Professional Auto Body Repair at Star Body Works

Star Body Works is well-known in the Rogue Valley, as they have been serving Medford customers for 65 years. Co-owner Mark Lamensdorf, along with his brother Art, bought the business in 1990 and they have since added service centers in Rogue River and Talent before opening a shop in Grants Pass earlier this year. “Art and I learned how to work on cars at our uncle’s towing company in southern California early on,” Mark said. “After high school I started my own collision shop and by the time we moved to Oregon I had been operating for over 15 years. We moved to Oregon 24 years ago for a better quality of life and because we love to fish and hunt.”

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“Star Body Works is dedicated to restoring your car to its original condition after an accident. We specialize in major collision repair and diagnosis, both foreign and domestic cars and trucks. From our office staff to our estimators, detail, body men and painters, we strive to give you the best possible service and repair experience available.” The centers also offer professional towing services with direct billing to most insurance companies. The towing is fast and damage-free, and major auto club cards are accepted. The phone number is 1-800-STAR TOW.

Professional equipment hauling services are also available, hauling everything from farm tractors and dozers to man lifts, trailers, loaders, excavators, trucks, skid steers, containers, and more.

According to Mark, the overall mission of Star Body Works is the customer’s complete satisfaction. “We understand that your car is a substantial investment,” he said. “That is why we choose to use state-of-the-art equipment and high touch services for repair and restoration. One way to help you through the trying process of repairing your vehicle is by providing information and communications on our website, www.starcollisioncenters.com.”

At Star Body Works, they give the customer the options he or she needs to begin the process. “We offer our customers several ways to begin and complete the car repair process so that it is an easy and predictable experience instead of a troublesome inconvenience,” Mark said. “In addition to our website, you can make fax submissions. We always welcome walk-in customers who would like advice or wish to fill out a Star Body Works Repair Request in person. Regardless of how you decide to repair your vehicle with us, you’ll find our Online Vehicle Status Service both convenient and time efficient.”

The Medford collision center is located at 1024 Summit Avenue. For more information, the phone number is 541-779-5621.
Rape and sexual assaults are not crimes that should be taken lightly. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, every two minutes someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted. Only 54% of sexual assaults are reported to the police, and 97% of rapists will never spend a day in jail.

On the other hand, a report by DiCanio in 1993 stated that “while researchers doubt prosecutors do not agree on the exact percentage of false allegations, they generally agree on a range of 2% to 8%.” Those numbers, unfortunately, only refer to accusers who recant, so the figures could be even higher.

Putting those numbers into perspective, you’d think that local police departments and district attorney offices, which are entrusted with protecting both rape victims and those accused falsely, would work overtime gathering evidence in order to see that justice was served for victims on both side of the equation.

In the recent case of Greg Hartley, the Ashland Police Department and the Jackson County District Attorney’s office failed miserably in their duties. For my story started in early July when I received a call from a local businessman who related the story of a man, Greg Hartley, who had been arrested for allegedly raping his 76-year-old dad’s wife (his stepmother). The accuser and the accused were both 50 years old.

On Tuesday, July 30, I arranged for an interview with Greg Hartley’s girlfriend. At that time, Hartley had already been serving 36 days in jail awaiting his court date. Bail had been set at $1 million (later amended to $500,000 but still out of his price range).

I met Chris Damon at her and Hartley’s condominium, and she laid the paperwork on the table to begin her story. Hartley had been pulled over for a burnt out tail light on June 24, 2013, then arrested and charged with rape after the police officer realized there was a warrant out for his arrest. The warrant had been ordered on March 21, 2013, after a grand jury determined that the evidence against Hartley for rape, compiled by the Ashland Police Department, was sufficient. It kind of makes you wonder why an alleged rapist was allowed to run free for three whole months, but that’s a story for another day.

Damon said both she and Hartley were shocked not only by the allegations but that the police department and district attorney failed to adequately investigate the false charges.

According to Damon, the alleged victim, Lisa, claimed that Hartley had raped her on the night of July 29, 2011, at the condominium after a day of drinking while boating on Emigrant Lake.

“She and Greg’s dad, Nick, weren’t even here that weekend,” Chris said. “They live in Lake Shasta City, and it was Greg’s son’s birthday, and they wanted to wish him a happy birthday. She was probably referring to a weekend at the end of August that year, when they could have a burst and we all went out to Emigrant Lake with a bunch of friends. But it makes no difference, because no sexual assault ever happened.”

Hartley had been alerted to Lisa’s rape charge by his dad. “Nick and Lisa were getting a divorce, and it was starting to get ugly,” Chris said. “She had filed restraining orders against Nick with some ridiculous charges, including that he had sexually molested their chihuahuas. The judge finally dismissed the restraining orders when he was shocked that her allegations were unfounded.”

When I called Nick Hartley in Lake Shasta City, he confirmed that Lisa had a history of mental instability, was taking anti-psychotic drugs, and was bent on revenge because of the divorce.

“She had a good friend Barbara, who told me something interesting,” Nick said. “Lisa and I were going through a divorce, and Barbara said that Lisa told her she didn’t get the house, the boat, and the dogs in the divorce so she was going to accuse my son of rape and ruin his life.”

Okay, now there’s a material witness that the Ashland Police Department might find useful. Did they ever call Barbara? Did they ever call Nick Hartley? Not before the arrest, they didn’t. What exactly did they do?

When I called Ashland Police Chief Terry Holderness on July 31, he couldn’t answer any questions about the case because it was going to trial. He did say that the report was 122 pages long, and that the Ashland Police Department might find useful. Did they "get the house, the boat, and the dogs in the divorce so she was going to accuse my son of rape and ruin his life."
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a call from Chris saying that Greg Hartley did not want to follow through with the story, that he was having panic attacks and afraid that the D.A. would only come down on him harder if he talked to the press. So I put the story on hold and marked August 20th on the calendar. I planned to go to the trial and watch Jackson County justice in all its glory.

All of that changed on August 16 when the D.A. decided to dismiss the case. The next day I got a call from Chris Damon, who said she and Greg still wanted to do an interview in order to clear Greg’s name in the community. I arranged to meet with them on Monday, August 26. But first I called Terry Holderness at the Police Department in order to get my hands on the police report.

The police chief informed me that he had to get clearance from the D.A. first, but that I would be welcome to “the 150-page report” as soon as it was available.

Meanwhile, Greg and Chris sat down with Sanne Specht of the Mail Tribune for an article which appeared in the Sunday, August 25, issue. The article related Hartley’s harrowing experience in the Jackson County jail and also mentioned Deputy District Attorney Dave Hoppe’s reasons for the dismissal.

According to Hoppe, “evidence that came in after Hartley’s grand jury indictment, combined with the alleged victim’s mental health issues, her drug and alcohol consumption the night of the allegations, and his duties as a prosecutor, caused him to drop the case in the interest of justice.”

What was that new evidence? When I called Dave Hoppe for an interview, he was semi-vague. “I had an opportunity to talk with Mr. Hartley, and I interviewed the other person,” Hoppe said. “Taking all these additional things into consideration, I decided to drop the case.”

Reading Det. Spence’s meager investigation before the arrest, it had me wondering what goes on behind closed doors of a grand jury. The detective interviewed the alleged victim, a friend of hers in Lake Shasta City, and Greg Hartley. That was it.

Greg’s girlfriend Chris gave Spence plenty of leads, from witnesses who were there the day of the alleged incident, to Greg’s dad, to the woman who recounted that Lisa had vowed to “destroy Nick’s son” ... even Lisa’s daughter was willing to testify against her. Spence was also given court documents from the divorce and restraining order, which hinted at a less than stable personality. Spence, however, did not follow up on any of that, or if he did it was hidden in the 121 pages I was not allowed to see.
According to Dave Hoppe, what goes on in a grand jury room is secret, and that right there should scare a lot of people about the administration of justice in this country. After I read the less than exhaustive police report submitted by Det. Spence (the original came in at a whopping five pages), I couldn't understand how a grand jury could possibly indict Hartley on such flimsy evidence.

Hoppe told me that there was additional information, but that it was all secret. What he was probably alluding to was the therapist's report, his Holy Grail that would prove Hartley had a history of sexually assaulting Lisa. If that's true, why didn't he simply wait until he had the evidence before calling a grand jury, bullying them into an indictment, and holding Hartley in jail for 53 days, ruining his business and reputation, and throwing his family into turmoil? When I asked Hoppe if Hartley would have any recourse for being falsely arrested and jailed for 53 days, he demurred.

“I work for the state, and cannot give any civil law advice,” he said. Okay, but Hartley now has to pay $1,000 to have the case expunged from his record and his mugshots removed from mugshots.com. Could the D.A.’s office at least do that for free as a sign of good faith?

“That's for the state to decide,” he said. “We have nothing to do with that, and I don't think he has to pay anything.”

Greg Hartley disagrees. “My lawyer told me the fee for getting it expunged would be around $900, plus $100 to get it off mugshots.com,” he said. Okay, and are you going to call a grand jury and indict Lisa for perjury and false accusations?

“No, as I said in the Mail Tribune article, there was no confession or recantation, so how would I prove the allegations?” Hoppe said. “The same presumption of innocence applies to his accuser.”

That sentiment isn't very comforting to Greg Hartley. “Why wasn’t I given the same consideration?” he asked. “There was no confession or recantation on my part. There were just allegations, and I could have given the D.A. any number of people to call to prove my innocence. And if he wants to charge Lisa with perjury, those same people can be called to prove her guilt.”

So there you have it. A man’s life is ruined and he spent 53 days in jail, while facing a possible sentence of 25 years in state prison. He was part of the 2-8%, probably higher, of false rape reports in this country every year, all caused by the breakdown of the system within the Jackson County District Attorney’s Office. If they had truly done their homework, note of this would have happened.

Greg Hartley is traumatized, and all he hopes is that the community realizes that he is totally innocent.

“Here I was stuck in one of the worst jails in the country, and the D.A. offered a deal to plea to a lesser charge and register as a sex offender,” he said. “If I did so, I could walk free that day, but I said no. I didn’t do anything wrong. I would rather spend my days in prison proclaiming my innocence than admit to something I didn’t do.”

According to Hartley, the damage inflicted by the Ashland Police Department and the District Attorney’s office will be hard to overcome.

“One day I’m off to work and living a normal life, and the next day I’m in jail,” Hartley said. “And I didn’t do anything. It’s the worst possible experience possible, knowing that you might be facing 25 years in prison.”

The couple agreed to an interview with the local media and even appeared on KMED talk radio, hoping to undo the damage to Hartley’s reputation.

“Most people have been very supportive, and some have even donated money,” Hartley said. “I don’t know if I can remove the stigma of being accused of rape, but I’m going to try. I have always done community work, and that will continue. I’ve helped train people with CERT and I've appeared at ScienceWorks a couple of times with my stunt kites.”

And for retribution? “I suppose I could sue Lisa in civil court, but she doesn’t have any money, so what’s the use?” he said. “I could sue the Ashland Police Department and the D.A.’s office, but that would cost a lot of money for an attorney and I’m not sure I want to do that. Maybe the best thing is to let it go.”

(Editor’s Note: One thing not mentioned in this article but alluded to by Chris Damon and Greg Hartley in my interviews with them was the messianic crusade by the District Attorney’s office to force people into plea bargains. In an ideal world, a district attorney would look at each individual case based not just on the law but on the facts and the potential for a successful prosecution.)

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the human costs of their decisions. A case in point: A friend of mine related the story of a 20-year-old kid who got in an argument with his 22-year-old girlfriend. The tiff extended out into the driveway, where the girlfriend was attempting to leave with their infant son. The “kid” grabbed her and brought her back into the house, where the argument continued. She locked herself in the bathroom and called 911, while he screamed hysterically and banged on the door. Moments later, the police arrived and the kid was arrested. Other than some pushing and shoving, no physical domestic abuse occurred.

The D.A.’s office spent almost two years dithering over the case, then finally charged the kid with assault and kidnapping (for forcing the woman back into her own home!) Because of Measure 11, he was facing eleven years in prison. So here you have two young, impetuous kids having an argument where nothing physical really happened, and our great, illustrious D.A.’s office charges one of them with kidnapping and threatens to put him in jail for ELEVEN YEARS! Granted, domestic abuse is a serious issue in Jackson County, but the District Attorney has huge blinders on when he views every case in a one-size-fits-all mentality. When Bubba comes home drunk and beats his wife within an inch of her life, that’s one thing. But to lump the aforementioned kid in with that kind of behavior is ludicrous.

Yet the Jackson County D.A.’s office does that all the time. The above example is only one that has come to my attention, and as a newspaper reporter, I get people calling me all the time with their own sordid tales of enforced plea bargaining.

So what did the 20-year-old kid do? He accepted a plea bargain and spent 90 days in the slammer, five years on probation, and is forever labeled a felon because he can’t get it expunged. Now, he can’t get a good job because the Almighty Jackson County District Attorney thought it would be in the county’s interest to ruin this person’s life.

If the D.A. truly wanted to do his job correctly, he would have brought those two kids into his office and asked them if everyone could just move on. His office spent almost two years letting the case gather dust, and by that time the kids were now 24 and 22 and had moved onto other relationships. The woman had no interest in seeing her ex-boyfriend “punished” by a vindictive state. The D.A.’s decision to indict him for kidnapping was criminal. Being young and dumb, yes, but being a kidnapper? Give me a break.

Personally, I would love to see an investigation into the inner workings of this D.A.’s office. Are they more concerned about conviction rates than they are of the human costs of their decisions? Do they purposely inflate the charges only to dangle long prison terms in front of terrified citizens in order to get a plea bargain? If that’s the case, they all need to be removed from office and replaced with live human beings with hearts.)