

Two suspects jailed in Orange church arson

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Honest student laborers discover hidden treasure

By Keith Manuel

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)—After ripping sheetrock from a moldy closet, Trista Wright was removing the debris when a flash of green caught her eye.

Wright, on a spring break mission trip to New Orleans, reached into the debris and pulled out an old, grubby \$100 bill. As she dug around in the debris a little more, she discovered that an air conditioning vent secretly had served as a makeshift safe, and she pulled out another \$100 bill, then another and another.

“At first, I thought it was Monopoly money. It was just stacks of \$100 bills. The money was very old,” said Wright, who was part of a Baptist Collegiate Ministries group from Armstrong Atlantic University in Savannah, Ga.

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When the students hastily totaled the money, it was more than \$30,000. The discovery presented a new problem: "What do we do now?"

After consulting with the leaders of the mission trip, they decided to notify the local authorities. The sheriff's department came, verified the identity of the homeowner and learned that the home had been in the family for several generations.

The owner of the home, who wanted to remain anonymous, had inherited the house after her mother died a couple of years ago. Wright said the woman was not surprised by the find because her mother hid things around her house all the time. In addition, her father was suspicious of placing money in banks, having grown up during the Great Depression.

Even though finding something hidden was not a surprise, the amount was a shock to the homeowner.

"The lady was speechless," Wright said. "It was such a blessing to the family. The Lord really blessed the family at the right time because (the owner) had some medical tests done today and was very anxious about the results."

The collegians' honesty sparked plenty of media attention, including an Associated Press article that was picked up across the United States and in numerous countries and segments on national TV news broadcasts.

There was never any thought of keeping the money, Wright told the AP. "We were called there to serve people and to be Christ-like." Otherwise, "I would have regretted it. Nothing good would have come of it."

"Trista came down here to serve, because Christ served," said Aaron Arledge, the New Orleans-area coordinator for the many Baptist collegiate teams streaming to the city during their spring break to gut flood-ravaged homes.

"It's great that an honest group was in the house," Arledge added. "Someone else might have just taken the money. The family thought it was

a miracle. For them to have lost so much and then to find this hidden treasure was just awesome.”

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