

Westman transferred to Gallup to face murder charges

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 01 June 2018 07:57



On Monday, Ryan Westman came home to Gallup.

Westman 25, had been held in the San Juan County Jail since Jan. 24 on charges stemming from a pursuit after Westman headed north on U.S. Highway 491 from Gamerco to avoid capture by deputies for the McKinley County Sheriff's Office.

On May 28, he was transferred to the McKinley County Adult Detention Center to face charges of murder.

Westman, who is also known by the nickname "Bam," was charged in the Jan. 22 death of 57-year-old Mitchell Chavez who was beaten to death with an ax.

Westman comes back to an area where he has a string of more than a dozen arrests over the last five years for a series of violent crimes. Among them was being involved in a house invasion where the homeowner was tied up for several hours and threatened while Westman and his cohort reportedly ransacked his house.

Shortly after being arrested, Westman managed to escape from the county jail after he was allowed to go into the exercise yard. He was later recaptured several hours later.

Despite all of his arrests, Westman never received a prison sentence although he wound up spending several months in the county jail waiting for a final judgement on the charges filed against him.

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According to police and court records, Chavez was sitting on the couch at the home of a friend of his when Westman came up to him from behind and struck him on the head several times with the ax.

He then asked the other people in the house to help him get rid of the body but they refused. The reason for the attack was uncertain since before then, Westman and Chavez were said to be friends.

Chavez was found the next day and both Gallup Police and county deputies began an extensive search for Westman. They received a tip in the morning hours of Jan. 24 that Westman was at a certain house in Gamerco but when they went to arrest him, Westman saw them coming and was able to get to a car and escape by traveling at a high rate of speed, heading north on U. S. Highway 491.

He managed to evade both the county deputies and Navajo Police and headed into Farmington where city police there took up the chase. He was able to evade them as well, but later that day, he was spotted at a Farmington gas station by U. S. Marshalls and was wounded in a gun fight.

With his arrest, the various law enforcement agencies began meeting to see who would have first shot at trying him and the decision was made in favor of McKinley County where he was facing the murder charge.

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