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WOODRUFF MAN RECEIVES 25-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE FOR VIOLENT CRIME SPREE

A Woodruff man received a 25-year prison sentence today after he admitted to robbing three Spartanburg County convenience stores while armed with a weapon and attempting to rob a fourth.

Kenneth Ray Rice, 32, pleaded guilty to three counts of armed robbery and attempted armed robbery. The robberies occurred at the Li'l Cricket Food Stores on Highway 221 and Highway 92 and the Kangaroo store on North Main Street in Woodruff between Dec. 30, 2008 and Jan. 17, 2009.

Rice entered the businesses at night or early morning hours while carrying a metal pipe, a baseball bat or a knife. He escaped with a nominal amount of the money during three of the robberies. The fourth robbery failed because a clerk pushed Rice away from the counter and chased him out of the business.

Woodruff police identified Rice after the Jan. 17, 2009 robbery at the Kangaroo store. During their review of the store's surveillance video, they discovered Rice visited the store earlier in the day wearing the same outfit he wore during the robbery. He wasn't wearing a disguise and the officers recognized him from a previous encounter.

Police also found the likely source of the knife used in the robbery.

Officers arrested Rice hours after the Kangaroo robbery after he was found hiding in a dumpster near his house.

Rice committed the robberies to support his crack cocaine addiction, according to Principal Deputy Solicitor Barry Barnette.

"This case is a good example of the impact of illegal drugs on a person's life," Barnette said. "Kenneth Rice will have plenty of time behind bars to think about the consequences of his pathetic actions"

Rice's previous criminal record included convictions for second-degree burglary, grand larceny, possession of a controlled substance, failure to stop for a blue light and siren and simple possession of marijuana. He will serve 85 percent of the new prison sentence before he is eligible for release.

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