

This is a developing story, please check our website and Facebook page for updates.

A local Gallup man, Ryan “Bama” Westman, is wanted for allegedly beating a man on the head with a blunt object, according to McKinley County Sheriff’s Department investigators.

At press time Jan. 25, MCSO Inv. Merle Bates said police caught up with Westman in Gamerco Jan. 24 and pursued him on northbound U.S. 491 to the Shiprock, N.M. area. New Mexico State Police and San Juan County law enforcement took charge from that point.

As of 3:45 pm, Jan. 25, Bates said Westman is still “at large.”

The reported assault to 57-year-old Mitchell Chavez occurred at #15 Zeta St. around 8:30 pm, Jan. 22.

Chavez sustained severe head injuries and was airlifted to Flagstaff where’s he’s listed in critical condition.

The affidavit for arrest warrant states “the victim would die from his head injuries as soon as he was extubated.”

Witnesses told investigators that Chavez was sitting on a couch at the residence when Westman, 25, struck him on the head multiple times. He then asked the witnesses for help in dragging the victim's body out of the home, but they reportedly refused to help Westman with the deed.

Westman said in front of the witnesses that he "knocked that n--ger out and was leaving to Albuquerque to pick up his girlfriend," the warrant states.

Witnesses also told investigators that they weren't sure what sparked the fight, but Chavez and Westman arrived at the residence together and were attempting to sell a handgun to a neighboring home on Zeta Street.

Westman faces charges of aggravated battery, assault with intent to commit a violent felony (with intent to commit murder), aggravated assault (use of a deadly weapon), and tampering with evidence. If Chavez passes away from his injuries, MCSO Sgt. Robert Turney said charges against Westman will be upgraded to murder.

Westman's no stranger to trouble, and had a slew of warrants for his arrest during the summer of 2015.

He scaled the fence of McKinley County Adult Detention Center along with another inmate June 23, 2015, but was caught five hours later.

When police arrested Westman, just days before his thwarted escape, he was exiting a stolen vehicle and was booked on three outstanding warrants, receiving or transferring a stolen vehicle, possession of a firearm by a felon, and concealing his identity.

Additionally, during his summertime 2015 stint in jail, Westman was served an arrest warrant for a violent home invasion, in which he allegedly tied up and battered the homeowner and burglarized the residence. And he was served with another warrant for reportedly kidnapping a

man by gunpoint, tying him up, and leaving him in the remote McGaffey area, east of Gallup.

Turney said to immediately call 911 if you spot Westman. Do not approach, he's considered armed and dangerous.

By Babette Herrmann

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