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FEATURED

TOP STORY

Eleven teens charged with trespassing on Bainbridge

By Jane Bellmyer jbellemyer@cecilwhig.com Apr 25, 2019



The 1,200-acre site that was once home to the U.S. Navy has been presented on some social media sites as a good place to explore. However, it's private property and 11 people were caught Wednesday and cited for trespassing there.

CECIL WHIG FILE PHOTO

PORT DEPOSIT — The new acting chief of police made her first arrests Monday, charging 11 people with trespassing on the former U.S. Naval Training Center Bainbridge property.

"We appreciate the actions of the chief of police in Port Deposit," Carl Roberts, president of the board of the Bainbridge Development Corporation, said of newly appointed Acting Chief of Police Susan Smith.

Ranging in age from 15 to 18, Smith said those 18 were issued criminal citations while the younger trespassers were referred to juvenile services. There were several groups of teens from Perryville, Conowingo, Elkton, Bear, Del.; and Quarryville, Pa. Smith said she preferred not to give the names of the 18-year-olds, even though they were charged as adults, because they are still in high school.

Smith was appointed to her role by the mayor and council last week, giving her law enforcement powers in Port Deposit, which includes the 1,200-acre Bainbridge property that was annexed into town years ago. She was actually taking a tour of the property where Cecil College operates its truck driver training program.

"I said I think I should know what's back there," Smith said Thursday, noting she thought it would be a couple of minutes of driving around. "Then I see all these people back there."

It was just after 2 p.m. Monday.

"I did not catch them doing anything wrong, unless they did it before I caught them," Smith said.

At the same time, Port Deposit Mayor Wayne Tome saw one group of teens on the property from the downtown side and contacted Roberts, suggesting he contact the Cecil County Sheriff's Office.

"The mayor called me and said he saw people walking up there," Smith said.

Smith had one group in custody when Rising Sun police officers arrived as part of the county's mutual aid policy.

"Rising Sun showed up with their new trainees and they got a group of four," Smith said.

There would have been a 12th arrest except one got away, she noted.

The alleged trespassers told Smith they learned about the site through social media, which described Bainbridge as a good place to explore. They told the officers they did not realize they were breaking the law. However, Smith pointed out the "No Trespassing" signs posted on the fence that surrounds the entire property.

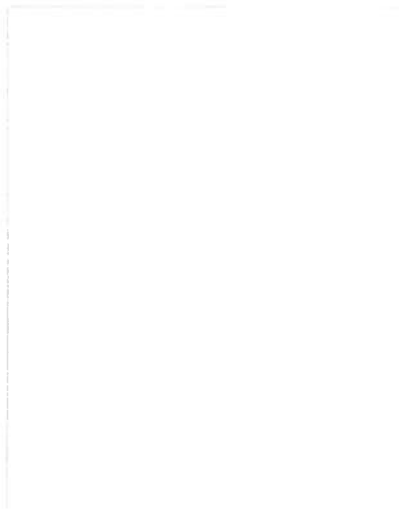
“They went in through a hole,” she said. “There are holes all over the place.”

Tome is happy about the arrests and he expects BDC will follow through with prosecution.

“We’ve had fires and vandalism up there,” Tome said.

With numerous abandoned buildings, many of which are at risk of collapse, the mayor said it’s too risky to wander around exploring the largely abandoned property.

“It’s inherently dangerous. Plus we want to be able to salvage what we can. We don’t want any more damage,” Tome added.



There have been at least three fires on the property over the past seven months. On top of the damage to BDC property, Tome said responding volunteer fire companies are also taking a hit.

“(Water Witch) lost a couple sections of hose and Perryville got a dented bumper,” Tome said. “Plus there’s the logistics. There are no hydrants up there.”

It’s just another reason that officials are telling people to stay off the private property, and Tome said that perhaps prosecution will help.

“We want to send a message,” Tome said. “We’re ready to interface with BDC on enforcement.”

Meanwhile, Roberts said the BDC will work on tightening its security.

“BDC will continue to assess all of the security needs,” he said.

Holes in the fence do get patched, only to get punched out again, or new holes are made elsewhere.

“Our message to the public is that it’s not safe to be on the property and it’s breaking the law,” Roberts said.