

## Deseret News Utah News

### Arrests of 2 fugitives stun benefactor

*Utahn had befriended men who are suspects in 2 shootouts, murder case.*

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**By Hans S. Moran**

Deseret News staff writer

GUNLOCK, Washington County — A lifelong resident of this sleepy southwestern Utah community, Rodney Leavitt is well-known as one of the town's good Samaritans.

"He's always picking up strays," said the 70-year-old rancher's daughter, Laree Leavitt Orton.

So it seemed natural that when Rodney Leavitt, a community council member and state water commissioner for the Santa Clara River Basin, found two brothers camping out in the wilderness with their young families, he offered them food and a place to live.

Tuesday, Leavitt was shocked to learn the two men he had helped were wanted by police in connection with two Ohio shootouts last Feb. 15.

Police arrested Chevie Kehoe, 24, without incident about noon Tuesday at Overson's Farm Center in Cedar City on an unlawful-flight warrant.

Agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Tuesday interviewed Kehoe, who spent the night in a booking cell at the Iron County Utah State Correctional Facility. Kehoe was taken from the facility about 7 a.m. Wednesday, an officer said.

Kehoe was taken to Salt Lake City Wednesday morning for a removal hearing before a U.S. magistrate, said ATF special agent BJ Zapor. The hearing is to determine whether Kehoe will be transported to Spokane, Wash., for arraignment.

Meanwhile, Kehoe will be held in the Salt Lake County Jail in custody of the U.S. Marshal's Office.

Kehoe's brother, Cheyne Kehoe, 21, surrendered Monday in his hometown of Colville, Wash.

He made an initial appearance Tuesday before Spokane County District Court Commissioner Virginia Rockwood, who ordered him held on \$1 million bail on a Clinton County, Ohio, warrant for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

The brothers are wanted on a 16-count indictment accusing them of shooting at lawmen in Ohio. Chevie Kehoe is also wanted for questioning in the slaying of a family in Arkansas.

Speaking on his father's behalf, Jay Leavitt said Rodney Leavitt (no relation to Gov. Mike Leavitt) found the brothers and their families about two months ago camping out about five miles northwest of Gunlock, an unincorporated area with less than 100 residents about 22 miles northwest of St. George.

The men told Rodney Leavitt their names were Jason (Cheyne) and JC (Chevie) Collins, Jay Leavitt said.

Cheyne Kehoe and his wife had an 10-month-old baby. Chevie and his wife had three children younger than 5 years. They had a truck with little fuel and their food supplies were running out.

After seeing their predicament, Rodney Leavitt brought some food to the group, Orton said.

But the men would not accept anything without paying for it. They told Leavitt they had encountered some hard luck and were trying to get back on their feet.

So Rodney Leavitt offered them a place to live and a small wage for working on a farm near Beryl, Iron County, Jay Leavitt said.

The men moved their families into a six-wheel trailer at the farm about 38 miles north of Gunlock and began to work the land.

"It was very evident that both of these young men were very family-oriented," Orton said. "I really liked them because, in this day and age, it's very refreshing to find someone that is willing to work for something.

"From the way they worked, we thought they had come from a farming background," she said.

In the two months at the farm, they planted about a 10-acre field of sweet corn and kept some chickens and a cow.

The brothers even began to become acquainted with the Gunlock community. They visited the town occasionally and interacted with the Leavitts and other residents. In May, Chevie Kehoe helped build a water fountain at a park for a Girl Scouts fund-raiser.

"They always conducted themselves as very nice family men," Orton said. "I was very impressed with their respect for their children and their wives and the elderly."

That's why Tuesday's news was such a shock.

A 16-count indictment from Ohio accuses the brothers of shooting at a state trooper, a Clinton County deputy sheriff and two Wilmington police officers in two gun battles after a Feb. 15 traffic stop.

The officers weren't hurt, but a passer-by was hit in the shoulder by a bullet fragment during the second shootout. Wilmington is about 50 miles northeast of Cincinnati.

The brothers had hats and jackets bearing FBI logos and two U.S. marshal badges, according to a search warrant police used to search a 1977 Chevrolet Suburban the brothers were believed to have been driving.

Police said the vehicle also held six guns, more than 4,000 rounds of ammunition, bulletproof vests and a large amount of military-type gear.

Chris Thompson, spokesman for Washington state Gov. Gary Locke in Olympia, said Locke has not received any request for extradition of Cheyne Kehoe, but the process normally takes a couple of weeks or longer.

Rockwood said Washington can keep Kehoe on a fugitive warrant for 90 days.

Chevie Kehoe was buying baling twine at Overson's when FBI agents arrested him Tuesday, Orton said.

He was also being sought for questioning in the slayings of Tilly, Ark., gun dealer David Mueller, 52; his wife, Nancy, 28; and her daughter, Sarah Elizabeth Powell, 8. The three

disappeared in January 1996. Their decomposed bodies were dredged from the Illinois Bayou near Russellville, Ark., June 28, 1996.

"I am absolutely stunned," Jay Leavitt said. "I can't believe this because these people worked hard for us, were very honest and seemed to be the salt of the earth."

*Deseret News correspondent Helen Gardner and the Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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