

SILVER CITY DAILY PRESS

AND INDEPENDENT

Mimbres man charged after stabbing EMT

An EMT was stabbed in the throat Wednesday afternoon by a patient being transported to the hospital from Mimbres, forcing his partner to rescue him from the vehicle and flee.

The EMTs were picked up by a contractor with the Chino Mine and later transported to Gila Regional Medical Center. The injured EMT was then transported to another hospital for further treatment. His condition was unknown.

The assailant, identified in a press release from the Grant County Sheriff's Office as Kel J. Avena, 35, of Mimbres, was also taken to Gila Regional after deputies were able to remove him from the ambulance and take him into custody. That prompted a lockdown at the hospital for about an hour as a precautionary measure, hospital CEO Robert Whitaker told the Daily Press.

According to documents filed in Grant County Magistrate Court and the sheriff's press release, the incident began at 1:23 p.m. as Grant County Emergency Medical Services responded to a call in Mimbres from a man who had consumed some orange juice that he believed had been laced with a narcotic.

The two EMTs evaluated the man at the home, then transported him along N.M. 152 toward the hospital for further treatment. On the way, Avena started to fight with the EMT attending to him in the back of the ambulance, according to the press release.

The EMT driving the ambulance heard his co-worker calling for help and pulled the ambulance over on the side of the road. A screen in the cab of the ambulance that showed a live camera feed from the back of the vehicle showed Avena standing over the EMT, ac-

ording to court documents.

The driver exited the cab, opened the back doors of the ambulance and pulled his co-worker, who was bleeding profusely, out of the ambulance. Avena allegedly threatened the driver, and the driver was able to activate a locking mechanism to trap Avena inside. The EMT who had been driving assisted his partner to try and stop bleeding from a stab wound in the right side of his neck, and they fled westbound along the highway.

The mine contractor, identified in court documents as Daniel Reyes, saw the EMTs running and stopped to help. They were able to meet up a few miles down the road with another ambulance responding to assist after the attack.

Deputies arrived at the ambulance with Avena inside and broke a window, but that did not allow them to get inside. They were then advised on how to open the ambulance, and when they did, Avena fell from a side door, completely naked, according to the court filing. He complied with deputies' commands and was taken into custody.

STABBING Page 14

CITIZEN SCIENCE

DNA surveillance, agave planting expand rare bat's range

By JUNO OGLE
Daily Press Staff

An endangered species of bat has been detected far north of its only known roost in New Mexico, thanks in part to citizen scientists here in Grant County.

Volunteers, many of them with the Gila Native Plant Society, swabbed area hummingbird feeders over the last couple of years, collecting samples of saliva that would be tested for environmental DNA to learn which nectar-feeding species of the nocturnal mammals might be visiting.

Earlier this month, Bat Conservation International announced that the eDNA collected on those feeders, as well as from the bats' natural food sources of Palmer's agave blooms, detected the endangered Mexican long-nosed bat as far north as the Double E Wildlife Management Area, just northeast of Gila. That's about 100 miles from the species' known roost in the bootheel in Hidalgo County.

The detection here comes after a 2020 finding of Palmer's agave at its northernmost location in the Double E, said Kristen Lear, director of BCI's agave restoration initiative. That discovery was also made with the help of citizen scientists through an iNaturalist project with volunteers from Grant County.

DNA Page 15

(Photo Courtesy of Horizonline Pictures, Bat Conservation International)

A Mexican long-nosed bat clings to an agave plant. The northernmost record of the species was recorded in the Double E Wildlife Management Area about 30 miles north of Silver City, thanks to studies done by Bat Conservation International and citizen scientists in Grant County.

Silver Schools' mental health funds uncertain

While the continued funding of a federal mental health grant to Silver Consolidated Schools is still in question, the district will be able to continue its programs thanks to a state initiative, an administrator reported Wednesday to the school board.

Cindy Barris, associate superintendent for instruction, told board members during

their regular meeting Wednesday night that Silver Schools has been invited to be part of a mental health initiative with the New Mexico Public Education Department and Department of Health.

"Being part of that state team comes with some funding. That funding will allow us to keep the members of the team that we have," she said, referring

to the district's three mental health workers and an intern.

The money will also allow the district to continue offering software that students can access for mental health support.

The state funding should be secure for two or three years, Barris said, and the district is also pursuing other grants.

The federal funding — for now, at least — appears to be

on hold, she said. In 2023, the district was awarded a five-year, \$5 million grant for mental health initiatives through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. Last May, the U.S. Department of Education discontinued the Biden-era grants, saying they conflicted with the Trump ad-

SILVER Page 14

\$1



Silver City, Grant County, New Mexico
Gateway to the Gila Wilderness

Vol. CXXVI, No. 101
Sixteen pages

Saturday

Join us today! Call 575-388-1576 to subscribe or advertise

Feb. 21, 2026