

## \$250,000 is stolen; two people charged

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*Plain Dealer Reporter*

The story has all the makings of a major motion picture: a stripper, a well-to-do businessman, a betrayal and a quarter-million dollars in cold cash buried by a tree in a field.

But investigators say it's real. An Elyria woman and a Lorain man are accused of stealing a toolbox of cash that a Westlake man had hidden in his basement, then burying the money in a field in Marietta in southeastern Ohio.

Westlake Police Lt. Ray Arcuri said Renee Hill, 39, and her accomplice, Anthony Maldonado, 46, were charged with burglary and aggravated theft. They were indicted this month and later pleaded not guilty.

The victim is 62-year-old Charles Shimola, who owns several apartment buildings, Arcuri said.

"Because of his business he had a lot of cash which he stored in a metal toolbox that he hid in the basement of his home," said Arcuri. "Hill, who is

a stripper at Bugsy's in Elyria, lives in one of his apartments. She befriended him and learned where he had hidden the box of money."

Hill, Maldonado and their lawyers could not be reached to comment on the charges.

Police believe Hill persuaded Shimola to take her to Chicago in early February. While they were gone, Maldonado broke through the basement window and stole the money, investigators said.

Shimola suspected Hill was involved. He hired a private investigator, Paul Baeppler of Integrity Security in Cleveland, to do some digging. The investigator broke the case, Arcuri said.

"He followed Hill and said she was flashing hundred-dollar bills and was spending a lot of money," Arcuri said.

Police questioned Hill. She admitted setting up the burglary and splitting the money with Maldonado, Arcuri said.

Maldonado took police to a field outside the city of Marietta, almost at the border of West Virginia, Arcuri said.

"He went to a tree where there was practically an arrow marked on it, dug a little bit, and found the cash," Arcuri said. "But there was only \$35,000 cash there and Hill only had \$15,000. The victim said there was \$250,000 in the case. We think either Hill moved the money out of state, or she has been dipping into it all along."

Arcuri said he told the suspects things would go easier on them if they turned over the rest of the money, but they had not.

Hill and Maldonado are free on \$2,500 bonds. They are scheduled to appear Wednesday before Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Judge Joseph D. Russo.



Hill



Maldonado