



# MERRY CHRISTMAS!



## Robbery suspect out of prison on compassionate release

By PHIL WRIGHT  
Hermiston Herald

The man Hermiston police arrested Friday, Dec. 17, following a bank robbery was out of federal prison on compassionate release.

Clifford Uptegrove, 58, of Yakima, remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, on charges of first-degree robbery, first-degree theft and felony fleeing and unlawful use of a weapon. State court

records show Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer on Dec. 20 set Uptegrove's bail at \$1 million.

The robbery occurred Dec. 17 just before 3 p.m. at Umpqua Bank, 450 N. First St., Hermiston, according to Hermiston police Chief Jason Edmiston.

He said preliminary information showed that moments after the robbery, a Umatilla County sheriff's deputy spotted the suspect in a vehicle in the area of Northwest Geer Road

west of Home Depot. That led to a vehicle chase on Theater Lane and eventually to Northeast Harley Lane. The deputy tried to stop the suspect, but he took off driving again.

Hermiston police took the lead in the chase, Edmiston said, and police video shows the suspect pulled over, and to prevent him from fleeing again, a Hermiston officer in a pickup parked against the driver's door and pinned him in.

"They they took him out at gun-

point," Edmiston said.

While no one was injured in the robbery, according to Edmiston, it was an "incredibly traumatic situation for the employees at the bank."

Records show Uptegrove has a history of robbing banks.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Washington in 2005 issued a press release about Uptegrove, then 41, going to federal prison for more than 20 years plus five years probation

after he pleaded guilty to armed bank robbery and using a firearm during a crime of violence.

According to the press release, police caught Uptegrove in March 2004 after a robbery at the River-view Community Bank in Hazel Dell, Washington, and during questioning he admitted to nine robberies of credit unions from 2001-04, including twice hitting the Kennewick Com-

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## Bring on the snow!



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

John Putnam leaps to destroy a snowball Monday, Dec. 20, 2021, at Sunset Elementary School in Hermiston.

## Demand for holiday decorations increases at secondhand stores

By ALEX WITTWER and ERICK PETERSON  
EO Media Group

Locals decorating for Christmas are finding more of what they need this year at secondhand stores.

Local thrift stores are seeing an uptick in Christmas shoppers, especially new ones, as supply chain issues dim prospects for artificial trees, decorations and lighting at big box retail stores.

Over at the Hermiston Goodwill store on Monday, Dec. 20, there was a small inventory of Christmas decorations. Some of the goods were mixed in with other items — a wreath, for example, sat between a weed wacker and an empty golf club bag. Also, ornaments, stockings, plastic holly and more were organized on shelves and in bins. Seven artificial trees stood near the door.

Standing behind a register, a Goodwill employee said the store has been busy selling such items. Over at The Salvation Army Store & Donation Center, Pendleton, a volunteer picked up the phone to say the same thing. It is busy, she said, and the store seemed to have fewer Christmas decorations than in years past.

Open Dec. 18 and 19, the Outreach Thrift Store is closed throughout the remainder of the year. However, Carolyn Clemons, a store director, said she had been carrying Christmas decorations.

"We've had everything from trees to ornaments, Santas, snowmen and more," she said.

She said decorations sold "very well," and sales for the decorations made up half of her sales in recent weeks. Thanks in part to the sale of Christmas decorations, the store was able to pay its rent after only two weeks of being open, Clemons said. She reported being happy about this success, because the store benefits the Outreach Food Pantry.

"The amount of people buying Christmas (decorations) has been a lot bigger in the secondhand stores this year," said Randi Stauffer, a manager at People Helping People, 2635 Bearco Loop, La Grande. "The cool thing about secondhand stores is you're able to find that vintage Christmas, that antique Christmas and that retro Christmas."

The secondhand store's warehouse has aisles and boxes full of ornaments and Christmas supplies, including retro-looking bulbs and ornaments. A discerning eye might catch a personalized snowman ornament engraved with the name John in its base, or a red bulb decoration emblazoned with a family photo from decades past.

Walmarts in La Grande and Pendleton were out of artificial trees on Dec. 16. Christmas lights and decorations that once lined the shelves in Pendleton also took a tremendous hit, with very little supplies remaining. Pendleton, however, had some

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## All aboard!

The Christmas Express unites locals to bring food, toys to those in need

ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

Volunteers wrapped presents and packed food boxes Wednesday, Dec. 15, at the Hermiston Community Center, for the Christmas Express.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the annual drive to provide goods for needy families gathered enough food, toys and more to provide for 500 families. Schools, social services and churches were among the groups that identified the families. Each food box weighed nearly 100 pounds and contained a turkey, potatoes and onions.

The Hermiston Police Department was the orga-

nizing group, but the department's chief was not taking all the credit.

"Donations came from everywhere," Edmiston said, and the canned food donations from local schools was "huge this year."

Traditional donors included the Walchli family (both sides — John and Skip), the Troy Betz family, the Alan Cleaver family, and several clubs — Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and Altrusa. The program usually costs \$15,000-\$18,000, he said, and has received \$14,776.44 in donations.

Volunteers used to be "historically limited to the police department," Edmiston said, but other groups joined in recent years. Nowadays, the effort to collect and pack goods is city-wide, with government officials, firefighters and family members all helping.

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Nickolas L. Oatley/Contributed Photo

Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 Chief Scott Stanton, center, volunteers Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021, with Richard Cearns, left, the division chief of emergency medical services and training for the district, and his wife, Whitney Cearns, at the Christmas Express in at the Hermiston Community Center.