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Couple arrested in theft of bleachers

BY BEATRIZ E. VALENZUELA ~ STAFF WRITER

APPLE VALLEY • An Apple Valley couple is behind bars and the two have pleaded not guilty to stealing bleachers from a local school over summer break, San Bernardino County Sheriff's officials said Tuesday.

Edward James Burke, 45, and Melissa Jean Santos, 43, were arrested last week after a concerned citizen read about the theft from the Academy for Academic Excellence in the Daily Press, according to a news release.

With the information provided, detectives were able to track down the recycling business where the bleachers had been scrapped, officials stated.

Through an investigation, officials learned Burke had stolen the bleachers from the school over a two-week period. Then he and Santos took the aluminum bleacher seats to a local recycling center over an extended period of time, officials said.

When students and staff returned from summer break, school officials discovered the seats had been stolen.

The school received an outpouring of support, including from Home Depot on Bear Valley Road. Several employees from the home improvement store went to the school to replace the aluminum bleachers with wooden ones until the money to purchase permanent metal seats could be raised.

Burke has an extensive criminal record, San Bernardino County Superior Court documents indicate. He has been arrested for various offenses including receiving stolen property, inflicting corporal injury on a spouse, disorderly conduct and numerous vehicle-code violations. Santos has been arrested several times for drug offenses, court records show.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ACADEMY FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

STOLEN SEATS: The bleachers at the Academy for Academic Excellence's athletic fields were vandalized and several parts were stolen. A man and woman from Apple Valley have been arrested in the case.

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