

Serial suspect has state arrest

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When Sterling Heights police arrested an illegal immigrant in a boxcar at the local Ford plant in September 1976, they handed the Mexican teen-ager over to federal authorities and thought nothing more of it.

Now, two decades later, that same man **has** been dubbed the Rail Killer -- accused of being a homicidal hobo who is America's newest **serial** killer.

Rafael Resendez-Ramirez is the prime **suspect** in at least eight murders in Kentucky, Texas and Illinois, crimes that all occurred near railroad lines. He was placed this week on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. He's known to ride the rails, **has** an extensive criminal record and is being sought by authorities all over the country.

Most suspected victims have been bludgeoned with items they owned: a pickax, a shotgun or a trophy.

"He could be anywhere. That's why we have him as a Top Ten," said Dawn Clenney, spokeswoman for the FBI's Detroit field office. "We've got to get this guy."

The Sterling Heights' **arrest** was among his first in the United **States**, and his fondness for the rails already was evident: He was found inside a boxcar inside the Ford plant at 17 Mile and Mound. The Canada-bound train originated in Atlanta.

Along with being a murder **suspect**, Resendez-Ramirez is wanted on rape, burglary and auto theft charges. The last charge stems from his penchant for stealing cars from his crime scenes.

Resendez-Ramirez, believed by the FBI to be 38 years old, **has** surfaced several times in Michigan. Twelve years after he was shipped out of Sterling Heights, Resendez-Ramirez was in in Ann Arbor. The FBI also **has** him listing a Detroit address in November 1988. No other information on a possible criminal record in Michigan could be found Tuesday.

A native of Puebla, Mexico, Resendez-Ramirez told police his name was Jose Reyes Resendez, one of more than 30 aliases he uses. Sterling Heights police booked him on charges of being an illegal alien and he soon was picked up by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Police Chief Thomas Derocha said.

He **has** a long history of crimes in New Mexico, Texas and California. He was convicted in Florida in September 1979 for burglary, auto theft, aggravated assault and battery, according to the FBI. He was sentenced to 20 years and one year probation, but it's unclear when he was released.

He is not considered a **suspect** in any Michigan murders, Clenney said.

"We're not aware of any victims in Michigan, and let's just hope there aren't any," added the FBI aide in Detroit.

One witness who placed him near a murder scene last week in southern Illinois told police she called in the sighting because "he just looked scary."

Law enforcement officials have been able to track Resendez-Ramirez through fingerprints and DNA evidence at several scenes.

He is wanted for the 1997 murder of University of Kentucky student Chris Maier, who was attacked along with his girlfriend as they walked along railroad tracks in Lexington. The girlfriend was raped and beaten, but survived.

The first of five murders for which Resendez-Ramirez is wanted in Texas occurred in December 1998, when someone broke into the house of Dr. Claudia Benton, in West University Place, and sexually assaulted, stabbed and beat the woman to death. Her assailant took her red Jeep Cherokee and dumped it later in San Antonio.

He then went on to bludgeon to death a minister and his wife as they slept in April, a 73-year-old woman June 4 and a 26-year-old woman in Houston the next day.

Resendez-Ramirez also is wanted for two killings in southern Illinois.

On June 15, the Jackson County Sheriff's Office in Illinois discovered the bodies of George Morber, 80, and his daughter Carolyn Frederick, 51, inside Morber's home in Gorham, Ill. The same **suspect** was matched to the other crimes by fingerprints at the scene.

On Sunday, more than 330 miles from Gorham, the bodies of Darin Oellerich, 23, and Rhonda Sue Wurm, 25, were discovered in their rented home near railroad tracks in Jo Daviess County in northern Illinois.

Sheriff Steve Allendorf said Tuesday that any connections between the double murder and Resendez-Ramirez "are speculation and not substantiated."

Still, the FBI is helping in the investigation.

"We're tracking him from where the homicides occurred," said Special Agent Rolando Moss of the FBI's Houston bureau. "It looks like he's headed north." Profile of **suspect** * Rafael Resendez-Ramirez is described as 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighing 140-150 pounds. He **has** black hair, brown eyes and may wear prescription glasses. He **has** scars on his right ring finger, his left wrist and his forehead. He also **has** a fading tattoo of a snake on his left arm, and may have a flower tattoo on his left wrist. * The FBI believes he may be a heavy abuser of alcohol and drugs. He is known to be allergic to aspirin.

Caption: Bill Aldridge of Wolf Lake, Ill., is heavily armed because he lives near the railroad tracks where the alleged **serial** killer claimed two victims.

Caesar Maragni / Associated Press

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