

Police Arrest
'Polite Robber'
After Tips Flow In

By Gene Johnson
Of The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A man accused of robbing a Seattle convenience store at gunpoint last weekend might have earned points with its owner by being polite.

But saying “sir” probably won’t impress prosecutors or federal authorities who say they have supervised him since he wrapped up a prison term for an earlier string of hold-ups.

The King County Sheriff’s Office identified the suspect Tuesday as Gregory P. Hess, 65. He’s a former Starbucks barista who has been on federal supervision since 2007, when he was released from prison after receiving a nearly six-year sentence for hitting five banks and a video store in

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the Seattle area.

His bail was set at \$250,000. He is being held for investigation of robbery but has not been charged.

Hess was arrested after surveillance video of Saturday’s robbery “went viral” and prompted several tips about the suspect’s identity, said sheriff’s Sgt. John Urquhart.

The man in the video is seen telling White Center Shell station owner John Henry: “Could you do me a favor? Empty the till for me please and put it right here. . I’m robbing you, sir.”

“Are you sure?” Henry replies.

“Yes, I’m sure,” the man says.

“Why do you want to do that?”

“Because I need the money,” the man answers. “I’ve got kids that need to be fed, sir. . I really am sorry to have to do this.”

Henry offered the man \$40, but the suspect declined it and took \$300, promising to pay the money back later, if he could.

Hess worked for three years at a Starbucks in Seattle’s Madison Park neighborhood before quitting in late 2002 because “he became dissatisfied with a change in direction



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Wes Moore



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Tonya Davis, Clara Scott, Carolyn Barge and Tracy Jones members of a book club have their picture taken with Wes Moore, the author of “The Other Wes Moore,” after his reading at the Northwest African American Museum in Seattle, Thursday Jan. 27. The book tells the story of the author and another man with the same name who grew up under similar circumstances but one ended up having a great deal of success in his life and the other ended up serving a life sentence for murder. “The Other Wes Moore” is also the Portland Everybody Reads book for 2011.

the company had taken,” according to documents filed in his federal case. Months later, he was robbing banks to pay for his rent and other expenses, including his “precious dogs.”

The federal case, which includes a lengthy sentencing memorandum that delves into his unhappy childhood and adult life, makes no mention of Hess having children.

His method in the 2003 robberies earned him a mundane nickname from the FBI: the “Transaction Bandit.” He sometimes asked a teller to make change for small bills, and once the drawer was open he demanded the money that was inside, showing the teller a pellet gun in his waistband.

He was arrested in those cases after former co-workers at the café saw his wanted photo in The Seattle Times and alerted authorities to his identity. He confessed soon after his arrest and was sentenced to 57 months in prison, plus \$9,723 in restitution.

In asking for a light sentence, his lawyer cited a letter written by his sister, recounting their unhappy childhood at the hands of alcoholic parents.

The sister also said the two of them stole from grocery stores to feed themselves, his sister wrote. Hess eventually was sent to live with a foster family.

After serving his sentence, Hess enrolled in a culinary arts program at South Seattle Community College. Although he earned \$800 to \$1200 per month, he failed to pay restitution as ordered for nearly a year after his release, the court documents state.

The federal documents also note that he was convicted in 1967 of forging a check to pay his rent.

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