

## State honors investigators \* 2 were killed during probe of business

By: Jason Brown, Acadiana Bureau

Kim Sledge, 44, and Rhett Jeansonne, 39, both investigators with the Department of Insurance, were shot and killed Tuesday afternoon by businessman John Melvin Lavergne, who later died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound during a standoff with authorities.

The shooting occurred at Lavergne's Insurance Agency on Court Street while the two investigators were attempting to retrieve evidence on two cases involving Lavergne.

Lavergne had been arrested in January on seven counts of prohibited acts and unfair trade practices related to his insurance agency.

Lavergne's family issued the following statement Wednesday evening: "Words cannot express the grief and sorrow we feel for the families of Rhett Jeansonne and Kim Sledge. We pray that God grants them the courage and strength to face the aftermath of this senseless tragedy."

Attempts to reach family members for Jeansonne and Sledge were unsuccessful Thursday.

In his executive order, Jindal highlighted the investigators' work for the state.

Sledge began her state career in October 2000, first with the Health Division and subsequently with the Fraud Section.

She is survived by her husband, J.C.; daughter, Brittany; and her young stepchildren, Avery and Jacob.

Jeansonne began his state career in November 2006 as an investigator.

He is survived by his wife, Bernadette; their 7-year-old daughter, Sharon; his three sons, Kristopher, Kale, and Konner; and a grandson, who was born May 18.

In a statement released Thursday, the executive director of the **Coalition Against Insurance Fraud**, Dennis Jay, called the shooting deaths "a senseless tragedy of the first order."

He said any case can lead investigators into harm's path, without warning or a chance to defend themselves.

### INVESTIGATORS

"Investigators deal with people whose emotions may be volatile," he said. "The potential for violence comes with any knock on any front door, even for seemingly routine interviews simply to gather facts."

Jay referred to the 2008 slaying of Sallie Rohrbach, a North Carolina insurance department

*"They died trying to make Louisiana a better and safer state," Dennis Jay, executive director for the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud.*



**Coalition Against Insurance Fraud**

auditor murdered by insurance agent Michael Howell while reviewing his agency's books for possible fraud.

Howell was sentenced to nearly 28 years in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree murder in May 2009.

Jay said the coalition extended its heartfelt sympathy to the department, its employees and the families of the two victims.

"They died trying to make Louisiana a better and safer state," Jay said.

Lavergne had been issued a cease-and-desist order and a summary suspension of his license for alleged misappropriation of insurance premiums, Insurance Commissioner Jim Donelon said Wednesday.

Lavergne allegedly failed to remit more than \$1,160 in premiums to insurance companies, which resulted in four of his clients having their insurance policies canceled because of nonpayment of premiums.

The cease-and-desist order was pending appeal with the Division of Administrative Law, Donelon said.

The status of Lavergne's January arrest remains unclear.

The Evangeline Parish District Attorney's Office did not return calls for comment Thursday.