

# State limited size of building Elementary school too small for student totals

by Jonathan Green

Space issues at the recently expanded Ralph Witters Elementary School were discussed by superintendent Marty Kobza during the Hot Springs County School Board meeting Thursday and in an interview Tuesday.

The lack of classroom space at the elementary school was exacerbated last fall when the board authorized a third section of fifth grade students.

Kobza, who is in his first year and was not here during the expansion, said areas of the building not intended as classroom space have been pressed into service, and added, "It would seem that when you built the building you knew it would be too small."

He said the original plan for the building was reduced by the state school facilities commission model used to fund such projects. The commission did not expect elementary enrollments to increase, "but the fact is, (they) have."

Kobza suggested the board consider moving the fifth grade from the elementary school across town to the middle school building, which has plenty of space.

Kobza immediately sought to tamp down objections parents might have about the intermix of fifth and eighth graders.

"It's not all gloom and doom," he said.

He proposed a number of possible actions to mitigate any possible negative effects.

Among other things, he said, a separate entrance could be used for fifth and sixth grade students,

isolating them from the older students. Bus, meal and class schedules could be staggered, also keeping the younger students away.

Kobza suggested the district consider moving sixth grade back into a self-contained model, where students don't rotate from class to class for different subjects. He also said such a move would help reduce teacher movement between buildings while opening doors to new classroom possibilities.

On Tuesday, Kobza said the board will need to come to a conclusion quickly, but he reiterated the need for public involvement in the decision.

A middle school staff meeting was to be held Wednesday after presstime with an elementary school meeting set later this week. He said he hoped there would be a public meeting by the first week of March.

Moving the fifth grade to the middle school was not the only possibility mentioned. Modular buildings could be brought in to house the overflow at the elementary school, for example.

Chairman Liz Mahoney intoned such temporary solutions often become long term problems.

Moving the fifth grade seemed like the most likely option.

The next regular school board meeting is set March 19, when the board might hear a recommendation to deal with the space issues at the elementary school.

At least one special public comment session should be held before then but has not yet been scheduled.



Rick Ridenour, portraying President Abraham Lincoln, entertains residents at the Wyoming Pioneer Home by delivering the beloved executive's first inaugural address. The event was part of the bicentennial celebration of Lincoln's birth. --Jonathan Green photo

# Quarberg: Center bill now in Senate; several progressing

by Breez Longwell Daniels

Five weeks into the general session the Wyoming Legislature is at the halfway point; bills originating in the House and passing third reading have moved to the Senate and vice versa.

Contacted in Cheyenne Monday night, Rep. Lorraine Quarberg of Thermopolis said she is just getting a chance to take a look at Senate bills. The House introduced 334 bills with 177 going to the Senate for deliberation. The Senate introduced 152 pieces of legislation, and 113 of those bills have moved to the House for consideration.

Quarberg discussed the House bills that would most directly impact Hot Springs County residents.

"The (Wyoming) Big Horn Basin Nature and Discovery Center came out of the House with \$100,000 to be given to a local joint powers board once it is formed, and a lease with state parks is created," she said. "It has been referred to the Minerals, Business and Economic Development Committee in the Senate.

"It is going to be important for people from Thermopolis to come back and testify again during the public hearing in the Senate."

Quarberg said residents could benefit from proposed changes to workers compensation and a one-time property tax reduction.

"The workers compensation bill would increase time you can take benefits, increase the amount of the benefit and increase the death benefit if you have a loved one that dies on the job. That is a really good piece of legislation that was long overdue. It is a significant change that affects everyone eligible for workers compensation."

Two bills moved forward addressing property tax issues. One was the Homestead Exemption Act, which would allow any homeowner in the State of Wyoming to receive a one-time property tax reduction based on the value of the home.

"I'm not convinced the Senate is going to hear either one of the property tax bills," Quarberg said. "We put homestead exemption right into the supplemental budget as an amendment.

"Now it is in two places as a back up measure, in the House budget and headed to the Senate. I am hoping for property tax relief."

"Another bill that I did carry that has benefits for Hot Springs County is an amendment to the Federal Natural Resource Policy Act, an account that is administered by the governor's office. It would increase the county's access to funding to help pay for expenses to interact with the federal government on BLM projects and federal land issues.

"Our conservation district is very active and the way statutes were written they could not access those funds."

Two education bills have caught Quarberg's attention. She voted against a bill that would have taken tutors out of the funding model; that bill has now been "killed" on the Senate side.

Another bill, sponsored by Rep. Debbie Hammons, D-Worland, has received Quarberg's support. This bill would require colleges and school districts interested in receiving grant funding to form a partnership.

Grants for programs targeted at gifted and talented students at risk of dropping out of high school would be the focus. Also available would be dual enrollment programs for career-technical educational programs.

Each college could tailor its program to fit the needs of local high school students, according to Quarberg.

She was disappointed a bill addressing minimum sentences for sex offenders failed.

"A mandatory minimum for sex offenders failed in the House; then we came back and made changes, and it died again over in Senate judiciary," she said. "That committee does not believe in mandatory minimums.

"I was really disappointed. We don't hesitate to set a maximum sentence for a judge, but the minute we set a minimum the Senate says we are intervening in a judge's discretion."

# County receives \$91,000 bonus; VAST seeking new site in county

by Cindy Glasson

Hot Springs County can expect just over \$91,000 in supplemental taxes from under assessment of several oil and gas parcels.

County assessor Shelly Dero-medi reported to the county commissioners Tuesday the taxes come from as far back as 2005.

VAST Manufacturing has decided to explore additional options within Hot Springs County and have asked the commissioners to withdraw the Wyoming Business Council grant application. They are very interested in doing business in the county, but not at the location in Lucerne stipulated in the WBC grant, according to commission chairman Brad Basse.

The recently awarded bid for the county's cold mix project was formally signed by the commissioners. The original contract was for 30,600 tons of cold mix.

The commissioners voted Feb. 3 to increase the contract by approximately 17% due to the bid coming in well below the estimated budget. This allowed the commissioners to sign a change order for an additional 5,270 tons of cold mix, bringing the entire contract to \$397,000.

The commissioners also signed an agreement with Inberg-Miller Engineering for testing the materials used and the compaction of those materials to fill the hole where the Oddfellows building once stood. According to Harry Hughes of Owl Creek Engineering, three bids have been received from local contractors for the compaction project and he is expecting more.

Lee Campbell, county planner, reviewed the proposed Pearce subdivision. The final plat of the area should be finished within the next two weeks. It has been difficult to complete since many of the easements in the area are not documented.

"We've been trying to document the historical easements as we're going along," Campbell said. "The old timers know they're there, but folks just moving here from out of the area don't. This will clarify things."

Russ Pearce has completed the initial steps toward making the subdivision a reality, but until it is approved he does not want to detach the water rights. That paperwork must go through the state.

Provided the completed plat is presented, the commissioners agreed to sign the original at their March 3 meeting.

# No details on abuse case here

by Jonathan Green

Thermopolis police chief Mark Nelson says his department is currently investigating a child abuse case and has arrested a man but would not release additional information.

The daily roster provided by the Hot Springs County jail does not list any man held there charged with such a crime, although there have been several men placed in the facility since Feb. 11, when the case was opened.

Further information will likely be withheld unless the state wins a conviction against the man in closed court, as county attorney Jerry Williams has asked the case to be sealed, Nelson said.

Williams could not be reached for comment.



Jed Pearce applies icing to create a Lincoln Bicentennial log cabin with graham crackers and pretzels during a Lights On! activity. --Breez Longwell Daniels photo

# PRCA 'Cowboy Rendezvous' moved ahead to June 26-27

by Cindy Glasson

The PRCA rodeo in Thermopolis is changing to a new name and an earlier date.

The Thermopolis Cowboy Rendezvous will be held Friday and Saturday, June 26-27. It had been held on Saturday and Sunday during Pageant Days, the first weekend of August.

Committee treasurer Dave Denton said the name change to a rendezvous should add a little pizzazz and make it a bit more memorable than just another PRCA rodeo.

Because the Hot Springs County Fair culminates with the junior livestock sale on the Friday before Pageant Days, the committee had not been able to hold the rodeo on a Friday and Saturday. The committee's decision will now allow a Friday-Saturday schedule instead of Saturday-Sunday.

The change will also eliminate the conflict with the Gift of the Waters Pageant, which is also on the first Saturday and Sunday evenings in August.

Denton said they are adding a new event this year. Single steer roping is not a required PRCA event, but it is very popular in Wyoming and will add a little "old time" flavor to the show.

Rocket Ryan will be the rodeo clown, and Tim Fuller will be the announcer.

National Finals Rodeo stock has been contracted from Triple V Rodeo out of Casper. Triple V had four National Finals Rodeo bulls last year.

# King offers property to state park

by Breez Longwell Daniels

Calvin King, landowner of the King-Spiller Butte Relic Site and Outdoor Learning Center, reports he has offered to sell the property to the State of Wyoming and state parks system.

King said the property would make a natural addition to Hot Springs State Park but at this time the state is rejecting his offer.

The 30-acre property is located between T Hill, the fairgrounds and the airport. King donated the conservation easement on the property to the Wyoming Nature Conservancy.

Hiking permits are available to tour the heritage site. Signs are posted identifying plants natural to the land.

On the west side is a memorial chapel and outdoor classroom named in honor of King's wife, Judy.