

Mall theft arrest courtesy of eBay

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Modesto police arrested a Turlock man Wednesday on suspicion of stealing photo equipment from his job and selling it to an undercover officer on eBay.

Teshaun Obidiah Sally, 19, was booked into Stanislaus County Jail on suspicion of possession of stolen property, commercial burglary, embezzlement, conspiracy and felony violation of probation, officer David Ramirez said.

The arrest was the end of an undercover joint operation with the Modesto Police Department and the Sacramento Valley Hi-Tech Crimes Task Force.

Ramirez said he and Detective Scott Ussery set up an account on eBay and made a successful bid to buy the stolen property.

Ramirez said he convinced Sally through e-mails to complete the transaction in person at the Starbucks in downtown Modesto. That is where they arrested Sally.

"We've actually done this before, trying to buy stolen property on eBay," Ramirez said. "But this was the first time we actually got to the property before it was sold."

He said more and more thieves are using auction Web sites such as eBay to fence stolen property.

Ramirez said the asking price for the stolen Canon professional camera, lens and battery was \$1,035. The winning bid was \$1,700, he said.

The actual value of the photo equipment was \$2,500, he added.

The investigation started Dec. 11, when staff at The Picture People, a portrait studio at Modesto's Vintage Faire Mall, called police to report a burglary.

According to police, there was no forced entry into the business, but the photo equipment and \$1,100 was gone. Ramirez said the cash register was pried open.

Police believe that Sally used a key to open a rear door and set up the business for a commercial burglary, Ramirez said.

Sally was an employee at The Picture People at the time of the burglary, but police did not suspect an inside job at the time, Ramirez said.

Manager was checking sites

The store's manager started searching auction sites on the Internet, hoping the thieves would try to sell the photo equipment that way. Saturday, the manager spotted an ad on eBay for equipment that fit the description of the stolen property. She informed police.

Ramirez met with Sally at the Starbucks about 1:30 p.m. While inspecting the camera, he noticed "Property of

Picture People" was labeled on the battery, which included a serial number.

He said officers quickly moved in and took Sally into custody.

Because Sally was on probation, officers were able to search his Turlock home without a warrant. There they found other stolen property, Ramirez said.

Officers found a computer monitor and a scanner that was reported stolen in August from the Sears Portrait Studio in Turlock, where Sally was working at that time, Ramirez said.

Police also found a Nikon wide-focus camera lens that was reported stolen on Jan. 11 from the J.C. Penney store at Vintage Faire Mall, Ramirez said.

He said there could be others involved in the thefts.

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Posted on 01/25/07 00:00:00

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