

Neighbors Were Unable To Stop Missouri Girl's Abduction **News**

Posted by : Randy

Posted on : 2014/2/20 4:03:04

ST. LOUIS (AP) -- Neighbors watched in horror as a 10-year-old southwest Missouri girl was snatched off the street just blocks from her home.



Some had spotted a man in a gold Ford Ranger pickup truck driving down the road in Springfield several times before taking off with the girl, investigators said. The residents even called 911 to report the truck's license number.

But the vehicle moved too quickly. And Hailey Owens was gone.

Now prosecutors have charged Craig Michael Wood with first-degree murder, kidnapping and armed criminal action. In filing the charges Wednesday, they alleged that the 45-year-old middle school football coach and teacher's aide abducted Hailey as she walked home from a friend's house Tuesday.

A probable cause statement said the fourth-grader's body was found stuffed in two trash bags inside plastic storage containers in the basement of Wood's Springfield home. She had been shot in the head, according to Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Patterson.

The basement floor was still damp from bleach, according to the probable cause statement.

Authorities won't officially confirm that the body is Hailey's until after an autopsy, but Springfield Police Paul Williams said "we have a high degree of confidence" in the preliminary identification, which indicates that it is the girl.

According to the probable cause statement, resident Michelle Edwards told police she and her husband were in their garage when saw a pickup truck approach the girl, who was holding a cellphone. She said the driver asked the girl for directions before he grabbed her with one hand and threw her into the truck "like a rag doll."

Another resident, Ricky Riggins, told the Springfield News-Leader that he chased the fleeing pickup in his car after a neighbor tried to pull the girl away.

"I couldn't keep up," Riggins said. "He was probably five to six cars ahead of me. ... It was so fast."

Wood was inside a truck parked outside his home when police arrested him Tuesday night. The probable cause statement said he was holding a roll of duct tape when officers arrived.

The truck is registered to Wood's father, Jim Wood, who told police he loaned the vehicle to his son. The father, who lives in nearby Ash Grove, declined an interview request from The Associated Press.

He and the girl apparently didn't know each other. Hailey attended Westport Elementary School; Wood worked at Pleasant View School.

Neighbors Were Unable To Stop Missouri Girl's Abduction

<http://www.kttn.com/kgozfm/modules/news/article.php?storyid=111504>

"There's no connection that we've been able to determine at this time between the victim and the suspect," Williams said.

Springfield school officials said Wood is a seventh-grade football coach and teacher's aide who supervises in-school suspensions at Pleasant View, which has students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Norm Ridder, the Springfield district's superintendent, said in a statement Wednesday that Wood began working for the district in August 1998. He said Wood has been suspended since his arrest.

Wood was initially hired as a temporary employee who worked as a substitute teacher before he was hired full time in 2006, school district spokeswoman Teresa Bledsoe said later Wednesday. He has coached football at Pleasant View since 1998 and was also an assistant boys' basketball coach.

"He met all of our qualifications for employment," Bledsoe said, noting that the Springfield district has a more rigorous background check requirement than state law, with an additional screening designed to detect substantiated allegations of child abuse or neglect as well as any past criminal violations.

Online court records show Wood had little criminal history. He pleaded guilty to possession of a controlled substance in 1990 in Greene County and was fined \$100. Wood also was convicted in 2001 for illegal taking of wildlife, a misdemeanor.

Williams said police have no idea of a motive for the killing. He said Wood has not talked to investigators since his arrest.

Joe Bridges, a local music promoter who organized a candlelight vigil for Hailey scheduled for Saturday, told The Associated Press that residents in the city of 162,000 are collectively mourning the child's abduction and death.

"The community is walking around right now with a very heavy heart," said Bridges, who described himself as a distant relative of Hailey but said he didn't know her well. "Everybody is just speechless."