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UPDATE: 3 shot, 2 critically, in violent night

Staff report

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In what police say was the most violent night the city has seen in recent memory, three men were shot in two unrelated incidents Tuesday.

Two were shot near a playground. Another was shot across the street from a church.

Two suspects are in jail, being held without bond. Two of the victims are reported to be in critical condition.

"Certainly it's unusual," city spokesman Josh Taylor said. "It's kind of a freak happenstance."

The double shooting occurred at 5:44 p.m. at Blue Ridge Park, 2155 Ridgewood Drive.

"The escalation started in the parking lot and ended up in the street across from the park," Taylor said.

Little information has been released about the motive of that shooting, which Taylor described as "not random."

Nicholas Popko, 25, was arrested and faces a charge of attempted murder. The two victims were left in critical condition, and as of Wednesday afternoon no update had been given on their condition.

As North Port firefighters hosed down the park's dirt-covered parking lot, resident Tom Bond said he was shocked to hear that such violence had occurred at what he called "a quiet, safe, family place."

"Normally it's just families here having cookouts," he said. "Sometimes it's packed with kids on the playground."

The second shooting occurred in the 4300 block of Wesley Lane, across the street from Trinity United Methodist Church.

An argument over a motorcycle escalated into an altercation that ended with gunfire at about 11:45 p.m., according to North Port Police.

William Burger, 37, is accused of shooting 45-year-old Mark Creel's left hand with a pistol. Burger is in the Sarasota County Jail without bond and faces a charge of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon.

On Wednesday, Creel's neighbors said they knew both men well and they believed Burger was acting in self-defense.

"He was afraid Mark (Creel) was going to beat the life out of him," Loretta Serna said.

Creel told police that Burger had the pistol pointed at his face, according to the arrest report. Creel said he tried to disarm Burger but was shot in the palm of his hand.

Officers reported they found Creel lying wounded in the street. Witnesses identified Burger as the shooter.

Burger told police the gun was located at the side of the house at 4310 Wesley Lane. There officers found the pistol and magazine, according to the arrest report.

More of Burger's statements to police were redacted from the arrest report.

EARLIER

Police are investigating two shootings in North Port.

The first shooting occurred at 5:44 p.m. at Blue Ridge Park, 2155 Ridgewood Drive. One man was arrested after two men were shot, according to police spokesman Joshua Taylor. The two men sustained critical injuries and were transported by helicopter to Sarasota Memorial Hospital. No other information was released.

The second shooting occurred early Wednesday morning in the 4300 block of Wesley Lane. A suspect was arrested and the victim was transported to an area hospital with injuries that are not believed to be life threatening, Taylor said. No other information was released.

The two incidents are not related, Taylor said.

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