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Moraga Arco armed robbery suspects captured in high-speed chase

By Vera Kochan



Arco gas station on the corner of Moraga Road and Rheem Blvd. Photo Vera Kochan

The whole scenario was like something out of a movie or TV show, except that it actually happened in Moraga.

Around 8 p.m. on Sunday, May 26, during the Memorial Day weekend, three suspects arrived at the Moraga Arco Car Wash and Gas Station, 425 Moraga Rd., with the intent to commit armed robbery. The suspects, one female and two males, were all under 18 years of age.

Kurosh Ghassem, Arco's co-owner, stated that his employee was ordered by the suspects to open the cash register and relinquish the tray as the female pointed a gun to his head while one of the males held a knife to his chest. The third suspect remained in the car.

Once the suspects fled the gas station, heading toward Lafayette on Moraga Road, the employee called 911. Thus began a high-speed chase that took nearly 30 miles to complete.

According to Moraga Police Det. Kevin Mooney, the MPD shared the suspect and vehicle descriptions with other police agencies. Lafayette Police Department was the first to spot the vehicle, and so began the pursuit onto Highway 24 heading toward the 680 freeway north and eventually onto Highway 4 where it ended in Antioch after, at times, reaching speeds of nearly 110 mph.

The chase ended on a city street when the suspects crashed their vehicle into a civilian vehicle whose passengers escaped serious injuries. At this point, the driver exited the vehicle and began to flee on foot. Sheriff's deputies found it necessary to deploy a taser on the escaping suspect. All three suspects were taken to a hospital for examination before being remanded into custody at the Contra Costa Juvenile Hall in Martinez.

Mooney praised LPD saying, "The way Lafayette handled the whole thing was textbook." He also credits the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, Pittsburg Police, Concord Police and Antioch Police Departments.

MPD officers Cpl. Russell Douthit and Craig Walker arrived on the scene where the gun and the cash tray were recovered.

Ghassem said, "My father wants to work with police to keep this from happening again." After an investigation follow-up with Mooney, Ghassem was assured that the MPD will step up its vigilance throughout town.

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