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- Front Page
- Holden News
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- Editorials & Opinions
- Letters
- Sports & Recreation
- Entertainment
- Schools
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Holden News October 4, 2007

Man arraigned on alleged threats

BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM

An individual whose alleged threatening phone calls brought police to the Dr. Leroy E. Mayo School in Holden on the first day of school was returned to Massachusetts September 25, after being arrested in Texas. Stephen J. Pope was arraigned in Leominster District Court on September 26 on charges relating to those threats.

Pope, whose last known address was in New York, was charged with threatening to commit a crime (bodily injury), disrupting a school assembly, and extortion after he allegedly called Mayo School on August 30 and left a message threatening to harm his sister, a teacher at the school, if she didn't give him \$25,000. According to police he implied he would return to Massachusetts to "address" the issue. He also said he would not want anything to happen to the children.

"We have no reason to believe this threat will be carried out," Mayo School Principal Judith Evans told Mayo parents in a recorded message to parents the evening of September 4, the night before the first day of school, "but we will have heightened

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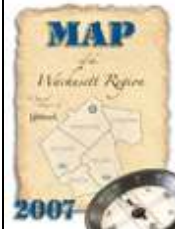


security at Mayo school, with police on campus tomorrow."

That message was broadcast following discussions between Holden Police and the Wachusett Regional School District, and after a search for Pope, who was believed to be living in New York, had resulted in no arrest by the time school began. The threats were considered serious enough by law enforcement to merit extradition if Pope was found and arrested in another state.



Plainclothes state police and uniformed Holden Police watched the arrival of students on the first day of school. A uniformed officer remained at the school until Pope's arrest.

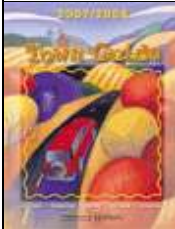


Evans said only one child was kept home from school on the first day of school due to the threats.

A meeting between parents and district and school representatives, Holden Police and representatives of the Worcester County District Attorney's office on September 6 brought about 50 concerned parents.



At the meeting, parents suggested better security for after-school and car pool pickups and also urged buzzing in visitors.



Police were removed from the school when Pope was arrested in those charges in Fort Worth, Texas on Friday, September 7. He waived extradition and was returned to Massachusetts on September 25.



Bail was set at \$50,000 cash. Pope is being held at the Worcester County House of Correction in West Boylston. He will return to court October 22.

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Pope's capture and arraignment are a mixed blessing, Holden Police Chief George Sherrill says.

The individual is back in the area - after making the threats from afar where it was presumed he would have difficulty following through on them - and will be out on bail or out of jail after serving time on various offenses. Pope is also wanted on other charges in Massachusetts.

A buzzer was installed at Mayo School on September 26.

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