

Brutal killing of teenage boy rocks community

15-year-old Seath Jackson was lured to a Marion County home, beaten and shot to death, and his body was burned in the backyard.

By Anika Myers Palm and Arelis R. Hernández, Orlando Sentinel

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At the beginning of March, 15-year-old Seath Jackson adored Amber Wright.

He posted on Facebook that he loved Wright, also 15, and noted on one peaceful afternoon that he was spending time with her and her brother, 16-year-old Kyle Hooper. Weeks later, the young couple had broken up.

Now Wright is accused of luring Seath to his death with a text message.

Marion County Sheriff's Office detectives said Wednesday that Wright, Hooper and three older friends were responsible for planning a deadly encounter during which Seath was brutally beaten, shot several times and his body burned to ashes. They were charged with first-degree murder. James Young Havens III, 37, who is Wright and Hooper's stepfather, is accused of acting as an accessory after the fact.

The killing shocked residents and crime experts alike.

"Our detectives — seasoned detectives — shook their heads in disbelief because this type of first-degree murder is unimaginable," sheriff's spokesman Judge Cochran said.

Authorities began searching for Seath on Monday, when his parents in Belleview — 75 miles northwest of Orlando — reported him missing.

It wasn't until Tuesday that Hooper — in the company of his mother, Tracey Wright — first told deputies that he saw 18-year-old Michael Shane Bargo shoot Seath. He later admitted that he, his sister and friends had planned the crime and lured Seath to his death, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Hooper told deputies that the plans for the crime began to come together as he, Amber Wright, Bargo, 18-year-old Charlie Kay Ely and 20-year-old Justin Soto were at Ely's house on Southeast 53rd Avenue in Summerfield on Sunday.

After Bargo said how much he hated Seath, the group hatched its deadly plot to lure Seath to the

house, according to arrest affidavits filed in the case.

It's unclear why Bargo so disliked the boy. Seath indicated on his Facebook page that he thought Amber Wright and an older boy he called "Mike" were in a romantic relationship.

Wright and Ely called Seath to try to get him to the house Sunday, but he declined at first, infuriating Bargo. After a barrage of text messages and phone calls from Wright, Seath finally arrived at the home that afternoon, according to the documents.

As soon as Seath entered the house, Bargo, Hooper and Soto began to hit him in the head with wooden objects. Ely told detectives that she ran into her bedroom after she saw Hooper hit Seath.

Bargo shot Seath several times with a .22-caliber revolver, according to the arrest documents. As Seath tried to leave the house, Soto tackled him, and Bargo shot him again, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Amber watched the killing, according to the documents.

The teens and Soto then placed Seath's body in a bathtub so Bargo could break Seath's knees in order to hogtie him and place him in a sleeping bag more easily. Soto said he and Bargo realized that Seath was still alive, so Bargo shot the boy again, according to the documents. Seath's body was then placed into a blue bag.

Soto said at that point he helped look for firewood, and the group then burned Seath's body in a fire pit in the backyard until it was just ashes and bone fragments.

They used a shovel to scrape Seath's remains from the fire pit and dumped them into several 5-gallon paint cans, according to the documents.

The group cleaned the house with bleach, according to the documents. Ely denied any involvement in the killing, disposal of the body or cleanup, according to the arrest documents.

Later, they played basketball, neighbors said Wednesday.

Neighbors, who did not want to be identified, said three of the murder suspects had just moved into the quiet neighborhood. Other than saying the suspects played loud music, residents said they do not recall much about the occupants.

"It's just so shocking," said one woman, who recalled seeing Soto playing basketball on a neighborhood hoop with her children Sunday. Another homeowner, who also did not want to be identified, said Soto rode the school bus to Belleview High School with her teens last year but later dropped out of school.

Search for remains continues

On Wednesday afternoon, investigators were rummaging through the backyard of the small

peach-colored mobile home that Ely, Soto and Bargo rented together. Evidence markers and blue tarps were placed all around the home where detectives think clues still remain. A red teddy bear and notes were stapled to a utility pole in front of the home as a small memorial to Seath.

According to the arrest documents, Soto told deputies that Bargo was responsible for moving the paint cans with Seath's remains from the property to another location.

Hooper said he thought the shovel used to move Seath's remains and the .22-caliber revolver Bargo used to kill him might still be on the property, according to the documents.

Authorities say Havens knew about the plan in advance — and that he drove Bargo to Starke after the killing.

As he was released from jail Wednesday on bond, Havens said he hadn't believed that the group would actually go through with the crime — and that he was worried about his own future.

"I'm looking at a lot of years [in prison] right now," he told television reporters. "I'm scared."

Public records show that Hooper, Ely and Havens have no criminal history in the state of Florida. Amber was arrested in May on a domestic-violence battery charge, but the charge was dropped. Soto was arrested several times as a juvenile on charges including possession of a weapon on school property, aggravated battery and burglary. Bargo was arrested twice on burglary charges in summer 2010.

Late Wednesday, detectives were still searching for evidence and Seath's remains at the home where he was killed and at a lime pit in Ocala.

The Jackson family did not want to see anyone, neighbors said as they guarded the entrance to the wooded rural property where the family lives.

Carrie Williams, who said she was a friend of the Jacksons', told television reporters that she was with the parents when police broke the news of Seath's murder.

"The look in their face, it was just awful," Williams told WFTV-Channel 9. "Kids fight all the time, but how can you go and murder someone like that?"

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