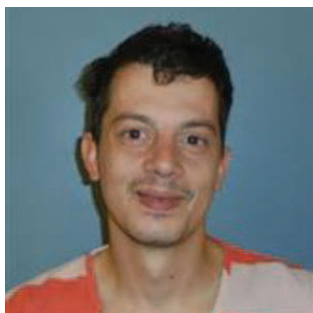


# Hermiston man pleads guilty to two stabbings

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
STAFF WRITER

A Hermiston man accused of stabbing two others last June pleaded guilty on Friday to two counts of attempted murder.

Aaron Martin Zuwala, 34, who appeared by video in Hermiston Circuit Court, had previously pleaded not guilty to stabbing Harold Lloyd Piercy and Richard James Rukaveno in June, but changed his plea on Friday. Four other counts, two of assault in the first degree and two of unlawful use of



Aaron Zuwala

a weapon, were dropped. Zuwala will serve two, 90-month sentences concurrently, minus the five months he's already spent in jail.

He is not eligible for a

reduction of sentence, and will have a three-year, post-prison supervision period. The court also suggested that he receive mental health services after prison.

Zuwala was arrested June 4 for stabbing Piercy and Rukaveno at a residence near a storage unit on Hermiston's Kelli Boulevard. He knew both of the victims.

Though Zuwala was ordered to have no contact with Rukaveno, he was only ordered to have no offensive contact with Piercy, at Piercy's request.

Jaclyn Jenkins, the Uma-

tilla County lead deputy district attorney, said she had been able to speak with Piercy, but the state was never able to track down Rukaveno after he went to the hospital. She said Piercy was favorably disposed toward Zuwala, and said he would like to have contact with him if Zuwala was open to the idea.

Zuwala spoke briefly at the end of the hearing, saying only that he regretted his actions.

"I can't believe this all happened, and I'm really sorry," he said. "It's kind of

a mystery to me why I did it, too."

Zuwala's defense attorney, Dan Stephens, said he had his client evaluated by a physician after the incident.

"Mr. Zuwala only has one little misdemeanor in his past," Stephens said. "I was concerned about psychological issues. It's very bizarre that this would occur the way it did."

But he said a doctor found no psychological issues.

"This was kind of a perfect storm of things going on in Mr. Zuwala's life," Stephen said. "There was

some substance abuse. Mr. Zuwala's been very apologetic about everything that happened."

According to court records, Zuwala has not one but several misdemeanors, including criminal mischief in the second degree, theft in the second degree, and furnishing alcohol to a person under 21.

Both Jenkins and Stephens said they did not want to comment further about the incidents leading up to the stabbing, or why Piercy was favorably disposed to Zuwala.

## Instructor at prison wins state award

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
STAFF WRITER

Dulcie Hays knows what it's like to have no one believe in you.

Growing up in Irrigon in a poor family, she said teachers and classmates never expected her to succeed.

Now the 2018 Oregon GED Educator of the Year, Hays draws on her own background as she helps inmates work toward their General Education Development certificates.

"I don't give up on people who society has already given up on," she said. "I get that."

Hays won the statewide award after a 15-year career with BMCC, 13 of which she's spent working as a teacher at Two Rivers Correctional Institution. She teaches inmates who are working toward their GED degrees, covering several subjects and every skill level. She also teaches a few times a week at the BMCC Hermiston campus, working with GED students.

Hays still thinks about the experiences that shaped her early education. Capable and ready to learn, she was hampered by other barriers.

"We were the poorest, whitest trash family in Irrigon," she said. "People never let me forget who my brothers were, who



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI  
RAMAKRISHNAN

**Dulcie Hays is the Oregon GED Educator of the Year. Hays is a teacher at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla.**

my cousins were. So I hated school. Freshman year, I missed so much school they took me off the roster."

But something clicked for Hays when, on a day she was suspended from school, her mom took her along to one of her classes at BMCC.

"It was the first time I'd really seen her motivated," Hays said, recalling that sitting in the class inspired her as well. "They just really wanted to help people."

After attending BMCC and Eastern Oregon University, she

returned to Irrigon, and applied for a job opening as an assessment and training specialist at BMCC. The job included training teachers, tutoring students for the GED, and administering tests.

In 2005, a teacher left the program, and others encouraged her to apply. Although she didn't have a master's degree, Hays created a lesson plan, and got the job — her current role.

Working with a group of about 12 students at a time, Hays teaches at TRCI five days a week, three classes a day.

She will have inmates, who have already passed the course, serve as tutors as they cover four subjects.

"We're teaching science, social studies, reading and math all at the same time," she said.

Because students are all coming in with different levels of skill and experience, they often have to individualize the lessons.

"I'm constantly looking for patterns, and having multiple objectives for every lesson, so everyone is getting something out of it," she said.

Along with writing grants and advocating for corrections-specific curriculum, much of Hays' time goes into understanding how individual students learn.

"I ask, 'What's something you know well? How would you

teach that to somebody?'" Hays said. "There's nothing you can't learn. More than the curriculum itself, I've had to adapt the approach."

Hays said about 30 percent of inmates statewide come in without a GED certificate. Getting one while incarcerated is often a springboard to further education.

Tammy Krawczyk, director of college prep at BMCC, said six students have completed their GED certificate since July. That number does not include the prison, she said.

But she said overall, BMCC has seen an increase in the number of students completing GED certificates, and those transferring into college courses.

Hays said she has seen a connection between the students who complete the GED program and succeed in school, and success once they leave TRCI.

"I've seen people out in town who were in our program," she said. "We've gotten postcards, phone calls from people wanting letters of recommendation, which we don't give. Or they just want to say thank you."

She said increasingly, there are programs to move former inmates back into the workforce, and highlighted the skills they develop if they apply themselves while in prison.

Still, it's a challenge for many

## Vehicle recovered after theft

HERMISTON HERALD

A man was arrested Thursday for allegedly stealing a vehicle from Agape House, a nonprofit organization that collects food donations and supplies for people in the Hermiston area.

Chad Seelye had parked the stolen 2004 Chevy Silverado in the Rite Aid parking lot on South Highway 395, and a Umatilla County Sheriff's Office deputy spotted him walking around the vehicle. Seelye was taken into custody in the Walker's Farm Kitchen parking lot.

Agape House Executive Director Dave Hughes said they noticed the vehicle missing from the property on Monday night. The thief had removed the license plate from the vehicle and put a different one on. Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the license plates belonged to a stolen vehicle out of Kennewick, which officers have not yet tracked down.

Hughes said the vehicle was unlocked, and it's possible the keys had been left in there.

He said no valuables were taken from the truck, and the truck had minor damage.

Hughes said this is likely the third time a vehicle has been stolen from Agape House.

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