

Richmond police investigate rape as hate crime

By Karl Fischer

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--- Four men beat and raped a woman and left her naked on a central Richmond street last weekend, punctuating their 45-minute attack with comments that made clear why they chose her as their victim — she is a lesbian, police said.

The crime, while equaled in violence by others in the city's recent past, differs in that it also bore the unmistakable stamp of prejudice against the victim, police said Friday.

For that reason, detectives will investigate the case as a hate crime as well as a sexual assault, and the Richmond Police Department offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to arrests and prosecution in the case.

"I've lost sleep over this. I am sickened," said police Chief Chris Magnus. "While every sexual assault is a terrible crime, this particular case is especially horrific because multiple individuals acted together in the commission of this assault, and because of the hate-crime aspect."

The victim, a 28-year-old woman who police describe as openly gay, parked her car on the 1500 block of Visalia Avenue, in the Belding Woods neighborhood, about 9:30 p.m. last Saturday.

As she walked to a residence on the block, four men approached on foot.

"One of the suspects struck the victim with a (blunt) object," Lt. Mark Gagan said. "There was very little interaction between the victim and the suspects. From that point, the physical assault turned into a sexual assault."

The rapists took the victim to a spot where they could not be seen from the street and assaulted her for some time. All four participated to varying degrees, mostly at the urging of the attacker who initially struck her, police said.

Throughout the attack the men, all strangers to the victim, made comments about her sexual orientation, police said. They also took her wallet and keys, which they used to open her car.

The men took her in her car about seven blocks, to the 1300 block of Burbeck Avenue, where they continued to rape her, both inside and outside the vehicle, police said. After about 45 minutes they kicked her out and drove away in her car, leaving her naked in the street. She reached a resident of the block who phoned police.

She was treated for her injuries at a hospital and released.

"It's rare to find four adults willing to condone behavior this extreme and violent. It's clear that some of them behaved as followers, but all of them are responsible for what happened," Gagan said. "They should know that their best chance (for leniency) would be to turn themselves in and cooperate with our investigation before we identify them and apprehend them on our own."

Officers found the victim's car elsewhere in the city Monday, and authorities are now examining evidence found in it.

Police said the victim described the ringleader as a Latino man in his 30s, about 5 feet 6 inches tall and weighing about 180 pounds, with black hair and brown eyes. He had a mustache and his breath smelled of alcohol. He primarily spoke Spanish.

His main accomplice was a black man in his early 20s, about 5-foot-10 and 170 pounds with black hair and brown eyes, who was called "Blue" by his colleagues, police said.

Two other Latino men also participated. Both were in their late teens or early 20s, and one was called "Pato," police said.

"We are hoping that residents know who these people are," Gagan said. "People need to pick up the phone."

Reach Karl Fischer at 510-262-2728 or kfischer@bayareanewsgroup.com.

How to help

Richmond police ask anyone with information about the Dec. 13, gang-rape in the Belding Woods neighborhood to call Detective Yesenia Rogers at 510-672-1718.

OR: Checks can be made to "Richmond Jane Doe" c/o Community Violence Solutions, 2101 Van Ness Ave., San Pablo, CA 94806 Attn: Mrs. Joanne Douglas