



# FELONY LANE GANG RETURNS TO SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

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## The “felony lane gang” was back in Rock County last month.

At least two county residents fell victim to the theft operation in February, Janesville police say.

Thieves broke into cars and stole checks that were cashed by a woman driving what is likely a rental car, according to an alert issued Monday.

These so-called felony lane gang operations have occurred throughout the country and were last reported in the Janesville area in June 2017.

Janesville police sent out the alert with photos of a woman in a car who they believe was involved.

Felony lane gang smash-and-grabs often involve victims who leave purses or wallets in their cars, and that’s what happened Feb. 15, according to the alert.

A woman ran into a Janesville day care center to pick up her child, and her car window was smashed, according to the alert.

Beloit police reported a similar case the same day, and checks from both victims were cashed in Darien, Walworth, and Rockton and Roscoe, both in northern Illinois, according to the alert.

Checks from victims in the Radcliff, Kentucky, area were cashed at the same time by the same woman, according to the alert.

The woman cashing the checks used two vehicles in consecutive days. One of the cars was a dark Infiniti QX70, according to the alert.

The term “felony lane gang” refers to the outer lanes of bank drive-up facilities, which often are used by those cashing the bogus checks.

Janesville police Det. Chris Buescher said past theft operations such as this one often targeted health clubs, dog parks and other places where victims are likely to be away from their cars for a fairly long time. He said it’s notable that the thieves in the latest Janesville case struck a car where the driver was likely to be back in a short time.

In the recent case, the woman left her purse on the front seat in the locked car, Buescher said. Authorities advise people not to leave valuables in plain view in their cars because they are more likely to become victims of smash-and-grab thefts.

“Nowhere is safe anymore,” Buescher said, adding that he’s heard of a non-felony lane gang tactic in which thieves target purses hanging from the backs of chairs at Panera Bread restaurants.

“A woman became such a victim at the Janesville Panera Bread last month,” Buescher said.

Buescher suspects that in a felony lane gang operation, one person or group of people steal from cars, a different set of people rent the cars, and a third set—all women—use the cars and cash the checks.

The first felony lane gang was identified in Florida, but it has spread around the country. Some officials believe different groups not associated with each other likely have adopted the same tactics.

One tactic is to strike in an area and then move out quickly before law enforcement becomes aware.

Buescher said he recently heard from police in Jefferson County and the Milwaukee area who also experienced felony lane gang tactics.

“I would love to say this group has moved on, but that’s not to say another group is not pulling up on the Interstate as we speak,” Buescher said.