

Former Austin officer arrests one of Southern Indiana's 'most wanted felons'

Written by Marty Randall

Thursday, 29 July 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 29 July 2010 06:10

An alert City of Madison police officer is being credited for taking a wanted felon from Scott County off the streets on Sunday, July 18.

Patrolman Joe Baker of that department had been patrolling in the area of a house where drug trafficking was suspected. During the early afternoon, he saw a woman, identified as Christina Nicole Richie, and a man come out of the house. Richie reportedly got into the driver's seat of a vehicle, and the man joined her as her passenger.

Knowing that Richie was a suspended driver, Ptl. Baker followed the pair for a short distance before pulling them over. When Ptl. Baker approached the car, he recognized not only Richie but also her passenger, Paul D. Stucker, 50, Scottsburg, described in a recent Indiana State Police new release as "...one of Southern Indiana's most wanted fugitives."

Unfortunately, Stucker recognized the officer as well from previous encounters with Ptl. Baker when he was an officer with the Austin Police Department.

Stucker jumped out of the car and began to flee on foot, despite Ptl. Baker having drawn his service revolver. The officer reholstered his weapon and drew out his electric Taser gun, advising Stucker that he would use the weapon on him if necessary.

Stucker stopped, submitting to handcuffing without incident. Both he and Richie were transported to the Jefferson County Jail.

The Scott County resident is now charged in Jefferson County courts with being a serious violent felon in possession of a handgun, a Class B felony; resisting law enforcement, receiving stolen property and two counts of theft, all Class D felonies; and being an Habitual Felony Offender. Other charges which are drug-related may be added later, it was learned.

Some of those charges stem from a July 8 burglary at an outdoor equipment dealership and a home close to the Scott/Washington County line on State Road 56, advised ISP Sgt. Jerry Goodin, Sellersburg post public information officer.

According to that information, two motorcycles, nine handguns and several Dewalt power tools were stolen.

Shortly after 11 p.m. on Saturday, July 10, Scottsburg city police were advised through the department's Tip Line that a stolen motorcycle was being driven up and down East McClain Avenue (State Road 56) in front of the Scott District 2 administrative offices.

Sgt. Steven Herald responded, being the closest officer to the area. He didn't see any motorcycle at first, his report indicated, but looking further, he observed a man on a cycle that matched the description of one of the motorcycles stolen on July 8 stopped at South Second St. and E. McClain Ave.

Though the officer yelled at the rider to stop, the motorcycle sped north on Second St. Sgt. Herald pursued the cyclist to Montgomery Street and then back down Second St. to Kerton Street. The rider went onto Fourth Street and then back out onto East McClain where deputies Jeremy Arnold and Joe Guarneri fell in behind the vehicle as it raced east out of Scottsburg.

The officers chased the motorcycle to State Road 3, with Sgt. Herald dropping out because of motor trouble. Patrolman Troy Ford took his place. They followed the motorcycle until the driver laid the cycle down near State Roads 3 and 203 in northern Clark County and took off on foot.

At the scene, the deputies and Ptl. Ford recovered a handgun which reportedly fell off the motorcycle. The cycle had a license plate that had been reported stolen from a Jeffersonville resident. The cycle itself turned out to be one of the two stolen on July 8.

In the description of the driver, officers listed him as a white male with blond, almost white, hair

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and perhaps 40 to 45 years old.

Late on Sunday evening, July 11, the mystery motorcyclist reappeared in Scottsburg, again riding a cycle around the District 2 administrative building on West McClain Ave. around 11:10 p.m., according to the initial report.

Sgt. Herald with the city police responded to the dispatch as did Deputy Arnold. The deputy said he saw the motorcycle traveling south on South Third Street toward his patrol car. As he activated his siren and emergency lights, Deputy Arnold said the motorcycle turned east on East McClain Ave.

Again, the pursuit continued as the motorcyclist went east and then south on S.R. 3, following the highway into northern Clark County. As the driver tried to turn east onto S.R. 203, he lost control of the cycle, and the vehicle laid down. When the deputy stopped at the cycle, he said he could see the apparent driver running through a back yard. Deputy Arnold tracked the man in his car, observing him running between houses and jumping a fence and entering a wooded area just south of the crash site.

Deputy Arnold followed on foot at this point, entering the same wooded area and calling dispatch for assistance so that a perimeter could be established and the suspect surrounded.

Two Jeffersonville officers responded as did staff of the Scott County community Corrections Department, Scott County Sheriff's reserves, other local deputies and Scottsburg and Austin police officers.

Even though a tracking dog was also used, the suspect was never found during the 1½ hour search that followed.

A trace using the motorcycle's identification number confirmed that it too had been stolen. Another handgun was also recovered at the scene near the motorcycle, and DNA was collected from a small blood splatter discovered on the cycle.

At the Indiana State Police post in Sellersburg, troopers were able to identify Stucker as a suspect in the theft of the license plate on the first stolen motorcycle from a surveillance video recorded at the theft site. That resulted in an arrest warrant for Stucker being issued on July 14 out of Clark County. From that date on, officers had been searching for Stucker.

The ISP news release indicated that law enforcement agencies are still attempting to locate a white 2003 Road King Harley Davidson motorcycle, a .45 cal. handgun, a .32 cal. handgun, seven .38 cal. handguns and several Dawalt brand power tools. Anyone with information on where these items are located or with further information about Stucker is encouraged to call Kentuckiana Crime Stoppers at 1-502-582-CLUE (2583) or the Sellersburg ISP post at 1-800-872-6743. Outside Indiana, the post may be reached at 1-812-246-2509.