

HOA Dispute May Be Root of Computer Hacking Case

By Daniel Lopez, Sentinel staff writer

Police are not commenting on a computer hacking probe that brought Riverside County detectives to a house here on Feb. 21, though it appears the case was sparked by a homeowners association dispute in Southern California.

Monday, Jerry Franchville, a spokesman with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, declined to speak about the raid on Cherry Blossom Drive in Watsonville and another home raid in Menifee, about 10 miles north of Temecula.

"We filed the warrant, and we are moving on," Franchville said.

At both locations, members of the agency's Computer and Technology Crime High-Tech Response Team entered the homes and seized several computers.

The Watsonville home belongs to a Capitola police officer who said the detectives were there because of one of his roommates, whose name has not been released.

A copy of the search warrant was not available from the Riverside County Superior Court on Monday. Riverside County sheriff's Sgt. Rick Waltch, who heads the high-tech team, could not be reached for comment.

However, in the days after the raid, he did speak with the daily newspaper The Californian in Temecula.

Waltch told a reporter that multiple computers were involved in the hacking case, and that one was traced back to Watsonville.

Investigators are still trying to determine the link between Watsonville and the Menifee house of Don Harris, the former lake manager for Menifee Lakes Master Association, Waltch said.

Harris, who led a successful effort to recall the association board, was terminated in 2006. He has filed lawsuits against the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and the homeowners association.

Authorities told The Californian that a Web site, Menifee Truth, which was started as a counter effort to the recall, was targeted by a hacker.

According to the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, no arrests have been made and forensic experts were examining the confiscated computers.

Rick Savard, a Menifee resident who operated the hacked Web site, said Monday he can't believe where the dispute has led.

"We don't understand what would have been so important to commit a crime over a silly homeowners association recall," he said.

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