

Missing man mystery: 'None of it makes sense,' Steven Koecher's mother laments

St. George » Steven Koecher, who was last seen Dec. 13 in Nevada, had financial strain and had been looking for a job.

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St. George » It's been nearly a month since Steven Koecher vanished, leaving his family alternating between hope and despair as they endlessly speculate.

The 30-year-old St. George man was last seen Dec. 13 in a homeowner's surveillance video leaving his car in a residential area in Henderson, Nev. Inside the car were Christmas presents for his young cousins and snack food, according to his cousin, Jeff Bradshaw, of Las Vegas. A police investigation, searches of the surrounding desert by helicopter and all-terrain vehicles, and the efforts of family and friends has turned up nothing substantive.

"We're taking things one day at a time," said Steven's mother, Deanne, who lives in Bountiful. "We go through different scenarios to try and get a handle on it, but none of it makes sense. I can't believe it's been this many days."

Greg Webb, a good friend of Koecher's in the LDS church, said he called Koecher the morning he disappeared. His cell phone has not been used since, nor his bank cards.

Webb said he asked Koecher to attend a church meeting in his place that day at 11 a.m.

"He said he was in Las Vegas, but would go back [to St. George] if I needed him to," said Webb. "I was also in Vegas so decided to go back myself. I told him just to do whatever it was he had to do and I'd see him later. That's it. I wish I would have asked him to go back to St. George."

Webb, who did not know why Koecher was in the Las Vegas area, said his friend always told him if he was not planning to be at church. That Sunday, he never called.

"It's one thing that sticks out in my mind," said Webb.

Webb said Koecher, who worked for *The Salt Lake Tribune*'s online edition from March 2007 until July 2008, had been actively looking for a full-time job and had sent out his résumé to a list of possible employers.

The power company was threatening to disconnect electricity at the house where Koecher rented a room and lived alone, according to Webb.

Deanne Koecher said she knew her son was having financial difficulty, but said the power bill was the landlord's responsibility.

"We talked about [finances] in our last conversation and I felt he was in control of things and I offered to help with his rent, saying that's what families did for each other," she said. "I transferred some money into his account, but it was never used."

She described her son as "a good young man" with a fondness for drawing, playing the guitar and singing.

"He didn't have issues or addictions or anything that could have led this to happen," said his mother. "He was devout to his church and liked water sports, always taking advantage of an opportunity to go boating."

She said Koecher, who has three brothers and a sister, graduated from high school in Amarillo, Texas, and served a mission in Brazil for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He studied at Ricks College (now Brigham Young University-Idaho) in Rexburg, Idaho, and eventually graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in communications.

Deanne Koecher said her son liked his job at the *Tribune*, except the overnight aspect. He also didn't like winter temperature inversions.

"Last winter really got to him so he took the opportunity to move to St. George," said his mother.

Once there, he initially had a job selling advertising for a publication and later worked part-time for a window-washing business.

His cousin, K.C. Naegle, described Koecher as someone who likes board games, hiking and family reunions.

"He's a great guy who has always been spontaneous," said Naegle, who lives in Layton. "It was normal for him to just out of the blue drive somewhere like Vegas to visit friends or go to a party or [church] ward activity."

St. George police Lt. James Van Fleet said the investigation is still open, but detectives are waiting for new leads.

"We've put out feelers hoping it will generate something but have no further evidence," Van Fleet said. "We're just hoping he checks in."

Van Fleet said the room Koecher rented at a St. George house was searched with his parents there, but nothing suspicious was found.

Jeff Bradshaw, a cousin of Koecher's who lives in Las Vegas, said Anderson Dairy is preparing to run Koecher's picture on their milk cartons along with information about his disappearance for distribution in southern Nevada and some stores in St. George.

Dave Coon, the dairy's vice president for sales, said he is a friend of Bradshaw's and is trying to help the family.

Bradshaw said the family is grateful for the dairy's generosity.

"Someone sitting at a table could look at a milk carton and say, 'Hey, I've seen that guy' or know him," Bradshaw said.

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About Steven Koecher

Age » 30

Description » 5-foot-8, 180 pounds with blond hair and blue eyes.

Have info? » Anyone with information is asked to call:

St. George Police Department, 435-627-4300

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, 702-229-2907 or 702-828-3111

Henderson Police Department, 702-267-5000

Online » Help Us Find Steven Koecher on Facebook.com

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