

Police dog credited for catching escaped patient; sheriff intends to bill state

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Police dog Gunnar may like playing and lounging in the grass during his off time, but he was all business Friday night when he and his handler, Spokane County Deputy Jason Hunt, tracked down a dangerous psychiatric patient who escaped from a mental hospital.

The duo, accompanied by Sgt. Jack Rosenthal, were hunting for Anthony Garver in thick woods in the foothills of Mount Spokane on Friday when Gunnar caught a scent.

“It’s a steep, thick, wooded area,” Hunt said. “We were busting brush for a long time.”

At that point the search for Garver was well into its second day. He had escaped from Western State Hospital sometime Wednesday evening and bought a Greyhound bus ticket to Spokane, arriving around 5 a.m. Thursday. He was spotted at his parents’ home in the area east of Forker Road around 3:30 p.m. Thursday.

“They’re a locating tool,” Hunt said of police dogs. “That’s what we use them for.”

In this case, Gunnar led the two deputies straight to Garver, who was hiding under a blanket near a tree. He gave up without a fight once Gunnar began to bark, Hunt said.

Spokane County Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich has been critical of the way Garver’s escape was handled. His office wasn’t notified of the escape until 6 a.m. Thursday and wasn’t notified that Garver had purchased the bus ticket to Spokane until about noon that day.

Garver was accused of killing a woman the last time he escaped, in 2013. In that case, Garver had been given a bus ticket to Spokane and was told to turn himself in at the prison in Airway Heights, but Garver never showed. Garver was found not competent to stand trial on the murder charge.

“This time they put him in the minimum-security wing of the hospital,” Knezovich said.

Knezovich said he intends to send Gov. Jay Inslee a bill for the overtime costs of the two-day manhunt that also included the Spokane Police Department, the U.S. Border Patrol and the U.S. Marshals Service.

The full cost has yet to be tallied, but Knezovich said it usually costs \$10,000 for a SWAT incident that lasts several hours. The SWAT team was only involved in the search Thursday evening, but there was also overtime for pulling in extra deputies for the search while also staffing normal patrols. The department’s helicopter flew for a lengthy amount of time.

“We basically stripped the investigative unit,” he said. “Budgets are really, really tight. The last thing I can afford is this kind of hit to my overtime budget.”

There is some precedent for the Sheriff’s Office getting reimbursed for a manhunt. In 2009, Eastern State Hospital patient Phillip Paul, who was accused of murder, escaped during a field trip to the Spokane County Interstate Fair. Knezovich said he sent the governor a bill for that three-day manhunt and was reimbursed for about 60 percent of the costs.

Multiple agencies bear some responsibility for Garver’s escape and they should all step up and pay their share, Knezovich said.

Knezovich received a letter from the acting secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services on Monday thanking his department for capturing Garver and requesting a meeting between the secretary and Knezovich to discuss security improvements at Eastern State Hospital.