

Rood, water plant operator, wins regional honor

3

County attorney to pursue case, board member

9

Hospice efforts progressing in Thermop

10

State cuts felt in Hot Springs, Boysen parks

13

Thermopolis
Hot Springs

Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

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Thousands in prizes

Demo Derby time arrives!

Drivers are gearing up for the 30th annual Thermopolis Demolition Derby on Saturday at the Hot Springs County Fairgrounds.

The calcutta at 6 p.m. will be followed by the derby at 7 p.m.

The Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce will present prizes in several divisions with a grand prize of \$2,000 given to the winner of the main derby. A \$500 prize for first place will also be awarded in both the men's and women's Herbie Derby (for compact cars).

The men's Herbie Derby is new, but a women's division has been in place for years. The Herbie Derbies will be just ahead of the final heat of the night.

Tim Yetter, one of the organizers, said last year wasn't a very good year for demo derbies, but judging from the number of cars in derbies in surrounding areas, this year may be a lot better.

"We never know how many we'll really have until we close the gate though," he said.

Yetter is looking forward to a lot of new drivers this year. Chrysler Imperials are not allowed in the Thermopolis derby and a lot of the surrounding towns have "outlawed" them as well.

"It's getting hard finding the old cars from the sixties and seventies," Yetter said.

The chamber still needs volunteers to help at the gates.



Tom Miller, left, and his son, Jason, remove the block lining around a water line in the Grandview Trailer Park on the south edge of Thermopolis on Tuesday. Their Cody firm is

removing the former RV parking along U.S. Hwy. 20 and replacing it with 22 additional sites for mobile homes similar to those already in the park. —Pat Schmidt photo

County students score low in many state test areas; superintendent relying on CLI to improve the scores

by Jonathan Green

The 2008-09 proficiency assessment for Wyoming students (PAWS) tests in Hot Springs County schools show growth in some areas but slippage in many others.

The district met adequate yearly progress (AYP) milestones as defined by Wyoming under the federal No Child Left Behind act, with two exceptions.

PAWS results tumble

Some PAWS measures dropped over 15% from the tests a year before. Only 28% of fourth graders (who start fifth grade Aug. 24) were classified as proficient or advanced in writing last year, while half of them met that mark two years ago as third graders.

District superintendent Marty Kobza said teachers are doing a good job but in some cases are teaching the wrong concepts for students.

At Kobza's behest, the district began a systemic re-engineering of its curriculum last year, through a three-year contract with the Curriculum Leadership Institute (CLI). He said revamping the curriculum will take time but should eventually lead to substantial test score increases.

The PAWS results are not the only tool the district uses to evaluate student progress.

Internal results from measuring academic progress

(MAP) testing indicated students, even those in the classes with low PAWS results, have been growing and "show some strength."

The curriculum rewrite should help with test scores, Kobza said.

"Alignment" (teaching students concepts at an early age to provide foundations for later learning) is a key problem with the current curriculum, Kobza said. Students need not only learn a body of knowledge before they graduate from high school, the knowledge needs to be accumulated in a logical progression.

The state authors of the PAWS tests know this as well, he said, and prepare the tests with that in mind.

The alignment issue was a key selling point last year when Kobza was lobbying the school board to contract with CLI.

He said, "We know exactly what we need to do to get turned around."

Kobza will have a child of his own in both the fifth and sixth grades this fall (two of the lowest testing grades in 2008-09) and said "I'm very confident" they will be well taught.

The school board will have a chance to approve the first CLI-redesigned curriculum, math, on Thursday. That package is the result of a year of work from a CLI mediator and input from math

teachers throughout the district, as well as other stakeholders.

As soon as the math curriculum is passed, the district will begin rewriting language arts teaching.

Kobza sees other indications the district is on the right track. While fourth through sixth grade test results are lower than state averages in every category, the situation improves substantially in higher grades.

Seventh and eighth grade students tested better than the state average in most categories while 11th grade students excelled the averages in every subject area but math, where local juniors were less than .2% behind. The superintendent said those results are important because they indicate middle school students are learning what they need, just not in the correct progression.

Third grade students also tested very well, showing growth over 2007-08 scores and substantially beating state averages.

Kobza thinks moving the fifth grade to Thermopolis Middle School will also help raise scores, but in the sixth grade.

Previously, sixth grade students had moved from class to class like older students. Kobza has repeatedly said he thinks students of that age should remain with a single teacher most of the

day, which is a side effect of the fifth grade moving to the middle school.

Goal met

The district satisfied annual yearly progress again in 2008-09 with two first-year warnings.

School districts must meet a number of goals to be considered on track for AYP. By 2014, all students should test proficient or better in all subject areas. Elementary school students failed to make adequate progress in language arts and in special education.

Kobza said the reconstruction of the language arts curriculum should get the elementary grades back on track, although those results still could take several years to be reflected in testing.

The hiring of a new, dedicated special services director (Al McClelland) should help address the special education deficiencies, as well. Previously those responsibilities were borne by Jodie Cameron, who split her time as middle school principal.

There is no sanction against the district for failing to meet AYP in those two categories, Kobza said. The first and second year a district fails to meet a criterion are warning years. After a third year of failing to meet AYP, the state can impose school or district level improvement regimes.

Results on back page.

School start near; time to sign up here

Classes start at all three Hot Springs County schools on Monday, Aug. 24.

That is three days later than last year.

Students new to the district are encouraged to register as quickly as possible.

High school students may register next Monday and Tuesday. Call guidance counselor Amy Mason at 864-6535.

If they have not registered already, middle school students in grades five through eight may call the TMS office at 864-6551.

Elementary students new to the district should be registered immediately. Call the office at 864-6561.

Teachers report for two days of staff development on Aug. 19-20 and have a work day Aug. 21.

School hours will be:

•Elementary school, 8:20 a.m.-3:25 p.m.

•Middle school, 8:20 a.m.-3:20 a.m.

•High school, 8:15 a.m.-3:25 p.m.

For more details on back to school, turn to page 7 or check the Independent Record next week.



A calf cavorts in front of its mother in Hot Springs State Park on Tuesday. —Pat Schmidt photo

Brian Rhoades facing 14 counts of felony larceny

by Jonathan Green

Brian Rhoades, 51, of 698 E. Sunnyside, is scheduled for an initial appearance in circuit court here Aug. 28 to address 14 counts of felony larceny.

Rhoades is accused of selling chemicals to area oilfield service providers under the guise they were from Rhoades' former employer, Champion Technologies.

In an affidavit filed against Rhoades, Wyoming Department of Criminal Investigation agent Tom Wachsmuth claimed Rhoades would refill empty 55-gallon drums marked Champion with chemicals he purchased elsewhere.

He would then forge sales invoices from Champion, which he delivered with the chemicals. He would then receive checks made out to him personally, which he would then cash or deposit into a checking account of which his family was unaware.

Area businesses affected included Morning

Star Oil, Box H Resources and Centennial Energy. Rhoades said by paying immediately in cash, the businesses would receive a 10% discount.

Wachsmuth alleges Rhoades initially claimed he skimmed leftover chemicals from returned Champion drums, a half-gallon at a time, until he had enough to fill a drum. Rhoades later apologized to the DCI agent for lying and said he had purchased the chemicals from a northeast-Wyoming business he refused to identify.

Wachsmuth said Rhoades made about \$100 per barrel.

The scam is alleged to have taken place from 2002-08, over which period Rhoades made nearly \$106,000. At \$100 per barrel Rhoades would have sold over 1,000.

Rhoades allegedly told Wachsmuth he began the fraud in order to pay credit card debt. If Rhoades is convicted in district court he faces up to ten years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$10,000 for each of the 14 counts.

Bill Struemke named new Hot Springs deputy county attorney, aids Williams

by Cindy Glasson

Hot Springs County has a new deputy county attorney to help with county attorney Jerry Williams' case load.

As a recent graduate of Widener University School of Law in Harrisburg, Pa., Bill Struem-

ke is looking forward to getting some experience under his belt. Struemke said his family has always been involved in public service so working for the county is a good fit for him.

Struemke has traveled the world as an Army brat and was in

the Army himself for 15 years.

Eventually he would like to start his own law practice.

Struemke is joined by his wife, Sara, and four children: Kurtis, a fifth grader; Anastasia, a second grader; Samantha, 4; and Alana, 1.