

Search continues
for new Bobcat
football coach

7

A closer look
at the BHB
Science Center

13

A guide to the 2009
Kiwaniis Health Fair

1a-20a

Thermopolis
Hot Springs

Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

VOLUME 110, No. 14, April 2, 2009

THERMOPOLIS, WY 82443

USPS 627-300

75¢

Hospital puts laptops in every patient room

by Cindy Glasson
Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital is moving forward technologically by installing computers in each patient room.

The hospital board approved \$22,170 at a meeting Tuesday to purchase laptop computers for 16 patient rooms. That will enable nursing staff to input patient information at bedside.

Several options were investigated, including having the nurses simply carry a laptop from room to room. At other hospitals where nurses carry the laptops, the computers were being left in hallways or stacked at the nurse's station.

To ensure patient privacy, nursing staff and physicians will each have a special key to log onto the computers. A timing program will automatically turn the computer off in the room to prevent access by others.

The board has received an application from an orthopedic surgeon who is interested in moving to Thermopolis. Initial background checks and interviews are underway.

"We can certainly support an

orthopedic surgeon in this area," chief executive officer Charlie Myers said.

The financial report from Shelly Larson, chief financial officer, shows a 30% increase in inpatient revenue for February and a total revenue of \$1.5 million. Contract labor costs were still high; however, some hiring of nursing and laboratory staff is underway. Permanent employees should lower the labor costs.

Research is underway on ways to lower pharmacy costs due to chemotherapy and oncology medications.

Bad debt and charity care rose to \$98,000 in February.

Other business included:

- Approval to lease a new hematology analyzer at \$1,152 per month with a \$1 buy out at the end of the three-year lease.

- Purchasing a new internal network system at an annual savings of \$7,500.

- Changing the date of the next board meeting to April 20 in order to do a review before forwarding the budget to the county commissioners on April 24.



Jessie Pennoyer squints against the snow and wind as she closes the gate. In the pasture, pregnant cows dine on the

rows of hay on the Pennoyers' Owl Creek ranch.
—Donna Pennoyer photo

Storm closes all three roads out of Thermop for first time in years

by Jonathan Green
Winter weather descended upon the Big Horn Basin again Sunday and Monday, leading to an unusual closure of all three highways out of Thermopolis late Sunday and early Monday.

Wyoming Department of Transportation plow operators, in the midst of 18-hour shifts, requested the road to Worland be shut at about 1 a.m. Monday.

There are no road closure gates on that portion of U.S. Hwy. 20. Thermopolis police and Washakie County sheriff's deputies reported having the highway closed by 1:25 a.m.

Wind River Canyon and Wyo. Hwy. 120 were closed earlier Sunday evening. All routes were open out of Thermopolis by midday Monday.

The Riverton office of the National Weather Service indicated nine inches of snow had been reported in Thermopolis but only three inches just two-tenths of a mile southwest of town. An automated station in the Owl Creek Mountains of Hot Springs County recorded five inches.

Strong winds contributed to

difficulties, with the weather station at the Thermopolis fire hall recording 20-35 mph gusts.

Wyoming Highway Patrol Lt. Dave Gluyas said there were reports of motorists ignoring road closures Sunday evening. He said within half an hour of the closures troopers were stationed at the road barricades to keep travelers off the highways.

Russ Dowdy, Thermopolis area maintenance foreman for WYDOT, said once monitors were dispatched to staff the closure gates there were no problems with vehicles continuing past them.

Dowdy could not remember the last time the Worland road had been shut due to weather.

Ken Smith with the WYDOT office in Worland said the department has begun dispatching

workers to monitor closed roads and notify plow operators when vehicles continue onto closed roadways to help them avoid any surprises. Staff from the Worland office sat at the north mouth of the canyon all Sunday night.

Penalties for violating road closures are set to increase significantly. On July 1 the maximum fine will go from \$100 to \$750.

Shane Wilson, assistant Thermopolis foreman, guided a woman and several children north through the canyon after they were stranded at Boysen State Park. The regional WYDOT dispatch office in Basin had forwarded a request to attempt to locate a white Mercury. The occupants had been expected in Thermopolis but had neither

arrived nor called.

Dowdy said the highway was "a nightmare" from the Wolf Creek store in the middle of the canyon south to Shoshoni. A highway patrol trooper radioed he was "dead in the water" just north of Shoshoni, waiting for visibility to improve so he could proceed.

Only one accident was reported to county authorities, a one vehicle rollover 12 miles northwest of Thermopolis on Wyo. Hwy. 120. While details were not available, Hot Springs County sheriff's deputy Kim Black said the driver refused medical treatment at the scene.

Radio traffic Sunday evening indicated numerous slide-offs. Dowdy said a plow in the canyon nearly collided head-on with a pickup.



Second grade student Jaxon Davis intently applies paper mache to a balloon at a Lights On activity Tuesday afternoon at the elementary school.
—Jonathan Green photo

RT to connect Thermop customers by fiber line

A \$6 million fiber-to-home project is planned in Thermopolis and Worland by RT Communications beginning in early summer.

Copper lines used for telephone and internet communications will be replaced with optical fiber to over 4,800 homes and businesses within the boundaries of the two towns. The project is expected to take four years.

"We see fiber-to-the-home as a way to position ourselves and our network for the future," general manager Becky Dooley said. "It is the only technology with unlimited capacity to deliver enough bandwidth, reliably and at a low enough cost, to meet consumer demands for the foreseeable future."

"All too often we think of increased bandwidth as a matter of increased speed. The benefit isn't just about speed."

"It's about unlimited capacity of the fiber which allows for transmittal of large files, such as movies, music, photographs and games. Health-care facilities and schools will benefit as they can easily transmit medical images and provide students with multimedia programming for distance learning."

"When placed side by side to older technologies, there is absolutely no comparison."

Fiber has actually been used in communications networks for more than 30 years, and a line from the Lovell area to Thermopolis was completed several years ago. It was and is relied upon to carry communications traffic from city to city or country to country.

The cost and complexity of fiber has decreased to the point it is now practical to link to homes or businesses.

According to Dooley, RT will provide information to help consumers understand what to expect during construction. Every effort will be made to minimize the impact to Thermopolis and Worland residents, whether in the streets or at each individual home or business.

RT Communications is the third largest phone company in Wyoming with 16 exchanges including Thermopolis, Worland, Shoshoni, Jeffrey City, Gas Hills, Newcastle, Upton, Moorcroft, Hulett, Osage, Kaycee, Midwest, Burns, Carpenter, Albin and Pine Bluffs. It has 63 full-time employees and is headquartered in Worland.

It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Range Telephone Cooperative of Forsyth, Mont., with two sister companies in Wyoming, Dubois Telephone Exchange and Advanced Communications Technology in Sheridan.



While children were out of school on Monday, a colorfully suspended white snow pony, mane blowing in the wind, seems to be fleeing drifting snow and a coiled rope on a near-by post. In the background is the Owl Creek Highway.
—Lara Love photo