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News

Man arrested in slayings was suspect in burglaries

By **Kris Antonelli**

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Scotland Williams, the 31-year-old Arnold man charged yesterday with murder in the shooting deaths of two prominent Bethesda lawyers, has been the prime suspect in a rash of burglaries in Arnold and Severna Park, Anne Arundel police said.

According to court records, Mr. Williams was arrested in September 1993 and charged with breaking and entering. He pleaded guilty March 3 to one count of theft and was released, having served six months while awaiting trial. He also was ordered to pay \$783 in restitution to the victims.

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County police arrested him again shortly after 6 p.m. Thursday as he was leaving his house in the 800 block of Bradford Ave. He was charged with two counts of first-degree murder in the slayings of Julie Noel Gilbert, 48, and her husband Jose E. Trias, 49, in their vacation home at Winchester on the Severn. Their bodies were found face-down in bed shortly after noon Monday. Each had been shot once in the back of the head.

Anne Arundel District Judge Joseph P. Manck ordered Mr. Williams held without bail after a hearing yesterday afternoon.

Earlier in the day, Circuit Judge Warren B. Duckett Jr. expressed his regrets for having released Mr. Williams two months ago.

"If I'd acted differently, he'd still be in jail, and maybe these people would be alive," he said. "I think about that, and it affects me deeply."

Police said they were tipped off to Mr. Williams when a security camera at the Maryland National Bank branch at Glen Burnie Mall photographed him using Mr. Trias' credit card to withdraw cash about 9:40 p.m. Sunday.

Mr. Williams was photographed a second time at Elkridge National Bank on Baltimore-Annapolis Boulevard Tuesday, police said. The third time he tried to use the card, at the Maryland National Bank branch in the Southdale Shopping Center, it was rejected, police said.

The arrest came after Detective Edward Stratton recognized the man in the pictures as the one he had arrested in the Severna Park burglaries.

Police staked out the house on Bradford Avenue about 5 p.m. and made the arrest an hour later. Police said Mr. Williams was wearing Ms. Gilbert's watch when he was taken into custody.

According to charging documents, Mr. Williams broke into the home of Ms. Gilbert and Mr. Trias in the 1600 block of Father Urban Lane through a sliding glass door. Police estimate that they died between 9 p.m. May 14 and 9 a.m. Sunday.

Neighbors said Mr. Trias arrived at the home about 3 p.m. May 14 and that Ms. Gilbert arrived about 4:30 p.m.

The couple's dark red Acura Legend was stolen after the killings and was found Tuesday in the 900 block of E. 20th St. in East Baltimore with the keys in the ignition.

The burglary was similar to one at the home of Judy and Edwin Fee in the 100 block of Berrywood Road in Severna Park Sept. 15.

Mrs. Fee and her family were asleep when a thief cut the screen off an open kitchen window to slip into the house and steal two blank checks from her purse, which was by her bedroom door.

"The detective told us we were really lucky that we did not wake up and confront him," Mrs. Fee said yesterday. "I'm still numb from it."

She said the intruder opened her bedroom door a few inches. "He turned the hall light on and walked into all the bedrooms. They were all open like that when we woke up," she said.

Mrs. Fee said she didn't notice the checks were missing until Mr. Williams tried to cash one for \$1,553 at a Baltimore check-cashing agency. The clerk called her to verify the amount. When Mrs. Fee said the check was stolen, the clerk stalled Mr. Williams until police arrived.

Mr. Williams also was charged with breaking into a home in the first block of Old Station Road in Severna Park July 19. Charging documents said he took jewelry from the home and sold it to a pawnshops.

At his hearing on the break-ins in March, Mr. Williams said he had purchased the stolen items from someone. His lawyer, James McCarthy, argued that police had no evidence that he had committed the break-ins.

Eugene M. Whissel, the assistant state's attorney who prosecuted Mr. Williams then, said yesterday that he agreed to accept the guilty plea to felony theft in March because Mr. McCarthy had a good argument.

Mr. Williams said during that hearing that he had been treated by a psychiatrist and that

he was discharged from the Army in April 1992 after serving for 12 years and being involved in the Persian Gulf war. He had no comment at yesterday's hearing. As he was being led out of the District Court commissioner's office yesterday, Mr. Williams, who is 5 feet 1 inch tall and weighs 120 pounds, smiled at television cameras and laughed at reporters.

Officer Randy Bell, a police spokesman said Mr. Williams was the "chief suspect" last summer in about a dozen break-ins in the Round Bay community in Arnold. He was never charged in those crimes, but after his arrest in September, the break-ins all but stopped, Officer Bell said.

Investigators searched Mr. Williams' home, but would not say what they found. Officer Bell said the small caliber gun used in the slayings has not been recovered.

Yesterday, a woman ordered a reporter off the property in Arnold.

Mr. McCarthy would not talk about his former client yesterday.

Robert A. Potter, a spokesman for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, where Mr. Trias was vice president and general counsel, said, "It is gratifying that police were able to make an arrest so quickly."

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