, had said at a hearing in November that Castro’s ex-girlfriend, Beth Conboy, told people on the morning of the fire that she suspected Castro of igniting it. Byrne also told a judge that Castro had “a history of association with arson” and “opportunity and motive” to set the fire.

Byrne and other attorneys publicly blaming Castro haven’t provided details or disclosed any other factors to explain why they think he’s responsible.

Conboy, 23, a resident of the apartments who suffered serious injuries after jumping from a window to escape the blaze, said she had not seen “any solid evidence” to suggest Castro was responsible — though a neighbor whose roommate was killed suspected him.

“I do not believe that he had anything to do with this,” Conboy said in a deposition last fall.

She denied ever telling anyone that she suspected Castro of setting the fire.

Efforts to reach Castro for comment were unsuccessful. He gave a deposition in the lawsuit last month, represented by Houston attorney Jason Lawrence, who didn’t respond to requests for comment. Castro’s testimony

isn’t among the publicly available lawsuit documents.

The inferno at Iconic Village killed Texas State students Dru Estes, 20, of San Antonio; Haley Michele Frizzell, 19, of San Angelo; and David Angel Ortiz, 21, of Pasadena; former Texas State student Belinda Moats, 21, of Big Wells; and James Phillip Miranda, 23, of Mount Pleasant.

All were in various second-floor apartments of the same building when the fire erupted shortly before 4:30 a.m. July 20, 2018.

Another victim, Zachary Sutterfield, now 22, survived with third-degree burns to nearly 70 percent of his body and a traumatic brain injury when he jumped from an outdoor balcony to escape. He is still recovering at his San Angelo home.

After the fire, some residents said their smoke detectors never sounded or were activated only after the danger was well underway. The apartments, built in 1970, weren’t required to have fire sprinklers.

Thirteen survivors and the parents of two victims killed have sued the apartments’ owners, leasing managers and various companies for more than \$1 million, accusing them of safety lapses. The defendants have denied any wrongdoing.

The case is set for a jury trial in Austin on Nov. 1.

The defendants convinced a state district judge to designate Castro and an unidentified “John Doe” as responsible third parties in the suit, using a strategy commonly known as the “empty chair defense” to point to someone else to reduce their own potential liability.

In previous interviews, criminal investigators haven’t backed the defense theory. San Marcos Fire Marshal Kelly Kistner has said the probe wasn’t focused on Castro “at all.” He could not be reached for an update last week.

Investigators haven’t disclosed where they think the blaze started or how it was ignited.

‘A wall of fire’

Conboy, a musician and songwriter originally from Wimberley and now living

in the Boston area, is among the lawsuit plaintiffs who survived. Her upstairs corner apartment was across a breezeway from the unit where Sutterfield, Frizzell and Ortiz were staying and was two doors down from where Moats lived.

Conboy testified that Castro would occasionally stay at her place while they were dating. They met in January 2018 during a game of unicycle football in a parking lot in San Marcos.

After three months, their relationship soured because Castro was jealous and controlling, but he never threatened or assaulted her, Conboy testified.

“We did not have an easy relationship, and we did not have an easy breakup,” she said. “He was a bit possessive of me.”

Conboy said she broke up with Castro several times, starting in June 2018, a week before someone burned a decorative tapestry draped on a couch in her apartment breezeway. Conboy said she was out of town; her roommate told her about it by phone but wasn’t home herself when it happened.

Miranda — a neighbor who later died in the apartment blaze — put out the tapestry fire, Conboy said. The burning fabric was on the ground in front of her apartment door, “at least 6 to 10 feet away from the couch,” she said.

Conboy said she called the San Marcos Fire Department but that nobody came to examine the tapestry, so she eventually threw it away. Fire Chief Les Stephens declined to comment on her assertion.

Conboy said she also reported the tapestry fire to a leasing manager in the Iconic Village office, who “basically told me that there was nothing that she could do.”

An ATF agent later told Conboy there was no connection between the tapestry fire and the larger inferno, that the two fires “100 percent are not related,” but would not tell her how investigators knew that, she said.

The lawsuit trial is expected to last six to seven weeks.

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TIGER

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at \$125,000.

Cuevas is charged with murder in an unrelated Fort Bend County shooting. The case, Elliott said, is expected to go to trial in December.

The suspect’s imminent release follows a recently filed search warrant in Harris County that show Cuevas’ landlord knew him by another name. The lease agreement for the home in the 1100 block of Ivy Wall Drive — where authorities said the juvenile tiger had been living — listed Nick Halden as the renter.

The landlord was shown a picture of Cuevas and identified him as Halden.

Elliott was unable to explain why Cuevas used another name on his rental contract and presumed it had to do with his mixed martial arts career.

“Many of these fighters use a different name when they fight,” Elliott said.

Police used the search warrant to seize a gun safe from the home in case it contained firearms — which would be another violation of Cuevas’ bond in Fort Bend County. The safe was taken to a police property room to be opened.

Elliott said the gun safe was empty.

The tiger vanished for nearly a week — with police surmising that exotic animal traffickers had stashed the animal — after a viral video showed the aftermath of its May 9 escape. The cat has since been relocated to the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch wildlife sanctuary near Dallas.

Police believe Cuevas is the tiger’s owner, an assertion that Elliott has repeatedly disputed.

Cuevas’ wife helped lead police to the tiger, police Commander Ron Borza said.

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A newly improved version of America's best-selling male supplement gives 70-year-old men the results they enjoyed in their 30's.

America's best-selling male performance enhancer just got a lot better.

It's the latest breakthrough for nitric oxide — the molecule that makes pleasure possible by increasing blood flow right throughout your body.

Nitric oxide won the Nobel Prize in 1998. It's why “the little blue pill” works. More than 200,000 studies confirm it's the key to performance.

And this new discovery increases nitric oxide availability resulting in even quicker, stronger and longer-lasting pleasure.

One double-blind, placebo-controlled study (the “gold-standard” of research) involved a group of 70-year-old men.

They didn't exercise. They didn't eat healthy. And researchers reported their “nitric oxide availability was almost totally compromised,” resulting in HALF the blood flow of a man in his peak.

But only five minutes after the first dose their blood flow increased 275%, back to levels of a perfectly healthy 31-year-old man! “It's amazing,” remarks nitric oxide expert Dr. Al Sears. “That's like giving 70-year-old men the power of 30-year-olds.”

WHY SO MUCH EXCITEMENT?

Despite the billions men spend annually on older nitric oxide therapies, there's one well-known problem with them.

They don't always work.

A world renown physician explains why. He's studied nitric oxide for over 43 years. He is the physician-in-chief at a notable hospital in Boston. He says a “deficiency of bioactive nitric oxide... leads to impaired endothelium-dependent vasorelaxation.”

In plain English, these older products may increase levels of nitric oxide. But that's only half the battle. If it's not bioactively available then your body can't absorb it and won't perform.

Experts simply call it the nitric oxide “glitch.” And until now, there's never been a solution.

5th GENERATION NITRIC OXIDE FORMULA FLYING OFF SHELVES

Upon further research, America's No. 1 men's health expert Dr. Al Sears discovered certain nutrients fix this “glitch” resulting in 275% better blood flow.

He's combined those nutrients with proven nitric oxide boosters in a new formula called *Primal Max Red*. In clinical trials, 5,000 mg is required for satisfying performance. *Primal Max Red* contains a bigger, 9,000 mg per serving dose. It's



A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven in a clinical trial to boost blood flow 275% resulting in even quicker, stronger and longer-lasting performance.

become so popular, he's having trouble keeping it in stock.

Dr. Sears is the author of more than 500 scientific papers. Thousands of people listened to him speak at the recent Palm Beach Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz. NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Namath visited his clinic, the **Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine**.

Primal Max Red has only been available for a few months — but everyone who takes it reports a big difference. *“I have the energy to perform three times in one day, WOW! That has not happened in years. Oh, by the way I am 62,”* says Jonathan K. from Birmingham, AL.

HOW IT WORKS

Loss of staying power starts with your blood vessels. Specifically, the inside layer called the endothelium where nitric oxide is made.

The problem is various factors thicken your blood vessels as you age. This blocks availability causing the nitric oxide “glitch.” The result is difficulty in getting and sustaining healthy blood flow.

How bad is the problem?

Researcher shows the typical 40-year-old man absorbs 50% less nitric oxide. At 50, that drops to 25%. And once you pass 60 just a measly 15% gets through.

To make matters worse, nitric oxide levels start declining in your 30s. And by 70, nitric oxide production is down an alarming 75%.

Primal Max Red is the first formula to tackle both problems. Combining powerful nitric oxide boosters and a proven delivery mechanism that defeats the nitric oxide “glitch” resulting in 275% better blood flow. There's not enough space here to fully explain how it works, so Dr. Sears will send anyone who orders *Primal Max Red* a free special report that explains everything.

MORE CLINICAL RESULTS

Nutrients in *Primal Max Red* have logged impressive results.

In a *Journal of Applied Physiology* study, one resulted in a 30 times MORE nitric oxide. And these increased levels lasted up to 12 hours.

“I measured my nitric oxide levels, you can buy a test kit from Amazon,” reports 48-year-old Jeff O. “Monday night I showed depleted.”

Then he used ingredients in *Primal Max Red* and, “The results were off the charts. I first woke around 3 a.m. on Tuesday ready to go. My nitric oxide levels measured at the top end of the range.”

FREE BONUS TESTOSTERONE BOOSTER

Every order also gets Dr. Sears testosterone boosting formula *Primal Max Black* for free.

“If you want passionate pleasure you had in your younger days, you need nitric oxide to get you going. And testosterone for energy and drive,” says Dr. Sears. “You get both with *Primal Max Red* and *Primal Max Black*.”

HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX

To secure free bottles of *Primal Max Black* and get the hot, new *Primal Max Red* formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-764-8964 within the next 48 hours. “It's not available in drug stores yet,” says Dr. Sears. “The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer.”

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about *Primal Max*, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back,” he says.

The Hotline will be open for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number will be shut down to allow them to restock. Call 1-800-764-8964 to secure your limited supply of *Primal Max Red* and free bottles of *Primal Max Black*. You don't need a prescription, and those who call in the first 24 hours qualify for a significant discount. Use Promo Code NP0521PMAX092 when you call in. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered.

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