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TSB Deputies Rise Early to Bring Down a Tagger

By JIMMY STROUP

(Feb. 13, 2008) Beginning at 6 a.m., 25 Transit Services Bureau (TSB) deputies and three California Highway Patrol officers prepared to serve a warrant in South Los Angeles, today, targeting a tagger who had damaged three Metro divisions.

By 7 a.m., the tagger "Guser" was arrested under a warrant served in connection with 72 individual instances of vandalism on the Metro system. Gustavo Romero – "Guser's" given name – is a 23-year-old who has two prior arrests for vandalism.

Romero is suspected of causing \$108,000 in damage to various Metro divisions, including Central City Division 1, Crossroads Depot Division 2 and Arthur Winston Division 5.

"This guy is into etching, which costs us a lot of money to fix," said TSB Deputy Albert Zambrano, who along with Devin Vanderlaan was responsible for building the case against "Guser."

"This is the ninth guy we've taking down from UPN," Zambrano said. "We wanted to go after this guy because he was big."

UPN is a tagging crew known as "Under Pigs Noses" or "UR Property Next." The crew has made Metro their favorite canvas so, in turn, TSB has made the crew their favorite target.

"We've gotten a lot of their major guys in the last year or so," said Vanderlaan, who indicated that UPN has been cut by a third thanks to the TSB's attention.

Informant made the difference

The case against "Guser" was made by using information from another UPN member who had talked to deputies in hopes of gaining leniency in his punishment.



"Guser" tags are seen throughout his neighborhood. This tag is thrown up in front of his house. Below, board found in the backyard of "Guser's" house was used to practice tags.

Photos by Jimmy Stroup



“Guser” wasn’t all that difficult to find after that helping hand: he was fond of tagging his own neighborhood, according to deputies. The curb in front of his own house carried his moniker.

After searching his house, deputies reported finding two methamphetamine pipes and piles of paper with practice tags. TSB Sgt. Augie Pando said the evidence found in the house indicates that “Guser” is no longer satisfied with simply tagging.

“This guy’s definitely into gang activity based on the symbols we found in the house,” Pando said.

Sgt. Mike Estrada said there was evidence that “Guser” had made some attempts to conceal the evidence of his tagging, but that the sheer volume of paper and paraphernalia made that a futile gesture.

TSB deputies figure the damage to the Metro system caused by just the UPN crew members already arrested is in excess of \$700,000.