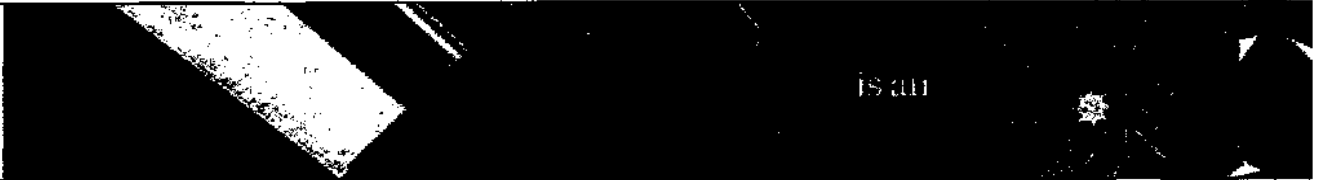


The News
&
Advance



Maier Museum of Art bomb threat was a ruse to deflect attention from removal of paintings, LPD says

By Christa Desrets
cdesrets@newsadvance.com
Wednesday, October 3, 2007

A Lynchburg Police Department officer trying to divert attention from the removal of four paintings from the Maier Museum of Art on Monday evening told onlookers that there was a bomb threat at the museum, LPD north division Captain Todd Swisher said Tuesday.

Some who heard the comment assumed that was a plan orchestrated by Randolph College officials to keep observers away while the artwork was removed, numerous sources said Monday and Tuesday.

But the bomb threat ruse did not originate with the college, Swisher said.

"Randolph College did not relate that to us," he said. "At no time was there an actual bomb threat there ... I think there was an effort to ensure there were few people in the area of the (museum) building."

At about 6:30 p.m. Monday, a police officer closed access to the museum's access road while a truck and several cars waited outside the Maier's side parking lot. After the cars left, two more officers walked up the access road and spoke with reporters before leaving the scene.

The officers were on scene to provide security during the removal of artwork valued at tens of millions of dollars, college spokeswoman Brenda Edson said on Tuesday.

"We understand how people feel that we had to remove the artwork so quickly," she said. "However, we're talking about artwork that's estimated at significantly more than \$30 million. You cannot take chances with that."

Karol Lawson, who resigned from her position as director of the museum Tuesday, was inside the museum at the time and later heard from several people who were told about a bomb threat.

She wishes the situation would have been handled differently and questions what would have happened if a student had heard the comment and told others.

"How irresponsible is that in the age of Virginia Tech shootings and homeland security?" she asked.

Swisher said he had spoken with the officers involved.

"I think in retrospect, we would do things differently if presented with the same scenario," he said.



Police Officer Fakes a Bomb Threat on College Campus

by Aimee Norton

WSLS NewsChannel 10

Wednesday, October 3, 2007

While four paintings were quietly taken out of the Maier Museum at Randolph College, two Lynchburg City Police Officers were on hand for security. When a crowd started to gather, one of them told a Randolph College student there was a bomb threat at the museum.

Captain Todd Swisher told our media partner the Lynchburg News and Advance that, "At no time was there an actual bomb threat there; I think there was an effort to ensure there were few people in the area of the (museum) building."

"It is scary just because of all the stuff that's gone on in the last couple of years," said Randolph College Student Ashley French.

She heard the rumor on Tuesday. The school later confirmed the false report in an email.

"We wanted to make sure our students knew what had happened and wanted to be forthcoming with that," said the school's spokesperson, Brenda Edson.

"When I received the email yesterday saying that it was an officer who started the rumor that there was a bomb threat I was just appalled," said French.

The officers were at a street corner near the museum turning traffic and onlookers away. College administrators asked them to be there because the artwork was worth over \$30 million.

"We didn't want to take any chances that something could happen to that artwork. We were trying to be as secure as possible," said Edson.

Captain Swisher did say that in retrospect they would have handled the situation differently. He said the incident is being investigated. The officer is still on active duty.

Lynchburg's Police Chief Colonel C.W. Bennett released a statement Wednesday saying "The officers' spur-of-the-moment decision to use a ruse in this situation was a mistake: such action is not in keeping with Lynchburg Police Department policy or with the principles under which the Department operates."

He went on to say, "The Lynchburg Police Department apologizes for this mistake and regrets any inconvenience that it caused.

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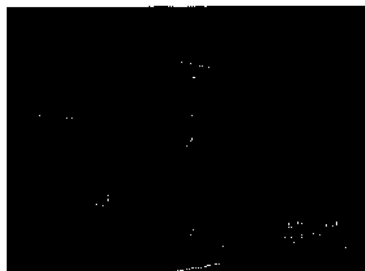
October 3, 2007

Lynchburg police apologize for using bomb threat ruse



The Lynchburg Police Department says officers were wrong when they told people there was a bomb threat at the Maier Museum.

Randolph College officials asked for the officers Monday to help provide security as four pieces of artwork were removed from the museum. According to a police news release today, college officials said they wanted the work done "as discreetly as possible." Several people near the museum asked the officers what was going on. Hoping they could clear the area quickly, the officers told them there was a bomb threat at the museum.



While protecting the movement of this artwork, Lynchburg police said there was a bomb threat

In the news release issued Wednesday, police chief Charles Bennett said the officers' decision was a mistake and was not in keeping with department policy or principles. "Fundamental to the Department's value of Professionalism are the principles of integrity and trust," Bennet wrote in the release. "In this instance those principles were compromised by a spur-of-the-moment decision that was inappropriate. "

The news release said the matter was being dealt with according to department policy, but it did not say what action, if any, would be taken against the officers. The officers were not named in the release.



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Officer Uses Bomb Threat To Cover Art Move

By Christa Desrets
Lynchburg News & Advance
Wednesday, October 3, 2007

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But the bomb threat ruse did not originate with the college, Swisher said.

"Randolph College did not relate that to us," he said. "At no time was there an actual bomb threat there ... I think there was an effort to ensure there were few people in the area of the (museum) building."

At about 6:30 p.m. Monday, a police officer closed access to the museum's access road while a truck and several cars waited outside the Maier's side parking lot. After the cars left, two more officers walked up the access road and spoke with reporters before leaving the scene.

The officers were on scene to provide security during the removal of artwork valued at tens of millions of dollars, college spokeswoman Brenda Edson said on Tuesday.

"We understand how people feel that we had to remove the artwork so quickly," she said. "However, we're talking about artwork that's estimated at significantly more than \$30 million. You cannot take chances with that."

Karol Lawson, who resigned from her position as director of the museum Tuesday, was inside the museum at the time and later heard from several people who were told about a bomb threat.

She wishes the situation would have been handled differently and questions what would have happened if a student had heard the comment and told others.

"How irresponsible is that in the age of Virginia Tech shootings and homeland security?" she asked.

Swisher said he had spoken with the officers involved.

"I think in retrospect, we would do things differently if presented with the same scenario," he said.

Wednesday afternoon, police sent out this statement:

On Monday, October 01, 2007, Randolph College administration contacted the

Lynchburg Police Department requesting assistance with the removal of several items of artwork from the Maier Museum. This request came approximately two hours prior to the timeline set by Randolph College for the removal of the artwork. Due to the value of the artwork, administrators requested the items be moved as discreetly as possible. Members of the Lynchburg Police Department responded to Maier Museum to provide security during the removal of the artwork and upon arrival observed several persons in the immediate area of the museum, which was not anticipated. A number of these persons repeatedly asked the officers why they were at the museum. In an effort to quickly clear the area as requested by the Maier Museum staff, the officers used a ruse in which they told persons in the area that there had been a bomb threat. The area was promptly evacuated and the artwork was successfully removed from the museum. The ruse utilized by the officers was not orchestrated by Randolph College.

The officers' spur-of-the-moment decision to use a ruse in this situation was a mistake: such action is not in keeping with Lynchburg Police Department policy or with the principles under which the Department operates. Fundamental to the Department's value of Professionalism are the principles of integrity and trust. In this instance those principles were compromised by a spur-of-the-moment decision that was inappropriate. The Lynchburg Police Department apologizes for this mistake and regrets any inconvenience that it caused.

This matter is being dealt with in accordance with departmental policy.