

Porterville Recorder, The (CA)
November 8, 2007

Section: Local News

UPDATE: Granite Hills students being told campus is safe

Action: Police on Granite Hills campus as off-campus search continues

Author: GLEN FAISON, JOHN TIPTON & SARAH ELIZABETH VILICANA

Article Text:

Students at Granite Hills High School have been locked inside their classrooms since the start of the school day as police search for a suspected killer in a nearby orchard.

Marie Aromin, 17, a senior at Granite Hills, said by cell phone that the campus was locked down at about 8:15 a.m. just as school was starting for the day - and remains locked down now.

Aromin said police have been on campus all day. She said school officials have been giving brief updates - but with few details - about the status of the continuing lockdown. The thrust of the updates, she said, is that the school is safe.

"We've just been hearing snippets here and there about what's going on," Aromin said.

Students are only being allowed to leave their respective classrooms, Aromin said, with police escort.

Authorities are searching an orchard and a hill near Granite Hills High School for a man suspected of killing a woman Wednesday in Porterville.

The high school is locked down as a result of the search as emergency responders stage along Putnam Avenue while the search continues.

The orange grove that's being searched is at the east end of Morton Avenue at the end of the roadway at Conner Street. Police just prior to 10:30 a.m., in conversation heard over a police scanner, were focusing on a shed or vehicle within the orchard.

Officers with the Porterville Police Department, including members of the SWAT team, along with deputies from the Tulare County Sheriff's Department are poised to move in once the suspect is located.

A helicopter from the Kern County Sheriff's Department is currently circling over the orchard, trying to pinpoint the suspect's location. The suspect is believed to be hiding in an orchard.

Police believe he may have a firearm of some kind.

The suspect has a cell phone and has been in contact with some of his friends, Porterville police Lt. Chris Dempsie said today.

Police are trying to make contact with the suspect to bring the situation to an end before they have to take action.

The incident began shortly after 8 a.m. today. Police indicated early today that the suspect may have been in the area overnight since the slaying of a woman sometime Wednesday.

The identity of the victim has not yet been released.

A vehicle matching the description of the suspect's vehicle was found at the edge of the orange grove that's being searched, police report.

Today's action comes in the wake of a suspected homicide which occurred sometime Wednesday.

The Porterville Police Department reports receiving information at about 5 p.m. Wednesday about a possible homicide that occurred earlier in the day. The investigation led officers to the 300 block of North Capitola, where they report finding a dead woman in her apartment.

Police, in a news release today, said there were signs of trauma, but a cause of death has not been determined.

The woman's name was not released pending notification of her family.

Bobby Joe Suggs, 29, of Porterville, is being sought in connection with the killing. He is described as 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighing 170 pounds, with brown hair and brown eyes. He is believed to be in the Porterville area or on the Tule River Indian Reservation.

Officers have not officially confirmed that the man in the orchard is Suggs.

Anyone with information about the killing or about Suggs' whereabouts is asked to call the Porterville Police Department at 782-7400 or Detective Jeff Dowling at 782-7411.

Copyright 2007, The Porterville Recorder. All Rights Reserved