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Police may arrest Roberts in next 3 weeks

By Evan Goodenow, Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN - The attorney for a man whom police officers say threatened them with a knife before they shot him said there's a legitimate reason for Jack Roberts' behavior, but she isn't ready to reveal it yet.

"Once the public knows the full story, they will undoubtedly understand that Jack Roberts is not responsible for what happened that night," New Haven-based attorney Tara Knight said about the March 29 shooting.

Police believe Roberts was trying a "suicide-by-cop" in which a person goads police into shooting them. Robert was shot by officers Greg Bradley, Tim Connolly, George DeIMastro and Ray Ouellet. The officers are on administrative leave until state police and New Haven State's Attorney Michael Dearington decide if the shooting was justified. They have declined comment.

Roberts, a city resident in his late 30s, was acting deranged and stabbed himself with a buck knife near his Birdsey Avenue condominium before the officers arrived, according to neighbors. The actions were completely out of character for Roberts, according to friends and neighbors. They describe him as an affable man who lived alone, played trombone and piano in a jazz band and has been employed by Southern New England Telecommunications for 14 years.

Sources said Roberts was struck by a police cruiser driven by Sgt. Anthony Manzione as Roberts closed in on a retreating Connolly in a field near the intersection of Birdsey Avenue and Old East Main Street.

According to sources, Roberts resumed his charge, was fired upon, went down, got up again and was shot again. Roberts was hit at least three times.

Roberts, who has been unavailable for comment, was released from Hartford Hospital on April 13. "He's healing well and trying to put back some of the pieces of his life right now (and) hoping things don't crash down on them," Knight said.

Knight said she has refused to allow local or state police to interview Roberts, but there are no plans to sue police over their actions, she said. Knight said she expects Roberts to be arrested within three weeks, and she said she might say what triggered his actions then.

"I would anticipate it will be soon," Detective Sgt. Robert Hettrick said of the impending arrest. State police spokesman Sgt. Paul Vance was unsure when Eastern District Major Crime Squad investigators would wrap up their probe.

"They're working on it, they just don't have a completion date," Vance said.

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