

TOP STORY

## Police: Thefts lead to chase, crash with cruiser in Stafford

Keith Epps

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### 2 arrested in thefts, chase, crash

Two Florida men are facing a slew of charges following a series of incidents that began with thefts in Fredericksburg and included a police pursuit during which the suspect crashed into a police cruiser, authorities said.

Fredericksburg police spokeswoman Sarah Morris said city officers went to Alum Springs Park about 2 p.m. Wednesday after receiving reports about several cars being broken into.

While officers were speaking to the victims, one victim received a bank alert that their credit card was used at the Target in Central Park. Morris said loss prevention personnel at the store obtained video footage of the person who used the card and a description of the vehicle that he left in.

City police relayed that information to surrounding jurisdictions and a Virginia State Police trooper spotted the vehicle heading north on Interstate 95 in Stafford County. The driver refused to stop and the resulting pursuit ended up in the area of Courthouse and Wyche roads in the Stafford courthouse area.

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In the parking lot of the Rappahannock Juvenile Detention Center, police said, the suspect vehicle smashed into a state police cruiser. At that point, the driver and his passenger fled on foot. The trooper was not injured.

Stafford Sheriff's spokesman Ryan Wilbur said off-duty Sgt. G.A. Haney happened to be at a nearby Sheetz and assisted the trooper in catching the fleeing driver.

Deputy S.M. Eastman and his police dog, Ruby, tracked the passenger through the woods for more than a mile. That suspect came out of the woods at U.S. 1 and was finally apprehended.

The driver, 21-year-old Jerome Jeffrey Wilson Jr., and Leskeil S. Richards, 27, were both charged with six counts of credit card theft, two counts of credit card fraud, vandalism of a vehicle and obstruction of justice.

Wilson was also charged with felony eluding, hit and run and two counts of reckless driving. Richards was additionally charged with identity theft, giving false identification to law enforcement and two counts of forgery.

Both men are being held in the Rappahannock Regional Jail.

## **Man convicted for child porn**

A Spotsylvania County man who solicited sexual contact with who he thought was a 10-year-old girl was convicted of 36 felony offenses Wednesday.

Matthew Tobias Erickson, 42, was convicted by a Spotsylvania Circuit Court jury of 26 counts of solicitation of a minor and 10 counts of possessing child pornography. He was acquitted of multiple other charges.

The solicitation convictions each carry mandatory minimum sentences of at least five years in prison, meaning Erickson would receive at least 130 years when he is sentenced May 8.

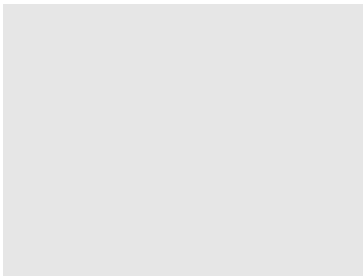
According to evidence presented by prosecutors Ryan Mehaffey and Jeremy Thiesen, a private group that goes online in search of predators had a profile picture of a 10-year-old girl. A woman from Indiana was online pretending to be the child.

Erickson reached out to the “girl” via Instagram during the latter part of 2021, telling her she was beautiful, and eventually had a number of explicit online conversations with the woman pretending to be a child. Among the messages he sent were videos of him performing a sex act on himself.

At one point, the “child” wrote about coming to Virginia to visit her aunt. Erickson tried to arrange meeting the child in person when she came, Mehaffey said.

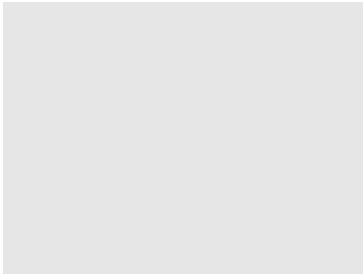
Members of the predator identification group eventually showed up at Erickson’s home with a camera and got him to confess to his activities. Police were called, and child pornography was recovered from Erickson’s phone.

-Keith Epps



Richards

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Wilson

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**By Keith Epps**

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