

Aberdeen tavern owner under investigation for food benefit fraud

Local News

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ABERDEEN, Wash. - Tavern owner Richard "Dick" Michael Lantz, is under investigation for "profiting on poverty" through food stamp trafficking and unlawful redemption of an Electronic Benefits Transfer card and possible other criminal violations, following a search of the his business on Wednesday, May 8. Fraud enforcements officers from the state Department of Social and Health Services and local law enforcement agencies searched the Northwest Passage, 617 W. Curtis St., following reports that DSHS clients, receiving Basic Food supplements, were buying large quantities of commercial-sized food items with their EBT cards. Store employees saw Lantz place the items into the clients' shopping carts. After they paid for their purchases with their EBT cards, the clients were seen unloading the groceries into a vehicle registered to Lantz. After following Lantz, investigators saw the items being unloaded at the tavern.

Another store employee told investigators that most of the Basic Food clients who accompanied Lantz on these shopping trips were homeless and had no means to store or keep the large amount of foods purchased from spoiling. "I call it profiting on poverty," said Steve Lowe, senior director with the DSHS Office of Fraud and Accountability. "Searching the tavern, we found EBT cards that were likely used to make the large food purchases for the tavern owner. Also found were a large of amount of prescription narcotics, which will be investigated by local law enforcement agencies." DSHS will continue its investigation, scouring items collected under the search warrant, including EBT cards, bank account records, checks, ledgers, financial records, store receipts, employee information and other items related to operating the business.