



Georgetown County Sheriff's Office

A. Lane Cribb, Sheriff

430 North Fraser Street

Georgetown, South Carolina 29440

News Release

Contact: Lieutenant Neil Johnson, Public Affairs Officer, (843) 436-6049

For Immediate Release

October 15, 2009

Three Cemetery Thieves Arrested

(Georgetown, SC)--Georgetown County Sheriff's Investigators arrested 18-year-old Cory Matthew Avant, 23-year-old Rodney Lee Swails, and 32-year-old Billy Joe Parsons for Theft of Grave Property and Criminal Conspiracy after stealing and then selling/attempting to sell 158 brass vases to a local recycling center.

The investigation began after caretakers for each of the cemeteries reported that there were brass vases stolen from several grave sites within the cemeteries. It was reported on October 10, 2009 that Andrews Memorial Cemetery was missing 35 vases, on October 12, 2009 that Pennyroyal Memorial Cemetery was missing 85 vases, and on October 13, 2009, Morning Glory Cemetery was missing 44 vases.

When the caretaker for Pennyroyal Memorial Cemetery reported their vases stolen, Georgetown County Sheriff's Deputies went to a local recycling center in Georgetown to inquire if any vases had been purchased. Through their inquiry it was found that 123 vases had been purchased from Swails and Parsons. Sheriff's deputies and investigators recovered the vases and shortly after they left, they received a call stating Swails and Parsons were back attempting to sell 35 additional vases.

Sheriff's deputies and investigators returned to the recycling center and recovered the additional vases and detained Swails and Parsons. Each stolen vase was valued at approximately \$275.00 a piece which was a total recovery of \$43,450.00.

As a result of the detainment of Swails and Parsons and during the investigation, sheriff's investigators found that the 158 recovered vases came from the cemeteries listed above. Sheriff's investigators also discovered these thefts began at the beginning of October and that Swails and Parsons were conspiring with Avant which lead to his arrest.

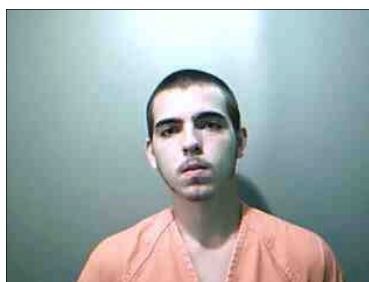
On October 12, 2009, Swails (11154 Gapway Road, Andrews) and Parsons (34 Grape Lane, Andrews) were arrested and charged with 3 counts of Theft of Grave Property and 3 counts of Criminal Conspiracy. These charges were for Pennyroyal Memorial Gardens and Morning Glory Cemetery, located on Pennyroyal Road in Georgetown, and Andrews Memorial Cemetery, located on Highway 521 in Andrews.

On October 13, 2009, Avant (10961 Gapway Road, Andrews) was arrested and charged with 1 count of Theft of Grave Property and 1 count of Criminal Conspiracy. Avant's charges were for Andrews Memorial Cemetery.

Avant, Swails, and Parsons are currently being held at the Georgetown County Detention Center. Swails and Parsons is being held under a \$30,000.00 cash/surety bond and Avant is being held on a \$10,000.00 cash/surety bond.



Rodney Lee Swails



Cory Matthew Avant



Billy Joe Parsons