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Local bank among victims

Texas man off to prison for loan, investing cons

by Jonathan Green

A Texas man who apparently swindled over \$200,000 from Bank of Wyoming has entered into a plea agreement with the assistant U.S. attorney in Dallas and will probably be sentenced to federal prison Sept. 18.

Joseph Kelly Lara, 41, went by the alias Nick DeAngelis Mancuso while operating a fictitious securities firm in Irving, Texas, according to a grand jury indictment filed in the US District Court for the District of Northern Texas.

FBI files complaint in 2008

In a June 11, 2008, criminal complaint, FBI special agent Timothy Neylan alleged Lara forged court documents indicating he had changed his name to Mancuso.

Neylan said the name change was necessary because Lara had already served time in federal prison for fraud and theft.

Lara then reportedly used his phony identity to open two companies that purported to sell securities. According to Neylan's affidavit, Lara claimed to have a special relationship with Google executives and told several clients their six-figure payments were being used to purchase Google stock.

First State Bank involved

At some point Lara ran into someone from Bank of Wyoming, at the time known as First State Bank of Thermopolis. The grand jury indictment alleges that around August 2004, Lara met with a First State officer at Lara's sham investment firm.

Lara provided First State with a forged statement of financial condition showing his net worth to be more than \$18 million.

The indictment continues, "Based on (Lara's) false and fraudulent representations, First State Bank of Wyoming (FSB) made two loans to Nick Mancuso: \$35,145 (on) Nov. 16, 2004; and \$170,000 (on) Dec. 21, 2004."

B.Y. not identified in document

Neylan, the FBI agent, alleged Lara worked

closely with a First State officer, who he mentions repeatedly in his affidavit. "According to B.Y., an officer at FSB, the defendant applied to FSB for a loan in or about November 2004.

"B.Y. personally dealt with the defendant in connection with the loan application, and B.Y. has described a number of representations that the defendant made to B.Y. in connection with the defendant's application for a loan from FSB..."

"The defendant failed to repay the loans, causing significant losses to FSB."

Yarrington was bank president

The bank president at that time was Brian Yarrington, but the court documents do not confirm that he is B.Y.

The current Bank of Wyoming president, Darrel Small, would not comment on the situation other than to confirm he was aware of the case and he did not expect the bank would see its money repaid.

"I doubt it," he said.

He added there often isn't anything left to liquidate when such a scheme is rolled up.

Small cited confidentiality when he refused to say how much money Lara owes the bank.

(Later the Independent Record learned about the total in the grand jury indictment and Neylan's affidavit.)

Loss handled 'years ago'

Small said the bank had dealt with the loss "years ago." Small was not with the bank in 2004.

The grand jury indicted Lara on ten counts, including bank fraud involving at least one other bank, wire fraud, securities fraud and conspiracy. According to the plea agreement, he admitted to one count of securities fraud, and Alan Buie, the assistant U.S. attorney handling the case, agreed to drop the other nine counts.

Neylan estimated total losses from Lara's scam to be \$1 million. Lara faces up to 20 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000, as well as restitution.



No, Tucker Starkey isn't getting ready to drink from a dipper. Watch for the Independent Record next week to learn more about what the Hot Springs County Weed and Pest District employee is doing. —Breez Longwell Daniels photo

'Tug' help needed to welcome summer!

Tug-o-war teams are still needed for the Second Annual Welcome to Summer celebration on Friday from 5-9 p.m.

Last year hundreds of people attended the Red Rock Family Practice event, and the goal this year is to surpass 1,000. Among the attractions are a free barbecue, a watermelon eating contest, a community bake-off, music, games and prizes.

Personnel from Red Rock, the hospital and Gottsche have been busy preparing the pulled pork at Wind River Processing for the feed.

There will be a drawing for four Colorado Rockies game tickets and hotel accommodations.

To enter the bake-off or tug-o-war, contact Red Rock Family Practice by 3 p.m. Thursday. The clinic will close at 3 p.m. Friday to prepare for the event.

Defending champions are Bartholomew Well Service in the tug-o-war and Rose Mary Horsley in the bake-off.

Teams top All-sports, Class 2A

Thermopolis received the Class 2A All-sports Award from the Casper Star-Tribune.

The award is based on a scoring system that awards points for how high athletic teams finish in state competition.

For the school year just completed, Thermopolis girls and boys teams had a combined 79 points. The closest of the other 18 schools were Mountain View with 74 and Wyoming Indian with 69.

The Bobcats finished third in the boys division with 46, trailing Lusk with 59 and Wyoming Indian with 48.

The Lady Bobcats were fifth with 33 points, behind Mountain View with 54, Big Horn 40, Tongue River 37 and Sundance 35.5.

"Thermopolis won just one state title, taking the girls golf championship in the fall, but added a second-place finish in boys golf and a third-place finish in boys basketball to hang on for the combined banner. In fact, no Thermopolis team finished lower than fifth at state as the Bobcats won their first All-sports Award banner," the Star-Tribune reported.

L. Quarberg: EDC seeking new director

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Economic Development Company is looking for a new executive director.

Current executive director Lorraine Quarberg told the EDC board in January she wanted to cut her work load with the EDC. She will be retained on a consultant basis and work out of her home.

"I wanted to reduce my hours to concentrate on my legislative duties," Quarberg said. She is a state representative.

The executive director position entails 30 hours per week. Salary is based on qualifications and experience.

Call 864-2348 for details.

Land in northwest corner offered for three facilities

by Cindy Glasson

A Thermopolis landowner has ten acres for sale that he feels would be perfect for several proposed projects in Hot Springs County.

Dan Wychgram toured the land with representatives of the Greater Learning Foundation in April, suggesting it would be an excellent site for three proposed projects: the discovery center, the recreation center and the senior center.

Wychgram said he supports all three community projects, regardless of where they end up being located. However, since sufficiently-large building lots, community support and money are limited resources, he suggested a combined effort.

Wychgram said he was approached by Donnie Bjorhus and Harry Hughes from the recreation center committee regarding the possible purchase of ten of the available acres.

Wychgram pointed out the town plans to install a water supply tank on the ridge north of town. The route for the water line has been staked along the northward ex-

tension of 12th Street, on the east side of the possible building site.

That plus the the presence of nearby electric service provide a good start on infrastructure.

Bjorhus said the recreation center committee is looking at three other possible building sites:

- Lane 3 by Ryan Brothers Trucking
- Land behind the middle school
- The old Empire Oil Co. property on the southeast edge of Thermopolis.

"We haven't had price tags put on any of these properties by the landowners," Bjorhus said.

Guy Drake of the Greater Learning Foundation said the discovery center is committed to locating at the entrance to Hot Springs State Park.

The 10-acre site on Wychgram's land "is a nice location, but not in an area where we would get the amount of exposure the discovery center will need," Drake said.

Hot Springs County Senior Center officials were not contacted by the Independent Record about the site.



Firefighters check Thermopolis Rehabilitation and Care Center early Tuesday after a dryer in the basement caught fire. Portions of the facility were temporarily evacuated, but no injuries were reported. The dryer, already slated for replacement, was destroyed. —Pat Schmidt photo