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District sees rise in student enrollment

by Joe Sovia

It's good news for Hot Springs County School District No. 1 in terms of enrollment to begin the 2010-11 school year.

According to superintendent Marty Kobza, ADM (average daily membership) and full-time student numbers show 16 more students enrolled than at the end of the 2009-10 year. On the first day of school Aug. 23, there were 668 students enrolled; the count was 641 to end 2009-10.

"Our funding is based on the number of students we have. That helps us significantly," Kobza said Friday. "We can continue to offer the same programs we're offering now."

How much each district receives on a per-student basis is dictated by the block grant model, according to Kobza.

The increase of 16 students may be a little misleading since funding is based on a three-year ADM average.

"This year, our three-year average went up six students," the superintendent said.

However, that computes to between \$100,000 and \$150,000 additional funding coming from the state to the local district.

This is the fourth straight year the district has seen a modest increase in enrollment, going from 637 for all grades in 2005-06 and 2006-07 to 668 in 2010-11.

This school year, there are seven classes with 50 or more students. The high is 62 in third grade; there are 61 sophomores. The low is 40 in both pre-school and second grade.

"The number has been in the 40s and 50s in a class," Kobza said of years not too long ago. "Fifty was kind of considered a large class for us."

Overcoming decline during 1990s

District records show a steady decline in enrollment in the 1990s.

The student count was 963 to start the 1990-91 school year and dwindled to 817 in 1999-2000. It bottomed out at 737 in 2005-06.

The district had 1,202 students to begin the 1972-73 school year.

"I'm really excited to see some growth," Kobza said of increases in recent years.

He believes the increase in student count will not have an adverse affect on class size, actually moving the district closer to an "ideal" 16 students per class. There are generally two or three sections of each subject, such as math, science, etc.

Kobza said the numbers in pre-school and second grade have actually grown; what is now the second-grade class was in the 30s as kindergarteners.

"The cohort retention is significant. It's a measure of where you're at (academically)," the superintendent said.

Kobza indicated there has been growth in what are now the sophomore and freshman classes. "People are staying (in Thermopolis), and they want to come to school here," he said.

"It will fluctuate at different times of the year," Kobza said of enrollment, such as just after the Christmas and New Year's break. "Hopefully, with those changes we'll stay at the same average throughout the year."

He said the Learning Center has benefited the district.

"It helps keep students in the process (of learning) engaged," Kobza said. "That helps with fluctuation."

Take a look at this butterfly



Second graders Remington Ferree and Maggie Cable show Kari and Charlie Ferree a monarch butterfly in Mrs. Carswell's class during the open house at Ralph Witters Elementary school.

—Lara Love photo

Early deadline for Sept. 9 issue

Since the Independent Record office will be closed on Monday, Sept. 6 in observance of Labor Day, the deadline for display and legal advertising in the Sept. 9 issue is 4 p.m. Friday, Sept. 3. The office will be open until 5 p.m. on that day.

The deadline for editorial/news content and classified ads in the Sept. 9 issue is noon Tuesday, Sept. 7.

Chamber still in need of funding

The Thermopolis Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce is trying to find ways to increase revenue amidst funding cuts and nearly 100 businesses who haven't paid membership dues.

"We don't have any money for operations," said chamber director Kathy Wallingford at a special meeting of the chamber's board of directors Tuesday night.

The chamber presented the board with the current list of chamber members and fees paid so far for the fiscal year.

To resolve the issue of businesses that haven't paid dues, the board elected to send reminders to the businesses saying essentially they will have 30 days to sign up and pay the dues or the chamber will have to cut existing benefits to them.

The chamber recognizes the financial situation of its various member businesses, but they hope the businesses will still opt to join

this year, even if it is at a lower tier than previous years.

"Something is better than nothing," said chamber president Veva Blakesley.

The chamber also contends they are losing money in several of the tiered brackets due to not enough money coming in from dues and additional expenses for the brackets.

Before, a business would pay a fee for membership and also pay for event sponsorship. Now, the sponsorship is built into the membership fee, which brings in less money for the chamber compared to when they were separate. The chamber also incurs the cost of additional benefits of the tier, such as banners. Between the late payment of dues and the drop in revenues from the tier system, the chamber faces a deficit of about \$26,000.

Blakesley pushed to continue the tiered system. She likened the new system to a business model. A new business owner knows he/

she won't make a profit the first year, and eventually it can take five years to kick off.

Sticking with the new system is better than the alternative, which Blakesley considered to be going door to door and begging businesses for money. The board agreed the new system should remain in place for the remaining fiscal year.

The board also discussed a 50/50 raffle, a prize raffle and a free membership raffle at the Fall Festival to raise money. They also plan to start selling tickets for raffle items for the chamber banquet at the festival.

While the small fundraisers could potentially help the chamber with its funding shortfall in the short term, Town of Thermopolis board liaison Dick Hall didn't think it would help in the long run.

"You're trying to solve a thousands of dollars problem with nickel-and-dime solutions," he told the board.

Turbo Turtle Trek brings in \$9,900 for Rotary

by Cindy Glasson

More than 990 turtles made their way down the Big Horn River Saturday for the fifth annual Turbo Turtle Trek, sponsored by the Thermopolis Rotary Club.

After being dropped into the river at the Eighth Street bridge, the turtles wasted no time floating down the river to the Broadway Street bridge where Rotary members fished them out of the water.

The club raised \$9,900 with the event. Twenty-nine prizes were donated by local businesses to make the fundraiser a success once again.

Angie Guyon's turbo turtle was the first to float across the finish line. She won the grand prize of a \$1,000 voucher for travel booked through Travel wRight.

Marcia Shanor took second place, winning a Remington Model 700 rifle, .300 caliber RUM with scope and case.

Here are the other prize winners:

Third, weekend at the Cody Legacy Inn-Allen Braaten.

Fourth, two-night stay with breakfast for two at the Crossed Sabres Ranch, Cody-Mary and Rod Hart.

Fifth, weekend at Super 8 Thermopolis with swimming and one dinner included-Beth Drake.

Sixth, 32" HDTV-Trish Owens.

Seventh, weekend at Deadwood Gulch Gaming Resort, Deadwood, S.D.-Kelly Sheperd.

Eighth, gas grill, donated by T&J Propane-Diana Sova.

Ninth, Digital camera-Messenger and Jurovich.

Tenth, Social Hour Party for 10 at Days Inn, Thermopolis with drinks and food-Pinnacle Bank.

11th, golf and dinner, Legion Town and Country Club and Stones Throw Restaurant-Kay Bjorklund.

12th, BluRay DVD player-Diana Sova.

13th, guided white water raft trip for four in Wind River Canyon-Kim Black.

14th, dinosaur fossil dig for two-Shelly Larson.

15th, family membership for one year at Buffalo Bill Historical Center-Karla

Ohrmund.

16th, one-day swimming pass for four at Hellie's TePee Pools-Kori Linton.

17th, private petroglyphs tour-Jerry Slagle.

18th, one-day swimming pass for four at Star Plunge-Cheryl Hambrick.

19th, free propane bottle fill-up at T&J Propane-Jason Moody.

20th, one-day swimming pass for one at Star Plunge-Monica and Sahara Hamilton.

21st-25th, propane bottle fill-up at T&J Propane-Etta Brown, Chuck Cooper, Marcia Shanor, Lisa Bomengen and Pennie Anderson.

26th & 27th, large anything pizza from Pizza Hut-Wyoming Dinosaur Center and Bob Ryan.

28th & 29th, large one-topping pizza from Pizza Hut-Bethany Webber and Mona-Loa Hudik.

Residents asked to report graffiti

by J.D. Stetson

Thermopolis Police officers are not amused by a local artist expressing himself by defacing public property.

Officers want the public to be aware of several instances of graffiti in East Thermopolis with the initials "EBK."

The first notification for the graffiti occurred at 10 a.m. Saturday when passersby noticed the phrase "EBK 2010" and "EBK ALL DAY" written in black spray paint on a retaining wall in front of 148 E. Arapahoe St.

At 3 p.m. Monday, a private property owner reported the same graffiti written on a tanker truck near Amoretti and the railroad tracks.

"We would encourage the public not to hesitate to call in suspicious behavior," said head police dispatcher Bill Gordon.

Officers also want residents to call if they see any new graffiti around town. In the meantime, officers have increased their level of observation with regard to the graffiti, he said.

"We'd love to catch him in the act," Gordon said. Unlike previous occurrences of graffiti in Thermopolis, Gordon doesn't believe the recent incidents are random acts caused by someone who happens upon the opportunity for graffiti. "The greatest help for us would be for the public to be observant," he said.

The graffiti artist also defaced a "Yield" sign in East Thermopolis and a sign indicating a Hot Springs Memorial Hospital service road.

East Thermopolis Public Works director Mike Ready did not know whether the town would replace the sign in its jurisdiction, but he didn't think it would be very expensive.

To report suspicious activity, call 864-3114.



Sheriff Lou Falgoust and Michael Wright look on as turtles take the plunge for the Rotary Club's Turbo Turtle Trek on Saturday afternoon.

—Cindy Glasson photo



This sign in East Thermopolis was recently vandalized.