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Mentally ill man flees police, kills pedestrian

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Sun-News reporter

A pedestrian was killed Monday during a high-speed, early morning police chase that began when a Las Cruces man with a history of mental illness assaulted a woman and stole her car. The chase tied up traffic at several locations in Las Cruces during the morning rush hour. One busy intersection remained closed for several hours.

Carlos Preciado Jr., 24, of Las Cruces, has been charged with an open count of murder, robbery, unlawful taking of a motor vehicle and aggravated fleeing an officer, all felonies, said Las Cruces Police Department Lt. Randy Lara. Preciado was taken to the Doña Ana County Detention Center, where he is being held on a \$500,000 cash bond.

Dead is 68-year-old Alvin Moore of 800 South Main St., who was killed at the intersection of El Paseo Road and South Main Street, Lara said. Witnesses said Moore often walked to the nearby Denny's restaurant to get coffee and a newspaper.

Court records state that Preciado has admitted to the incidents that led to the charges.

The incident began about 7 a.m. when Preciado, who was unarmed, encountered Consuelo Rios, 51, of Chamberino in the parking lot of Home Depot, 225 South Telshor Blvd.

He reportedly ran at her and knocked her to the ground, then took her keys and fled in her gold 2002 Ford Expedition. Rios, who was not seriously injured, had just finished purchasing a new air conditioning unit.

"I feel badly because it was my vehicle" that killed Moore, Rios said. "I'm just heartbroken about this."

Police were alerted and spotted the Expedition moments later on Solano Drive, Lara said. A chase ensued, at speeds ranging from 90 to 120 miles per hour, according to court records. Moore was in the crosswalk on the southeast corner of Main Street and El Paseo Road when he was struck at 7:07 a.m., Lara said. Medical investigators declared him dead at the scene, but his body remained in a bag on the sidewalk until about 9:45 a.m.

According to court records, Preciado didn't slow down when he traveled through the intersection, though the light was red. Several of the officers reported seeing Moore's body "flying" through the air after it was struck.

A woman who saw the Expedition strike Moore said the first couple of officers kept pursuing Preciado, and a third stopped to check on Moore.

"They were going about 100 miles an hour," she said.

The chase continued toward University Avenue. From that street, Preciado attempted to enter Interstate 25 headed south when he encountered a state Motor Transportation Division officer, Harry Sanchez, who fired at least one shot at Preciado's vehicle, Lara said. He did not know if the bullet struck the Expedition.

Preciado made a U-turn and headed north on Interstate 25.

Preciado exited on North Main Street and surrendered to police at 7:17 a.m. in the parking lot of Kmart, 3860 North Main Street, Lara said. He was arrested without further incident.

Preciado is a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic who has refused to take his medication, said his father, Carlos Preciado Sr. He was ordered by District Judge Jerald A. Valentine on July 11 to check into Mesilla Valley Hospital for an evaluation to determine whether he needed to be involuntarily committed to a mental health hospital. The hospital released him last week after a five-day evaluation, his father said.

The evaluation came after Valentine ruled that Preciado was not competent to stand trial on a charge of hitting his mother and dismissed the charge.

"They released him and said he's not a danger to himself or others," Carlos Preciado Sr. said.

"Now our family and the family of the deceased are going through hell."

Hospital officials did not return a call seeking comment.

Carlos Preciado Sr. said Monday began when his son stole his truck, which police later found abandoned between Interstate 25 and Telshor Boulevard near Home Depot. Preciado's parents were looking for him at the time of the chase, his father said.

After the chase ended, officers spent hours diverting traffic and investigating at the various crime scenes.

Amir Esmaeili, owner of Fiesta Motors Inc., on the corner of El Paseo Road and Main Street, described the scene at the intersection, which remained closed until about 10:30 a.m.

"I saw a body in a bag, about, maybe, 15 police cars, 25 cops," he said. "He killed this man."

Police are continuing the investigation and the district attorney is reviewing the case. In addition, police will conduct an internal investigation to determine whether the high-speed chase and the shot fired by Sanchez were justified, Lara said.

"We try to balance needs and safety," Lara said, in describing an officer's decision on whether to pursue a suspect through a populated area or let him go.

Some witnesses questioned the decision to pursue Preciado through the city.

"I think it's totally wrong. They shouldn't have done this at those speeds through the town," one woman said.

Sun-News reporter Sara Taylor contributed to this report.

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Mug of Preciado

Photo Caption #1: Sun-News photo by Heath Haussamen

The body of a pedestrian is taken away from the intersection of El Paseo Road and Main Street on Monday after being hit by a man driving a stolen vehicle.

Photo Caption #2: Sun-News photo by Vladimir Chaloupka

At left, a Ford Explorer is seen at the New Mexico State Police station after it was stolen and involved in a fatal hit-and-run Monday. A Las Cruces man has been charged with an open count of murder and unlawful taking of a motor vehicle, among other charges, in the incident.

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