

Lodging tax board defends 3-on-3 decision

by J.D. Stetson

The Hot Springs County Lodging Tax Board knows many think of them as villains when it comes to the 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament.

But the board sees it differently.

During the board's monthly meeting Tuesday, members discussed the public outcry and issues that have been brought forward during the past month with regard to the May tournament.

In November, the board made a decision not to subsidize the tournament costs with \$12,000 in lodging tax dollars unless there is community support behind the event. The board still maintains a budgeted amount of \$15,000 for the event.

The board also pledged to help the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors in seeking funding for

the event through other means in the community.

During the recent public meeting, the board stipulated another reason for its decision.

State law and the board's by-laws do not allow the board to directly fund events, said board member Jim Mills.

Under the state law, lodging tax dollars are limited to advertisements and promotion of tourism for the community, Mills said.

It also can't be used to the benefit of a "for-profit" agency, and Mills thinks the 3-on-3 is a for-profit operation.

Chamber executive director Kathy Wallingford reported the chamber office has been inundated with calls from people expressing concerns and donating money for the 3-on-3.

See Tax on page 9

Public incapacity ordinance passes

by J.D. Stetson

Revelers who have too much to drink on New Year's Eve won't have to worry about a new law allowing officers to arrest people who get incapacitated in public places.

The new law will take effect Jan. 3, two days after the New Year celebration. The Thermopolis Town Council passed the ordinance on third and final reading Tuesday night. The law instates incarceration as a penalty for people who are incapacitated in public places due to imbibing of alcohol or drugs.

The law is meant to give officers a tool to use to protect the subject from harm's way. Under the current law, officers have

been giving incapacitated people a ride home or arresting them on a breach of peace charge, which may or may not hold up in court.

Under the law, "incapacitated" means anyone who is under the influence of a controlled substance and is unconscious or too weak or disoriented to be able to care for his or her own needs or recognize obvious dangers.

The law does not prohibit people from traveling without driving a vehicle to their home or to seek treatment.

The punishment for breaking the law is a maximum jail stay of up to three days and a fine up to \$750.

See Ordinance on page 9

Two men arrested for burglary

by J.D. Stetson

Thermopolis police officers arrested two men Monday in connection with a burglary at the Wishy Washy Washateria reported Saturday morning.

Officers received a report someone had broken into secured areas of the laundromat sometime Friday night, said police chief Mark Nelson.

The thieves took several cases of soda and the DVR machine used for the laundromat's surveillance system.

Officers eventually found the DVR machine in a Dumpster. The video depicted the two men who entered the laundromat.

Based on the video, officers obtained a search warrant for a home in the 800 block of Washakie Street.

Nelson did not want to release the names of the two men until after they make their arraignment in Circuit Court. The ages of the men are 32 and 19. Nelson said the case could be related to other burglaries in the area.

Officers also ticketed John Baker, 22, for possession of marijuana after officers found drugs during the search of the home. Further details are expected within the next week.

Floating on air



Kent Hessenthaler was the winner of the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce's Residential Lighting Contest for 2010. His property on Lane 10 featured large lighted "Peace On Earth" and star, and a nicely decorated home and yard, good for \$50 in Chamber Bucks. Jerry and Shawn Fields' home at 704 Park St.

was second for \$25 in Chamber Bucks. The yard included a parachuting bear, pictured above. Honorable mention went to Kevin Kolar's home at 1028 Amoretti St. Thermopolis Eye Care was the lone entry in the Commercial Lighting Contest and won first place.

— Joe Sovia photo

Chamber's request for county funds denied

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners were once again approached by the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, requesting additional funding at their meeting Tuesday afternoon.

Chamber director Kathy Wallingford was joined by chamber board member Gene Boehmke at the meeting.

"We have good news and bad news," Boehmke said. "The good news is it looks like the 3-on-3 tournament will likely go on, thanks to lots of help over the last two weeks."

"Continuation of the chamber after 3-on-3, though, is questionable. We will be out of business in March if we do not get any help."

Boehmke said there had been no help from the town or the county, and about 40 chamber members had not paid their dues.

"Lacking a miracle," he said, "June 30 we will no longer be an entity."

Wallingford continued, reminding the commissioners the chamber's job is to bring new business and tourist dollars into the community.

"We hired two grant writers," Wallingford said, "but they've both dropped out. We're looking for others who can do the writing."

Chamber visitation up

Wallingford said Hot Springs County is becoming a destination place, having 9,000 people come through the doors of the chamber in 2009 and 13,000 in 2010.

"The downtown district is tight," Wallingford said. "The money is

not being spent. People are having to choose between going swimming or going to the Dinosaur Center.

"Our fundraisers are tight, too. People are having a hard time paying \$35 to attend a fundraiser. We're going to be tapping into our reserves for the first time this January."

Commissioner Mike Baker reminded Wallingford of the challenge the commissioners had made to the Thermopolis Town Council that they would match any funds the town could give.

The town was not able to give anything to the chamber this fiscal year.

"We have some money coming from the lodging tax," Wallingford said. "They do the best they can, but we need operating funds now."

"It takes \$6,000 a month to run the chamber. If we don't have the operating costs we'll have to shut down and that will mean lost jobs."

There are currently two paid staff members at the chamber, Wallingford, and her assistant, Michelle Lue.

Commissioner Brad Basse said the commissioners budget is set and he really doesn't see this as an emergency expenditure.

"We were cut \$11,000," Wallingford said. "The town has told us 'no' twice now. We've always had the help before and now we don't have it." No action was taken to help with the chamber's plight, however, board chairman John Lumley assured the pair they would look at the budget again, but doubted there was anything the county could do for them at this time.

Entertaining at HSCMH



Linda Hausner looks on as Hub Whitt entertains in the lobby at Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital on Tuesday. Various entertainers have performed at the hospital this week in honor of the holiday season.

—Cindy Glasson photo

Christmas services at local churches

- The schedule of Christmas church programs and services includes:
- Community Federated Church, 244 N. Sixth – Dec. 24, candlelight services, 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.
 - First Baptist Church, 310 S. Sixth – Dec. 24, Christmas Eve service, 6 p.m.
 - Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 642 Arapahoe – Dec. 24, Christmas Eve service, carols, 9:45 p.m.; Dec. 24, Holy Eucharist, 10 p.m.; Dec. 26, morning prayer, 9 a.m.
 - Living Waters Assembly of God, 318 N. Eighth – Dec. 24, Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service, 7 p.m.
 - Risen Son Southern Baptist Church, 342 Amoretti – Dec. 24, Christmas Eve service, 6 p.m.
 - Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, 129 Mountain View – Dec. 24, children's Christmas service, 6:30 p.m.; Dec. 26, Christmas service, 9:30 a.m.
 - St. Francis Catholic Church, Eighth and Arapahoe – Dec. 24, family Christmas mass, 5 p.m.; midnight mass; Dec. 25, Christmas Day mass, 9 a.m.; Dec. 26, Feast of Holy Family, 9 a.m.; Jan. 1, New Year's Day mass, 9 a.m.; Jan. 1, Epiphany mass, 5 p.m.; Jan. 2, Epiphany mass, 9 a.m.
 - St. Paul Lutheran Church, 288 Highway 20 South – Dec. 24, Christmas Eve service, 7 p.m.; Dec. 25, Christmas Day service, 9 a.m.

IR office closed Friday

In order for our employees to spend time with their families during this holiday season, the Thermopolis Independent Record office will be closed Friday, Christmas Eve.

The office will also be closed on Friday, Dec. 31 – New Year's Eve.

Regular office hours will resume Monday, Jan. 3, 2011.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Independent Record staff!

Tax from page 1

“I think the community is coming together,” Wallingford said.

The chamber also is working to renegotiate the contract for the event to get a better deal.

She also stressed that under the current contract, no other community within 150 miles of Thermopolis is allowed to have a 3-on-3.

“We have neighbors chomping at the bit to take 3-on-3,” she said.

3-on-3 funding issues

Lodging Tax Board president Angie Guyon reported having successful conversations with executives from the Wind River Casino to see about getting sponsorship money for the event, which could range from \$2,000 to \$4,000.

Board member Dan Moriarity also thinks the chamber should approach the Shoshone tribe for sponsorship of the 3-on-3.

Wallingford reported the chamber had secured \$1,000 in donations thus far, and expects another \$3,000 before the Jan. 20 deadline for the chamber’s first \$6,250 payment to World Events.

The conversation also turned toward the funding shortfall for the event caused by the chamber’s tiered membership system.

Board member Harvey Seidel outlined a flaw in the system resulting from the tiered system. Businesses who chose one of the upper tiers thought they were also sponsoring the event and money would be set aside from their chamber dues for the 3-on-3.

Unfortunately, the money was not set aside because the chamber needed the money for its operations in response to less funding from government agencies and less money from chamber dues.

“In reality we have to be fair that some people think they have been supporting 3-on-3 through that tier system, when in reality they haven’t been,” Seidel said.

Continuing education

Board member Ernest Cummings commended the Lodging Tax Board members for their leadership and professionalism during the past month as people have “cornered” and asked them why they made the decision about 3-on-3.

He added he was slightly disturbed by some of the comments

he’s seen in the media regarding the issue, particularly from members of the chamber’s board of directors, and commended the board for not bashing other government agencies as the controversial issue has progressed.

He stressed there needs to be a push for education to various members of the community on what both the Chamber and Lodging Tax boards do for the community.

“The important thing is to educate the public on what exactly we do, what the chamber does and get their buy-in,” Cummings said.

Both Lodging Tax and Chamber boards planned to meet with Hot Springs County Commissioners later Tuesday to discuss funding of the chamber and the 3-on-3 issue.

Ordinance from page 1

Other business

■ **Septic system agreement:** The council discussed allowing Calvin King to install a septic system on a piece of property he is developing near Springview Street.

Town attorney Mike Messenger said the cost for King to hook up to town sewer to be about \$100,000 if he were to connect.

Messenger said the town would not set a precedent because it is a single case in which there will be no new development in the immediate area.

The council agreed to allow the agreement to move forward under condition the septic system design meets Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality standards, and on approval of the county commission, which has authority for septic system permits in Hot Springs County.

■ **CDBG Grant funding:** Mayor’s assistant Fred Crosby informed the council of the Wyoming Housing Network’s intention to seek its sponsorship in applying for a grant through the state for an apartment complex on town property near 14th Street.

Crosby expects the council to take action at its next regular meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 4.

■ **Landfill agreement:** The council has scheduled a work session with Hot Springs County Commissioners to discuss the town’s landfill agreement.

The work session will be at 5 p.m. Jan. 4 at town hall.