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Tractor dealer employees arrested on fraud charges

By Doane Yawger

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Three people have been arrested by Merced County Sheriff's Department detectives on identity theft charges in connection with losses reported by a Merced tractor dealership.

Deputy Paul Barile, sheriff's department spokesman, said the three people are suspected of using checking account numbers from the tractor firm to order credit cards online.

Derek Morris, 32, of Merced, and Rena Smith, 35, and Randy Crable, 36, both of Mariposa, were arrested Wednesday about 11 a.m. on charges of credit card and identity theft and fraud.

Crable was released on his own recognizance while Smith remains in Merced County Jail in lieu of \$50,000 bail and Morris is being held on a no-bail hold for probation violation, according to a correctional official.

Barile said Detective John Mussotto had been working on the case for about a week and was able to identify the suspects because they put their own names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail address, along with the tractor firm checking account, on bogus credit applications.

The total loss is estimated at \$1,000, Barile said. Detectives were able to intercept the suspects before more losses were incurred, he added.

Detectives found computers, mail from other people and credit cards when they searched the detached garage in the 700 block of Crist Avenue where the men were living, Barile said.

Along with his local detective duties, Mussotto is also a member of the Sacramento Valley High-Tech Crimes Task Force, Barile said.

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