

Parker accused of trying to run over men at marijuana grow

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

Former marijuana business owner and convicted felon Michael Alan Parker ended Wednesday night, Sept. 20, in Umatilla County Sheriff's handcuffs, accused of assault at a Hermiston marijuana grow.

The sheriff's office reported deputies Jon Roberts and Travis Stark responded to a location on North Highway 395 near Hermiston for a report of a driving complaint and assault.

County Undersheriff Jim Littlefield said the sheriff's office would not provide a more specific address because there is a marijuana grow operation at the location.

The deputies found two men who claimed Parker, 57, was not welcome there but refused to leave.

"The assault victims reported Parker started fighting with them and warned them that they would need guns to keep him away," according to the sheriff's statement.

They claimed Parker got in his vehicle and tried to run over one of them, but hit a fence and became stuck. He ran away, the sheriff's office reported, and the two victims left to call police. When they returned, they found several windows broken out of their motor homes and several damaged marijuana plants.

Undersheriff Jim Littlefield said the deputies found

Parker at the scene and arrested him on the following: second-degree attempted assault, fourth-degree assault, two counts of first-degree criminal mischief, one of second degree criminal mischief, second-degree trespass and two counts of menacing.

Deputies booked Parker into the county jail in Pendleton late Wednesday, according to online jail roster. Littlefield said Parker soon bailed out. Circuit court records show the district attorney's office has yet to file charges against Parker. The case remains under investigation.

Parker is the former owner of the Columbia Basin Compassion Center medical marijuana dispensary. When reached Friday, Parker would not comment on the arrest but stressed it had nothing to do with High Desert Cannabis, 2003 S.W. Emigrant Ave. in Pendleton. He also asserted he has no interest in the business other than buying his marijuana there. He hung up twice during questions and did not answer a third call.

The morning of his arrest, Parker was at the Pendleton Police Department. Police Chief Stuart Roberts said he was trying to demonstrate he had some authority over the High Desert Cannabis store.

Parker's daughter, Aimee Parker, co-owns High Desert with Michael Ekblad. Both live in Hermiston, according

to state records. Police Chief Roberts said the two appear to be at odds.

Roberts said Michael Parker came to his office Wednesday morning upset when High Desert staff would not allow him into the store. Roberts said Parker showed paperwork from his attorney, Will Perkinson — who also is the Pendleton municipal judge — intended for Aimee Parker to relinquish some authority in the business and give her father a say in its operations.

Parker said he was about to head down to the business and deal with the situation, according to Roberts, who said he advised Parker not to cause trouble. Roberts said he agreed with Parker's request for an officer to accompany him to the marijuana store.

"We were there on a kind of peacekeeping mission more than anything else," Roberts said.

Roberts said the officer at the scene called the local marijuana compliance agent for the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, and the agent ruled Parker could not manage the store. Roberts said Parker was angry when he left.

While he can't manage the store, Roberts said he vetted Parker as an employee. Parker has an extensive criminal history, Roberts said, but nothing in recent years that would disqualify him from working in a marijuana retail business.

Walden discusses immigration, cybersecurity in Hermiston stop

By JADE McDOWELL
STAFF WRITER



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden speaks during a Hermiston Rotary luncheon on Thursday in Hermiston.

The country's immigration system is a "byzantine mess" that Congress needs to fix, Rep. Greg Walden said Thursday at a Hermiston Rotary Club meeting.

Walden advocated for a comprehensive legislative package featuring stronger border security, a better visa system, an overhaul of the legal immigration process and a permanent solution for recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

"I'm actually glad the president put a hot rock in our pockets to get it done in the next six months," he said, referring to President Donald Trump's decision to begin phasing out DACA.

Walden said for a legal immigration system to work, a country must be able to control its borders with a combination of tactics, including physical barriers and patrols.

"You're never going to have a wall across the whole thing," he said. "That just doesn't make sense."

Not all undocumented immigrants are walking across the Mexican border, however. Walden said 45 percent of undocumented immigrants got into the country on a temporary visa, then overstayed that visa. There are tens of thousands of immigrants like that from Ireland alone, he said.

"We have a broken visa system," he said.

There are plenty of questions that need answered in an immigration overhaul. As tens of thousands of jobs in technical fields go unfilled because companies can't find qualified applicants,

Walden questioned whether it makes sense to give so many of the country's legal immigration spots to people chosen by lottery or based purely on a family connection. He also questioned whether the country should be "booting out" young people who could be helping fill those skilled jobs.

"What do you do with kids who, through no fault of their own, have been here since they were in diapers, and have been a good part of their community?" he asked.

Another hot topic Walden took questions about Thursday was cybersecurity. After North Korea's nuclear weapons, he said cyber warfare was the biggest threat to national security. Much of what is being done is classified, Walden said, but he could say that as chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, after "every one of the briefings I go to, I feel a little bit better."

Cybersecurity in the private sector is more difficult for Congress to deal with. Walden said Equifax CEO Richard Smith has been asked to testify in front of the Committee on Energy and Commerce

about the massive security breach the company recently experienced, which may have exposed the social security numbers of more than 143 million people. He said it was frustrating to read in the media that the company had used "admin" as both the username and password for one database.

"I can't fix stupid," he said. "I can punish it, but I can't fix it."

During lunch with the Rotary Club Walden also gave a rundown of some of the issues he has been working on. The Committee on Energy and Commerce is working with the Food and Drug Administration on a regulatory overhaul that will allow new drugs to reach the market faster. The committee re-authorized and re-wrote the "Brownfield sites" program that assists communities in cleaning up industrial lands that are contaminated but below the level of a Superfund site. They approved safe drinking water legislation that appropriates \$8 billion over 5 years to combat lead contamination through means like replacing old drinking fountains at schools.

Council eases residential lot rules

By JADE McDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

Residential properties that have laid empty in Hermiston may come to life after the city relaxed residential development standards and approved a new infill properties program Monday.

In response to a city council goal of encouraging more housing development, the city's planning commission had two workshops with members of the real estate community and wrote a set of amendments to the city's code. City Planner Clint Spencer said one of the biggest problems facing developers in Hermiston is the high cost of bare land, and one developer had commented that even being able to put one or two extra houses into a development often makes the difference to whether a project pencils out.

"We want to help them recoup their investment," he said.

To do that, the city reduced lot size requirements by 1,000 square feet, with the exception of lots for duplexes in R-3 zones, which went from a minimum of 7,000 square feet to 6,500 square feet. Lot coverage

maximums were increased by 10 percent in each zone, with a single family dwelling in an R-1 zone now allowed to take up 40 percent of the lot instead of 30, plus another 10 percent for a porch, gazebo or patio.

Front yard setbacks were also reduced. While garages must still be 20 feet from the front of a property, other parts of the home can now come within 15 feet and covered porches can come within 10.

STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Hannah Hair
Senior - McLoughlin High School

Hannah currently has a 4.0 Grade Point Average. Hannah is a member of Mac-Hi Leadership Class, Varsity Club and FFA. Hannah spends many hours doing community service in her community and school. Hannah has served several different offices in FFA, President 2 years, Sentinel and reporter. Hannah has been a 4 years participant in Softball and Basketball.

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