

Henrico police battle groups of apartment bandits

By Mark Bowes

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For 33 days, a handful of young thugs turned lives upside down and struck terror in central and western Henrico County apartment complexes.

One man was struck with a gun while relaxing outside his apartment, then held at gunpoint inside with his fiancée.

Three men jolted awake as robbers kicked in their front door, were repeatedly punched and kicked as the robbers took several hundred dollars. One victim was shot in the stomach without provocation and left to die.

In another incident, the robbers entered an apartment where a dozen men had gathered for a party, stripped them of jew-

elry and cash and stole laptop computers.

Similar crimes — 12 in all — occurred between Oct. 22 and Nov. 24, 2003, in a half-dozen apartment complexes.

"These are invasions of the one place on the planet where people normally feel that they're the safest," noted Paul Cushman, assistant Henrico commonwealth's attorney, one of three prosecutors who tried the recently completed cases.

Henrico police at one point had up to 30 officers working the invasion-style robberies that grew increasingly violent and brazen. When they arrested four young people — two of them teens — police Chief Henry W. Stanley Jr. called a news conference to announce the arrests and allay residents' fears.

Fourteen months after the final robbery, the last of the four suspects was recently sentenced to prison, ending one of Henrico's most heinous robbery cases in years.

The two lead defendants — Tori D. Chisholm, now 17, and Wiltor F. Fritz, now 26 — were sentenced to serve 47 and 90 years in prison, respectively, after being convicted of at least 20 felonies each. Two associates, Malkuth Carraway, now 18, and Alexis Kirby, now 22, were sentenced to serve 3 1/2 and 3 years in prison, respectively, for lesser roles in the crimes.

The robbery rampage began, it seems, as a gang initiation for the youngest of the four, then only 15.

That teen, Chisholm, a Henrico High School dropout,

did the first two robberies alone as several associates watched nearby. Chisholm told police he was willing to rob to become a member of the Bloods, a local version of a gang made popular in South Central Los Angeles.

His friends "were sitting up on top of this hillside, looking down for potential victims," explained Chuck Felmlee, a member of the prosecution team. Chisholm "would run down the hill and do one (robbery), run back up, then run back down the hill a second time and rob the second folks."

The group frequently gathered at Kirby's apartment, where they hatched their robbery plans and would meet later after the crimes.

"They would all come over to her apartment and smoke marijuana and get high," Felmlee

said. "And from her apartment, they would sort of decide, 'All right, let's go out here and do a robbery.'"

Investigators got the break they needed to begin identifying the robbers.

"That was the dynamite charge right there that we needed to get things rolling," Valentine said, "and start building our case."

A couple of days later, police learned that some of the jewelry and laptop computers had been pawned in Chesterfield County. After retrieving those goods, police executed a search warrant at Kirby's home. They found several weapons, including three of the guns used in the robberies.

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