

County coal now heats UW buildings, students

by Pat Schmidt

The University of Wyoming is now being heated with coal from western Hot Springs County.

Grass Creek Coal Co. has a three-year contract to provide 25,000 tons of coal annually to UW's heating plant.

Jim Kummerfeld of Lovell, a longtime strip miner and hauler in the bentonite industry, acquired the Grass Creek Coal Mine lease in 2004.

"They seem to like the coal OK," Kummerfeld said of the shipments to Laramie that started in July.

Bergener Trucking of Laramie is transporting the coal.

Kummerfeld said the low sulphur coal from Hot Springs County compares favorably with the coal Arch Minerals had been supplying. BTU levels for coal are around 11,000 for Arch, 10,000 for Grass Creek, 9,000 for Sheridan and 7,000-8,000 for Gillette, he estimated.

There are four people working at the mine with Gary Evans as foreman. Equipment includes loaders, a dozer and excavators. Kummerfeld plans to move in a screening plant and get a crusher.

The mine near the former Grass Creek town site was operated by a Montana firm, Northwest Resources, from 1988-94.

The mine owners include Darwin Hillberry of Riverton, Dee Hillberry of Hot Springs County and Jim Hillberry of Powell.

The heating facility on the north part of the UW campus not only pipes heat to over 50 buildings during the winter, it also provides the hot water for things such as showers.

"It's a pretty cheap way of heating," Kummerfeld said.

He said slightly higher ash content limits uses of the Grass Creek coal. They tried using the coal to dry the limestone produced on the Wyoming-Montana border near Warren, but that didn't work well.

Coal has also been tried at regional bentonite plants, but natural gas is preferred.

To meet the increased demand, workmen will be blasting at the Grass Creek mine, probably in September but as early as this month. According to a public notice, blasting will be between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on any day but Sunday, and a 60-second warning horn will precede the blasts.

The horn will sound ten second to signal all clear. Access to the mine is restricted to authorized personnel and there will be a guard at the gate during blasting.

There is a possibility of blasting at other times due to emergency situations.

The search for other uses for the Grass Creek coal continues, including one that would require hauling to Bonneville to load on Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad cars. Kummerfeld said that one could turn out to be particularly interesting.

He did not mention any plans to use the area at Kirby where Northwest Resources loaded their coal.

Kummerfeld's brother, Jerry, is a longtime Thermopolis resident.



Swinging around a corner out front on the boom of a T&J Propane truck being cautiously driven by his grandfather, RJ Owsley, is Mack Buckner. Top honors in the Pageant Parade went to the Wild Bunch float and horse entries. —Pat Schmidt photo

Lander man missing on Boysen

A Lander man identified as Michael Peck-Jacobs, 29, apparently drowned in Boysen Reservoir when he was swept off a pontoon boat Sunday about 8 p.m.

There were six people on the boat when the high winds and waves hit the lake. The other five people survived.

Fremont County officials were still searching for Peck-Jacobs on Wednesday morning.

Craft Fair attracted 80 booths

by Cindy Glasson

The annual Kiwanis Craft Fair on Pageant Days weekend had 80 booths, up from 57 last year.

Janine Kelso, one of the coordinators, said there was a very diverse selection of goods and the fair was well received.

"Our attendance was at least average, and attendance on Sunday was just as good as the attendance on Saturday," she said.

Kelso said most of the participants had average to better than average sales this year.

Booth winners were:

Fabric: Wendy Miller, Billie Jo Norsworthy and Elaine Green.

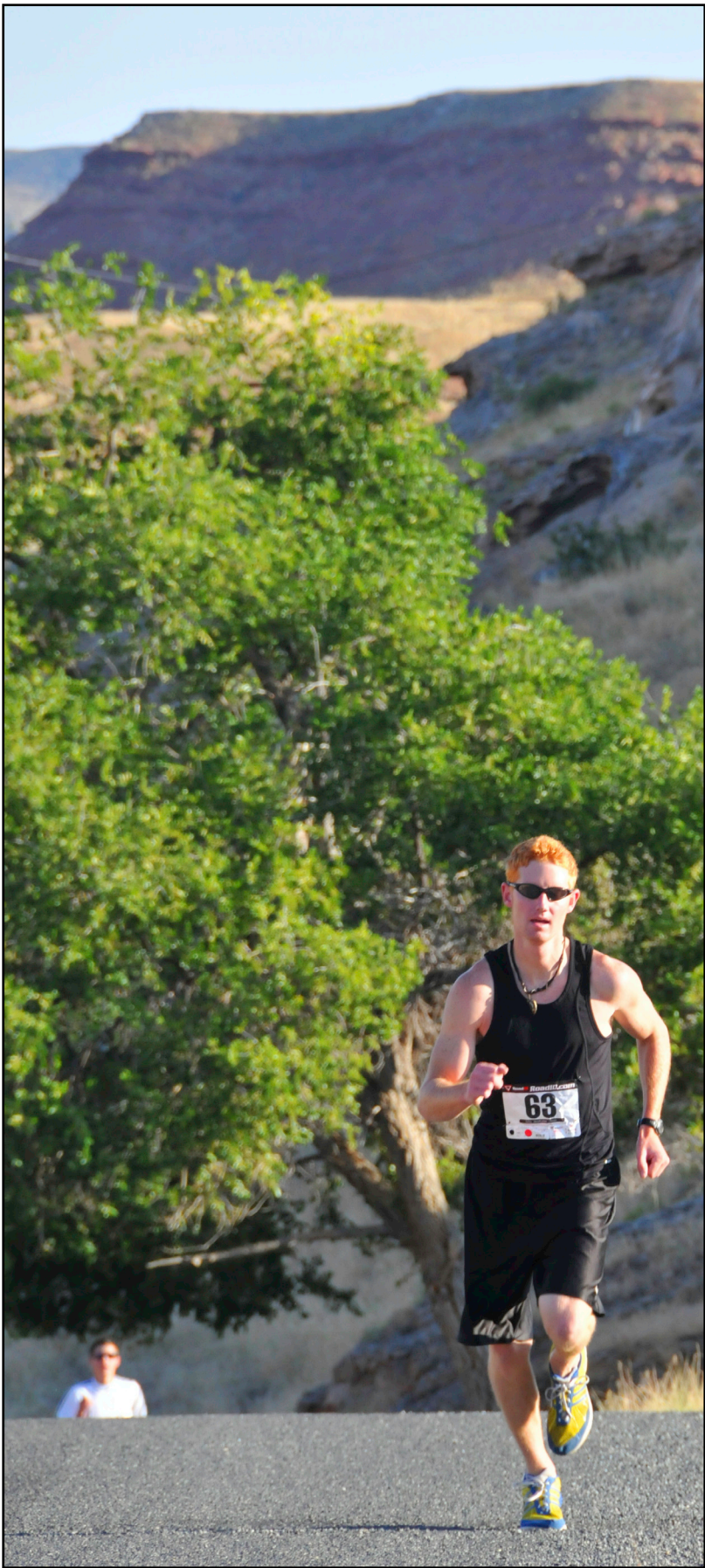
Mixed group: Miller, Aubrey Meadow, Rita Bishop and Bridger Bronze.

Wood: Johnndi Alcorn, Morris Yetter and Paul Bleicher.

Food: Cindy Stevens, Lisa Brownell and Carolyn Carter.

Jewelry: Rebecca Steinke, Green and Chris Hulme.

Judges for the adjudicated show included Cheryl Shero and Lee Campbell (jewelry), Annelise Domhoff and Robin Smith (pottery), Karl Allen and Tom Kimble (mixed group) and Doug Nichols and Vern Dockter (wood).



Tim Williams leads the runners back up the slope from White Sulphur Spring in the annual Pageant Days Run/Walk on Saturday. He won the 5K in 17.32.5. More on page 6.

Bands offer concert here

StreetSmart will perform free at the Hot Springs State Park pavilion Thursday from 5-9 p.m. as part of the Wyoming Arts in the Park program.

The concert will also feature Aftershock with dancers Callie and Jocelyn Johnson of Thermopolis. The repertoire is described as family entertainment with an "oldielicious" taste.

Wild Bunch captures three awards in Pageant Parade

Top honors in the Pageant Parade went to the Wild Bunch float and horse riders for best interpreting the "We're In Hot Water Now" theme.

The Wild Bunch also won the float division and the horse/pets division. Chamber of commerce director Kathy Wallingford said there were 35 entries with lots of variety.

"It was great to get the whole community involved," she said.

Wallingford said the parade committee has received some good ideas that will be considered for next year. Suggestions and new members are welcome at the chamber office. The results in order of finish:

Overall: Wild Bunch, Pinnacle Bank, Wyoming Whiskey, Gift of the Waters, Gottsche.

Vehicles: Little Miss Thermopolis, WOW Discount, fire department.

Floats: Wild Bunch, Pinnacle Bank, Wyoming Whiskey.

Horses/Pets: Wild Bunch, Wyoming Whiskey, Wyoming Carriage.

Walking: Boy Scouts.

Kiddie Parade: Abby Voss.

Doctor, former board member, criticizes illegal hospital action

by Cindy Glasson

Dr. Howard Willson is questioning the validity of a special Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital board meeting on June 23 involving his wife, Belenda, a hospital employee.

While hospital board members apparently agree they made a mistake, they merely ratified the original action.

The Independent Record was allowed to listen to a conference call between Willson, a former hospital board member, and attorney Bruce Moats, who handles many open records and open meetings cases from his office in Cheyenne.

Willson, on the advice of Moats, contends the agenda of the June 23 special meeting was changed without notice, an action Moats said makes any action taken null and void according to Wyoming State statute 16-4-405(b).

In addition, anyone at the meeting may be found guilty of a misdemeanor unless they openly object and have that objection recorded in the minutes, Moats indicated. Another way to absolve a board member of a misdemeanor would be to object at the next public meeting and have that objection recorded in the minutes.

No objections by any of the board members are recorded in the minutes of either the special meeting on June 23 or the next meeting on June 30.

During the meeting, the June 23 agenda was amended to include discussion of the hospital's organizational chart as well as a proposed amendment to the "Tuition Reimbursement Policy." The original agenda called only for a review of the "Diversification of Funds" policy.

The June 23 special meeting minutes stated, "At the February meeting held in Cody, Charlie (Myer) discussed the possibility of eliminating the chief operating officer position at the hospital due to business concerns. This was extensively discussed by the board with no dissension.

"In accordance with the board of trustee's by-laws, the board was presented with a new organizational chart which will become effective as of July 1, 2009.

"The chief operating officer's position has been eliminated; Belenda Willson, who held this position, has been offered the opportunity to continue at HSCMH in her original capacity at the hospital, that of quality improvement coordinator."

According to the minutes the motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the new organizational chart.

Minutes from the June 30 meeting indicate the June 23 special meeting minutes were approved and still show Belenda Willson as chief operating officer in the roster of those at the meeting.

"Nothing they did falls under the original (June 23) agenda," Dr. Willson said.

He said notice of the special meeting was not posted anywhere on hospital grounds, preventing Belenda Willson from having the opportunity to speak for herself or to allow the public the chance to speak on her behalf.

(The Independent Record received notice of the special meeting on June 19, too late to be published in the June 18 newspaper and did not have a reporter at the meeting because the subject did not appear to be important.)

Belenda Willson said she had no indication she would be talked about at the special meeting.

"I asked if I needed to be there and I was told I did not have to, that it was about banking only," she said.

Moats indicated Willson could make a formal complaint to the county attorney.

"I wish more members of the governing body would stand up and object when these things go on," Moats said.

Ron Jurovich was chairman of the board at the time of the incident. Bill Williams is the current board chairman.

While admitting a mistake, Charlie Myers, chief executive officer of the hospital, declined comment on July 22 and said, "We will deal with this at the next meeting."

During that July 28 meeting Williams said "I didn't realize we couldn't do that (amend the agenda of a special meeting)."

The board then voted to approve the organizational chart as it had been presented June 23.