

Driver plows stolen vehicle into Grace Hall

By Kathryn Reed

Julie Smith-Tunnell is accused of stealing her second vehicle in two months.

The most recent time ended with the vehicle going into the front of Grace Hall at St. Theresa's Catholic Church in South Lake Tahoe.

"We found her lying down behind a rock about 30 feet from the collision," police Lt. Brian Williams told *Lake Tahoe News*. He added that the 40-year-old South Lake Tahoe woman was lying on the keys, but denied being the driver.

The vehicle had been stolen from the second floor of Harveys in Stateline where employees park.

The owner of the vehicle on Saturday night realized his backpack with the keys inside of it had been stolen from the employee lounge. He took the bus home, leaving his vehicle there. But when he returned Sunday the Yukon was missing.

He then found out his Yukon had been driven into Grace Hall on Jan. 26 about 1am. Smith-Tunnell was reportedly traveling down Lyons Avenue toward Highway 50 at a high rate of speed when the crash occurred.

The vehicle and building sustained significant damage.

The force of the GMC Yukon Denali hitting the structure knocked goods off the shelves that are given away by Bread & Broth each Monday. There was concern the Jan. 27 meal would have to be canceled or moved to a new location.

Parishioner Paul Camacho organized a crew to clean up the mess

and secure the building as well as it could be. Dave Walker with the city's building department said it was OK to let people inside.

"We were very relieved we were able to go ahead and serve dinner," Beverly Sass, church secretary, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "This Friday we have our biggest fundraiser for the school, the 20th annual crab feed. We are able to go ahead and do that. Then we'll reassess things next week and replace the damaged beams."

Smith-Tunnell was arrested on charges of stealing a vehicle, possession of stolen property and driving without a license. In November she was arrested on a stolen vehicle charge. She remained in jail Jan. 29 on \$51,500 bail.

Sgt. Pat Brooks with Douglas County Sheriff's Department said it would be up to the district attorney if Smith will face charges in Nevada.

Williams said auto thefts have been occurring at least every other week since the temps dropped. He said people are leaving them in their driveways to warm up and then someone swipes them.