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## Police foil alleged plot to kidnap jeweler's family, rob store

*By Pat Murphy  
Eccentric staff Writer*

A plot to kidnap and possibly kill as many as six people as part of a jewelry store heist was thwarted by the cooperative efforts of 17 police departments, according to Southfield police.

Speaking at a press conference Tuesday, police Chief Joseph Thomas Jr. said five men were arrested last week after law enforcement officers learned of their plan to kidnap the owner/manager of Darakjian Jewelers — and his family — then force him to open the store after hours to steal cash and expensive merchandise. The store was apparently selected because of its reputation for having expensive merchandise and well-to-do customers.

One of the suspects told police the plot called for killing the family, possibly including two children and disposing of their bodies before selling the loot in other states, Thomas said. Police did not name the intended victims nor did they say where they lived though the victims are believed to be Oakland County residents.

The suspects were charged with conspiracy to commit armed robbery and conspiracy to commit unlawful imprisonment, the legal term for kidnapping. No charges were filed involving the alleged threat to kill family members.

### Five arrested

Thomas was vague or refused to answer some questions, saying he did not want to disclose sensitive information. "It's also difficult to talk about a crime that did not occur," he said.

Thomas was accompanied by more than a dozen law officers representing what he described as the "best example of cooperative police work I've seen in my 35 years."

Five men were arrested last Thursday, two days before they planned to kidnap the victims and rob the jewelry store, Thomas said. All stood mute when arraigned before a magistrate in 46th District Court on Sunday as not guilty pleas were entered on their behalf. They were scheduled for pre-examination conferences at 8:30 a.m. Monday.

All were remanded to the Oakland County Jail after failing to post bond. They were identified as Carlos Alberto Soler Norona, 44, of Royal Oak; Julio Cesar Repilado Licorish, 37, of Lansing; Lester Jennings Bush, 20 of Hazel Park; Henry Stankivich Bush, 32, of Port Huron and Huley Oscar Kennedy, 31 of Detroit.

Soler Norona was described by Thomas as the "mastermind." The suspect at one time was a lieutenant in the Cuban military, the chief said.

The suspects had apparently planned the heist extensively. "They had conducted surveillance of the store, obtained information on the owner and family members and acquired assault weapons, shotguns and handguns," Thomas said. Police recovered some of those weapons in Royal Oak, he said, as well as a sizeable amount of cocaine in Hazel Park.

When informed of the plot, the family was extremely cooperative, Thomas said, and some members left the state as a precaution.

Southfield police were the lead agency in the investigation and arrests, Thomas said. But special recognition was merited for Farmington Hills Police, the Oakland County Narcotics Enforcement Team and the Oakland-Macomb Intervention Team.

"That is not to minimize the contributions of the other agencies," Thomas said. But because of these agencies, "a heinous crime did not occur," he said.

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