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Irvine 'chair burglar' suspect arrested

Thousands of pieces of jewelry found in the home of Raymond Lopez, 47, are on display at the police station.

By SONYA SMITH

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IRVINE – A man suspected of being the "chair burglar" has been arrested by Irvine police, and thousands of pieces of jewelry believed to be connected with the case are on display today at the police station, officials said.

Raymond Lopez, 47, is suspected of committing 200 home burglaries over the past five years, police said.

Lopez was arrested at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday on charges of burglary, attempted burglary and possession of burglary tools, and is being held without bail at the Orange County Jail. The Downey resident is connected to at least three residential burglaries in Irvine, police said, through DNA evidence collected at the scenes by Irvine police forensic specialists.

Lopez is being charged with one count of having a firearm (a handgun found in his home), one count of attempted burglary at a home in Rossmoor, and five counts of burglary – three in Irvine, one in Cypress and one in Rossmoor, Love said.

Jeff Love of Irvine police said the culprit is known as the "chair burglar" because in hundreds of past burglaries, the same routine of placing a chair or potted plant next to a home's fence for a quick, easy escape was used.

Thousands of what the police believe are stolen goods were displayed for the media at the Irvine police station today at 10:30 a.m. The jewelry and coins were found at a jewelry store in Cypress, the name and location of which were not given because of the ongoing investigation. Love said the suspect was allegedly using the jewelry store to sell the stolen goods.

The collection included various silver jewelry pieces, \$50, \$100 and Indian bills rubber-banded together, old stopwatches, coin collections, a shotgun with a pistol handle, pearls, rings and silverware. Police estimate that as much as \$250,000 in stolen goods was taken and less than \$10,000 in cash.

Lopez is suspected of using the jewelry to sell as-is or melt down to sell in bulk; Mike Hamel of the Irvine police department said this is suspected because a few gold medallions were found at the suspect's home that appeared to be made from melted-down gold jewelry.

The found jewelry will be made available for public viewing in the next few weeks, Hamel said, and people who think their stolen jewelry may be in that pile can come in to the station with a police report that contains a list of the items stolen. If people do not have their police reports, the department can search back three years by the person's name, as long as a police report was filed.

Love said the suspect was found via geographic profiling software, which uses crime data to estimate where future similar crimes might occur and where the culprit might live. The Canadian-based software, Rigel, uses an algorithm created by Kim Rossmo, who once worked as an inspector with the Vancouver, B.C., police department.

The software uses crime data such as crime locations, suspect information, case details and investigator details to present the data in two- or three-dimensional surface maps called "jeopardizes," showing the most probable locations of an offender's residence. The Irvine Police Department has several detectives trained in the software.

Detectives used the predictions generated by the software, and noticed a person who appeared suspicious.

Irvine police's Crime Analysis Unit used the home burglary data to give detectives general areas where the crimes were likely to occur and possible times. Lopez was then kept under surveillance and tracked using GPS technology, allowing detectives to develop what they believe is incriminating evidence against him, Love said.

Hamel said Lopez is the suspect in the 200 "chair burglar" home burglaries in which the same patterns were found in hundreds of home burglaries: cash, jewelry and handguns were commonly stolen; the homes were usually robbed between sunset and nightfall; and a chair or potted plant was found propped near a backyard fence for use as an easy exit.

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