

Three held after man taken from Twelve Tribes religious commune in San Diego area

June 6, 2015

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VISTA – Three people from Puerto Rico were arrested on suspicion of kidnapping a relative from a religious commune in Southern California, authorities said Saturday.

Friday night's arrests came after a San Diego County sheriff's deputy spotted what looked like a hit-and-run in Vista, Sgt. Patrick Yates said in a statement. When authorities stopped two vehicles that fled the scene, they detained four people in a red van and one person in a gray van.

Investigators determined that the driver of the gray van was pursuing the red van after three people kidnapped a 23-year-old man they feared was being "brainwashed" by the Twelve Tribes Community, Yates said.

The suspects – Andres Martinez-Manso, 51; Eliza Martinez, 25; and Robert Harry Matthew, 25 – intended to rescue the man, Yates said.

They were taken into custody for investigation of kidnapping. The relative and the driver of the gray van were released.

Twelve Tribes said in a statement it was thankful the man, whom they identified as Robert Martinez, returned to the commune.

"We are very thankful that he is back at home with his wife who is expecting their first child next month. We do not know of the motives for this action," the statement said.

[The Los Angeles Times reports](#) members of the religious community live in a house in Vista which also serves as a church. Others live on a 66-acre avocado ranch in the eastern part of the county. The group also runs a deli in Vista and its members are often seen at farmers' markets selling produce.

Devotees live a communal and patriarchal lifestyle, with families working on the farm, children homeschooled, men often with full beards and women dressed plainly. Twelve Tribes follows certain Biblical scriptures but does not consider itself Christian.

"We live as a big, extended family because we love one another," the group said in its statement. "We love to work together in our Yellow Deli, where many, many

people in Southern California come and continually witness our life and our relationships. We are not hidden or inaccessible.”