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# Haley VA worker spent 17 years in N.Y. prison for manslaughter

By William R. Levesque, Times Staff Writer

A licensed certified nursing assistant did time for manslaughter before a hospital job.

TAMPA - Carlton Scott's ex-wife said he moved out of New York state after legal difficulties there. He eventually came to Pasco County. He wanted a fresh start.

Scott, 53, got a Florida license as a certified nursing assistant in 2007. Then he got a job as a CNA for one of the nation's busiest veterans hospitals, the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa.

While still married to him, Martha Rose said, she warned Scott to keep a low profile at Haley. She said she didn't think his co-workers knew about his 24-year-old secret.

Scott had killed a man in New York.

A state criminal background check failed to disclose Scott's 1984 manslaughter conviction and 17-year stint in prison, state health officials say. Eulinda Smith, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Health, said the agency could find no record that Scott notified them about the conviction. Health officials said they are trying to locate Scott's original application.

The conviction would usually bar someone from getting a CNA license, Smith said, unless they got a waiver from the state Board of Nursing. Department records show Scott did not go before the board to get such a waiver. Scott's license expires Jan. 1, unless the state renews it.

What Department of Veterans Affairs officials at Haley knew is unclear. Scott did not return calls for comment. And Carolyn Clark, a Haley spokeswoman, declined to say whether the VA knew of Scott's criminal history.

Clark said the VA also performs a criminal background check on employees.

But in a statement released on Friday, Clark said felons can still be hired "if they have demonstrated clear evidence of rehabilitation."

She would only confirm that Scott was hired by Haley in 2005 - his ex-wife said he worked in the kitchen before he became a CNA - and now works in Haley's Acute Rehabilitation Unit, where inpatient mental health patients are treated.

Rose, who was married to Scott for a decade before they divorced in 2009, said she called the VA regional office in St. Petersburg earlier this year to tell officials about her ex-husband's conviction. She said a physician whose name she did not save returned the call and told her the VA was aware of Scott's criminal history when he was hired.

"He doesn't belong there," Rose said after the *St. Petersburg Times* contacted her last week. "I want people to know that a man who killed somebody is working at the VA."

Scott has no criminal record in Florida and no discipline against him on file with the Department of Health.

Court records in Manhattan that would detail Scott's crime were not immediately available, though New York corrections officials confirmed he was convicted of manslaughter in 1984 for killing someone with "a sharp instrument" on Oct. 10, 1983.

It is unclear if a jury convicted him or if he accepted a plea deal.

Florida health officials said a private company submits criminal background checks on its behalf to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The name of the company was unclear late Friday. The FDLE check on Scott came back "clear," Smith said.

The *Times* paid FDLE for a criminal history of Scott that disclosed he had once been charged with "murder." Rose, his ex-wife, said Scott had initially been charged with second-degree murder, but the charge was reduced to manslaughter.

An FDLE spokesman said a newspaper request for a criminal history would disclose the same information as a request by any state agency or private company.

Tampa attorney Joe Magri, who has represented several people who have sued the VA over employment issues, said the VA has fired people for even minor arrests or charges.

"The VA has applications with questions where people are supposed to disclose this stuff," Magri said. "I know it's important to their application process. It would surprise me a great deal if they didn't do that kind of background check."

Rose, the ex-wife, said her ex-husband is very personable and is a hard worker, and she said she thinks once the VA found out about his background, his bosses decided to overlook it.

"He really impresses people," Rose said.

*Times* researchers Shirl Kennedy and Caryn Baird contributed to this report. William R. Levesque can be reached at [levesque@sptimes.com](mailto:levesque@sptimes.com) or (813) 226-3432.



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