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Tactical team responds

Man ends standoff without loss of life

by Jonathan Green

A potential tragedy ended without injury Sunday night when a man was taken into custody by tactical officers after threatening to shoot a Thermopolis police officer.

Because the man is being held under emergency detention regulations, police chief Mark Nelson declined to release his name, saying only he is 43.

The incident began while the man was on the phone with his brother, who lives out of state. He became potentially suicidal, and the brother contacted their mother in Park County.

She contacted law enforcement about 7:15 p.m. Two police officers and a sheriff's deputy went to the house at the west end of Arapahoe for a welfare check. The man refused to answer the door.

The three officials had been informed of firearms in the house and made their way to the rear, where they knocked on a basement window.

Again, there was no direct response from the man, but the officers overheard him talking to his brother on the phone, Nelson said.

At some point the man threatened to injure or kill himself "before they get me," referring to the officers.

The situation escalated when he said he could shoot one of

the officers who he had "in (his) sights."

The officers backed off to the perimeter and contacted Nelson, who authorized bringing in the regional tactical team that trains for such emergencies.

It took a good deal of time to establish contact with the man, who had taken the telephone off the hook and ignored his cellular phone, Nelson said.

Eventually a negotiating team was able to contact the man, and he agreed to come outside to continue discussions.

Once he was outside tactical team members quickly subdued him before he was taken to the Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital for a mental evaluation a little after midnight on Monday.

Nelson is uncertain whether charges will be brought against the man due to the emotional issues involved and it could be some time before a final decision is reached.

"It turned out well," Nelson said. "Nobody was injured; we didn't have to (force) entry into the house; there was no property damage."

Reflecting on the temperature, which hovered between zero and five degrees during the five-hour ordeal, Nelson said, "Many were cold, but none were frozen. Not a very pleasant night."



Thermopolis town employees working to clear 14th Street on Tuesday included Ken Harvey, left, using a shovel to move water down the curb line; Basil Sorensen, center, walking

toward the barrel on the hump where water is rising; Fred Oneyear using a road grader to scrape ice; and backhoe operator Stan Kraushaar.

—Pat Schmidt photo

Rising water closes 14th

by Pat Schmidt

Underground spring water has closed 14th Street in Thermopolis between Wyo. Highway 120 and Fremont Street, and

town officials are proceeding cautiously.

About two weeks ago, the center of 14th street at its intersection with Johnson Street started rising. A bump approximately two feet high and half the width of the road forced drivers to go around.

At first town officials believed the problem was related to bentonite below the street that had caused problems in past winters. Then water started building up around the bulge as traffic began going around it.

To make certain the problem

wasn't a broken water main, town officials tested the water. The lack of chlorine and the presence of hard water minerals made it obvious the water was coming from a spring rather than treated water from a main line.

Assistant to the mayor Dan Stansill said town crews reasoned the spring water started rising to the surface of the street because freezing ground blocked its flow. If they start digging while the blockage is still there, they fear the flow might spring up in somebody's basement or

start flooding a wider area.

On Tuesday afternoon, town crews started clearing the snow and ice off the street, on the remote chance the blockage might thaw.

Stansill isn't certain what might be done next. Other fears are further damage to the street, as well as the new sidewalks.

Until the problem is solved, there is a good possibility the street will remain closed. Because that is leading to too much traffic on nearby streets, Stansill urged drivers to use other routes and avoid the area.

Want to go to capitol on Friday?

People are needed to appear Friday in support of the Wyoming Big Horn Basin Nature and Discovery Center before a legislative committee in Cheyenne.

Rep. Lorraine Quarberg reported House Bill 239 for what was formerly known as the Big Horn Basin Interpretive Center has been read and assigned to the Minerals, Business and Economic Development committee.

It is scheduled for a committee hearing Friday at 8:30 a.m. at the State Capitol.

If you want to join the delegation making the trip, contact Sue Blakey at 864-3391 for more information.

The bill requests \$15 million to develop the first phase of the facility near the entrance to Hot Springs State Park. The project will provide a visitor center, as well as the development of activities and programs to attract visitors as a destination site.

It also includes a technology center, a youth entrepreneurship area and space for nature-based education. Other goals include helping develop and promote skilled artisans, agricultural tourism and geotourism.

Project supporters include the Town of Thermopolis, Hot Springs County Commission, Wyoming Travel and Tourism, Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, Hot Springs State Park, Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources and Central Wyoming College in Riverton.



Framed by hoarfrost on trees and the icy shoreline of the Big Horn River in Thermopolis, ducks thrive in the below zero temperatures on Tuesday.

—Pat Schmidt photo

Should local entity or the state own the former N.G. building?

by Breez Longwell Daniels

The future of the National Guard armory building will be discussed at a meeting Tuesday.

The Thermopolis Town Council will host the work session at 6 p.m. The Hot Springs County Commission, Recreation District Board and Hot Springs State Park superintendent Kevin Skates will join them.

Several town, county and state entities recently received a letter from Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources director Milward Simpson regarding a transfer of ownership of the armory building from the military department to the Armory Joint Powers Board.

The Joint Powers Board is composed of representatives from the Thermopolis Town Council, Hot Springs County Commission and Hot Springs County Recreation District.

When the National Guard discontinued use of the armory building in the state park it leased the building to the Joint Powers Board for use as a community recreation center.

Simpson said it would be much less complex if the military department transferred ownership of the building directly to the Joint Powers Board instead of to State Parks and Cultural Resources as originally discussed.

The Joint Powers Board is now weighing the potential costs of repairs against the amount of public use. When the 40-year-old building was first leased to the joint powers board for use as a recreation center the state had an engineer go through the building. The engineer found the building structurally sound.

However, over time, repairs will eventually have to be made.

The roof is fine as is and the boiler after some minor repair work, according to recreation director Donnie Bjorhus.

The kitchen, however, is virtually useless. It is not up to code and rather small, making it difficult to use for organizations to prepare food

Thermopolis Mayor Bill Malloy said the town, county and recreation district (the Joint Powers Board) have each contributed \$5,000 annually to cover maintenance expenses for the facility.

"My personal feeling is that I would like to get out of the building business," Malloy said. "Basically we give \$5,000 to support recreation; it isn't the town owning the building."

At a recent town council meeting, councilman Tom Linnan said he is in favor of working with the county to continue to maintain the armory building.

Bjorhus echoed those feelings, saying he would hate to see the community lose this building.

The January schedule of events at the armory is full, with each day being used for community activities including walking, indoor tennis, tumbling programs, youth sports practices and more. The only days, including weekends, the armory was closed and not in use this month were Jan. 1 and 10.

The current arrangement allows the Joint Powers Board to oversee the facility and the recreation district facilitates programming.

The county uses a portion of the building for storage for the sheriff's department.

The concern of all entities involved on the Joint Powers Board is unforeseen maintenance expenses down the road.

"The biggest issue at this point is what will be done when something major needs fixed," Bjorhus said. "What will that bill be and how will it be paid? Major maintenance is a financial concern."

"The state is no longer interested in owning the building, and they do not want to commit to maintenance expenses."

"If the Joint Powers Board does not take ownership, it would be a storage building owned by the state. I don't think there is a person in this community that wants the building to become a giant storage unit."

“(Nobody) wants a
giant storage unit.”
--Bjorhus