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Victim of home invasion offers college education to attackers

By **Brian Rogers**

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With a gun pointed at his head, Victor Ho opened the safe in his upscale Bunker Hill home for two masked attackers who took cash, jewelry and guns, then tied up the emergency room doctor and went out the front door.

It was the sort of ordeal that can affect people for years, but in this situation, it could end up changing the lives of the attackers more than the victim.

Weeks after the Oct. 17 incident, when authorities sought the public's help in catching the criminals, Ho and his wife made an extraordinary offer to the still-unidentified young men: Surrender and we'll pay for your education, even college.

"If you commit the crime you have to do the time, but once you get out, we'll help you out," Ho said. "Whether it's a trade school, whether it's higher education, I will support that all the way."

Ho said his offer stems from a belief that simply locking up criminals is not the answer.

"We aren't trying to change the way we prosecute people," Ho said. "We are trying to see what we can do so stop recidivism."

On that October afternoon, Ho's housekeeper answered the door at his home in the 11800 block of Redcoat to find a man holding two cardboard packages. Two other men wearing black ski masks and gloves, one with a pistol, forced their way in and locked the housekeeper in a closet.

In the middle of the robbery, the 46-year-old doctor came home to find the first man sitting in a white SUV in the driveway, police officials said. The doctor left two of



Jake Daniels

Dr. Victor Ho recounts the Oct. 17 robbery at his home in Houston, during which masked men held a gun to his head and forced him to open his safe. Ho and his wife are offering to pay for the education of the robbers if they turn themselves in and serve their time.

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his children, ages 3 and 11, watching the Disney Junior channel in the family's car and went inside, where he was met by one of the other masked men.

After forcing Ho to open the safe and also taking four handguns and a shotgun, the men tied the doctor's hands, took his cellphone and fled.

The attackers wore masks, but Ho said he believes they were in their late teens or early 20s.

Although Ho was the one who had a gun pointed at his head, he said he was not the one who was under stress.

"There was a young kid and I could tell he was nervous. He was shaking," Ho said. "That's the person I'm really targeting for this."

An ER physician since 1997, Ho has seen all manner of trauma working 24-hour shifts at hospitals in Houston, Beaumont and other Southeast Texas towns. The doctor also trains with live weapons as the medical director of the Jefferson County SWAT team. Ho's familiarity with guns and his experience in dealing with stressful situations kept him from panicking, he said.

"I'm affected, yes, but I'm better prepared than most people in the community to get a gun pointed at their head," Ho said.

His friends said the offer is typical of Ho and his wife, because they're both optimists who have long been concerned about others.

"That's just who they are," said Dr. Jeffrey Thompson, who's been friends with Ho since 2004. "They're always looking for ways to help others."

Experts were intrigued by Ho's response to the question of how to get the criminals who victimized him off the street.

After the trail went cold, a police sketch artist created two composite drawings of the assailants. Ho also doubled the standard \$5,000 reward offered by Crime Stoppers.

"It strikes me as someone who is thinking about the big picture," said Paul Raffoul, professor emeritus of social work at the University of Houston. "It's a social inequity that he's trying to remedy."

The professor said the solution is twofold because it gets the actual culprits off the street, while hopefully addressing some of the bigger issues in their lives, which may be typical disparities associated with race and income in America.

"It's really magnanimous," Raffoul said.

Memorial Villages Police Chief J.D. Sanders said he hopes the publicity surrounding Ho's offer will lead detectives to the attackers before they strike again. Sanders said the crime matches several others that have been committed around Houston.

It is an incident fairly rare to the small affluent west Houston villages of Bunker Hill, Hunters Creek and Piney Point that Sander's staff patrols.

"I've been here 16 months and I've seen two," Sanders said of home invasions.

Anyone with information about the crime is urged to contact Crime Stoppers of Houston, at 713-222-TIPS (8477), or to call the Memorial Villages Police Department at 713-365-3700.