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Suspect in St. Paul break-in caught by homeowner

By PAT PHEIFER, Star Tribune

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Jon Sokol wasn't trying to be a hero when he confronted a burglary suspect who had brazenly broken through the front door of his home in St. Paul.

Sokol, 49, said his adrenaline was flowing as he crept up the stairs, revolver in hand, from the basement bedroom he shares with his wife.

His wife had been awoken at about 4:45 a.m. Wednesday by their alarm system and initially thought Sokol had -- *again* -- opened the door to get the newspaper without turning off the alarm. But there he was, sleeping right next to her.

Then she heard footsteps. "I think there's somebody in the house," Sokol recalled her whispering. "I'm thinking to myself, 'Nooooo.'"

Sokol said he'd gotten to the second step when he saw somebody cross the room upstairs. "Oh my, there *is* somebody in our house," he thought.

"I grabbed our gun, which we keep for protection," he said.

"As I stepped around the corner, he hit me ... right between the eyes," Sokol said. "And I fired the gun.

"Down on the ground he went and I insisted, in a not very nice way, that he not move," he said. "I held him at gunpoint until the police arrived."

Michael G. Spencer, 31, of St. Paul, has been charged in Ramsey County District Court with two felony counts of burglary. He has a lengthy criminal record, including convictions for theft and burglary as recently as last year.

According to the criminal complaint, Spencer feigned "unconsciousness, but finally responded ... that he had not been shot" after police arrived at 5 a.m. Wednesday at the Sokols' home in the 1400 block of Carroll Avenue.

Spencer is being held in the Ramsey County jail in lieu of \$50,000 bail.

Sokol said the burglar had a knife, but Sokol doesn't know if he was hit by that or a fireplace poker that he noticed had been moved.

He ended up with a small cut on his forehead and a somewhat shattered sense of

security. He and his wife dead-bolted themselves in their bedroom Wednesday night, and still he stayed awake all night keeping watch while his wife slept.

The neighborhood has been on guard lately, he said. Two vehicles were vandalized a block from the Sokols' house last week, and on the night of the burglary, two other vehicles were vandalized and a porch was broken into.

Sokol said he doesn't know the defendant and doesn't know why his house was targeted. It's well-lit, he said, and has signs front and back about the alarm system.

"It's a happy ending, I guess," Sokol said. "The good guy's still alive, for the time being. And the bad guy is captured. It turned out like you see in the movies."

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