

Officer's memory leads to 2 arrests; Brothers charged in robberies, named as slaying suspects

Robert A. Erlandson and Kris Antonelli

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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Zombro also told detectives that Michael Zenone had left the store security job to work as a bartender at the Hunt Valley Golf Club -- where police had found the red Jeep Cherokee of one of the Loch Raven slaying victims.

A background check turned up no criminal record when Michael Zenone was hired at Hecht's in 1993, Zombro said. Michael Zenone later was charged and convicted in 1994 of felony theft from Nordstrom at Towson Town Center and ordered to serve 100 hours of community service and 15 months of probation.

FULL TEXT

It was a rookie cop's recollection that led to two brothers being charged as bank robbers and named as suspects in last summer's double slaying at Loch Raven Reservoir, a crime that had baffled police for months.

"I know that guy," Officer Timothy J. Zombro said during roll call April 30, when he saw security camera photos of a robbery suspect casing a bank. His mates at the Wilkens Precinct laughed and said, "It looks like you."

But the officer was right. And his tip to detectives led to the weekend arrest of Michael Zenone, 27, who had worked for Zombro as a security guard, and his brother, Anthony J. Zenone, 30, on bank robbery charges.

The brothers became suspects in the Loch Raven slayings when an AK-47 assault rifle found in the Zenones' Hamilton-area home matched cartridge cases at the reservoir, police said Monday.

The FBI has charged the brothers with the April robberies of the Mercantile Safe Deposit and Trust branch in White Marsh and the First Virginia Bank in Towson. The Zenones also have been charged by Baltimore authorities with the February robbery of Kenwood Bingo Hall.

They have not been charged in the Loch Raven slayings; Baltimore County police said yesterday that they are continuing to look for links between the Zenones and the deaths of Vernon Smith and Vincent Young.

Zombro, 26, the son of a retired Baltimore County police lieutenant, recalled yesterday that after seeing security camera photos, he phoned his suspicions to detectives in Towson. Within hours, he had joined county and city police and FBI agents on his first plainclothes surveillance, watching a house in the 4400 block of Forest View Ave. in Baltimore.

Zombro, who graduated first in last year's police academy class, said he soon saw a familiar face -- the one in the

photos. It was Michael Zenone, who had worked for him in 1993 and 1994 when he was security director for Hecht's at Golden Ring Mall.

Zombro also told detectives that Michael Zenone had left the store security job to work as a bartender at the Hunt Valley Golf Club -- where police had found the red Jeep Cherokee of one of the Loch Raven slaying victims.

By early last Wednesday, police had a 24-hour watch on the Zenones, whom they suspected of having robbed at least two banks and of planning other holdups.

Police arrested the brothers Saturday outside their house and began a search that turned up thousands of dollars of reportedly stolen goods and 21 rifles, including the AK-47.

The cartridges from Loch Raven and Kenwood had been tested by the state police in February through computer-generated images but did not match, said William Toohey, county police spokesman. The county had no ballistics expert at the time, he said.

But after Lt. Craig Bowers, head of the homicide squad, overheard two robbery squad detectives talking about the bank and bingo robberies -- and the use of an assault rifle -- he suggested another test. "He said, 'Let's compare the actual cartridges,' and when they did under a comparison microscope, bingo, they match-ed," Toohey said.

"I'm glad I was able to help bring this together and to a safe conclusion," Zombro said yesterday.

Still, he said, he was surprised that Michael Zenone could possibly be involved in such violent crimes. "I never knew him to be involved with guns or anything."

Neighbors on the Zenones' quiet, tree-lined street also expressed disbelief about the arrests.

For six years, the brothers lived in a three-story white house, in a neighborhood of older homes with front porches, rocking chairs and bright pink, purple and red azalea bushes amid neat lawns.

The Zenones were well-liked by neighbors, who said the brothers helped shovel cars out of the snow during the blizzard.

"I wish we had more neighbors like them," said Tamara Miller, who lived next door for a year. "I still don't believe any of it. I've never seen anything suspicious and they don't have shades on their windows."

Zombro said that he never met Anthony Zenone but that Michael Zenone often spoke of him. They were body-builders who worked out frequently, he said, adding, "They were pretty big guys."

The FBI identified Anthony Zenone as an employee of United Parcel Service in Laurel.

Mark Dickens, a spokesman at UPS headquarters in Atlanta, said personnel records for the past eight years did not show Anthony Zenone as an employee. However, he added, some UPS stations employ temporary help and no record is kept of that.

As a plainclothes security officer, Michael Zenone was effective in catching shoplifters, Zombro said. He was a "police buff," who talked about his friends in the Anne Arundel County Police Department and his "ride-alongs" with

county officers.

A background check turned up no criminal record when Michael Zenone was hired at Hecht's in 1993, Zombro said. Michael Zenone later was charged and convicted in 1994 of felony theft from Nordstrom at Towson Town Center and ordered to serve 100 hours of community service and 15 months of probation.

Ed Hoover, general manager of Hunt Valley Golf Club, said Michael Zenone had worked at the club as a bartender since April 1994. "He was always on time and did his job, which makes this extremely surprising to me and to everyone else at the club."

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Illustration

PHOTO 1 (PHOTOS APPEARED IN THE TEL SECTION ONLY) PHOTO 2; Caption: Security camera: Banks security photos shown two men identified by police as Anthony (left) and Michael Zenome. SAME AS PHOTO 1

DETAILS

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