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Sheriff Nabs
Alleged Copper
Wire Thief

- Suspect
accused of
stripping
copper wire
from Metro
Green Line
tracks.

*From left, Metro Rail
General Manager Mike
Cannell, Sheriff's
Detective Frank
Richter and Capt.
John Witt.*

By LAURA KLOTH

(February 17, 2009) A trail of grease and some crafty detective work led to the arrest of a homeless man accused of stealing \$10,000 worth of copper wire from the Metro Green Line, said Los Angeles Sheriff's Detective Frank Richter.

The suspect, Ted Stewart, 46, who is known on the street as "Riverbed Ted" was arrested Nov. 5, and is now at Los Angeles County Jail.

On Feb. 6, Richter's efforts in leading the investigation were recognized by Metro Rail Operations General Manager Mike Cannell and Transit Services South Bureau Captain John Witt.

After accepting his award, Richter said he wanted to also recognize everyone who assisted in the investigation including the rail workers who helped by greasing the tracks to catch the suspect.



< Metro Green Line
train approaches rail
yard interface switch.
Copper wire runs
parallel to tracks prior
to switch areas where
trains cross over, said
Rail TOS Jaime Pulido
at the Metro Green
Line Yard Control.

*Photo: Gayle
Anderson*

Richter said investigators were baffled after the first theft occurred in August because they couldn't figure out how the suspect was making a clean getaway, after cutting the copper wire out of the tracks near the Green Line passenger station at Norwalk, Richter said.

"There wasn't a whole lot to go on," he said.

Then the suspect struck three more times, and that's when a couple of rail workers decided to smear grease on the copper wire to help investigators trail him, Richter explained.

Meanwhile, investigators began searching homeless encampments in the area, and interviewing witnesses. Fingers pointed to Stewart who is apparently the "self-proclaimed" mayor of one of the camps, and known to be a copper recycler.

Detectives literally followed a trail of grease to the suspect and discovered his bike and trailer were also full of grease.

Stewart was allegedly collecting copper from the rail site as well as other locations, and allegedly selling it for cash.

"It's very valuable and very pure. He was going to a metal recycling place and making money off of it," said Los Angeles Sheriff's Lt. Jenny Bethune.

Stewart was charged with eight felony counts including grand theft, petty theft and tampering with a railroad, Richter said. He is expected to appear in court on March 9.