

Parties still working on pools pact

by Cindy Glasson

A two-hour conference call Tuesday between the Star Plunge, TePee Pools and the Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources Commission tried to bring the parties closer to a lease agreement. In the end, however, no decisions were made.

A new draft lease agreement was received by Dan Moriarity of the TePee Pools on Christmas Eve. Roland Luehne with the Star Plunge received his copy of the draft Monday night. Both men said this did not give them time to confer with their attorneys.

"There is no communication between the state and here," Moriarity said.

"There has been a lot of back-and-forth and careful consideration regarding these leases," said Milward Simpson, State Parks and Cultural Resources director. "We have added some major changes since the first meeting in October."

One of the major changes addresses the length of the lease being offered by the state to the concessionaires. The proposal on the table allows an initial 20-year lease with the option to request a 15-year extension. Consideration for the extension would be based on the concessionaires providing a business plan. The draft also states the extension, at the discretion of the commission, could be granted for less than 15 years.

The request could be made at any time during the initial 20-year agreement.

In addition, any proposed capital improvements must be finished within a one-year period. If not completed, the lease could revert back to the initial 20-year agreement.

Simpson told the commission this was being considered as something of an incentive for the leaseholders to provide improvements to the properties, which would ensure long-term betterment for visitors.

Bill Moriarity, also with the TePee Pools, said it was impor-

tant to know a 35-year lease agreement would be in place in order to obtain loans from banks for capital improvements.

He voiced concern the proposed agreement doesn't guarantee the 35-year lease and said he would like more assurance to that affect.

The state still is requesting a lease fee hike of 1 percent per year for the next three years, based on the gross annual income of the property. Simpson said they hoped this would help the concessionaires gradually increase their payments rather than hitting them with a full 3 percent increase immediately.

A previous draft put lease payments on a sliding scale that could have risen as much as 5 percent.

Some of the commission members said they are not pleased with the gradual increase or the proposed rebate.

Dan Barks of Gillette said he would prefer to see a flat rate charged to the concessionaires. He dislikes the idea of a "rebate" for improvements.

"You pay 'X percent' to the state," he said. "No reinvestment clause. It's up to the business owner to decide what needs to be improved."

"Let's keep things simple," Barb Vietti of Thermopolis said. "I agree with the flat-rate idea, but I could live with the graduated increase."

"The commission has twice asked for 3 percent per year with a percentage to go back into the business," commission chairman Ernie Over of Pavillion said. "We have a tremendous gift that these concessionaires are benefiting from. This just doesn't happen in the real world."

Another major change in the draft lease is something Simpson referred to as an innovation. It involves a reduction of lease fees, provided the fees in question are used for improvements to the facility. A cap of 1 percent of the total fees could be used this way.

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Slip-sliding fun



Josiah Morency and his mom, Jenna, enjoy a thrilling ride down Warren Hill. It has been a long-standing tradition to block off the section of the street from traffic in the winter to the delight of sledders. — Lara Love photo

Area jobless rate improves

by Keith E. Domke

Hot Springs County's unemployment rate bucked the state trend in November, edging downward slightly from 6.7 percent in October to 6.3 percent in November, the Wyoming Department of Employment Research & Planning Department reported. The number of locally unemployed individuals decreased by six from 158 to 152. In November 2008, only 83 eligible county residents were without work.

Hot Springs was one of seven counties in the state to experience a lower jobless rate in November than the month before.

Teton County had the state's highest jobless rate at 11.7 percent, followed by Big Horn at 8.4 percent and Lincoln at 8.1 percent.

"Most county unemployment rates followed their normal seasonal pattern and increased from October to November," the department stated.

The lowest rates were in Albany County, 4.1 percent; Sublette, 5 percent; and Goshen,

Hot Springs unemployment			
	Nov. 09	Oct. 09	Nov. 08
Labor force	2,394	2,374	2,395
Employment	2,242	2,216	2,312
Unemployed	152	158	83
Jobless rate	6.3%	6.7%	3.5%

was 7 percent. In October, the Wyoming jobless rate was 6.8 percent. A year ago, it was 3.1 percent.

Thirteen of the state's counties reported higher unemployment figures in November compared to October. Three were unchanged.

"From October to November, employment decreased by 4,500 jobs," the report stated. "This is larger than the normal seasonal decrease of 3,000 jobs."

Seasonal job losses were experienced in construction, manufacturing, wholesale trade, professional and business services, leisure and hospitality and other services. Government employment increased in the state.

Over the year, the largest job losses occurred in the natural resources and mining, the department said.

Nationally, the unemployment figure was 9.4 percent. In October, it was 9.5 percent. A year ago, it was 6.5 percent.



Licking liquor before its time from a vat of fermenting grain are Gov. Dave Freudenthal and Wyoming Whiskey tourism director Donna Nally. Wyoming Whiskey's opening came in at No. 2 for the top 5 stories of 2009. — Jonathan Green photo

2009: The year that was

Independent Record's top five stories diverse

by Keith E. Domke

Triumph and tragedy. Beginnings and endings. The promise of better things to come. That sums up the top stories of 2009 that made headlines in the Independent Record.

The IR came up with what it believed were the top five stories of 2009. Although there were many strong possibilities to pick from, staff members whittled the list down to five. And they are a solid five, topped by the July closure of the failed Bank of Wyoming, which changed ownership and reopened as Central Bank & Trust.

The state's first whiskey distillery, Wyoming Whiskey, opened its doors in October. The grand opening was attended by hundreds of people as Kirby celebrated being the host town for the new business.

Speaking of celebrating, Hot Springs County High School crowned another state champion just before Thanksgiving as the Bobcat football team rolled through the regular season and then the playoffs in capturing the Class 2A state crown. The championship was earned during a snowstorm at War Memorial Stadium on the University of Wyoming campus as Thermopolis avenged its only regular-season loss by coming from behind to beat Glenrock for the title.

In April, RT Communications announced it was connecting Thermopolis homes and businesses through fiber optics, an extensive project expected to advance the town technologically. The project

EXTRA, EXTRA ...
REREAD ALL ABOUT IT
Top 5 stories of 2009

1. Bank of Wyoming forced to close.
2. Wyoming Whiskey opens.
3. Bobcats win state football championship.
4. City to be wired with fiber optics.
5. Pat Schmidt retires as IR publisher.

is expected to take four years to complete. Progress was made during the year.

Finally, longtime Independent Record publisher Pat Schmidt announced his retirement in late November, ending a 26-year career as the local newspaper's top man. Schmidt was the 100-plus-year-old paper's longest-serving boss.

1. Bank of Wyoming

The failed bank was ordered closed on Friday, July 10, and it reopened the next day as a branch of Central Bank & Trust Co. of Lander. About 80 employees and contractors from the Federal Deposit Insurance Company descended on the bank at about 5 p.m. on July 10.

In the final press release from Bank of Wyoming, the bank said it was "pleased to have been a part of the community for over 100 years."

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