

4 arrested in Ventura County Fairgrounds burglary case; \$518K stolen



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Authorities have arrested four suspects in connection with the theft of more than \$500,000 from the Ventura County Fair in August. *STAR FILE PHOTO*

Four Los Angeles County men have been arrested in connection with the theft of more than \$500,000 at the Ventura County Fair in August.

The arrests, announced Friday afternoon, took place Thursday during an operation at multiple sites in LA county, said officials with the California Highway Patrol and Ventura County District Attorney's Office.

The burglary was carried out at the fairgrounds on Aug. 10 as the 12-day event was underway. About \$518,000 in cash was [stolen from the fair's administration building](#) in an early morning break-in at the seaside venue in Ventura, authorities have said. The money came from gate receipts and parking, a fair official previously said.

Little new information was provided with Friday's announcement, including whether any of the suspects have a known connection to the fair or the vendors and contractors it works with.

"We are still actively investigating," said Officer Jorge Alfaro of the CHP's Ventura-area office. The highway patrol is investigating the crime since the fairgrounds are state property.

The four men arrested Thursday were connected in terms of the burglary, Alfaro said.

Joey Buttitta, spokesperson for the DA's office, said such information would "all come out over the next few weeks and months."

A spokesperson for the fairgrounds, Megan Hook, declined to say whether any of the suspects were employed by the fair or related agencies.

"Right now, we're just releasing what's on the press release," Hook said.

Stacy Rianda, CEO of the Ventura County Fairgrounds, thanked the CHP and DA's office "for their investigation and subsequent arrests and will continue to work closely with them as the investigation continues."

Rianda has previously said that during the fair, money is prepared for deposit each night and picked up by an armored car before gates open in the morning.

Thursday's law enforcement operation involved four search warrants served simultaneously.

The suspects arrested were identified as:

- Alexander Piceno, 28, of Baldwin Park
- Rafael Morales, 56, of La Puente
- Carlos Alberto Aranda, 44, of Los Angeles
- Jesus Rios, 55, of El Monte

Alleged crimes include burglary, grand theft, theft of public money and conspiracy.

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CHP Lt. Eric Zivic of the agency's special services unit for the Coastal Division said in a statement Thursday's operation "shows the strength of the CHP's investigative teams in collaboration with our county, state and federal partners."

Ventura County DA Erik Nasarenko said in a statement that since summer, "the public has been demanding answers for this burglary at our fairgrounds." He thanked the CHP and said his office would file four felony counts against each of the suspects.

All four suspects remained in custody at Ventura County jail facilities Friday. Bail for Piceno was set at \$500,000; for the other three men, bail was set at \$1 million, jail records show.

This story may be updated.

