

Published November 23rd, 2011

Orinda Police Department Nabs Potentially Masked Men

Laurie Snyder

Officer Danny Vargas, the Orinda Police Department's 2010 Officer of the Year, nipped in the bud the careers of two more aspiring criminals last week. Photo from the City of Orinda website

Two young men got more than the great bargain they were looking for when they allegedly attempted to case the CVS store in the heart of Orinda last Tuesday evening as prelude to their potential commission of a robbery.

Thanks to alert actions by a CVS staffer and Orinda's finest, the guys with the misguided mission are now both in jail.

The suspects, who ducked out after being spotted by the clerk, drove off in a car missing its front license plate and tried to elude the Orinda Police Department, but were caught at the eastbound freeway ramp by Officer Danny Vargas, the Orinda Police Department's 2010 Officer of the Year. Officer Vargas, most often seen around Orinda with his K-9 partner, Chef, bird-dogged the suspects with help from a fellow officer and kept the suspects from getting away.

As Vargas was interviewing the pair, he caught the distinctive whiff of weed, searched the car, and uncovered, in addition to marijuana, a loaded handgun, starter's pistol, a stash of ecstasy, and Halloween masks - a most interesting find in light of the recent series of armed robberies that have rattled East Bay residents in Concord, Pleasant Hill, and Walnut Creek.

In one of those armed adventures, three subjects wearing dark colored clothes, surgical gloves, and Halloween masks attempted to rob a 7-Eleven in Pleasant Hill during the wee hours of September 27th. One was reported as carrying a semiautomatic handgun. On the 28th, again in the early morning, armed and masked individuals successfully walked off with cash and other items from a Walnut Creek Valero station. This time, a customer pumping gas was shot at but not injured.

Since then, according to Corporal Jason Kleven, the Watch Commander of the Pleasant Hill Police Department, similar armed robberies have been reported at a Verizon store and another 7-Eleven in that community. Police are looking at whether or not there is a definite connection between any of the robberies as part of their investigation into the individual cases.

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

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