

# Man charged with thefts from storage facility

By Jayson Jacoby  
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

Baker City Police arrested a local man Saturday morning, Dec. 26, on charges that he stole items from at least three recreational vehicles parked at a storage facility.

Alexander Prentice Griffin, 29, whom police described as a transient, was cited on multiple charges and released.

Charges include three counts of unlawful entry into a motor vehicle, second-degree theft, second-degree

criminal mischief and second-degree criminal trespassing.

The incident started about 5:52 a.m. on Saturday when Baker City Police received a report from the Safe-T-Stor self storage business at 3100 15th St. about someone taking items from the business to a trailer in the 3300 block of H Street.

The person who called police said multiple trips had been made and that the security gate at the facility had not been opened, Police Chief Ray Duman said.

Police found that the perimeter chain

link fence at the business had been cut, and that at least three recreational vehicles had been entered.

Police later found Griffin on 15th Street near H Street. They recovered multiple pieces of camping gear that had been stolen from vehicles at the storage facility and taken to a home where Griffin was staying.

In addition to the charges related to the thefts, Griffin was cited for a contempt of court warrant from Baker County Justice Court.

## RESCUE

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McCue learned that Frazier was acquainted with one of McCue's friends, Mike Williams of Baker City. McCue said he told Frazier that if the hunters didn't return, he could call Williams, who would then get in touch with McCue.

About 7:30 p.m., McCue's phone rang.

The caller was Williams.

The hunters were still missing.

McCue said he and Williams, snowmobiles in tow, headed toward the mountains and arrived back at Catherine Creek Summit around 8:30 p.m.

McCue said that although he and Coles hadn't seen any other snowmobilers on their earlier ride, when they went more than 15 miles east to the West Eagle Meadows areas, he did recall seeing fresh snowmobile tracks.

Snow fell on Christmas night and through much of the day Saturday in the area, McCue said.

He and Williams rode east on Road 77. At 10:33 p.m. — he checked the time — McCue found the hunters' snowmobile parked near the junction of Road 77 and a spur road, No. 860, which was blocked by a tank trap and fallen trees.

The junction is about seven miles east of Catherine Creek Summit.

McCue and Williams rode back to the highway to tell Bill Frazier what they had found, and to get to a place where they had cell service.

McCue said he initially called the Baker County Sheriff's Office, although the snowmobile was actually just over the county line in Union County.

The Union County Sheriff's Office received a call about the missing hunters at 11:32 p.m. Saturday, said Lt. Ken Woodward.

Woodward said the sheriff's office activated its search and rescue team and requested help from the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

Ash said his phone rang about 1 a.m. on Sunday. He also summoned the county's



Travis Ash/Contributed Photo

The hound dog that accompanied a pair of hunters was cold but otherwise unharmed.

search and rescue team.

Ash said he and Downing arrived first, driving a side-by-side all-terrain vehicle equipped with tracks.

McCue led the pair to the snowmobile.

Ash said the hunters' boot tracks — they weren't wearing snowshoes — were easy to follow through the snow of the otherwise untrampled 860 road, which led north toward the South Fork of Catherine Creek.

Ash estimated the snow was three feet deep.

Although he and Downing wore snowshoes, Ash said that when he stepped into the snow without the aid of the snowshoes he sank almost up to his waist.

Ash said walking the 860 Road was relatively easy as the road is mostly flat.

When he and Downing reached the end of the road near Huckleberry Spring, they saw that the hunters' tracks continue down a steep slope to the north.

Ash said he and Downing decided to continue following the tracks rather than wait for more searchers.

Once they left the road their progress slowed, and the going was much more difficult, Ash said.

"It was so steep that anytime you went to make a turn, if you didn't dig your

(snowshoe) cleats in you went down," he said.

Eventually he and Downing unstrapped the snowshoes because it was easier — though not easy — to wallow through the snow without them.

Ash said he and Downing reached the South Fork of Catherine Creek near its confluence with two tributaries — Corral and Prong creeks.

The hunters' tracks continue north up Corral Creek.

Ash said the creeks weren't solidly frozen, and he and Downing broke through the ice in several places. They were wearing waterproof boots and gaiters, but Ash said he wondered whether the hunters, who also had broken through the ice, had gotten soaked.

A little before 8:30 a.m., Ash heard voices responding when he and Downing made one of their frequent calls or whistles.

They reached Curtis and Frazier at 8:34 a.m. by Ash's watch.

They were, Ash said, "very appreciative."

He said the pair had heard what they thought were calls a few minutes before Ash and Downing arrived.

Ash joked that that might have been him and Downing muttering, none too happily,

when they broke through the creek ice.

The hunters had a Bic lighter, he said, and using paper business cards from Frazier's wallet they kindled a small blaze to help dry their socks, which had indeed been soaked while they crossed the creek bottom. They also had a dry bag they used to collect water from the creek to slake their thirst.

"It must have been a miserable night," Ash said.

The rescuers and the hunters hiked north along Corral Creek to the 620 spur road, where a side-by-side from the Union County Sheriff's Office was able to reach them.

While they waited, Ash said he and Downing built a bigger fire and gave Curtis and Frazier food and water.

It's not clear how low temperatures plummeted during the night. The nearest weather station is the Taylor Green snow-measuring site, which recorded a low of 24 degrees. But Taylor Green is on a ridge, where temperatures on still, clear winter nights usually are warmer than in creek bottoms such as where the hunters spent the night, as cold air tends to sink into low areas.

Ash said he didn't have a thermometer. But he said it was cold enough that when he removed his gloves, which were wet from the creek crossing, they froze rapidly.

Ash said Curtis and Frazier did well to get even a meager fire going.

Without the flames, the pair would have been very vulnerable to hypothermia, a life-threatening lowering of the body's core temperature.

"It could have been a recipe for disaster," Ash said. "I'm glad we found them when we did."

While Ash and Downing were trudging through the snow, McCue was still aboard his snowmobile. He spent the entire night patrolling with Williams, stopping occasionally to shout.

"It wasn't very fun," McCue said. "I was freezing cold. My voice was gone."

But McCue said he was committed to the rescue.

"If I can be an asset, I'm going to be there," he said.



Facebook screenshot

A screenshot from a video on Facebook of the Christian Life Center's Christmas celebration shows the women's choir gathering on stage. Around 100 people reportedly attended the service Sunday, Dec. 20, in Elgin.

# Some churches in Union County continue to have in-person events

By Kaleb Lay

The (La Grande) Observer

UNION COUNTY — While some faith organizations in Union County have foregone in-person services and gatherings around the Christmas holiday to avoid spreading COVID-19, others have forged ahead despite the risk.

In Island City, the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church plans to hold a three-day youth conference over the New Year holiday, raising concerns about COVID-19 transmission and the potential for another outbreak.

A June outbreak of COVID-19 was tied to Lighthouse Pentecostal, when at least 236 people were infected following several in-person events the church held. The outbreak set back Union County's reopening at the time and the story garnered national news coverage.

Now, as the pandemic has reached its most severe stages across the state and nation, the faith group plans to convene a youth gathering dubbed "Avalanche 2020."

Lighthouse Pentecostal declined multiple requests to comment and respond to questions about the event, its importance to their faith or what safety measures church leaders are implementing.

In Facebook posts advertising the event, the church declared that a "youth hangout" would take place after services with "food, gym and games." Lighthouse Pentecostal also is selling Avalanche merchandise in its online store.

The Oregon Health Authority and federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have warned people not to gather with those outside their own household, and Oregon, California and Washington issued joint advisories against non-essential travel.

Lighthouse Pentecostal is not alone in forging ahead with gathering plans for the holidays. The Christian Life Center in Elgin on Sunday, Dec. 20, held an in-person service.

"It was wonderful," said Christian Life Center pastor Eli Smith. "We had a special kids ministry and women's choir. It was just a great family atmosphere. Everybody was excited and rejoicing, and (there was) a sense of peace. That's really what we were hoping for."

A video on the church's Facebook page shows groups of un-masked attendees singing in close proximity, and people can be heard coughing in the indoor crowd.

Smith said around 100 people attended the service, which was more than usual, but he said he was confident no one sick attended and that the gathering would not lead to a rise in local COVID-19 cases.

"I'm not worried at all, absolutely not," Smith said. "We haven't had any cases or outbreaks this whole time, from the very beginning of COVID until now, just because ... common sense. If they feel like they're sick or they've been around anyone with COVID, they're gonna take the necessary precautions and self-isolate for 14 days and that kind of stuff."

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## MERCHANTS

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"Baker is trying to survive the pandemic, the restaurants are barely making it," he said. "People took their time, poured their heart into it or opened a restaurant or whatever, and then they just can't pay bills."

At Queen City Modern, owner Ann Bryan said prior to the Christmas season that business had "been actually very good."

"People have been shopping local and supporting local," Bryan said. "I feel like it's been pretty busy, it definitely has picked up. I think people are intentionally trying to make a point to support local businesses during this time."

Bryan, who closed her business in March until early July, said business was relatively brisk during the summer, a trend she attributed mostly to visitors, but sales were sluggish in October through the middle of November.

Bryan, who also has a coffee shop, Mad Matilda's, said the ban on indoor dining that started Dec. 3 hurt that part

of her business.

Like Almond, Bryan believes the eclectic offerings at local shops gives merchants an advantage.

"I think with all the shops in Baker, we all have the same things you can get out of town and even more unique products," Bryan said. "Personally, I try to source out products that are unique and quality and I also keep my price points reasonable."

Bryan said she requires customers to wear masks, and she has masks available for those who need one.

"We've been sanitizing doorknobs and the computers after people leave," she said. "So we are trying to take all precautions that we can."

Josey Gaslin, who owns The Sycamore Tree, said pre-Christmas sales were below normal, but not dramatically so.

"It's been busy, but not as busy as most years," Gaslin said.

She has designated one door for entry and one for exit, and set up a station near the entrance with hand sanitizer.

"We are encouraging small

group sizes and we are limiting the number of people we can have in the building at once based on state requirements but fortunately we haven't had to turn anyone away yet because just the way the groups come in, it tends to not be an issue with capacity yet," Gaslin said. "We also are making sure to disinfect any common areas, the door handles, register stations like the counter and the card processing machines. Employees are washing their hands obviously a lot anyways."

At Mad Habit Boutique,

owner Chelsa Mitchell said an increase in her online sales through Instagram has helped her weather the pandemic.

During the holiday shopping season, Mitchell attributes a buy local campaign with helping her business and other local merchants.

"The push for keeping it local and the efforts of the Baker City Trailhead and the Baker City Downtown, all the work they've done to really encourage folks to do as much shopping locally as they can," Mitchell said. "They have that

whole slogan, 'put your money where your heart is,' that was a really good keep it local campaign. A lot of people subscribed to that and already do, but understood that of any year, this is the year that they needed to really get out and be really mindful of where they were spending their money."

Cherie Evans, who owns

Random Resales and Riches, a consignment store, said her sales have fluctuated both before and during the holiday season.

"It really hasn't changed that much for me," Evans said. "I think just because of the kind of business I am, because I have such a variety, I think, of anything and everything, it just kind of comes and goes."



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