

# The McDowell News

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## NATIVITY SCENE OF THE ACCIDENT



SUBMITTED PHOTO/OLD FORT POLICE DEPARTMENT

This photograph shows the damage that was done to the Nativity scene Monday morning at Bradley Park in Old Fort. The town is ordering a new Nativity scene, but it probably won't arrive until after Christmas. A bench placed in memory of Linda Bunch, founding member of the Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance, was also damaged.

# Truck plows through Christmas display

## Driver blames potato chip in Old Fort crash

BY MIKE CONLEY  
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With the fence around the Arrowhead Monument repaired, the town of Old Fort is now trying to put its Nativity scene back in place in time for Christmas.

On Monday at 8:45 a.m., Larry Gipson, 58, of Clayton, Ga., was driving his 2010 Dodge pickup truck east on Main Street in Old Fort. Gipson told police he was eating some potato chips while driving and one

of them lodged in his throat, causing him to black out. The truck went off the street, traveled through Bradley Park and struck the town's Nativity scene, according to Police Chief Melvin Lytle.

The accident took out Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Two shepherds and some sheep appeared to be unharmed.

The truck also hit the rock work, some shrubbery and a bench dedicated to the memory of Linda

Bunch, one of the founding members of the Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance. The nearby gazebo was not hit. Lytle said he estimated the damage to the park and its contents at around \$6,000.

No one was injured in this incident. Gipson was charged with reckless driving. The damage to his pickup is estimated at \$15,000, said Lytle.

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# Former chief: I don't deny taking cash

## Hardin says he had permission from VFD board members

BY RICHELLE BAILEY  
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Jimmy Hardin doesn't deny that he took money from Hankins-North Fork Volunteer Fire Department when he was chief. What he does deny is that he did it out of malice and behind the backs of department members.

"Yes I did take the money out of the fire dept.'s account with the impression that I could, but with every intentions of paying it back as soon as my check came

in from an insurance policy that I had cashed in but it was going to take 6 to 8 weeks before it got here," Hardin stated in an email to The McDowell News.

The former chief said he thought he had permission from the chairman and vice chairman of the board of directors.

"I had two vehicles broke down and that was what the money was for to fix the vehicles," he said in his email. "I was under the impression that ... (the vice chairman) would draw up a letter stating that I used the money to fix my vehicle so that I would be able to fulfill my Duties as Chief and pay it back when the check got here."

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**Jimmy Hardin,**  
Former fire chief  
from Hankins-North  
Fork Volunteer  
Fire Department

Hardin stated that he never intended to defraud or steal from the department.

"But you see, some of the people on the Board of Directors of the Fire Dept. didn't like it when I was voted in as Chief, because I have been

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## Cash Reward Available

# Walmart theft suspect strikes twice



On Dec. 6, the suspect left in this black Jeep SUV.

## Police need help identifying culprit

BY RICHELLE BAILEY  
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Police are searching for a man who stole from Walmart once last week and attempted it a second time but was deterred by an employee.

The suspect and the vehicle in which he left were caught on tape.

At approximately 1 a.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 4, the culprit filled a grocery cart with two security cameras, a CD player, toys and women's clothing — \$1,223.74 worth of items, according to Detective Sgt. Rick Gutierrez of the Marion Police Department. He went out the side door, got in a white ve-

hicle and left.

Two days later, at approximately 2 a.m., the same man entered Walmart and loaded a cart with merchandise but was stopped by an employee, Gutierrez stated. The suspect fled the store and left the area in a black Jeep SUV.

Anyone with information about the crimes, suspect or vehicle is asked to call the Marion Police Department at 652-5205 or McDowell County Crimestoppers at 65-CRIME (652-7463). With Crimestoppers, your identity remains anonymous, and you could receive a cash reward.



Police say this man stole more than \$1,200 worth of merchandise from Walmart on Tuesday, Dec. 4, and tried to do it again on Thursday, Dec. 6.

Feedback  
Use the online form at  
mcdowellnews.com  
to write a letter to the editor

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### WEATHER

**HIGH 52** Mostly sunny  
**LOW 35** Details, 2A



# Got Heartburn?

Help Is A Phone Call Away... (828) 580-6752

From treating irritable bowel, ulcers, pancreatic problems, gallstones, and Crohn's Disease, to reflux disease and much more, Dr. Deborah Levenson and Dr. Duane Moise at Blue Ridge Digestive Health are ready and able to meet ALL of your digestive health needs.

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