Detectives seek suspects in car theft, torching

by Cheryl McDermott & BWNS

Sheriffâ€™s detectives are seeking the publicâ€™s help in locating a woman suspected of stealing a struggling single motherâ€™s car, a vehicle found abandoned and in flames hours later. A man identified as a â€œperson of interestâ€• 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 Sheriffâ€™s Detective Jim Strovink, Meghan Guthrie, 24, is thought to be responsible for a series of crimes with 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 â€œperson of interestâ€• 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.

â€œShe canâ€™t even pay the existing tow bill,â€• Strovink said, explaining that because she was unable to retrieve personal items needed for her employment from the car, Stephens lost her job. â€œShe continues to spiral into arrears with rent and other expenses,â€• 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. â€œShe canâ€™t even attend her sonâ€™s basketball games,â€• 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 Sheriffâ€™s Office Tip Line at 503.723.4949. A reward has been offered.

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