

# ✓ Whatever happened to Big-Hearted Bob?

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CAPITOLA — Bob Dee Motors, which gained notoriety from television ads featuring owner "Big-Hearted Bob" in a Superman-like costume, closed suddenly Tuesday.

Bob DeJarnett, otherwise known as Big-Hearted Bob, has not been seen in 2½ weeks, employees said Tuesday. His Oldsmobile, Jeep-Eagle dealership at Capitola's Auto Plaza closed Tuesday morning amid rumors of bankruptcy and a new owner.

Employees, who haven't been paid in two weeks, are angry that Pacific Western Bank has frozen the dealership's account and will not release paychecks.

All they've been told is that a "new owner" is expected to take over "within 48 hours," said numerous employees, including Service Manager John Condron and service technicians Steve Wallace and Randy Van Winkle.

"We're all in a little shock," Condron said. Wallace said, "There was no notice or anything. We showed up this morning as normal, and were told we were closed down." Added Van Winkle, "There've been tons of rumors. All we know is we haven't seen Bob Dee in 2½ weeks."

A spokesman at Oldmobile's zone office in Pleasanton had a terse "no comment" regarding the situation. Wil Goodrich, a spokesman for Pacific Western Bank, said, "There's nothing we can discuss on this case at present. Our hands are tied."

Roy Baldwin sold the dealership to DeJarnett in November 1987.

Baldwin still owns the property. When asked whether he would be interested in again operating the dealership, Baldwin said, "If in fact the opportunity were there, and I don't know if it is, it's a possibility."

DeJarnett has been in the auto-sales business since 1955, having owned dealerships in Illinois and Missouri.

A former neighbor of his in Rio del Mar, who asked not to be identified, said DeJarnett had recently moved.

The telephone listing for DeJarnett has been disconnected, with no forwarding number.

Employees, as well as Capitola City Manager Steve Burrell, said they were unaware of any financial difficulties that might have led to the shutdown.

"It's been busy," said Service Manager Condron. "We've been busy calling customers, telling them to pick their cars up because we're not going to be able to get to them."

Burrell couldn't say whether sales tax-revenue from Bob Dee Motors had dropped off in the past year. Burrell agreed with other Capitola auto dealers in saying the sudden closure shouldn't have too much of an effect.

Both Bernie Foegel and Dan Tait, general sales managers for Marina Pontiac-Buick-Cadillac-GMC Truck and Bergstrom Motor Co., respectively, said they didn't anticipate any effect — either for the better or worse — because of the closure.

"We have such different

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel



Employees of Bob Dee Motors gather outside dealership, wondering whether they still have jobs. The employees haven't seen their boss recently, and don't know where he has gone. At left is a promotional picture of Bob DeJarnett in a Superman costume.

## Bob Dee/ Employees puzzled

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clientele," Foegel said. Tait added, "Being located before them (in Capitola Auto Plaza), we're in superior position anyway. People have to drive by us to get to them."

Both noted that they had also heard rumors that new owners would take over.

Yet, Bob Dee Motors' employees are confident that everything will work out in the long run.

"I feel bad for all our loyal customers, our loyal employees and I feel bad for me," Condron said. "I have a new baby at home and two other children, and haven't been paid in two weeks."

Wallace noted that they've been issued photocopies of their unsigned checks. "But that's not going to pay our mortgages," he said. "We're willing to hang in here; nobody's ever fired us."

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