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Suspect in account theft jailed

By Mike De La Cruz

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Three warrants served in Merced and Winton by Merced sheriff's detectives on Wednesday resulted in the arrest of one man.

Frank Earl Roehrenbaeck, 30, was arrested around 9 a.m. when sheriff's detectives assisted by the sheriff's STAR team served the search warrant at his home at 1681 Juneau Court in North Merced.

The warrant authorized detectives to search for a computer allegedly used to transfer money from the victim's bank account to Roehrenbaeck's account, stolen checks, and property the victim said was missing.

Detectives and deputies shouting they were peace officers and demanding entry smashed their way through the front door and found Roehrenbaeck, his girlfriend Lori Anne Hicks, 31, and a small child inside.

Sheriff's Detective John Mussotto, who headed the investigation, said the thefts and forgeries go back to the first part of the year when Roehrenbaeck was working for a Southern California construction company in Planada.

Mussotto, assigned to the Sacramento Valley High Tech Crime Task Force, said the incident came to light when the foreman returned to Southern California and learned checks from the checkbook he kept in his pickup had been taken and forged with his name.

The foreman reportedly had loaned Roehrenbaeck his pickup to use on the project and to pick up equipment.

He realized the checks had been removed from the back of the checkbook when he received canceled checks made out to Frank Roehrenbaeck, and a bank statement showing he was \$15,000 short.

When the victim found a \$2,000 online money transfer from his bank account to Roehrenbaeck's and an AT&T Corp. bill in the name of Lorri Hicks, he called the sheriff's department, Mussotto said.

Armed with this evidence, the detective obtained the search warrant, which was served on Wednesday.

The search turned up a 16-gauge pump shotgun and ammunition. Roehrenbaeck is an ex-felon and prohibited from possession any type of firearm or ammunition.

Roehrenbaeck was booked into Merced County Jail on suspicion of being an ex-felon in possession of a firearm, being an ex-felon in possession of ammunition, and forgery.

He remained in custody on Wednesday in lieu of \$50,000 bail, said sheriff's spokeswoman Christine Krebs-Belluomini.

Hicks reportedly was not involved in the forgeries or thefts and was not held, Mussotto said.

While deputies serving the two narcotic search warrants in Winton failed to make any arrests, a report of the searches will be sent to the district attorney's office for possible complaints, said sheriff's Deputy Jason Cope.

Cope, who headed the investigation, said the warrants were served around 11 a.m. at two adjoining homes in the

6900 block of Chestnut Avenue.

The warrants were obtained after a three-week investigation into tips that the occupants of both houses were involved in selling drugs, the deputy said.

In a trailer house behind one of the homes, deputies reportedly found about one gram of methamphetamine ready to be snorted, and in the next-door house a small quantity of meth.

Also found on the properties were "snorting pipes" used to ingest meth and plastic bags with residue believed to be meth, the deputy said.

He said his report will be forwarded to the district attorney with a recommendation that charges be filed for possession of methamphetamine and for maintaining a house where a narcotic is sold or used, Cope said.

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