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# FOUR FALLEN OFFICERS **Clemmons repeatedly slipped through cracks**

#### TIP TO CRIME STOPPERS WASN'T FOLLOWED UP

He was investigated for drug smuggling and strongly resembled robbery suspect

The robberies were take-

over style and professional-

ly executed. Four were at

Witnesses in the Lake-

wood heist got a good look

at one of the two robbers,

and helped with details for

AutoZone stores — in Ta-

coma, Bremerton, Lake-

wood and Edgewood,

Pierce County.

#### BY JONATHAN MARTIN AND NICK PERRY Seattle Times staff reporters

Last April, a Department of Corrections officer was watching a television news story about a series of armed robberies around Puget Sound when he saw a Pierce County Crime Stoppers sketch that bore a striking similarity to a man he'd once monitored – Maurice Clemmons.

The officer passed on the tip to Clemmons' current supervising officer, who called Crime Stoppers. Yet, somehow, the tip didn't filter down to all the detectives working the cases.

A Crime Stoppers operator told the officer that they had "received too many tips/leads already," according to the second DOC officer's notes. Crime Stoppers "refused to take any more tips from the DOC.

"That doesn't make any sense," counters Lauren Wallin, a Pierce County Sheriff's analyst who coordinates the Crime Stoppers program. "We take all tips that come in unless a suspect is apprehended." Whatever happened, it wasn't the only time that Clemmons slipped through the cracks of criminal investigations after moving here from Arkansas in 2004. Did the man who killed four police officers Sunday live a crime-free life for the five years he was in Washington before he was arrested in May 2009? Records from police, state corrections and federal law enforcement suggest the answer is no. In addition to the possible connection to the Puget Sound-area robberies, Clemmons was investigated by the U.S. Postal Service and a regional drug task force for drug trafficking. And he was the suspect in an armed robbery in Arkansas just a few months after moving to Washington.

the sketch.

Pierce County sheriff's spokesman Ed Troyer said the robberies remain unsolved.

"It definitely looks like [Clemmons], but that's not enough to say he is a suspect," said Troyer of the sketch. He noted that detectives who searched Clemmons' home this week had not recovered a submachine gun that could be seen in one of the robberies, at Oh Gallagher's Sports Pub in See > SHOOTER, A11



CRIME STOPPERS PIERCE COUNTY SHERIFF

**MISSED OPPORTUNITY?** Sketch, left, depicts the suspect in a series of armed robberies. DOC officer noticed the resemblance to Clemmons, right.

## **GREGOIRE**, DEMS SAY TAX PLAN WILL BE IN **BUDGET FIX**

**CUTS ALONE WON'T FILL \$2.6 BILLION HOLE** 

#### GOP to fight any new taxes in package next session

BY ANDREW GARBER Seattle Times Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA – Gov. Chris Gregoire and Democratic leaders in the state House and Senate on Thursday said they plan to propose a tax package next year to help close a \$2.6 billion budget shortfall.

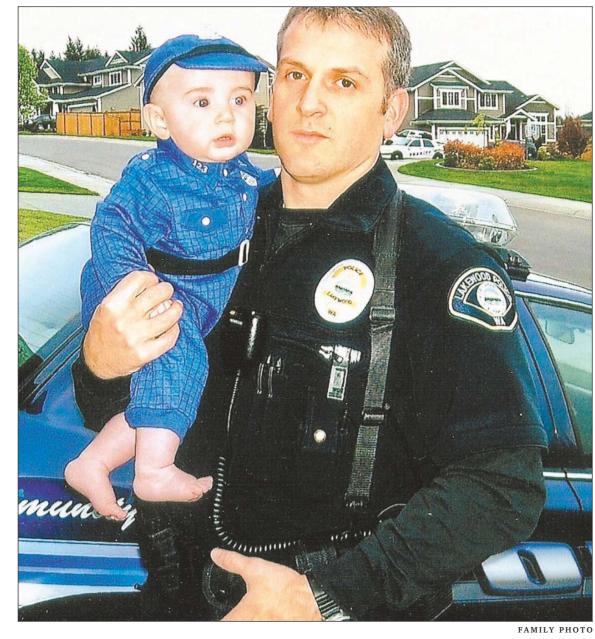
Democrats have been saying for weeks they were considering the idea. This is the first time leaders have said they'd actually propose taxes. No one would discuss details, and Republicans remain adamantly opposed to any new taxes.

The current support for taxes is in stark contrast to the last legislative session, when Democratic leaders seemed to choke whenever they were asked about the topic, especially early on. Gregoire repeatedly opposed the idea.

Now they're saying the budget shortfall is just too big to handle only through cuts.

Gregoire went first, announcing on TVW — a nonprofit television station largely funded by the state that "we're at a point now where there's no doubt in my mind I can't live with that budget. I can't cut hospice care. I can't cut maternity care. I can't cut all state need grants. I can't do that."

#### Lakewood Police Sgt. Mark Renninger, 1970-2009



#### Armed-robbery link?

Earlier this year, detectives started noticing the similarities among 11 armed robberies between April 2008 and April 2009.

#### INSIDE

**New revelations** in search for accomplices > A12

**Tuesday memorial** Details, map > A10

**Bail-bond agents** How system works in Washington > A13

**Clemmons' aunt** gets support, offers of help > Brodeur, B1

Lakewood Sgt. Mark Renninger is shown with his son, Nicholas, about two years ago.

## Devoted to family, dedicated to police work

This is the first of four news obituaries on the slain Lakewood Police officers.

#### BY KATHERINE LONG Seattle Times staff reporter

e was a former Army Ranger, a nationally known SWAT team trainer and the rock of his department — a man with such charisma and natural leadership skills that when he showed up at the scene, his fellow officers knew things were going to be all right.

So it seems an especially cruel irony that Lakewood Police Sgt. Mark Renninger, 39, was gunned down - executed, his fellow officers say — before he got a chance to fight back.

The four Lakewood police officers who were killed Sunday "were executed because they were cops," said Lakewood Police Officer Matt Brown. "But none of them saw their lives that way."

Sgt. Renninger saw himself as a family man, Brown said. When he left the office, he left police work behind him.

The Puyallup father of three "was very, very devoted to his wife and kids," said his brother Michael, of Bethlehem, Penn.

Sgt. Renninger met his wife, Kim, after he moved to Washington. The couple had three children: Ashley, 15, Allyson, 12, and Nicholas, 3. "He always did different things to make sure

See > LAKEWOOD, A10

See > TAXES, A15

Revenue-raising possibilities > A15

## Home sales increase, but decline is foreseen

BY ERIC PRYNE Seattle Times business reporter

Seattle-area home sales rose in November for the sixth straight month, the Northwest Multiple Listing Service said Thursday. Will there be a seventh?

With the boost from the federal first-time homebuyers' tax credit likely to wane, at least for the next few months, some observers say sales volumes could start sliding again this winter.

"We could be looking at a second dip in housing," said Glenn Crellin, director of the Washington Center for Real Estate Research at Washington State University. "I hope I'm wrong."

Closed sales of King County houses in November were up 81 percent over last November's anemic total, the listing service reported.

Condo sales rose 63 percent year-over-year in King County; house sales in Snohomish County rose a whopping 120 percent. But many of those November buyers were first-timers who signed sales agreements earlier in

See > HOMES, A16

Home, condo sales > A16

**NATIONAL NEWS** Senate votes to keep cuts to Medicare > A5

**BUSINESS** 

Boeing hopes to fly first two 787s this year > A21 old favorites > B5

as trial wraps up > B1 **YOUR FRIDAY** Holiday TV: new offers,

LOCAL NEWS



S.	Index
	ASK AMY
-2	NICOLE BRODEUR
	BUSINESS
	COMICS, PUZZLES
1999	DEATHS, FUNERALS
1 (Line	EDITORIALS

	LOTTERY, CORRECTIO
NWFRIDAY B9	MOVIE LISTINGS
NWFRIDAY B1	NWTICKET & MOVIE
A21-23	SPORTS ON TV, RAD
NWFRIDAY B7-9	STOCK TABLES
NWFRIDAY B2	WEATHER
A24	YOUR FRIDAY

IONS	A2	Classif
N	WTICKET E17	NWAUTOS
ETIMES	E SECTION	MERCHAN
DIO	SPORTS C2	PETS DIRE
В	USINESS A23	RENTALS D
N	WFRIDAY B10	PUBLIC NO
١	WFRIDAY B5	

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ETS DIRECTORY	B6
ENTALS DIRECTORY	B3
UBLIC NOTICES	C5

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#### FOUR FALLEN OFFICERS

#### < Lakewood FROM A1

#### SGT. MARK RENNINGER

#### SWAT team leader had natural skill in police work

his kids were having a good time," his brother said. Michael Renninger brought his own family out to Washington for a visit with his big brother in July, and said it was one of the best family vacations he'd ever had. The families took trips to Seattle and Mount Rainier, and went to a Mariners game. They barbecued on the grill at Sgt. Renninger's handsome newer home in a Puyallup subdivision.

This week, police officers from area jurisdictions kept round-the-clock vigils at that home. Neighbors dropped flowers off at a small streetcorner memorial to Sgt. Renninger, while hundreds visited a much larger memorial to all four officers in front of the Lakewood Police Department.

Michael's been told that his brother was one of two officers who were shot first by gunman Maurice Clemmons, and that he had no chance to react.

"That's what's hurting me, thinking how well he was trained and how devoted he was to the training," he said.

"This was such a cowardly act, and he had no chance."

Mark Renninger grew up in Bethlehem, Penn., the second of six children. He was a star football player at Liberty High School and, as a senior, was courted by coaches to play college football. Instead, he chose to join the Army, Michael Renninger said.

Growing up, Michael said his brother was "very funny, just great to be around." Remembering the day his big brother left for Army boot camp, Michael choked back his emotions.

"He was 18, I was 12," he said. "I was at the recruiter's station, and I remember crying because he was leaving."

In the 1990s, Sgt. Renninger was stationed at Fort Benning, Ga., when he was

KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Sgt. Mark Ren-

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training at the

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SWAT team

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A Puyallup police officer and his family grieve at a memorial outside the Puyallup home of slain Lakewood Sgt. Mark Renninger.



WASHINGTON STATE TACTICAL OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

accepted into the elite Army Rangers. Mike Sienda, who now works in Army Intelligence in Charlottesville, Va., got to know him well.

The group would parachute into a remote area, navigate through the woods at night and carry out a mission. In those exercises, Renninger shone. "Mark was a leader even when he was a

junior soldier," Sienda said. But Sgt. Renninger was also personable and wellliked by his fellow officers. "He was a great kid, always funny, cracking jokes," Sienda said. "He had a lot of friends. He was an easygoing person.

"When I think back on those times, those were some of the best times in my career

because of Mark," said Sienda, who kept up with Sgt. Renninger over the years by phone and e-mail.

After Fort Benning, Sgt. Renninger moved to Fort Lewis to join the Second Ranger Battalion. When he left the Army, it was no surprise to brother Michael that he chose police work.

"He had this strong will

from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., and will resume after the service to transport people back to

**66** He had this strong will and strong desire to be there and to help people. Law enforcement was his passion."

MICHAEL RENNINGER Brother

and strong desire to be there and to help people," Michael said. "Law enforcement was his passion."

Sgt. Renninger joined the Tukwila Police Department and worked there from 1996 to 2004, and also served as president of the Tukwila police guild. "He just really had a natural skill for police work," said Tukwila Assistant Police Chief Mike Villa.

"He was very persistent in pursuing the criminals. He was also a very intelligent and smart police officer - he didn't take unnecessary risks."

Villa said Sgt. Renninger had an innate ability to make split-second decisions and worked well in a team. "I've been on many SWAT callouts with him, and he consistently operated well in that environment," Villa said. "He was one of my top performers."

As with the other officers, Villa, too, is stunned that one of his best-trained officers, a man with a special talent for recognizing threats and a trainer who emphasized officer safety, could be gunned down in a senseless shooting.

"It's really difficult," Villa said. "Mark had a lot of friends at Tukwila. He was working in a world where we're dealing with criminals who may want to hurt us. Mark was real cognizant of that."

In 2004, he left Tukwila to join the newly formed Lakewood department. He became the leader of a interjurisdictional SWAT team,

called the Metro SWAT team, made up of smaller cities around Tacoma.

"There are few people I look up to, and Mark was one of the few," said Brown, the Lakewood officer, who is also a member of the Metro SWAT team. "You knew when he showed up that things were going to be all right."

Sgt. Renninger was on the executive board of the Washington State Tactical Officers Association, a statewide lawenforcement group dedicated to SWAT team training. And he was known around the United States for his SWAT training work, said Tom Fitzgerald, the association's president and a leader on the Seattle SWAT team.

When a SWAT incident took place elsewhere in the country, Sgt. Renninger would call the officers who were involved and find out what went well and what went wrong, always looking for ways to improve SWAT tactics, said Sgt. Jeff Selleg of the Port of Seattle Police, who is also on the association's executive board.

"He had such a vast network of friends and contacts," Selleg said.

"He was tremendously dedicated to his family," he added.

In addition to his wife and children, he is survived by four brothers, Matthew, Marty, Michael and John; a sister, Melissa; and his mother, Nancy.

Katherine Long: 206-464-2219 or klong@seattletimes.com



Seating

to air the service live. The procession will at 10 a.m. at the north gate of McChord Air Force Base and will proceed through Lakewood to the police department, where Lakewood police and families of the slain officers will join the procession.

work-television stations plan South and 10th Avenue South, will open at 9 a.m. Parking for those going to the auditorium is at the Church of All Nations, 111 112th St. E. A shuttle will run

Charity Donation Service

### limited at memorial service

#### BY SANJAY BHATT Seattle Times staff reporter

**Pierce County organizers** say the public should be prepared to take buses Tuesday to a Tacoma Dome memorial service for the four Lakewood police officers gunned down in the deadliest attack on law enforcement in state history.

The service is expected to draw more than 20,000 people and fill the Tacoma Dome. Organizers are encouraging the public to watch the service from an overflow location in Parkland.

General seating at the Tacoma Dome will be limited because of the number of law-enforcement and other public-safety officials attending from all across the country and beyond.

The public is encouraged to consider picking a spot along the processional route and watching the service from an alternative location, organizers say. Local net-

Doors to the Tacoma Dome will open at 11 a.m., and the service will start at 1 p.m.

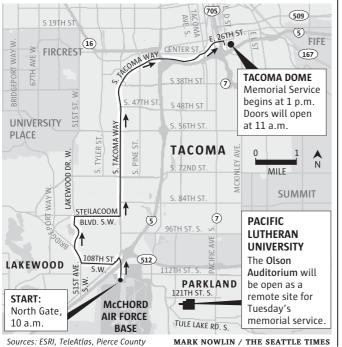
Those planning to attend the service at the Tacoma Dome also may have trouble finding parking because most of the parking spaces will be reserved for procession vehicles and emergency vehicles, organizers said. The public is encouraged to use two off-site parking areas.

From 10:30 a.m. until noon Tuesday, Pierce Transit will provide free bus service from the two off-site lots to the Tacoma Dome, and resume service back to the lots after the ceremony. The two off-site parking areas are Cheney Stadium, 2502 South Tyler St. in Tacoma, and the north parking lot of the Tacoma Mall.

The public also can watch the service from Pacific Lutheran University's Olson Auditorium in Parkland. The auditorium, at 124th Street

#### Memorial procession route

More than 20,000 officers are expected to attend Tuesday's memorial for the four slain police officers. The public is urged to line the procession route or watch the memorial service from a remote location.







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#### < Shooter FROM A1

#### **CRIME STOPPERS TIP** NOT FOLLOWED UP

#### **Drug task force** investigated him

Lakewood on Nov. 14, 2008. A bar patron was shot in the face and grazed during that robbery.

Among the robberies was one at 9 p.m. March 19, when two men armed with a submachine gun robbed a KFC in Shelton, according to police reports.

Shelton Police detective Paul Campbell said there were four employees in the store at the time who were getting ready to close up. The robbers bound some of the employees with duct tape. At least one was ordered to empty the register and a safe. The men had their faces covered and were wearing gloves.

"They weren't amateurs; they knew what they were doing," Campbell said. "They walked in and controlled everybody."

More than eight months after the Shelton robbery, Campbell said he still doesn't have "squat" on the

#### **66** I'd have

definitely gone down that road if it had been brought to my attention."

PAUL CAMPBELL, Shelton Police detective

case after eliminating up to a dozen possible suspects. He said he wishes he'd been informed of what the DOC officer noticed - the similarities between the Crime Stoppers sketch and Clemmons.

"I'd have definitely gone down that road if it had been brought to my attention," he said. Campbell said he would have considered Clemmons a "person of interest" in the case, given his history of armed robbery and the sketch.

#### Drug smuggling

In September 2005, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service investigated Clemmons for a case involving shipments of marijuana between Seattle and South Dakota, said Jerry Styers, a

In March 2007, after a meeting of a multiagency drug task force in the Seattle area, the postal inspector's office shipped its records on Clemmons to the task force. Styers said that happened because the postal inspector was told the task force was already investigating Clemmons.

Jodie Underwood, a Drug Enforcement Administration spokeswoman, said her agency cannot confirm any previous or ongoing investigation.

#### Little Rock robbery

Hints that Clemmons might not have been living the straight life can be found soon after he moved to Washington under the

supervision of DOC.

Released from Arkansas on parole for aggravated robbery and theft in March 2004, Clemmons moved into an apartment in Seattle's Pioneer Square with his half-brother, Rickey Hinton, who is now charged with aiding Clemmons while he was on the run.

Records indicate that, at times, Clemmons held a number of regular jobs. His first was with Metro Bail Bonds, where he worked for several weeks. He also told DOC, at various times, he was working at a metal recycler and pulling out seats from buses.

He held a job at Nortrak rail supplies in Seattle, where he was "doing well, shows up on time and gets along well with other employees," Nortrak human resources told DOC in 2005, according to records.

FOUR FALLEN OFFICERS

Clemmons also registered two businesses in Washington: Sea-Wash Pressure Washing & Landscaping, and Reggiee's Southern Dawgs. And he owned at least three homes in the Tacoma area - telling authorities he was able to collect rental income.

Soon after arriving in Washington, Clemmons caught a break. On July 8, 2004, Little Rock police took a report from a man who claimed he'd been robbed at gunpoint.

The man told police he'd met the suspect in the lobby of a Comfort Inn and struck up a conversation. The suspect invited the man to "hang out" in his room, 212.

Up in his room, according to police records, the suspect pulled out a handgun and stole the victim's gold watch, his gold ring and \$1,400 in cash. The suspect then jumped into a car with another man and drove off.

The crime doesn't appear to have been well planned. When police checked with the front desk at the Comfort Inn, employees said a man had paid for Room 212 with cash — but had shown his Washington-state identification.

The name on the ID: Maurice Clemmons, making a visit to his home state.

However, Little Rock police never filed charges. When officers started asking the victim about drugs, he "left the area" soon after, according to the police report.

"The victim was a drug addict and he was not a good witness, and they could not make a case against Clemmons on that one," said Lt. Terry Hastings, a spokesman for the Little Rock Police Department. "The victim was the only witness, and he just wasn't a good enough witness.'

Susan Kelleher and staff researchers David Turim and Miyoko Wolf contributed to this report. Jonathan Martin: 206-464-2605 or jmartin@seattletimes.com



spokesman for the postal inspector's office in Seattle. Investigators found pack-

ages of marijuana shipped out of Seattle, and shipments of cash sent to a Federal Way home Clemmons shared with his wife, Styers said

One package addressed to the home had about in \$5,500 cash, Styers said. At least one man was charged in South Dakota on the case, but he fled to Everett.

It is unclear what happened to Clemmons as a result — neither he nor his wife have been charged, according to federal court documents.



The Seattle Time SPORTS

#### FOUR FALLEN OFFICERS

## Bank accounts may be sign of planned getaway

**INVESTIGATORS PROBE MONEY TRAIL** 

#### Half-brother charged with aiding Clemmons

BY STEVE MILETICH, JONATHAN MARTIN AND CHRISTINE CLARRIDGE Seattle Times staff reporters

TACOMA - Maurice Clemmons, the man who gunned down four Lakewood police officers Sunday, may have laid plans in advance for a getaway by opening several bank accounts he could access on the run.

Documents filed in Pierce County Superior Court on Thursday show investigators are attempting to follow a money trail as they look for accomplices who helped Clemmons evade police after the shootings.

One of those alleged accomplices, Clemmons' halfbrother, Rickey Hinton, 46, was charged Thursday with three counts of rendering criminal assistance.

Pierce County sheriff's detectives filed search warrants seeking financial records from four banks where Clemmons and his wife, Nicole Smith, may have had accounts, to determine whether the records would show who tried to give Clemmons money.

"It is believed that Clemmons might have established several accounts prior to the shooting that could later be accessed by Clemmons or his relatives/associates," according to a search-warrant affidavit.

Clemmons may have received a prepaid debit card that one of his female "associates" loaded with several hundred dollars after the shooting, according to the documents.

#### Credit cards missing

In addition, Clemmons may have stolen credit cards from one of the four Lakewood police officers he killed at a Parkland coffee shop. The wallet of one of the officers was found open and it appeared credit cards were missing, according to a search-warrant affidavit. "The further this investigation goes on, the more we see how truly evil Maurice was and how shocking it is that anybody would assist him in any way," Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney Mark Lindquist said. According to police and prosecutors, Clemmons spoke about his desire to kill police officers and children at a family gathering Thanks-



ELAINE THOMPSON / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS Rickey Hinton, half-brother of Maurice Clemmons, is led into Pierce County Superior Court on Tuesday.

giving Day and reiterated his intentions the night before the slayings when witnesses said he told them he was going to "take out a group of cops" and instructed them to watch the news."

Another search-warrant affidavit filed Thursday in Pierce County Superior Court indicates Clemmons was still within three miles of the coffee shop — and at one of three homes he owned about five hours after the murders.

According to court documents, a neighbor saw Clemmons and his sister walk into a residence at 7427 S. Asotin St., in South Tacoma, at

12:30 p.m. Sunday. A GPS ankle bracelet, which had been placed on Clemmons by a bail-bond company seven days earlier, was found at the South Asotin Street home by police later that day. Clemmons apparently cut the tracking device off his ankle shortly after 1 p.m. Sunday, according to court documents. Sheriff's spokesman Detective Ed Troyer said Thursday that undercover detectives were sent to monitor all of Clemmons' properties as soon as their locations became known.

house and we sent undercovers to his other properties the second we found out about them," Troyer said.

A Pierce County sheriff's detective spotted a pickup that matched a description of the getaway vehicle at 9:12 a.m., according to a search-warrant affidavit filed Thursday.

The detective said he saw blood on the inside door handle, and learned from a dispatcher the truck was registered to Clemmons' home address in Tacoma.

Clemmons also owned the Asotin Street address, according to property records.

State Department of Corrections Secretary Eldon Vail said he got a call around 9 a.m. Sunday alerting him Clemmons, who was under DOC supervision, was suspected in the officers' slayings.

inal assistance in the first-degree.

Thursday, Hinton pleaded not guilty to three counts of rendering criminal assistance. Prosecutors allege Hinton helped Clemmons by providing transportation, destroying evidence and lying to police.

Pierce County Superior Court Judge Frederick Fleming ordered Hinton held on \$2 million bail.

Troyer said authorities are still looking for two other individuals who they believe were involved in the effort to help Clemmons.

According to charging documents, Hinton, who lived in a Parkland home owned by Clemmons, was first contacted Sunday morning by a Pierce County sheriff's sergeant investigating the officers' slayings.

#### With grandson

Hinton, who was walking with his 12-year-old grandson, told the sergeant he was headed to buy groceries for breakfast, the documents allege

heard from Clemmons and, while spending several hours with sheriff's deputies, continued to insist he had no knowledge of Clemmons' whereabouts, according to the documents.

knowledge of the shootings,

cers looking for Clemmons stopped a vehicle leaving an Auburn address associated with Clemmons. Hinton was in the vehicle with brothers Douglas Davis, 22, and Eddie Davis, 20, who were charged Tuesday with helping Clemmons elude police.

ments, Hinton was not only home when Clemmons appeared at the Parkland house after the shootings, he gave the keys to his car to one of the Davis brothers, who then drove Clemmons away.

Hinton has since acknowledged he gave his cellphone to his grandson immediately after the shootings and told the child to delete Clemmons' phone numbers from the phone, the charging documents say.

"Eddie Davis reported that he, Douglas Davis and Hinton all knew on Sunday morning that Clemmons had shot police," the documents say.

According to court documents, the Davis brothers helped Clemmons get medical attention at a relative's house in the Algona-Pacific area, then delivered him to a woman who drove Clemmons to Seattle.

Another man, Darcus Allen, 38, is being held on a fugitive warrant from Arkansas, where he is wanted for armed robbery while Pierce County investigators and prosecutors prepare to file charges against him.

Police and prosecutors believe Allen drove Clemmons to a carwash two blocks from the coffee shop and waited while Clemmons killed the officers.

If investigators can prove Allen knew what Clemmons intended to do at the coffee shop, prosecutors say, they will file murder charges against him.

The family of slain officer Greg Richards, including his widow and two of his three children, attended Hinton's hearing Thursday, saying the slain officer would have wanted them to face those involved in his death.

Richards' sister-in-law, Melanie Burwell, said Clemmons and his associates have "no conscience. ... They're high-fiving each other.'

Information from Seattle Times staff reporter Ken Armstrong and Times archives is included in this story. Steve Miletich: 206-464-3302 or

smiletich@seattletimes.com



"As soon as we knew who he was, we were watching his charged with rendering crim-

It's unclear what time deputies went to the Asotin Street home. Troyer said at the time police were checking out eight to 10 possible suspects, including two people who falsely confessed to the killings.

So far, six relatives and friends of Clemmons have been arrested on suspicion of providing aid to Clemmons after the murders, and three of them have been formally



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES A Seattle police officer looks at a memorial Wednesday outside the Forza coffee shop.

## Coffee shop closed at least unfil next week

BY CHRISTINE CLARRIDGE Seattle Times staff reporteen

PARKLAND, Pierce County – The coffee house where four Lakewood police officers were killed by a gunman Sunday won't reopen until at least next week.

Brad Carpenter, chief executive officer of Forza Coffee, said Thursday a decision on when — or if — to reopen the Parkland store won't be made until after Tuesday's memorial for the four officers.

"No business decisions will officers were shot, and

be made until after the memorial," Carpenter said.

The officers were killed at around 8:15 a.m. Sunday by Maurice Clemmons, who was wounded in the exchange of gunfire. Killed were Sgt. Mark Renninger, 39; and officers Ronald Owens, 37; Tina Griswold, 40; and Gregory Richards, 42.

Clemmons was fatally shot Tuesday morning by a Seattle police officer. The coffee house was

closed immediately after the

mourners have set up an impromptu memorial outside the business where visitors all week brought flowers, cards and other items to pay their respects to the slain officers.

Forza Coffee Co. is a Gig Harbor-based franchise operation that Carpenter and his wife, Cindy, started in 2005. Carpenter is a former police officer.

For those wishing to help the officers' families, Forza has put donation boxes at all 22 of its locations and is also accepting donations on its Web site: www.forzacoffeecompany.com.

Christine Clarridge: 206-464-8983 or cclarridge@seattletimes.com

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#### FOUR FALLEN OFFICERS

## Bail-bond agency took gamble

#### \$190,000 BOND |

A Chehalis company agreed to post bond so that Maurice Clemmons could get out of jail. But the industry says don't blame it for the deadly results.

#### **BY ANDREW GARBER** Seattle Times staff reporter

CHEHALIS – There's a sign in the window at the Jail Sucks Bail Bonds office that says "Open 24 hours," but the door is locked and the lights are out.

This is the company that agreed to post a \$190,000 bond, allowing Maurice Clemmons to walk out of the Pierce County Jail last week. Six days later, authorities say, Clemmons walked into a coffee shop and gunned down four Lakewood police officers.

The owner of the company hasn't returned phone calls, but bond agents say their industry shouldn't get the blame for a case like this.

"If this guy (Clemmons) had come to me ... if he had sufficient collateral and money, would I have bonded him out? Most likely," said Ty Brokaw, owner of Bad Boy Bail Bonds in Tacoma. "If I knew this guy would do what he did, hell no."

#### 'You never know'

And that's the conundrum for bail-bond agents. "You never know," said Holly Bishop, president of the Washington State Bail Agents Association.

"You have that big sign, 'Innocent until proven guilty.' If he's paid his crime in the past and goes off the deep end again, what are you going to do?"

Bail-bond agents are often the subject of movies and television shows, but the average person doesn't run into them unless they're in trouble

It's a little-known industry except to people working in the legal system - regulated by both the state Department of Licensing and the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

Bail-bond agents go through criminal-background checks and training and have to pass exams by both agencies to be licensed.

Craig Adams, a Pierce County deputy prosecutor.

A woman answering phones for Jail Sucks said the company is open for business, but the Chehalis office was in the process of moving and closed temporarily. She would not answer questions related to Clemmons' case.

The Jail Sucks Web site has an extensive letter addressing what happened. Part of the letter reads:

"I want to be clear that had we known Clemmons was

capable of such a heinous crime we never would have posted this bond. ... As a requirement of the bond, given the charges and size of the bond, we required Clemmons to be on a GPS bracelet and to check in weekly and also to have two co-signers and put up a piece of property as collateral. We met with Clemmons twice during the week of the 23rd, once when he was released and again on the 24th. Nothing at that time seemed out of the ordinary."

The Lakewood police officers were killed Sunday, five days after the last meeting.

Police said they found a GPS ankle bracelet during a search of a house where Clemons was believed to have been staying.

State lawmakers are promising hearings and an exhaustive look at what happened and why, including scrutiny of the bail system.

State Rep. Al O'Brien, D-Mountlake Terrace, vice chairman of the House Public Safety and Emergency

Preparedness Committee, said he wants to change state law so that people charged with serious violent crimes have to pay the entire bail themselves instead of being allowed to post 10 percent through a bail-bond agency.

Tom McBride, executive secretary of the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, said he believes Washington has more expansive rights than many

states when it comes to setting bail.

In fact, the only crime for which a judge can deny bail is aggravated murder, which carries the potential death penalty.

"The truth is the state Constitution presumes you have a right to bail and presumes it won't be an excessive bail," McBride said.

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There are 78 bail-bond agencies licensed in the state. Jail Sucks was licensed in 2007.

The Department of Licensing says 54 complaints have been filed so far this year regarding bail-bond companies.

Jail Sucks received none, although in 2008 the department discovered two of the company's branches were not licensed.

That has since been resolved, and the firm is in full compliance, according to the department.

#### Two rejections

The Pierce County Prosecutor's Office said Clemmons was turned away by two bail-bond agencies, based on his history of failure to appear in court. However, Chehalis-based Jail Sucks Bail Bonds agreed to issue a bond.

The charges Clemmons posted bail on included second-degree rape of a child and assault.

Bond agencies generally require defendants to put up 10 percent of the bond. They can let defendants pay the 10 percent over a period of time, but it's up to the company.

The agency keeps the money paid upfront; that's how they make a living.

They also generally require collateral, such as a lien on a home, for the remainder of the bail.

In return, the agency essentially tells the court it will be responsible for paying the bail if the defendant flees.

When a person tries to escape, the bail-bond agency usually goes after them. Brokaw said he's generally given six to eight weeks to hunt down a person and bring them back.

#### No payment required

In this case, because Clemmons was shot dead by a Seattle police officer early Tuesday, Jail Sucks is off the hook and will not have to pay the bail. Plus it can keep whatever fees were paid by Clemmons, according to



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