

'Average Joe' bandit linked to Hills case

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

A man known to authorities as the "Average Joe" bandit was captured by the FBI this week in Huntington Woods and faced a U.S. District Court Judge in Detroit for his alleged involvement in several area bank robberies, including a May 27 robbery in Farmington Hills.

Supervisory Special Agent Kevin Kendrick, with the FBI office in Troy, said Mark Joseph Gordon, 31, is thought to be responsible for 11 robberies between April 22 and June 14 throughout Oakland and

Macomb counties, including an incident in Bloomfield Township the same day as the Farmington Hills robbery. There appeared to be no particular pattern.

"(The robber seemed to choose) whatever was close and whatever was handy," Kendrick said.

Gordon was under surveillance by the FBI, the Troy Police Department and the Oakland County Crime Suppression Team for several days before being apprehended at the Dunes Hotel, where he had been staying, in Royal Oak June 14. Kendrick said he was arrested without incident.

The robber was known for wearing a fishing cap and sunglasses during the hold-ups and for his polite demeanor. During the Farmington Hills robbery of the Orchard Lake and 12 Mile Comerica, he reportedly wrote a note on a deposit slip demanding money without producing a weapon or making threatening gestures. This was the same method he used for other robberies, according to authorities.

Gordon appeared before a U.S. District Court judge in Detroit June 15. He could face up to 20 years in prison for each of the 11 counts if convicted, according to

Kendrick.

"He'll probably be indicted within the next 30 days," he said, though Gordon and his attorney will decide whether he will plead guilty — and be sentenced — or plead not guilty and face a trial.

Kendrick said the key to apprehending Gordon was teamwork.

"This was I think a tremendous demonstration of a cooperative endeavor," he said. "All (law enforcement agencies) did a tremendous job. We could not have done it alone."

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It's just a shameless act."

Students told police the teen had shown the tapes to others at the school, including a relative of the victim.

On Friday, authorities seized 70 videotapes along with several computer components from the family's Hills home and Ottawa County cottage.

Investigators are viewing video cassettes in an attempt to find the questionable recordings. As of Tuesday, nothing had been found.

"To look at 70 tapes that are hours long takes a considerable amount of time," Assistant Police Chief Chuck Nebus said.

A police expert is expected to review computer components seized.

The teen was aware he's been the focus of a joint investigation by West Bloomfield and Hills police. As a result, police don't expect the actual video tapes or spy camera to turn up.

"He had ample opportunity to hide everything or dispose of it," Nebus said.

Anyone with information about the case or whereabouts of video tapes or camera are asked to phone Farmington Hills police (1-248-473-9695) or West Bloomfield police (1-248-682-9200).

Some students who saw the tapes have been cooperative with police, Dwyer said. The teen lives in a northwest portion of Farmington Hills, which is part of Walled Lake school district.

"We applaud the students for reporting this act," Dwyer said.



One over: Cara became more socially outgoing as the school year progressed, teachers say.

Cara from page A1

engaged in group discussion. She became one of the young leaders of the afternoon kindergarten class.

"She's made a lot of progress in all areas," Frederick said. "She's socially more outgoing ... and academically, she's made great progress. In fact, she's one of the better readers of the class."

Cara said she loves reading books about animals, naming "Under the Sea" as her favorite.

But her kindergarten experience wasn't just literarily rich. She gained a best friend in pony-tailed classmate Abby Zych as well as an older mentor in fourth-grade "buddy" Caroline Jansen.

Frederick said she values

letting fourth graders and kindergartners team up during the year. "It's an important thing, and the fourth graders really take on that role-model position."

The girl's leadership qualities were noticed by Amy, too. "If someone's being mean, she tries to right it," Lazare said. "She's still a pure little girl and very observant of everything around her."

With kindergarten over, summer activities lie ahead for the children of Amy and Mark Lazare. Cara and her 4-year-old brother, Jarrett, will get to spend more time together, except for when Cara attends a summer camp at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

Arson suspected in small fire

A fire at Gateway Apartments in Farmington Hills on Monday is believed to have been deliberately set.

Someone set a small fire with

clothing and papers, which damaged a storage door. The fire was doused with cups of water.

Police found footprints leading to a nearby apartment complex.

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