Oregon man arrested after digging grave

by Cheryl McDermott

An Oregon man was arrested in a rural area of northwest Washington County after a caretaker held him at gunpoint until deputies arrived when he was discovered digging a suspicious hole measuring about 6 ft. by 3 ft. and 3-ft. deep. Detectives say the hole appears to be a grave, and are looking for anyone close to the suspect who may have been, or is intended to be, killed.

Ronald Lee Karel - WCJ photo Karel dug a hole about 6'x3'x3' that detectives believe was intended to be used as a grave - WCSO photo Washington County Sheriffâ€™s deputies responded to a 911 call placed by the caretaker of the property on Thursday, January 10. The caller described the suspicious circumstances and said he was holding the suspect, later identified as 63-year old Ronald Lee Karel, at gunpoint until help arrived.

Karel had been digging the hole behind a gate on private property, and his vehicle was also stuck behind the gate, deputies said.

â€œKarel offered no logical explanation for the excavation,â€• a news release stated, although he told deputies he was looking for evidence of ash from the Mount St. Helens eruption.

Karel was placed into custody and lodged in the Washington County Jail. He has been charged with second-degree criminal trespass and third-degree criminal mischief, and remained in custody as of January 17.

Detectives, joined by the Washington County Major Crimes Team have contacted family members, business associates, and other known associates of the suspect. So far, they havenâ€™t been able to locate anyone near to Karel who is deceased.

However, the investigation is continuing to determine if anyone known to Karel may be in danger if he is released from custody.

Anyone with information about the incident, suspect or a possible purpose for the hole-digging is asked to contact detectives at 503.846.2500.

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