

# Fact-Checking Facebook: Madison County attempted abductions

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BETHALTO – Two people last week claimed a similar man asked them both for assistance unlocking a vehicle, and each of them took to social media when the man was able to get into said vehicle and drive away without their assistance at the Bethalto Dollar General store.

One of the women who experienced this was Megan Weller, a Godfrey resident who was in Bethalto with her little brother and sister a week ago from this past Saturday. She said she was with her siblings getting snacks and saw a man holding a bag of charcoal.

That man asked for assistance getting into his truck – he said the keys were inside of his truck and it was running. He asked if she could fit her little brother through the back window of the truck, and she refused.

Weller said the man seemed disappointed, adding he was going to call his wife. By the time she got to her car, however, the man was inside of the truck and driving away.

“I was very confused about the situation,” she said.

Weller described the man as a white male with a well-groomed beard standing around six feet tall. She said he had dark brown hair with gray in it. She described the vehicle as a black truck with dark-tinted windows.

“I got on Facebook a few days ago, and saw another girl had a similar incident,” Weller added.

Indeed, social media featured another woman at that same Dollar General describing the same man – only this time in a different vehicle.

In that account, a man fitting that description had a puppy inside of a dark-colored Chevrolet Trail Blazer, also with dark-tinted windows. He told a woman passing his truck the puppy must have locked him out of the vehicle. He allegedly tried to get her to put her hand through the window.

Like Weller, the second woman refused and walked away from the man. He then got into his vehicle with no issue, according to that post, after two other men pulled into the parking lot.

“It sounds like a different vehicle, but I believe it's the same guy,” Weller said. “It feels like a whole creepy situation.”

She said she made a police report, and Bethalto Police Chief Craig Welch confirmed his department was working on the situation, adding they were “leaving all options open” and are “acting as if all information is accurate and true.”

“There is a possibility that this is a misunderstanding,” Welch said. “But, if it isn't, then the consequences could have been severe.”

Recent weeks have seen several Facebook postings from Michael's in Edwardsville to the Home Depot in Alton regarding what people have considered to be attempted

abductions. During the alleged Alton abduction, Facebook was blazing with people sharing an account of a young man being nearly snatched from the parking lot of the home improvement store.

Subsequent to that mass sharing, both the child's mother and the Alton Police Department reached out to Riverbender.com to explain the situation was, in fact, a misunderstanding.

A source from Madison County law enforcement told Riverbender.com many people report situations such as these after one of them occurs and is either reported on social media or regular media. That source said abductions and attempted abductions are not common in the county, but added people should always be vigilant of their surroundings.

That was echoed by Welch who invited people to contact law enforcement any time they encounter a situation they feel to be unsafe or suspicious. He added that not every situation will end with an arrest, however, but evidence will be collected to resolve the problem and/or put the person who experienced it at ease.

At this time, Welch said his department is looking into collecting surveillance data from nearby establishments. Weller said she was told no direct surveillance of that parking lot is in action. Welch said, while that is true, he is going to look for more possibilities from surrounding businesses.