***Media Relations Information for 01/23/2013***

*Public Relations Officer – Sgt. John Krueger*

*Office: 281-842-3161*

**La Porte Police arrest 2 in string of armed robberies; need help locating a third suspect**

In a City which typically enjoys a low crime rate, Police were alarmed when two armed robberies, and an attempted third, were reported within a three day period. The three incidents also occurred within 1 mile of each other and shared similar methods of operation and suspect descriptions, leading police to believe that all three crimes may have been perpetrated by the same group of individuals.

Two of La Porte’s east-side Valero service stations, one on Spencer Highway and one on Fairmont, and a What-a-Burger restaurant along S.H. 146 were the targets. During two of the offenses, one of the robbers would approach the front counter inside of their selected business, while cloaked in a black sweatshirt and face covering, and immediately display a small handgun while issuing a demand for cash. The other suspects acted as look-outs immediately outside of the business. The third event involved a pair being spotted on the exterior of the business, via surveillance camera, whereupon the pair made entry into the business, but the employee quickly triggered a panic mechanism which locked down the entire counter area, leaving the suspects empty-handed.

Fortunately, the similarity of offenses soon led police to make a swift connection when an attempted Burglary of a Motor Vehicle was soon after reported in the same area, involving similar suspect descriptions. Once the details were gathered by attentive patrol officers, detectives took action and quickly pieced the crimes together, leading to the identification of one of the three involved suspects. Subsequent investigation provided police with the names of the remaining two suspects and led to the recovery of the handgun and masks that were used during the crimes in question.

18 year old Caleb Refuge and 17 year old Austin Jean, both La Porte residents, were located and arrested within 12 hours of the last robbery incident. Both were charged with Aggravated Robbery, a crime which carries a prison sentence ranging from 5 to 99 years and potential fine of up to $10,000. A warrant for Aggravated Robbery was also obtained for a third suspect, 17 year old George Merritt Jr., also from La Porte, however, Merritt is still at large.

LPPD is asking area residents to remain on the look-out for Merritt, who is believed to have fled the area. If anyone becomes aware of his location, please contact La Porte officials immediately at 281-471-3810.

 

**PHOTO UNAVAILABLE**

**Wanted by Police**

Austin Jean Caleb Refuge George Merritt Jr.

12/13/1995 10/17/1994 08/03/1995