

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Jim Burke, with your local news and commentary for Friday, January 5, 2024.

This is from the *Peninsula Daily News (PDN)*: A Port Angeles woman is facing felony charges in one – and possibly two – counties for allegedly hopping behind the wheel of a Clallam Transit bus on December 27 and driving it almost all the way to Shelton. The Mason County Prosecutors Office has filed charges against Hailey Weatherbie, 35, for possession of a stolen motor vehicle. She has an arraignment hearing to enter a plea in Mason County Superior Court in Shelton on Monday. Clallam Transit General Manager Jim Fetzer said staff alerted him shortly before 5pm on December 27 that one of its buses on a layover at the Sequim Transit Center was missing. A review of video footage from outside the transit center showed a woman forcing the doors of the bus open and driving it away at 2:19pm. A transit worker also identified Weatherbie as being at the transit earlier in the day and inquiring about getting to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, Fetzer said.

The Mason County Sheriff's Office and Washington State Patrol were alerted when the bus' GPS tracking device identified its location on state Highway 3 near Allyn, just north of Shelton. Lt. Nathan Birkliid of the Mason County Sheriff's Office said it received a call from Mason County Emergency Communications around 5pm about a possibly stolen 29-foot Clallam Transit bus. A Mason County deputy identified the bus and pulled it over about 10 minutes later. The deputy confirmed Weatherbie matched the description of the person seen in the video footage and took her into custody, according to a Mason County probable cause statement. Weatherbie was booked into Mason County Jail for investigation of possession of a stolen motor vehicle and then was released on her own recognizance. Weatherbie was the only occupant on the bus when she was apprehended.

The buses are not started with a key, Fetzer said, but by following a certain sequence and engaging a master switch. Fetzer said, "She seemed to know what she was doing; she had to have had some knowledge," and he noted that Weatherbie drove carefully and under the speed limit. There was no damage to the bus, a 2022 Gillig diesel, which costs about \$600,000.

After heading east on U.S. Highway 101 and turning onto state Highway 3, Fetzer said the bus passed through the Bremerton ferry toll gate, turned around, stopped at a Bremerton gas station and then continued south. Fetzer said in light of the theft, Clallam Transit has instituted more stringent procedures that will greatly reduce the risk of a similar event. Drivers are now required to completely shut down buses that are in layover for more than an hour, thus preventing anyone from being able to start them.

In the *PT Leader* this week, Centrum's executive director Robert Birman announced that Fort Worden State Park received an award of \$600,000 in capital funds from the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust of Vancouver in support of restoring facilities there. Those funds are being matched by the Sage Foundation for a total of \$1.2 million earmarked for restoration of Centrum's artist cabins which provide year-round accommodations for visiting artists-in-residence and teaching faculty. He said, "The non-profits at Fort Worden are bringing significant private philanthropy to bear on improving the aging facilities at the Fort as evidenced by this most recent grant, and others we have obtained. The cultural Partners on the campus have taken on roughly one-third of the deferred maintenance needs on our campus, which allows the PDA, Parks, and the Fort Worden Foundation to focus on the remaining infrastructure and buildings that are essential to serving year-round guests and the visiting public. It is a win-win for everyone."

KPTZ Radio Port Townsend is one of the cultural partners in Maker's Square at the park, which includes Northwind Art, Centrum, and Port Townsend School of Woodworking. The programming Partners at Fort Worden were granted 25-year leases in 2022 under the condition that they individually assume all of the maintenance and restoration needs of their facilities. It is estimated that the Fort carries more than \$100 million of deferred maintenance needs throughout its campus. The Artist Cabins – six buildings built by the Army in 1941, most as temporary barracks – represent \$4.8 million in maintenance needs, or 47% of Centrum's total obligation under its lease. M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, created by the will of the late Melvin J. (Jack) Murdock, provides grants to organizations in five states that seek to strengthen the region's educational and cultural base in creative and sustainable ways.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening.