

OTTUMWA — Local realtors and other service providers are reminded of safety precautions after a frightening weekend assault in Ottumwa.

At about 5:30 p.m. Friday, Kathy Sorak, a realtor with Coldwell Banker, met with several people to show them a house on North Court Street in Ottumwa. When they entered the house, the men assaulted Sorak, held a knife at her and tied her up.

Sorak was able to free herself and escape. She hid in the house until the men fled. They got away with cash and a cell phone, according to the Ottumwa Police Department.

Sorak was treated and later released from Ottumwa Regional Hospital.

At about 8 p.m. Friday, police located the suspects at 513 North Court St. Apt 3. Police had to obtain a search warrant for the apartment because the suspects refused to come out.

After executing the search warrant at 1:46 a.m. Saturday, police charged Carl Edward Lennie, 40, homeless, and Matthew James Howard, 24, 513 N. Court St. Apt. 3., with first-degree robbery, a Class B felony. They are both being held at the Wapello County Jail, each on a \$25,000 bond.

Coldwell Banker Broker Les Thostenson said the incident is a reminder of the dangers of any in-home service job.

“Safety in any particular situation is not always guaranteed,” he said. “It’s something we are aware of and we do have to watch for.”

Thostenson said that realtors are given safety guidelines in their pre-certification courses. Jobs like cable service, repair technicians and other work that involves going into peoples homes face risks of similar events, he said.

“They can run into some situations that can be kind of scary sometimes,” he said. “Realtor organizations are always aware and concerned for the safety of people in those situations.”

Thostenson said an assault like that doesn’t happen often, but it can happen.

“We’re very fortunate that it wasn’t more serious in this case,” he said. “There are some risks out there, and you just have to be aware of what’s going on.”

Sorak was showing several people a house for sale at 1120 North Court St.

“This particular incident goes to show that it can happen anywhere,” Thostenson said, adding that North Court Street is a busy road in Ottumwa.

Thostenson was impressed with the Ottumwa Police Department’s work on the case and how quickly they were able to arrest the suspects.

“You can prepare and plan ahead, but you can’t necessarily predict what’s going to happen,” said Ottumwa Police Sgt. Rick Jones. “But taking the steps to be safe could prevent it from happening.”

Jones said it’s important for people to follow general safety practices. Be aware of the surroundings and what’s going on around you, he said.

“Let people know where you’re going to be and what time you’re going there,” Jones said. “If you’re planning on meeting somebody, figure out who they are.”