

Emergency director: Quitting land lines prompts problems

by Jonathan Green

Hot Springs County emergency management director Bill Gordon warns those who have disconnected their land-line telephones that dispatchers might not be able to locate them if they dial 911 on a cellular phone.

Gordon said he understands the economic considerations that drive people to go wireless, but the wireless 911 location system is not perfect.

Older cell phones that lack global positioning system (GPS) circuitry will never display a caller's location to the 911 dispatcher, and both buildings and vehicles can interfere with the system, he said.

So long as a cellular device has a signal, the 911 call will go through, but he estimated between 20-50% of wireless 911 calls do not provide location information.

The location pinpoint is especially useful in 911 hangups or when the caller cannot provide a location to the dispatcher.

Gordon said it would help for residents to contact the dispatcher at 864-3114 and provide their cellular telephone numbers in advance. He promised those numbers would be used strictly for 911 call location purposes.

The dispatcher can see the number placing the call and will be able to search records to see if anyone has provided that number in advance, he said. If the caller is unable to provide their location, the dispatcher can send help to the address previously provided.

Gordon confirmed prepaid (or "pay-as-you-go") wireless handsets have the hardware necessary for GPS location on 911 calls but cautioned all phone users should check their phone settings to ensure the capability is activated.

He said wireless handset users should contact their carriers if they have any questions.

Quarberg analyzes session

by Jonathan Green

State Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-28) says now that the Legislature has passed a supplemental budget it is up to Gov. Dave Freudenthal to keep the state on an even keel until the budget session next year.

While she doesn't expect Wyoming to run into catastrophic conditions like other states hit harder by the recession, she doesn't think the state will enjoy the easy budgeting days of the recent past. Quarberg is confident Freudenthal will do a satisfactory job of adjusting the budget to the changing fiscal resources of the state, which she said are getting "bleaker and bleaker."

The governor has authority to cut up to 10% from each state department budget and can transfer up to 5% from one departmental budget to another. Additionally, Quarberg said Freudenthal has the authority to deny funding for some projects approved in the supplemental budget.

Two of Quarberg's bills were passed and two were not.

The bill supporting funding for a Big Horn Basin Discovery Center at Hot Springs State Park passed the House and Senate and was expected to be signed by the governor on Friday, she said.

Quarberg marked the passage of that bill as her greatest accomplishment during the session. She said her heart sank when Freudenthal said the center would not receive funding during his state of the state address.

The bill requires Hot Springs County and Thermopolis to enter into a joint powers board and to obtain a lease for the center from the Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources before a \$100,000 appropriation will be issued to the board.

That money will be used to fund project and economic viability planning. Any unused portion must be returned to the state on June 30, 2010.

Her other bill that passed amends statutes to make explicitly clear conservation districts can receive federal natural resource policy account funds. She said it was important to make the distinction when western counties in Wyoming often depend upon active conservation districts to develop policies for public federal lands.

After passing through the House, an effort to implement minimum sentencing for some sexual offenses died in the Senate. Quarberg called the failure of the bill to be approved in the other chamber her greatest disappointment "bar none" of the legislative session.

Quarberg lamented lawmakers want to set maximum penalties for every crime enacted by the Legislature just to turn around and refuse to impose minimums, arguing to do so would limit the discretion of judges.

She also was disappointed the Legislature voted to order the Department of Transportation to comply with federal government requests for information contained in the Real ID act.

The two bills sponsored by Quarberg to fail passage in the session included one establishing licensing for denturists (those who install dentures) and another which would have allowed employers to provide non-certified day care for employees' children.

She will try the denturists bill again in the future, noting, "It wasn't ready for prime time."

Bare legs to crab legs at 88th event

by Cindy Glasson

Bermuda shorts and flip flops may not be what you think of in the midst of winter, but you will definitely be living in paradise if you attend the 88th annual chamber of commerce banquet on Saturday.

Festive decorations in a luau theme, complete with seashells, sand buckets and fish nets will fill the Hot Springs County fair building. Add an abundance of king crab legs, shrimp and prime rib to the mix and a night of fun is sure to follow.

This is the 90th anniversary of the chamber, and president Veva Blakesley is hoping to have some surprise guests.

Businesses that design a centerpiece for their table will be eligible to win a centerpiece. There is also a raffle for a Las Vegas trip.

The citizen and business of the year will be announced. The citizens nominees Ann Hardesty, Mark Whitt and Dorothy Milek. Businesses nominated are Nature's Corner, KTHE Radio and Wyoming Pioneer Home.

Chamber board members and senior class parents will be serving at the banquet. The funds the parents raise will go toward the graduation night party.

The Tiki Lounge opens at 5:30 for the pre-dinner mixer, and dinner begins at 7 p.m.



Colorful shoe laces flying, Bobcat center Anthony Apland, 50, prepares to shoot over Blayne Gilbert of Pine Bluffs. For more on the Bobcats third place finish at the state tournament, turn to page 6. —Pat Schmidt photo



Enjoying some of the good weather on Sunday, Reese Danis soars high above the skateboarding complex at the foot of T Hill in Thermopolis. Snowstorms and colder temperatures moved into the area that night and continued through Wednesday. —Pat Schmidt photo

County home prices and sales soaring; will trends continue?

The selling prices of homes in Hot Springs County have jumped 82% in the last six years, according to county assessor Shelley Deromedi.

The average price soared from \$78,705 in 2003 to \$142,906 in 2008.

The number of houses sold peaked at 91 in 2005, up 86% from 49 homes just two years before.

Though down, the number of houses sold has been 72 each of the last two years.

With the national downturn in the value and sales of homes, 2009 will be an interesting year in which to watch the number of houses sold and the average price in Hot Springs County.

Deromedi said the county is definitely not seeing the foreclosure rates that other states are experiencing.

According to realtytrac.com, one in every 466 homes in the U.S. received a foreclosure notice in January. Wyoming was at the bottom of that list with just 83 families receiving foreclosure notices.

The year, average price and number of homes sold, according to Deromedi's figures:

Year	Price	Homes
2003	\$78,705	49
2004	\$85,615	63
2005	\$97,453	91
2006	\$122,544	75
2007	\$125,576	72
2008	\$142,906	72

Geis pleased with Legislature

by Cindy Glasson

State Senator Gerald Geis, Worland, said he was pleased with the 2009 session of the Legislature in spite of having to tighten belts in the budget.

He thought passing the supplemental budget was one of the most important parts of his time in Cheyenne.

Geis, who is a member of the Ag Committee, said the committee passed "pretty much all we wanted," specifically enhanced brucellosis testing, a new lab in Cheyenne and bringing the weights and measures division up to 21st century standards.

"Our folks are buying and selling based on scales throughout the state," Geis said. "They deserve to have those scales be accurate."

According to Geis, 3.5 million was spent last year repairing state lands that were torn up by four-wheelers and ATVs. He believes education is the key to stopping the damage, educating the public as well as educating the new legislators about the seriousness of the problem.

Geis feels that money could have been spent on other projects if everyone was more knowledgeable about our state lands and their use.

The current economy was the main thing on everyone's mind this session. Geis said state officials don't know what next year will bring. Will programs have to be cut? Will new taxes have to be levied to make up the difference?

"A lot will depend on oil and natural gas prices," Geis said. "If oil goes back to \$100 per barrel, things should remain steady."

Although he worries how tough it will be to maintain with just four months of tourist season, Geis is glad the \$100,000 passed for the Big Horn Basin Science and Discovery Center in Thermopolis.

He said it will be a great asset to the area and should bring in school, college and university students from all over the country to learn about Wyoming.

Geis will be attending the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce banquet Saturday.