

Chased by police, vehicle rams into Guardian Angel's truck

By Lanz Christian Bañes/

Posted: 02/20/2010 01:01:32 AM PST
The Solano County Guardian Angel chapter leader and his wife had their feathers ruffled Thursday night after narrowly escaping serious injury.

"We're OK," Omar Martinez said as he and wife Carmen emerged from the wreckage of their white truck whose tire lay half a block away after the vehicle was struck by a car police were chasing.

The couple escaped with minor bruises, with Martinez complaining of aches on Friday after "the adrenaline rush wore off."

The collision occurred at Marin and Tennessee streets, literally yards from the Martinezes' restaurant. Martinez was heading westbound on Tennessee Street at about 9:30 p.m. and had begun to slow down in the intersection to park right across from his restaurant, he said.

"Suddenly, my wife started screaming," Martinez said, noting how the two saw the silver suspect car bearing down on them.

The suspect struck the couple's vehicle on the rear driver's side and spun north through the

intersection until it came to rest just feet from a home on the 1500 block of Marin Street, witnesses said.

"It's so scary," said Sara, 23, an area resident who saw the collision and declined to give her last name.

The Martinezes' truck spun westbound on Tennessee Street, striking a traffic signal post and coming to rest facing the wrong way on westbound Tennessee Street. It came to a stop just feet from where Martinez had planned to park it.

Initial confusion among responding officers as to which vehicle contained victims and which contained suspects led officers to point their weapons briefly at Martinez and his wife until officers recognized him, Lt. Eric Mortenson said Friday.

Emergency personnel then made sure Martinez and his wife were OK and went after the suspect, Martinez said.

Martinez had gone through the Vallejo Police Department's Citizens Academy last fall.

The chase began on Ohio Street about 20 minutes before the crash when an officer noticed the silver vehicle's taillight was out. When the officer checked the car's plates, he discovered the vehicle had been involved in a previous chase in which it had eluded police, Mortenson said.

As soon as the police lights came on, the car

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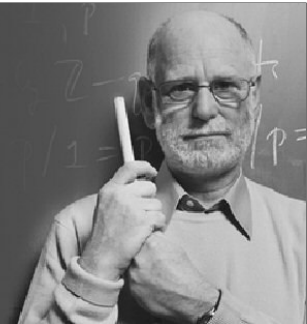


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sped off through Vallejo, at times reaching speeds in excess of 90 miles per hour on surface streets, Mortenson said.

The suspect led police from Ohio Street near where the chase extended to Columbus Parkway in East Vallejo, through downtown and past the Times-Herald building.

When the suspect vehicle crashed, the driver, Roy Lee Austin, 27, of Vallejo fled and led officers on a brief foot chase through back yards before he was subdued, Mortenson said. One officer injured his leg during the struggle and is now off duty, Mortenson said.

Austin was treated at a local hospital and arrested after his release, Mortenson said. It was not immediately clear what charges he might face.

Martinez had been one of several facilitators at Vallejo Together, a community forum held Wednesday to discuss how the city can reduce the type of violence that has plagued it in recent weeks. The Guardian Angels is a volunteer patrol group invited into Vallejo more than a year ago.

A few of Martinez's Angels were on hand Thursday, having rushed to the collision scene after they had called Martinez to update him on the chase and warn him that it was near his location.

Martinez remained jovial even as he surveyed what was left of his vehicle Thursday night.

"It's all about this," Martinez said, opening his hand to reveal the crucifix he had been clutching -- the reason for his and his wife's survival, he added.

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