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3 charged with exploiting elderly veteran

SEBRING -- Three people have been arrested and charged with forging checks from an elderly veteran. The victim is the grandfather of 23-year-old Joseph Ryan Binger of Sebring, one of the people arrested.

Det. Steven Ritenour was notified of the suspected fraudulent checks on Feb. 16 and given a stack of checks that the victim, who is 84 and in an assisted living facility, said he had not signed or authorized to be signed by anyone else. The suspect checks were made out to Ryan Binger and several others were made out to Rebekah Danielle Smith, 17, of Sebring and 19-year-old Mariesa Turner of Sebring.

Ritenour's investigation turned up seven checks bearing the grandfather's name that were not legitimate. The grandfather said he had written some checks to Binger in the past, but just three or four, and that none of the checks made out to Turner were written by him.

Turner told Ritenour that the victim wrote many checks to Binger to help with a car payment, but that claim did not match the frequency of the checks, several of which were dated within days of each other. She said those checks were for other bills. She also claimed that Binger was the only family member who ever went to see the victim, a claim that was countered by employees of the facility.

Binger and Turner who had recently bonded out of jail after being arrested for drug possession Feb. 14 were arrested Tuesday when they were found at a home together. Smith had been taken into custody at her home the day before. Binger and Turner were charged with three counts of uttering a forged check, three counts of fraudulently using the identification of a veteran and felony larceny from a person over age 65. Smith was booked on one charge of felony larceny from a person over age 65 and one count of uttering a false check.



Photos (from top): Binger, Turner, Smith.

Note: Not all arrests lead to a conviction. All suspects are innocent until proven guilty in court.