

Detectives seek suspects in car theft, torching

by Cheryl McDermott & BWNS

Sheriff's detectives are seeking the public's help in locating a woman suspected of stealing a struggling single mother's car, a vehicle found abandoned and in flames hours later. A man identified as a "person of interest" is also being sought.

Arrest warrants have been issued for Meghan Guthrie (left). Julian Interian Avila is being sought as a "person of interest" (right). - CCSO photos According to a news release prepared by Clackamas County Sheriff's Detective Jim Strovink, Meghan Guthrie, 24, is thought to be responsible for a series of crimes which began January 10 when she allegedly stole a jacket containing car keys from the victim, a customer of the Harmony Inn on SE 82nd Avenue, and ended with the 1997 Dodge Intrepid found in flames, abandoned and completely destroyed on Interstate 205 in Portland.

The "person of interest" also sought, a man who is seen accompanying Guthrie on surveillance footage, has been identified as 24-year old Julian Interian Avila.

The victim, Sheryl Elizabeth Stephens, was described by Detective Strovink as a single parent who worked part-time as a road-flagger. Stephens had no insurance, he said, and still owes \$1,800 on her car loan. She is raising two high school-aged children, he added.

“She can’t even pay the existing tow bill,” Strovink said, explaining that because she was unable to retrieve personal items needed for her employment from the car, Stephens lost her job. “She continues to spiral into arrears with rent and other expenses,” he added.

Apparently this particular case has struck a nerve with the detective, possibly because of the devastation she has expressed, and the desperation she feels. “She can’t even attend her son’s basketball games,” he said.

Guthrie is described as 5-foot 6-inches tall, weighing 130 pounds, with brown hair and hazel eyes. A warrant for her arrest has been issued for car theft, first-degree theft, reckless driving and criminal mischief. She also has an outstanding arrest for carrying a concealed weapon, issued in Multnomah County.

Avila is 5-foot 4-inches tall, weights about 150 pounds, and has dark hair and dark eyes.

Strovink asks anyone with information to call the Sheriff's Office Tip Line at 503.723.4949. A reward has been offered.

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