



Gateway killing suspect's past includes lengthy criminal record

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Friday, January 13, 2006

The Bonita Springs man police say is responsible for the deaths of a couple in the Gateway community had an extensive criminal past and spent much of his later teen years behind bars, court records show.

Authorities arrested Fred D. Cooper Jr., 27, on Wednesday. He is charged with two counts of premeditated murder. While they are the most serious crimes he has ever been charged with, this is not Cooper's only arrest.

Cooper is charged with killing Steven and Michelle Andrews, both 28. The couple was found slain in their home shortly after 7 a.m. on Dec. 27.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office says Cooper was linked to the killings through unspecified DNA evidence. Neither a transcript of the 911 call nor autopsy reports for the Andrewses have been released. Investigators continued to be tight-lipped on details Thursday.

Lee County Sheriff Mike Scott said Cooper was the boyfriend of a woman who had been in a relationship with Steven Andrews. Scott said the woman and Steven Andrews were co-workers.

Cooper and Kellie Ballew, 26, an administrative assistant at Outside Productions, where Steven Andrews worked, shared the same Bonita Springs apartment on Pine Haven Way in 2004, according to records.

The two had a young child together and are said to have been dating, said Lee County Sheriff's spokesman Angelo Vaughn. Cooper's most recent address is 28263 Jeneva Way in the Village Walk of Bonita neighborhood.

According to Florida records, Cooper is the only child of Denise and Fred Dewitt Cooper Sr.

Denise and Fred were married in a Broward County civil ceremony in December of 1978, five months after Cooper's birth. It was the second union for both.

Nearly 14 years to the date later, in Martin County, the two parted ways, with custody being awarded to Denise Cooper.

Fred Cooper Jr.'s public history with the Martin County Sheriff's Office starts shortly after.

Sheriff's Office records show Cooper was arrested twice in 1993 and faced two charges of theft and one for obstruction of justice.

Arrested three times in Martin County in 1994, he was convicted for failure to appear and burglary. Though he was 16 at the time, police records show "treat as adult" stamped across the juvenile portion of his file.

Court records show he had prior convictions for grand theft, burglary and vehicle theft at that time.

Cooper was sentenced as a youthful offender to 12-month and 24-month terms to be served concurrently.

The court also recommended a mental health evaluation and treatment for Cooper while he was in the Department of Corrections.

He spent nearly 15 months behind bars, according to the DOC.

Released in March of 1996, Cooper was arrested again by April 17 of that year.

According to a Martin County Sheriff's Office arrest affidavit, Cooper was accused of being one of two men who broke into one car and rifling through other cars parked in a compound at Auto Craft International in Stuart.

Keys to one of the cars in the compound were found in his pocket, according to the affidavit.

"Upon speaking to Cooper, he stated they came there looking for stuff," it reads.

In August of 1996, court records show, Cooper was sentenced to four years in jail following a conviction for two counts of burglary, one count of attempted burglary and one count of possession of burglary tools.

By that time, Cooper had a lengthy sentencing report, including information on past history of burglaries, thefts and an assault and battery case.

Considered a youthful offender, he was ordered to pay \$90 in restitution to the business and \$50 in investigative costs. The court ordered he be placed in youth facility and recommended boot camp.

In court papers, Cooper said he had only completed the 10th grade at South Fork High School in Stuart, that he worked as a dishwasher at a restaurant for \$4.25 an hour and rode a motorcycle.

Cooper got out of jail in August of 1999, according to department of corrections records.

According to court records, he was released into the custody of Angela Yeary and went to live in Indiantown in western Martin County.

Yeary was Cooper's mother's last name prior to her marriage to his father, according to Florida marriage records. It is not known if or how Angela Yeary is related to Cooper.

Public records show Cooper moving several times in the next few years, including into homes with Ballew.

Lee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Larry King said Cooper left the Bonita Springs area Saturday, quitting his job and loading a moving van that he then drove to the Orlando area.

Over the weekend, Cooper moved into 249 Whitesand Court in Casselberry, a residence that according to Seminole County property records is owned by David Ballew, Kellie Ballew's brother.

Though Cooper was not arrested until Wednesday, neighbors of the Ballew home said they noticed increased police presence in the area before that time.

Whitesand Court resident Nahid Jahanmiry said she noticed a regular police presence on the street this week.

"It looked like they were hunting someone down," she said.

Ballew could not be reached for comment Thursday. A family spokesperson reached at the Ballew home in Orlando said no one wishes to comment on Kellie's involvement with Cooper or Steven Andrews.

"This is a very unfortunate situation. We don't know much," said the man, who identified himself as a son of Ballew's grandmother. "Y'all do not need to call here anymore."

Pat Trefz, Steven Andrews and Ballew's former boss at Outside Productions in Bonita Springs, said the company could not comment on the couple's relationship or whether Ballew was still employed there.

"We can't release any information at this time," Trefz said. "We're still really saddened with the loss of Steve and Michelle."

According to the Sheriff's Office, Cooper worked at Sun Sports Cycle & Watercraft on Metro Parkway in Fort Myers, but his co-workers there declined to comment Thursday, deferring to the company's owner, who did not return phone calls about the killings.

Those who did know Ballew and Cooper said they were surprised by what they had been hearing in media reports.

Kim Stevens, 55, a neighbor of Ballew and Cooper when the pair lived in the Pine Haven neighborhood in Bonita Springs, said he occasionally spoke to Cooper and never had any negative thoughts about him.

"I'd see him in the parking lot working on his truck or coming in," Stevens said. "I'd say 'hi,' he'd say 'hi.' They both seemed like nice people."

There was not too much contact with the couple, however, because they were much younger than most people in the community, he added.

Stevens said he was bewildered to hear Cooper was the suspect in the killings.

"I thought oh, my God, you wouldn't think he'd do that," Cooper said.

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The Stuart News also contributed to this report.

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