Flat tire leads to money laundering arrests

by Cheryl McDermott

Two California motorists were arrested Wednesday morning after a detective who stopped to help them with a flat tire became suspicious and placed them under surveillance. A consensual search of their vehicle led to the seizure of a handgun, the car, and over $40,000 in cash, and ultimately to the arrest of the two men suspected of drug sales-related money laundering, police reported.

(above left) Fransico Olivera-Amezcua, (above right) Gerardo Mendoza Ruelas - DJC photos. (below) Over $40,000 cash and a handgun was seized - CODE photo.

According to Bend Police Lt. John Gautney, about 10 a.m. a Central Oregon Drug Enforcement (CODE) detective stopped to help Fransico Olivera-Amezcua, 21, and Gerardo Mendoza Ruelas, 23, both of Redding, California, when the 2000 Pontiac Grand Am they were occupying suffered a flat tire on Highway 97 in Redmond.

The actions of the two men were suspicious, so the detective left but kept the men under surveillance as he called for a Redmond Police officer to assist.

Together the detective and officer contacted the men, and during the interview found the car, registered in Washington state, did not belong to the men. The driver gave consent to search the vehicle, Gautney said, and a semi-automatic handgun and a bag with filled with cash was found in the trunk. â€œNarcâ€•, a drug-detecting dog with the Deschutes County Sheriffâ€™s Office, was brought to the scene and â€œalertedâ€• on the cash â€œas having been associated with controlled substances,â€• the lieutenant said.

The investigation revealed that Olivera-Amezcua and Ruelas were headed from Washington to California, the vehicle didnâ€™t belong to either man, and the money found was contaminated by drugs, Gautney reported.

Both men were taken into custody and lodged in the Deschutes County Jail where they face charges of money laundering and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Olivera-Amezcua was also charged with carrying a concealed weapon and possession of a firearm.

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