

Bi-Mart pharmacies ship customer files to nearby pharmacies as close

ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The long lines at local pharmacy checkouts may grow even longer, as Bi-Mart pharmacies close and ship customer files to other locations.

Don Leber, Bi-Mart vice president of marketing and advertising, explained the situation in an interview Thursday, Oct. 28. As Bi-Mart sold its pharmacies to Walgreens, most Bi-Mart pharmacies began closing — 56 in the Northwest, including 37 in Oregon. In cities where there is a Walgreens, Bi-Mart is sending customer files to Walgreens.

Several towns, however, do not have a nearby Walgreens pharmacy, which is the case for Bi-Marts in Hermiston, Pendleton, Baker City and La Grande. The distance from one of these locations to the nearest Walgreens pharmacy — in Kennewick, Ontario or Walla Walla — would involve a drive of more than 30 miles to around 100 miles, depending on location.

As commutes to distant pharmacies is impractical, Leber said arrangements are in the works to send customer files to other pharmacies.

The Hermiston Bi-Mart pharmacy, which closed Oct. 26, began transferring files to the Hermiston Safeway pharmacy Oct. 27, Leber said. Pendleton's files are going to the pharmacy at the town's Safeway as well on Nov. 11, the day after Bi-Mart's last day of operations, Leber said. The La Grande Bi-Mart pharmacy is likely to transfer files to Safeway, too, though a deal was not yet confirmed, Leber said. The transition would occur in mid-November.

On Oct. 28, Leber said he did not know where Baker City files would be shipped. Discussions over their transfer were ongoing. He said the Baker City Bi-Mart pharmacy would be open into November and would not close before a decision was made.

He added these dates are subject to change.

Leber said Walgreens

will keep 10 Oregon Bi-Mart pharmacies open. These pharmacies will operate under the Walgreens name. The list of 10 had yet to be confirmed by Thursday.

The problem of closing pharmacies

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, released a letter Oct. 20 referencing the Bi-Mart sale. In the letter, he expressed his "deep concerns about these closures." Wyden, in the letter, alludes also to fees that impose "financial strain" on pharmacies, which has caused 2,200 U.S. pharmacies to close. His letter calls for a "formal review of pharmacy closures in the U.S. in the last five years" and for regulation of fees.

Leber said that these fees, which Wyden sees as a problem, cost Bi-Mart millions of dollars every year. This is forcing the company to make this decision to exit the pharmacy business.

"We could no longer do it at a profit," he said. "Long haul, it would put Bi-Mart in jeopardy."

Investigation leads to arrest of man accused of child sex crimes

By BRYCE DOLE
Hermiston Herald

A months-long Hermiston police investigation led to the arrest of a man on Oct. 26 for a slew of child sex crimes, according to Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston.

Steven Ira Brown, 36, is in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, for felony counts of using a child in sexual conduct, second-degree sexual abuse, luring a minor, and misdemeanor counts of contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor and third-degree sexual abuse.

Edmiston said police began investigating Brown

in June. He wouldn't disclose any details about the charges, but said the victim involved in the case is a 16-year-old girl who knew Brown. He said Brown's alleged actions started at least six months before the police investigation began.

Edmiston also wouldn't describe their relationship other than to say that the two knew each other, adding Brown was "not a stranger" to the teen.

Brown knew Hermiston police were investigating him, Edmiston said, as officers seized property from his home. Edmiston said Brown tried to hide from police but was eventually

found in his home. On Oct. 26, police waited outside his home. After calling his attorney, Brown "came out to face the music," Edmiston said.

Edmiston also described Brown as a "well-known social media warrior antagonist." On his Facebook page, Brown has posted several videos criticizing police and the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office.

Edmiston said police have been in the process of locking down digital information in the case that they will provide to prosecutors.

Brown remains in the local jail with a preliminary bail of \$100,000.

Normal November expected after warm October, NOAA says

Hermiston Herald

According to preliminary data received by NOAA's National Weather Service in Pendleton, temperatures at the Hermiston airport averaged warmer than normal during the month of October.

The average temperature was 54.1 degrees, which was 2.2 degrees above normal. High temperatures averaged 66.6 degrees, which was 1.4 degrees above normal. The highest was 78 degrees on Oct. 3. Low temperatures averaged 41.5 degrees, which was 2.9 degrees above normal. The lowest was 27

degrees, on the Oct. 12.

There were two days with the low temperature below 32 degrees.

Precipitation totaled 1.25 inches during October, which was 0.53 inches above normal. Measurable precipitation — at least .01 inch — was received on five days, with the heaviest, 0.46 inches, reported on Oct. 22.

Precipitation this year has reached 3.78 inches, which is 4.13 inches below normal.

The highest wind gust was 54 mph, which occurred Oct. 24. There was one day when the wind exceeded 50 mph.

The outlook for November from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for near normal temperatures and above normal precipitation. Normal highs for the Hermiston Municipal Airport fall from 57.0 degrees at the start of November to 43.0 degrees at the end of November. Normal lows fall from 33.0 degrees to 28.0 degrees. The 30-year normal precipitation is 1.19 inches.

The National Weather Service is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department.

Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District chief on leave amid investigation

Private investigator looks into the matter

By BRYCE DOLE
Hermiston Herald

The Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District has placed its fire chief, Steve Potts, on paid leave amid an investigation into an "internal matter," according to Kyle Sipe, chairman of the fire district board.

Sipe said two volunteers with the fire district

recently met with him and had complaints about Potts. That prompted the board to place Potts on leave on Oct. 19 and hire a private investigator to look into the matter, Sipe said.

Sipe would not disclose any information about what the complaints were, nor why the board placed Potts on leave. He said he was "not at liberty" to discuss the ongoing investigation.

Potts did not respond to a call seeking comment.

Scott Stanton, chief of Umatilla Fire District No. 1, will take charge of the department for now, Sipe said.

Sipe, an instructional and robotics teacher with the Umatilla School District, could not elaborate on the investigation's timeline and would not disclose any information about the investigator.

When the investigation concludes, Sipe said the board will analyze the findings and determine what to do next.

Police pursue man for more than an hour after stabbing

By BRYCE DOLE
Hermiston Herald

Hermiston police chased a local man by car and foot for more than an hour on Oct. 26 after a stabbing, according to Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston.

The arrest came, Edmiston said, after the man crashed his car into someone's garage.

Anthony Robert Jones, 44, of Hermiston, is in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, and faces numerous charges, including first-degree robbery, second-degree assault, domestic violence crimes and endangering a person protected by a Family Abuse Protection Act order.

Edmiston said police at about 9:50 p.m. on Oct. 26 responded to the Walmart Supercenter after receiving reports of a domestic incident. Officers found a 44-year-old woman was stabbed twice.

Jones, police reported, is her ex-husband and the suspect in the stabbing.

Bystanders told police the man was trying to get money from the woman. She drove to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, along with police.

Jones left his car at Walmart, so police waited for him there.

He returned and got in the car before police could stop him, Edmiston said.

That began a car chase around Hermiston that would last from 12:14 a.m. to nearly 1 a.m.

At least four police cars pursued Jones, who Edmiston said traveled at "crazy" speeds around town. Police tried to set down spike strips but were unable to in time, Edmiston said.

The car chase ended when Jones crashed into a garage on the 800 block of East Pine Avenue. He fled on foot. Police caught Jones and arrested him

around 1:25 a.m. on the 200 block of Southeast Seventh Street. He remains in the jail on preliminary bail of \$790,000.

Edmiston described the length of the chase around town as "atypical." He said police want car chases to end sooner, calling it a "risk versus reward" scenario. He said police decided to continue the evening pursuit because there were few cars on the road and the weather was favorable.

The case now is in the hands of the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office.

State court records show a grand jury on Oct. 28 indicted Jones on 14 counts in all — six misdemeanors and eight felonies. He faces an arraignment on the charges on Wednesday, Nov. 3.

Records also show Jones has a history of criminal cases, including a 1998 conviction for attempted murder.

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