

Have skateboard will bash

Alleged attacks on gay men in Stark Street area prompt police investigation

by Inga Sorensen

Portland police detectives say they are investigating two alleged skateboarding attacks on gay men in the South-west Stark Street district, home to several gay bars.

"We're investigating a couple of incidents in which gay men were attacked and hit with a skateboard. One of the men, who was visiting from San Diego, was in pretty bad shape," says Jim Bellah, a detective with the Police Bureau's bias crimes unit.

According to Bellah, the attacks took place around 11:30 pm Sept. 17, near 12th Avenue and Stark Street. The first case involved the California man, who was walking with two Portland friends. Bellah says the trio told him that a man in his late teens or early 20s with a skateboard walked past them, turned, and then slammed the San Diego man in the head with the skateboard, knocking him to the ground.



"The attacker reportedly said, 'I hate homos, don't you?'" says Bellah. A few minutes later, another attack occurred involving 23-year-old Portland resident Frank Speck.

"Some friends and I had been popping into the bars on Stark Street. At some point I became separated from them, and that's about the last thing I can remember," says Speck, who says his friends told him they found him about 20 minutes later slumped on the sidewalk in front of the Silverado bar.

"Apparently they asked me what was wrong with me, and I told them that I had been 'fag bashed.' I then pointed to two guys across the street, saying they had done it. One of the guys had a skateboard. My friends took off after them and a fight broke out. Somebody called the police and an ambulance and the two guys took off, leaving the skateboard behind, which my friends then gave to the police as evidence."

According to Bellah, the San Diego man was taken to Good Samaritan Hospital and treated for "some pretty serious injuries." Speck, meanwhile, says he received medical attention for a concussion he suffered during his attack.

Bellah says he has made an "educated guess" about who the skateboard attacker may be, but no one involved in the incidents has yet been able to definitively identify the attacker.

"The skateboard had the name 'Knucklehead'

on it. We know of a Skinhead who goes by that street name, but there is also a street gang that goes by the same name, so it makes it a little tough to identify a suspect," says Bellah, adding the individual known as Knucklehead has a police record relating to burglary and theft, but no assaults.

Bellah also says the San Diego man has since gone back home, making the investigation more difficult. "I've sent him throw-downs [mug shots] to see if he's able to pinpoint the attacker. Unfortunately, we've been playing phone tag. This isn't an easy thing to do from a long distance, though we certainly haven't given up yet," he says.

According to Bellah, there have been no more reported skateboarding attacks since Sept. 17. He does, however, warn people to "watch out for guys with skateboards" in the Stark Street area.

"There are a lot of disenfranchised white kids out there with low self-esteem, who are looking to

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beat up on somebody," says Bellah, who describes the alleged attacker as white, with medium-length brown hair, slender, and about 5 feet 11 inches tall. "We're trying to do what we can, but people should take precautions and be wary of guys walking around there with skateboards."

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There has been some criticism lodged by Speck, however, who says his friends told him the police did not seem to take the situation "seriously" when they arrived the night of the attack. "My friends felt that the police could have gone after the attackers because they were still in the area, but they didn't," says Speck. "My friend also told me that the police were laughing during all of this. I don't know if they were laughing about this, but it seems like an inappropriate time to be laughing about anything."

Garvey says he has heard of no such criticism but plans to investigate the situation. "We take this very seriously. I haven't heard about this, but if it indeed happened, I need to know so we can rectify it. It's also important to me if someone simply has the perception that this happened. I'll certainly look into it."

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