

2 Good Samaritans Chase Down, Overpower Purse-Snatching Suspect

CRIMINAL

By PHIL SNEIDERMAN
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Two men showed unusual courage when they chased, and captured, a purse snatcher who had dragged his victim 20 feet down a sidewalk as he tried to pull her handbag away. Glendale police say.

The Good Samaritans—a bicycle shop manager from Santa Monica and a steelworker from Eliza Park—tackled and detained Jose Swales Gutierrez, 27, of Glendale, until police arrived last Friday night and arrested him, Sgt. Lief Neustrom said.

"While we don't recommend everyone take this kind of action, this kind of bravery and concern for other citizens cannot help but be admired," Neustrom said. "They could have gotten hurt. It

reminds me like this guy was fighting with them all of time until the police got there."

Gutierrez pleaded not guilty Tuesday in Glendale Municipal Court to one count of robbery, with a special allegation of causing great bodily injury. He remained jailed to face a \$50,000 bail.

Police Investigator Tom Kuhn said the victim, Eleanor Dorothy Berger, 52, of Glendale, received severe facial cuts and possible internal injuries. He said her purse strap became hooked under her arm, causing the robber to drag her 20 feet down along the sidewalk as he tried to wrest it away.

According to police, the purse-snatching occurred after Berger's husband dropped off the woman and her daughter to reserve a table at a restaurant in the 900 block of South Central Avenue.

The struggle caught the attention of others outside

the restaurant, and the robber finally let go of the purse and ran off, police said.

Jeffrey A. Wimmer, 26, said he was on a bike-tour training ride from Santa Monica to Arroyo when he saw the crime being committed.

"I was a little stunned by it," said Wimmer, who manages the Beverly Hills Bike Shop. "There's this little, older lady being knocked to the ground by the guy. My reaction was to stop my bike and turn around and chase after him."

Wimmer said the robber ran behind a house when he saw he was being pursued by a bicyclist.

"I hopped up on the sidewalk and chased him into the yard," Wimmer said. "He was about three feet from a fence and looked like he was going to jump the fence. I just pedaled up next to him, and then he, I

and my bike all went down together in a pile."

John J. Rodriguez, 25, of Eliza Park, who joined the chase, helped Wimmer detain Gutierrez until police arrived. "I knew he couldn't handle him alone," Rodriguez said. "He was trying to handle him and hold onto his bike."

Rodriguez said he was preparing to celebrate his wife's birthday at the restaurant when he heard a scream, saw the woman on the ground and a man running away. Like Wimmer, Rodriguez said he did not think about the possibility of getting hurt.

"If it wasn't for them, the guy obviously would have gotten away," Kuhn said of Wimmer and Rodriguez. "He had quite a head start, and the victim wasn't in any condition to chase him."

"I didn't do it to be a hero," Rodriguez said. "I'm a concerned citizen. I'm tired of seeing this. I just couldn't stand there and let it happen."