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PRESS RELEASE

UPDATE: Arrest made in suspicious fire on Densmore Dr.

Date: December 7, 2020
Case Number: 20ES06252

On November 14, 2020 at about 04:01 hours, the Essex Police Department and Essex Junction Fire Department received the report of a vehicle on fire inside a carport at 7 Densmore Drive in Essex Junction. The fire appeared to have started inside one vehicle and quickly spread to the others. In total, eleven vehicles were completely destroyed, eighteen more vehicles suffered damages, in addition to the carport being a total loss and three condo buildings nearby being severely damaged. One of the responding fire apparatus was also damaged by the fire.

Since then, Essex Police Detectives were able to develop several leads in the case that has led to the arrest of the responsible individual. Tyshawn Lee, 19, of Burlington, has been charged with causing the fire in addition to committing numerous vandalisms and thefts from vehicles in the area that same night. As Essex Police and Fire Departments were fighting the fire on Densmore Dr., Williston Police Officers conducted a traffic stop of a suspicious vehicle with two occupants, Lee and Brooke Plantier, 21, of Colchester. The officers observed property inside the vehicle that was believed to be stolen and seized the vehicle to apply for a search warrant while releasing the occupants as they did not have charges at that time. Upon obtaining the search warrant, Williston and Essex officers identified the property as being stolen from numerous vehicles entered the same night as the fire, some of them being close by to the location of the fire.

Through further investigative techniques and statements of cooperating individuals, information was developed that Lee, Plantier, and two other males, Darren Martell, 19, of Colchester and Nathan Morrill, 26, Transient, were responsible for numerous vandalisms and thefts from vehicles in Essex, Colchester, Williston, and South Burlington that night. Interviews of those subjects, including an admission statement from Lee, have led investigators to confirm that while committing a theft from the vehicle in the carport, Lee used hand sanitizer found inside the victim's vehicle as an accelerant to start a fire on the passenger seat. This soon caught the vehicle on fire and quickly spread to the rest of the carport. All of the suspects then fled the area and are believed to have committed at least one further theft from a vehicle at another location before dropping off Martell and Morrill and being stopped by Williston Police. Lee and Plantier are believed to then have left the state to South Carolina the very next day but then returned to Vermont in the last week. On December 4, 2020, Lee is further accused of threatening Martell in retaliation for cooperating with police. Lee was taken into custody by the Colchester Police Department on December 4th for this and the other listed crimes.

The Essex Police Department wishes to credit both the Williston Police Department and the Vermont State Police Fire Investigations Unit for their assistance in bringing this case to a successful resolution. Cooperation between agencies in Chittenden County is common practice and this is an excellent example of those partnerships in the common goal of public safety for all.

Tyshawn Lee, 19, of Burlington is charged with the following crimes: First Degree Arson, Criminal Threatening, Obstruction of Justice, Unlawful Mischief, and Petit Theft. He was lodged at Northwest State Correctional Facility for lack of \$25,000 bail and will be arraigned today.

Darren Martell, 19, of Colchester is charged with Unlawful Mischief, and Petit Theft. He was cited to appear in Chittenden Superior Court.

Nathan Morrill, 26, Transient is charged with Unlawful Mischief, and Petit Theft. He was cited to appear in Chittenden Superior Court.

Brooke Plantier, 21, of Colchester is charged with Accessory After the Fact related to her assistance with the crimes of Unlawful Mischief and Petit Theft. She was cited to appear in Chittenden Superior Court.
Issued by: Ron Hoague, Chief of Police

THE ORIGINAL PRESS RELEASE FOLLOWS:

Date: November 14, 2020
Case Number: 20ES06252

On November 14, 2020 at about 04:01 hours, the Essex Police Department and Essex Junction Fire Department received the report of a vehicle on fire inside a carport at 7 Densmore Drive in Essex Junction. Upon arrival, responders found the carport fully involved with fire. With the assistance of the Essex Fire Department, firefighters were able to extinguish the fire before it could spread to nearby buildings and residences. In the remains, it was found that twenty-four vehicles had been damaged, several being completely destroyed, and the nearby condo building suffering heat damage and broken windows. The fire appears to have started inside one vehicle and quickly spread to the others.

This fire is considered suspicious and the investigation is ongoing. Essex PD detectives are being assisted by the Vermont State Police Fire Investigation team and the Vermont Division of Fire Safety. There were several reports of thefts from vehicles overnight in the same area as well as others around the Village. Investigators are determining if they are related to this incident but they are not known to be connected at this time.

Anyone with information related to this incident is asked to contact the Essex Police Department.

Issued by: Chief Ron Hoague
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