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Bail bondsman charged with aggravated assault in pursuit of bail jumper

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A Gainesville bail bondsman is facing charges of aggravated assault after deputies say that in the pursuit of a bail jumper, he held three innocent people at gunpoint and threatened to kill them.

The incident, which occurred last week, follows a case earlier this year in which a masked bondsman was shot and killed and another was shot and critically injured by Jacksonville police.

Gainesville bondsman Tyrone Randy Johnson Jr., 29, was charged July 20 with three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Johnson, who owns the business Tyrone Johnson Bail Bonds, was looking for someone who had not shown up for court, according to the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, when at about 7:15 p.m. he went to a home in the 4100 block of Southwest 19th Drive. Court records show Johnson had posted a \$2,500 bond for a man wanted for driving on a suspended license. When the man failed to show up for court, Johnson went looking for him and headed for his last known address.

Instead of finding the man at the home, Johnson found three others who recently had moved in. The new residents told deputies they thought Johnson was going to kill them because he slammed one onto the hood of a car, threatened them by saying he would "blow your heads off" and was roughing up a resident.

Sheriff's Office spokesman Sgt. Todd Kelly said Johnson brandished an AR-15 rifle and that the victims said the threats were made while Johnson was wearing a tactical vest with the word "agent" on the back.

"We have no issue with bonds people doing their job, but the last thing we want to do is arrive at a scene and end up confronting someone else who is armed," Kelly said. "Deputies have a split second to make a decision in a situation like that, and it can put everyone involved in a real dangerous situation."

In the Jacksonville incident earlier this year, law enforcement said the men were trying to find and apprehend someone who had violated their bond agreement.

Witnesses thought the armed, masked men seen outside an apartment complex around 2 a.m. on May 24 might have been staging a home invasion robbery and called police.

Johnson referred questions to his attorney, Christian Straile, who said the case was "a big misunderstanding."



Doug Finger/Staff photographer

The door to Tyrone Johnson Bail Bonds, 3008 NW 13th St., Suite D, in Gainesville, the office of Tyrone Randy Johnson Jr. (inset). Johnson has been arrested on charges of threatening to kill three people while holding an AR 15 rifle on them as he looked for a bond jumper.



Kelly said deputies consulted with the State Attorney's Office before arresting Johnson.

"Bondsman are in a bad spot — it's a very dangerous profession," Straile said. "We're hopeful that at the end of this, Mr. Johnson will not be convicted even if we have to go all the way to trial."

Under Florida law, anyone with a felony conviction cannot work as a bondsman, even if their rights have been restored.

Johnson has avoided convictions — felony or misdemeanor — in four previous Alachua County criminal cases.

Court records show misdemeanor charges against Johnson have been dropped before trial three times by the State Attorney's Office, all involving incidents before he was a bail bondsman: in 2001 for indecent exposure in public; in 2002 for burglary; and 2007 for battery.

The records also show Johnson challenged misdemeanor battery charges against him in 2005 and a jury found him not guilty.

Johnson is continuing to work as a bondsman while free on a \$30,000 bond.

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