

Shooting rampage leaves residents reeling

2 charged in violence that left 4 dead and terrorized southeast L.A. communities.

By NATHAN SOLIS

The first gunshots rang out in Bell half an hour before midnight. Two men in a red vehicle sped away, leaving behind one man dead Sunday night outside an elementary school.

Over the next 90 minutes, authorities say, southeast Los Angeles County was the scene of a terrifying and seemingly random string of murders.

When it was over, four people were dead in a series of drive-by shootings within five miles of one another, including a 14-year-old boy. The violence left family members of the victims grieving and communities reeling.

On Thursday, Los Angeles County prosecutors charged two men with the killings.

“Multiple communities have been terrorized by these men’s callous, cruel, and coldhearted actions. This senseless violence will not go unanswered by the scales of justice,” Dist. Atty. George Gascón said in announcing the charges.

Investigators said the suspects are affiliated with street gangs, but did not disclose any information about a motive behind the shootings. It was unclear if one or both men opened fire in the shootings, and investigators said they have not recovered any weapons used in the killings.

Prosecutors charged 42-year-old Gary Garcia Jr. and 20-year-old Timberland McKneely with four counts of murder and two counts of attempted murder with special circumstances.

Both are being held in lieu of \$2-million bail. They were scheduled to appear in court Thursday and have not entered a plea, according to the district attorney’s office. Court records show that Garcia has an extensive [See **Shootings**, A10]



TWO OF THE FIREFIGHTERS hurt in the explosion in Wilmington on Thursday morning were in critical condition. “This is a difficult day in Los Angeles,” Mayor Karen Bass said in response to the injuries.

ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

LAFD crew injured in truck blast

Nine firefighters are sent to hospital after a burning semi’s natural gas tank explodes.

By KAREN GARCIA, NATHAN SOLIS AND HANNAH FRY

Nine Los Angeles firefighters were injured when a natural-gas-powered semi-truck that had caught fire exploded in Wilmington early Thursday, sending 30-foot flames into the air and rattling neighbors.

The situation began shortly before 7 a.m. when 10 firefighters responded to 1120 Alameda St. to extinguish a vehicle fire. Six minutes after they arrived — as they attempted to squelch the flames — a 100-gallon compressed natural gas tank that helped power the truck exploded, according to fire officials.

The blast sent up a plume of black smoke and a fireball that was large enough to reach a transformer on a power line, damaging it.

Nine firefighters were taken to Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. As of Thursday afternoon, two remained in critical condition while the others were being treated for general injuries. One of the firefighters in critical condition was transferred to Los Angeles General Medical Center, which operates one of only three burn centers in the city, the hospital said.

“This is a difficult day in Los Angeles,” Mayor Karen Bass said during a morning news conference at Harbor-UCLA.

“I’m here with a simple message to our firefighters in the building behind me and in fire stations across our city watching the news this morning unfold: The 4 million people of Los Angeles stand with you.”

The semi, which did not have a trailer used to transport cargo, was unusual in that it wasn’t powered by diesel. It was a clean-air vehicle fueled by two 100-gallon [See **Firefighters**, A7]

N.Y. trial date set for March in Trump’s hush-money case

Judge rejects bid for delay, noting another prosecution is on hold



MARY ALTAFFER Associated Press

DONALD Trump arrives Thursday at court in Manhattan. His trial in New York will begin just weeks after the Super Tuesday elections.

By MICHAEL R. SISAK

NEW YORK — Donald Trump’s hush-money trial will go ahead as scheduled with jury selection starting March 25, a New York judge ruled Thursday, turning aside demands for a delay from the former president’s defense lawyers who argued it would interfere with his campaign to retake the White House.

The decision means that the first of Trump’s four criminal prosecutions to proceed to trial is a case centered on allegations that he made payments to bury stories about extramarital affairs that emerged during his 2016 presidential run. Other cases charge him with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election and illegally hoarding classified documents at his Florida estate and obstructing justice.

In leaving the trial date intact, Judge Juan Manuel Merchan took advantage of a delay in a federal prosecution in Washington related to efforts to undo the election.

That case, originally set for trial March 4, has been on hold pending [See **Trump**, A7]

Beekeeper offers \$100,000 reward in Fresno hive heists

Brazen and repeated thefts from orchards prompt exasperated businessman’s offer.

By MELISSA GOMEZ

Andy Strehlow felt a deep and familiar sting when he saw the beehives were missing.

Just days before, the bees had been trucked more than 1,700 miles from his bee farm in South Dakota to a sprawling almond orchard near Firebaugh in Fresno County. He’d unpacked the boxes — 416 hives housing millions of buzzing bees — and placed them strategically around the property so his bees could work their magic, pollinating the almond blossoms in time for a late-summer harvest.

Three days later, on Jan. 31, he sensed a gap — a dismaying silence where bees should have been active —

and it didn’t take him long to realize 96 hives were missing, brazenly kidnapped sometime in the night.

“I felt violated,” said Strehlow, a commercial beekeeper who has grown Strehlow Bees Inc. into one of the largest beekeeping operations in the U.S. “Quite likely it’s another beekeeper, and that’s what really stings about it: beekeepers stealing from other beekeepers.”

And it wasn’t the first time his hives had gone missing. In the 25 years he’s been raising bees, Strehlow estimates he’s had close to 1,000 hives stolen. It was time, he thought, to take a stand.

So Strehlow is advertising a \$100,000 reward for information on the bee thief — about three times more than the 96 hives are worth. He’s hoping that sizable sum is enough to get someone close to the culprit — a wife, sister, brother — to turn him in.

“It’s not just me, but for my friends,” Strehlow said.

“It’s more important to get the guy found just so that he can be stopped.”

Late winter is a critical time of year for beekeepers and the Central Valley orchards that rent their services. Pollination of the vast acreage dedicated to almonds alone requires many millions of bees. In Fresno County, where almonds have long been a top crop, yielding more than a billion dollars in annual revenue, bees are an important asset in the local economy.

But that high-value demand also creates a lurking danger for legitimate beekeepers, who might spend a whole year gearing up for the pollination season. Often, February is also a time when criminals tend to strike, taking beehives to sell or rent to eager farmers who may not realize the bees are stolen.

There have already been nearly a dozen reports of bee theft this year, involving hundreds of hives in Fresno, [See **Beehive thefts**, A10]



IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

BOOSTING THE RANKS

Graduates Thursday at the LAPD Police Academy, above. Mayor Karen Bass’ hiring plan to boost LAPD has fallen short so far. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

U.S. eyes are on Russian weapon

White House confirms Moscow has “troubling” anti-satellite weapon. **NATION, A4**

Listeria outbreak prompts recall

A guide to the packaged foods recall and what you need to know about listeria. **NATION, A6**

Weather
Partly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 67/50. **B6**



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