

Former Walla Walla businessman set for fraud sentencing

By **ANDY PORTER**
For the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — A former Walla Walla businessman who operated a chain of car dealerships in eastern Washington, Idaho and Oregon faces sentencing this summer after pleading guilty to a criminal charge in federal court.

Mark Gilbert pleaded guilty April 20 to fraud in connection with a document related to the purchase of a home in Hawaii in 2014. His sentencing is scheduled for July 28 in U.S. District Court in Spokane.

Gilbert became a well-known figure in the Walla Walla business community after coming to the area in 2002 from the Portland-Vancouver area. By 2012, he had acquired auto dealerships in Walla Walla, College Place and Moses Lake along with dealerships in Milton-Freewater, Pendleton and Moscow, Idaho.

In exchange for the guilty plea, prosecutors have agreed to dismiss charges of bank fraud, two counts of aggravated identity theft and making a false declaration in relation to a bankruptcy case.

According to court documents, the charge Gilbert pleaded to is a class A misdemeanor with a maxi-



The Gilbert Auto dealership in Pendleton closed in 2013 after filing for bankruptcy. The former owner, Mark Gilbert, pleaded guilty on April 20, 2022, to a federal fraud charge and faces sentencing July 28 in U.S. District Court in Spokane.

East Oregonian, File

mum penalty of one year in prison, plus up to one year supervised release, not more than five years probation, a fine not to exceed \$100,000 and a mandatory \$25 special penalty assessment.

The plea agreement states that prosecutors and Gilbert “agree that the appropriate

penalty is a three-year term of probation.”

A federal grand jury indicted Gilbert in November 2017 after hearing evidence presented by the U.S. Attorney’s office which alleged he made false statements for a \$745,000 mortgage loan to purchase the home on

the island of Hawaii.

The case has been continued numerous times due to the COVID-19 pandemic, medical problems Gilbert is suffering and other issues.

Among Gilbert’s dealings was construction of the Honda dealership on property alongside state Route

125 in College Place, which opened in 2011. This was accompanied by the city constructing Commercial Drive to provide access to the business and a bank.

Gilbert’s business dealings began to quickly unravel in 2012 after the city of College Place filed a civil lawsuit

alleging he had failed to fulfill promises on repayment of the Commercial Way project.

Other lawsuits rapidly followed by credit companies operated by Honda, Nissan, Ford and General Motors alleging Gilbert had violated agreements for repaying loans by converting funds for other uses instead of repaying debts owed. These were accompanied by other civil actions from lenders and others demanding debts owed.

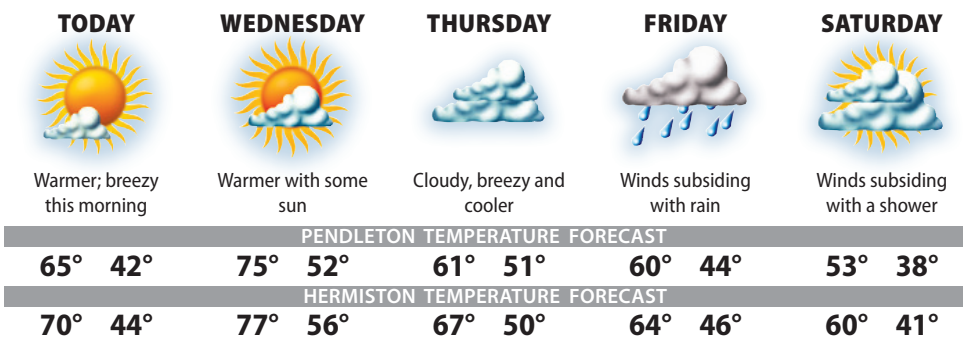
Another action that came in 2013 was from the state Office of the Attorney General.

In a complaint filed in Walla Walla County Superior Court, the AG’s office charged that four of Gilbert’s auto dealerships had violated consumer-protection laws by failing to promptly pay off customers’ trade-in vehicles, resulting in some buyers being forced to make payments on both their new vehicles and their trade-in to avoid collection agencies and repossession.

By the end of 2013, all of Gilbert’s auto dealerships had been closed, and in June 2014, he filed in federal court for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. The case was converted in August 2014 to Chapter 7 bankruptcy protection.

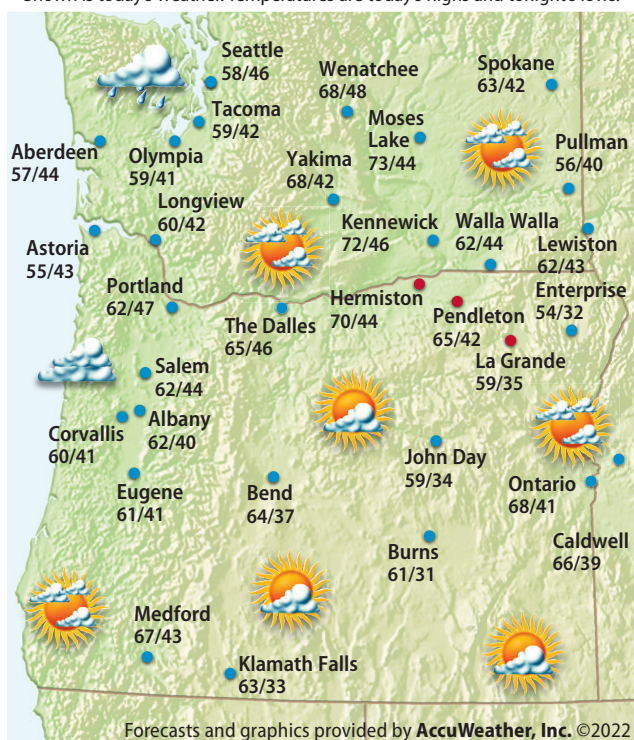
The auto dealerships in Walla Walla and College Place have since reopened under new ownership.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today’s weather. Temperatures are today’s highs and tonight’s lows.



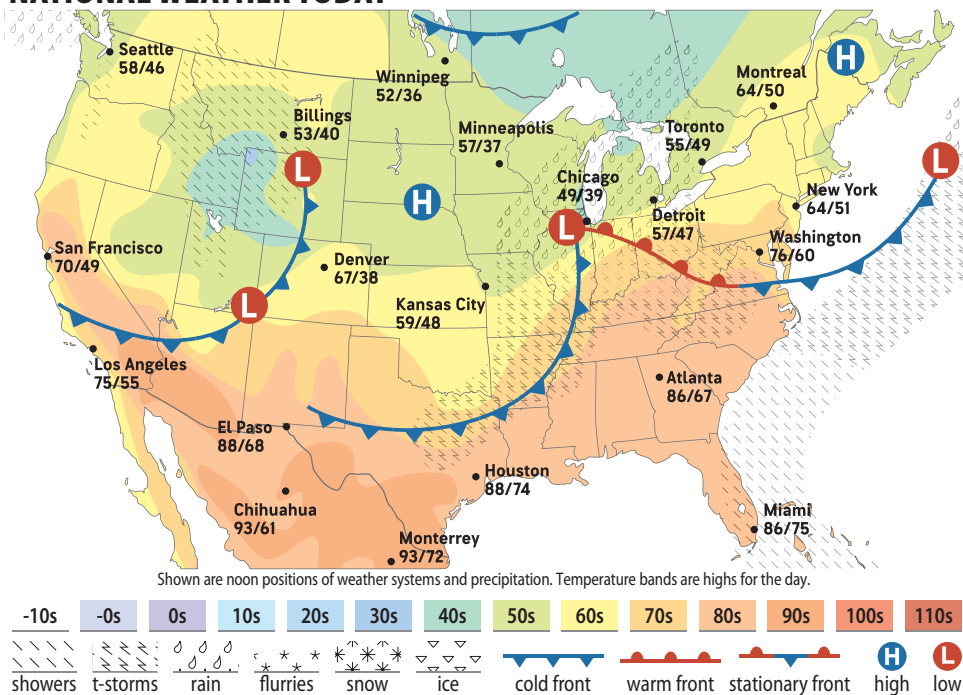
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	52°	44°
Normals	69°	43°
Records	91° (1900)	27° (2006)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.22"
Month to date		0.30"
Normal month to date		0.08"
Year to date		5.92"
Last year to date		3.80"
Normal year to date		5.42"
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	58°	46°
Normals	73°	42°
Records	92° (1937)	25° (1954)
PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.20"
Month to date		0.24"
Normal month to date		0.05"
Year to date		4.13"
Last year to date		1.99"
Normal year to date		3.60"
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Wed.	
Boardman	SW 8-16	S 4-8
Pendleton	WSW 8-16	NE 4-8
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	5:40 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	8:05 p.m.	
Moonrise today	7:08 a.m.	
Moonset today	11:29 p.m.	
First	Full	Last
May 8	May 15	May 22
		May 30

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday’s National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 101° in Vernon, Texas Low 10° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Baker County commissioners seek proposals for ambulance services

By **SAMANTHA O’CONNOR**
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The Baker County Board of Commissioners took a significant step last week toward finding a new ambulance provider for Baker City and more than half of the county should city officials follow through on a plan to stop operating ambulances through the city fire department on Sept. 30.

Commissioners on Wednesday, April 27, voted 3-0 to approve a request for proposals for an ambulance provider for the Baker Ambulance Service Area.

That covers Baker City and about two-thirds of the rest of the county, including Baker and Sumpter valleys.

The county has three other ambulance service areas — in the Richland, Halfway and Huntington areas.

By Oregon law, the county, not cities, is responsible for ensuring there is ambulance service in designated areas.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said during the

meeting at the county courthouse that with the city having set the Sept. 30 deadline, county officials needed to approve the RFP as part of the preparations for finding a replacement provider.

That’s likely to be a private company.

The RFP will be posted on the county’s website, www.bakercounty.org. The county will accept proposals from possible ambulance providers through June 3. The county is calls for a minimum 5-year contract.

After reviewing a report from City Manager Jonathan Cannon on March 22, the Baker City Council voted to notify the county that the city intended to discontinue ambulance service Sept. 30.

The reason, Cannon said, is the city, as has been the case for many years, spends more to operate ambulances than it collects in ambulance billing. The shortfall averaged about \$730,000 for the past five fiscal years, and the city projects a \$581,000 gap for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30.

Cannon said with ambu-

lance call volumes increasing, he expects the city would need to hire three more firefighter/paramedics later this year, which would widen that financial gap.

Baker County, which is giving the city \$100,000 for ambulance services this fiscal year, has offered \$150,000 for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Commissioners said April 27 they have not received a response from the city to that offer.

Cannon, though, has said he believes the city would need about \$750,000 to be able to continue ambulance services.

If the city does stop operating ambulances, the loss of about \$1 million in annual revenue from ambulance billing would force the city to cut six firefighter/paramedic positions. The fire department is budgeted for 12 positions this fiscal year, although two of those are vacant now.

Baker City Fire Department crews handle far more ambulance calls than fires — about 80% to 85% of calls are for ambulances.

IN BRIEF

Baker City resident warns of Medicare phone scam

BAKER CITY — Phyllis Fox wasn’t about to tell the fast-talking man on the telephone any of the details on her Medicare enrollment card.

But she worries other people might be temporarily fooled by the phone scam.

Fox, who lives in Baker City, said the caller, who spoke with a foreign accent, told her Medicare would be sending her a new card and he needed the information from her current card.

Fox said the call came on her home line — she doesn’t have a cellphone.

After hanging up, she called a Medicare office and spoke with someone who told her the agency had been “inundated” recently with questions about similar scam calls.

According to AARP, phone scams have been common since the federal government sent a new card to every Medicare beneficiary between April 2018 and January 2019. The new cards are designed to reduce the risk of identity theft.

Previous cards showed the person’s Social Security number, but the new cards use a unique, randomly assigned combination of numbers and letters — the Medicare Beneficiary Identifier.

In a common type of phone scam, according to AARP, the caller asks the Medicare recipient to verify personal information or pay a processing fee to activate the new card.

According to AARP, Medicare employees won’t call unless they’re responding to a legitimate request from a beneficiary.

—EO Media Group

CORRECTION: A headline used an inaccurate figure on Page A3 of the Thursday, April 28, edition East Oregonian. The figure should have been \$627K.

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