

*Fifth graders to TMS?*

# Superintendent details ideas for moving class

by Jonathan Green  
Hot Springs County School District superintendent Marty Kobza outlined three possible plans to deal with space issues at the elementary school Tuesday evening.  
The elementary building is out of space.  
“We have special education being taught in closets, literally,” he told about 35 citizens at the meeting. That included departing middle school principal Jodie Cameron and five school board members.

Kobza skimmed over two of the plans, adding modular buildings at the elementary school and asking the state School Facilities Commission (SFC) to review a request for funds to expand the elementary building. Instead he concentrated moving the fifth grade classes from the elementary to the middle school.

Another plan, passing a property tax bond issue to finance an elementary building expansion, was barely mentioned. Kobza did not seem to think there would be sufficient support for the proposal, which would see the entire construction cost borne locally.

Modular buildings would come out of the district’s pocket, Kobza said, although the cost would depend upon the quality of the buildings and whether they were leased or purchased.

A request for a review submitted to the SFC could take up to three years to be answered, and the district would be stuck with the same space issues during that time. Kobza also said a preliminary response from Todd Wilder at SFC indicated such a request would be denied.

While the calculation used by SFC to consider funding requests is complicated, the major factors include current and projected enrollment and current district building space (footprint).

Kobza said because of the excess room in the middle school, the SFC would probably determine the district has a sufficient footprint and further facilities are unnecessary.

Kobza said he was trying to turn the issue from a crisis of space into an opportunity for instruction. By moving the fifth grade to the middle school, he believes it is possible to improve the quality of teaching for everyone, especially the fifth through eighth grades.

Currently, grades six, seven and eight attend the middle school, go from classroom to classroom and otherwise share a building that is just over a decade old.

Kobza said moving the fifth grade into the middle school would give the district a chance to bring sixth grade students back into a “self-contained” system of instruction, where they do not have to move from class to class each period.

The fifth and sixth grade students would be taught in a segregated portion of the building with schedules staggered to minimize contact with older students.

Kobza said such a model would allow fifth and sixth grade students to receive instruction more closely tailored to their individual needs while improving math instruction for the older students.

He responded to a question from Fred Crosby about the quality of education for underachieving students by saying such a move would improve the situation for all students, regardless of how advanced they were.

Kobza said this seeming contradiction could be achieved by making it practical for students to be separated into groups according to proficiency, rather than age or grade. He said some math class students see the teacher instructing two or three subject areas at once.

The superintendent said moving the fifth grade would be nearly revenue-neutral even though it would create at least one additional position. That is because the state funding model would increase the grant total awarded to the school for another teacher.

The reaction from the crowd was mixed. A wide number of concerns were raised and addressed, although some attendees expressed skepticism at some of the proffered solutions. Those who identified themselves as current or former teachers mostly spoke strongly against using modular buildings for teaching.

Julia Schleusner asked if such buildings could be stick built instead of modular construction and a breezeway constructed to keep students out of the weather. Kobza said he would add it to the list of things to consider.

The superintendent said no decision had been reached by the board, but it was equally clear he is advocating to move the fifth grade to the middle school. While the other options require little work to implement, he had invested a considerable sum into investigating the implications of moving the grade.

Kobza would recommend fifth and sixth graders enter the middle school from an entrance separate from the seventh and eighth grade students. He said the younger students would begin and end school at a slight offset each day, while lunch would be staggered.

He said the sum of the ideas resulted in thinking about the fifth and sixth grades, and seventh and eighth grades, as two different “buildings within buildings,” making every reasonable effort to keep the two groups separated.

One audience member wondered who the fifth grade principal would be and where students would be sent for discipline. This seemed to be the only question that caught Kobza flatfooted.

He said the fifth grade would have the same principal as the eighth grade, whoever the new principal is.

After taking questions for about 20 minutes Kobza thanked everyone for attending and the group disbursed, with some leaving and others approaching the superintendent and board members.

A decision may be made at the March 19 board meeting.



Little is known about the Barnes Tusk that was discovered in Hot Springs County. The six-inch tip of a mammoth tusk is shown here from four angles to illustrate its ancient engravings that date back thousands of years.  
—Composite by Dr. Todd Surovell

## Mammoth tusk found in county unique to No. and So. America

by Jonathan Green  
A perhaps one-of-a-kind tusk, believed to be from a mammoth, has been found in Hot Springs County, according to a University of Wyoming professor.

Dr. Todd Surovell, assistant professor of anthropology, said the tusk fragment was found in this county about four years ago and first came to his attention about a year ago. The exact location of the find is being withheld to protect the site.

Surovell said the tusk fragment, which has been engraved with symbols, is most likely from a mammoth, which disappeared at the end of the last ice age about 12,000 years ago. He said the find was “unique to all of North and South America. No one has ever found such an item” as far as he knows.

A number of questions surround the find. Called the Barnes Tusk, the fragment, which weighs about a pound and is six inches in length, was found in an area that radio-carbon dating suggests to be only 2,500-4,000 years old. How did the tusk fragment get there?

Surovell said his “immediate assumption would be that it was carved sometime when mammoths still lived in Hot Springs County,” based on the type of engravings in the ivory.

The geometric incisions are unfamiliar to him and do not seem to be the type of markings he would expect from indigenous people living only 2,500-4,000 years ago. They are similar to engrav-

ings found elsewhere dated to 12,000 years ago.

He proposed it is also possible someone carried the already-carved object into the area 2,500 years ago. That would not necessarily mean the item was not local in origin; for instance, it could originate from the same group of mammoths discovered at the Colby mammoth site near Worland.

Further carbon dating tests might be ordered, but he said such tests are unlikely for the tusk itself. Knowing mammoths died out over 12 millennia ago means the tusk is at least that old, he said, and using carbon dating to precisely determine its age would involve drilling a hole into it. Such precision is not worth the damage.

Surovell also wondered about purposes for which the tusk was designed. Was it merely an artistic object, or did it serve a purpose beyond aesthetic design?

He suggested it might be part of a spear shaft wrench, used to straighten spears. If so, about half of the instrument is missing, based on comparisons to other such tools found extensively from western Europe to Siberia, Surovell said.

The university is weighing a more thorough search of the area where the tusk was discovered to see if additional artifacts can be located, Surovell said. There is “a potential for older sites” around the find area.

“(The tusk fragment) is such a unique and important artifact, we feel compelled not to give up,” he said.

## Stitches now WyoTex Fabric

by Pat Schmidt  
Keeping You In Stitches has new owners and a new name.

Danna and Blaine Thoman of LaBarge have purchased the business located a half block east of the traffic light from founders Karen and Dennis Sinclair. The name will be changed to WyoTex Fabric.

Danna was raised on a cotton farm west of Lubbock, Texas, and he grew up in LaBarge. Hence the WyoTex name.

He is related to the late Margaret and Jim John of Thermopolis.

The Thomans recently sold an 1,880 ranch near LaBarge, although they still have a small ranch and an oil field contracting business there.

Lois Williams, an employee at Stitches, played a key role in the sale. Danna was shopping and praised the business. Williams told her the business was for sale, and she contacted Bob Wyss of Properties West to complete the sale.

Stitches was founded in 1998 when Karen Sinclair noticed a substantial increase in the fab-

ric and quilting section of her Ben Franklin store. The demand prompted the opening of the new store.

Other businesses that have been located in the building over the years include More Than Flowers, BF Apparel, Coast to Coast, another flower shop, a toy store, a gift store and the Union

Meat Market.

Danna plans to expand the business by adding an internet presence. The rear of the store is being remodeled to provide a kitchenette.

The Thomans have been married five years and have six grown children and six grandchildren between them.



Karen Sinclair, left, greets Danna Thoman, the new owner of Keeping You in Stitches, now known as WyoTex Fabric.

## Band clinic attracts 140 Tuesday

Approximately 140 students are expected to perform during the annual Big Horn Basin Middle School Band Clinic at Thermopolis Middle School on Tuesday.

Sixth through eighth grade students from Ther-

mopolis, Greybull, Meeteetse, Manderson, Burlington and Lovell will participate. A free concert will be presented at 2:40 p.m. in the middle school gym. The community is invited to attend, according to Thermopolis band director Dustin Olsen.



After donning a sombrero, Chauncey Morris gingerly mounts Barney, a burro at the Thermopolis FFA Chapter Petting Zoo. Watching is chapter member Duard Cable. Sharing animals with school children is a tradition here during the annual celebration of National FFA Week.  
—Jonathan Green photo