

Suspect moved to Columbia

*See news Thursday
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By JOHN MONK
Staff Writer

A suspect in a three-county crime spree has been quietly moved from Horry County jail in Conway to a Columbia state prison-affiliated hospital for mental testing and safekeeping.

"He will be available to his attorneys at any time," said 15th Judicial Circuit Solicitor Jim Dunn.

Ronald R. Woomer, 24, of Huntington, W. Va., was taken to the state hospital Tuesday without a public announcement of the move. He is accused of four counts of murder and other crimes.

"It's our responsibility to see that the prisoner is kept safe, and to see that he is kept," said Sheriff M.L. Brown Jr.

Dunn said it's routine in major cases to send a suspect to the state hospital. Testing there can determine such matters as his competency to stand trial and whether

he knew the difference of right from wrong at the time of the alleged crime.

Security also played a key role in the transfer.

"We have some construction work going on, and there was so much (many people) going up and down, it was a little bit too much of a chance to take," said Horry County Police Chief Herman Enzor.

Another source elaborated, saying it was difficult to thoroughly monitor everyone going in and out of the jail. Police were concerned about other prisoners' safety if an attempt were to be made on Woomer's life, he said.

Following his hospital stay, Woomer probably will stay in Columbia in the state prison system for safekeeping, said Sheriff Brown.

Woomer left Horry County Tuesday morning for Colleton County, where he was arraigned on a murder and armed robbery charge

in connection with the death of John Turner. Then Woomer was taken to Columbia.

Turner, 67, of Cottageville, was shot to death and robbed of his coin collection last Thursday.

He was the first of five people to die violently in a nine-hour period, including suspect Eugene Skaar, 40, of Huntington, W. Va. Skaar committed suicide at the Myrtle Beach motel where Woomer was arrested.

Woomer has also been charged with two Georgetown County murders, one Horry murder, kidnapping, armed robbery and criminal sexual battery. All alleged offenses took place last Thursday.

Another suspect in the case, Fred Thomas Whitehead, 30, is still in the Conway jail. Whitehead is charged with conspiracy to commit murder and armed robbery and accessory to stolen goods.

Whitehead, an ex-convict from Florida and West Virginia who had

1976 housebreaking and larceny convictions in Myrtle Beach, is owner of Myrtle Beach's only coin shop, Myrtle Beach Coins and Stamps. He bought the coin shop in August.

Neither Woomer nor Whitehead have had bond set for them.

Solicitor Dunn said he will ask for the death penalty for Woomer.

A legal source said a trial in the matter is at least three months away.

Attorneys are researching where Woomer and Whitehead should be tried first. Crimes allegedly took place in three counties under the jurisdiction of two solicitors.

In a related matter, a Grand Strand General Hospital representative Wednesday said the condition of Wanda Summers is satisfactory.

Mrs. Summers was abducted from a Pawleys Island convenience store and shot during the crime spree last week.