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SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

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School calendar addressed

by Joe Sov
Trustees heard a report from Hot Springs County School District No. 1 Superintendent Marty Kobza about a proposed alternative calendar during last Thursday's regular board meeting.

In addition, several community members voiced their opinion about going to a 4½-day school week, and one of them feels the district should either stay with the current 5-day week or consider converting to a 4-day week for the 2011-12 school year.

During three public meetings about the alternative calendar, Kobza said the prime reason for going to an alternative calendar is to maximize teacher-student contact time in the classroom. It's common for many students and teachers to miss class on Friday afternoons due to ath-

letics and other extracurricular activities.

William Struemke and his

“
I would like my
kids to get the
extra education.

Parent William
Struemke advocating
4-day school week

wife Sara have three school-age children in the district.

“There have been some issues that I've raised,” Struemke said. “Have advocated the 4-day

school week with the fifth day being optional.” He added other school districts are using that alternative, thereby giving the teachers extra time with students without locking parents into a need to have their students at school on the optional day. Struemke called time with teachers on the fifth day “bonus hours.”

“I would like my kids to get the extra education,” he said.

Struemke said he wants to see more parental involvement in the development of the alternative plan. There was just one parent on the task force to evaluate an alternative calendar.

Tom Farstad, who has a granddaughter who is a district student, told trustees a change in the school calendar wouldn't

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The 91-year-old Middleton School will be featured during School Days the first Saturday in June. Above, Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center Director Ross Rhodes looks at an old globe while standing at a well-used chalkboard inside the school.

South Thermopolis water district project could start later this year

The South Thermopolis Water & Sewer District secured \$782,109 in funding for its \$4.8 million water system overhaul and expansion project from the State Loan and Investment Board (SLIB) last week.

The amount is in addition to a grant from the Wyoming Water Development Commission in the amount of \$2.1 million, which is scheduled to receive approval from the state legislature before it adjourns in March.

With the addition of the SLIB money, which requires the district to take out a \$260,704 matching loan, the district will have \$3.16 million of its total project cost secured for Phase One of the project. “We are glad to get what the board was willing to give the district,” said district chairman Neil Miller. “That said, we would have liked to have received more to complete this water system renovation project but are working to attain other funding.”

The SLIB Board, which is comprised of Gov. Matt Mead, Secretary of State Max Maxwell, State Auditor Cynthia Cloud, State Treasurer Joe Meyer and Superintendent of Public Instruction Cindy Hill, chose to pass all of the projects recommended by Office of State Lands and Investments Director Rob Thompkins.

In his recommendation, Thompkins stipulated the district will need to secure the \$260,704 matching loan by Sept. 1 or else face losing the \$782,109 from the SLIB Mineral Royalty Grant program.

In order to meet the deadline, the district has already started the process for securing a loan from a program operated through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development division.

“The SLIB Board has given us a tight deadline without much room for error, so this will be a challenge for our water district,” Miller said.

Project need

The water district hopes the current project will replace the existing system while also expanding it to include users who already pay property taxes to the district but do not currently receive water.

“I am fairly sure that at least Phase One of the proposed project will get underway later this year, unless some other problem arises that we are not aware of,” Miller said.

The existing system currently serves about 250 people – mainly those who are close to the main water line along Highway 20 South. The existing water tank pumps water up to a booster station that provides water to the Sable Run Subdivision. Many of the homes in the subdivision also are at higher elevations than the station.

The project includes the installation of about 46,000 lineal feet of pipe, replacement of a pump station, a new water tank and several pressure reducing stations.

The new tank will need to be installed at a higher location a considerable distance from the existing system in order to meet water pressure requirements for the entire district. Doing so will allow the district to reach 25 percent more of its residents.

“South Thermopolis Water & Sewer District urgently needs to move forward to fix an aging system that has many problems,” Miller said. “For instance, water quality and pressure issues both of which cause health and safety problems to our customers.”

Unknown issues

It is unknown how long it will take for the district to secure the loan from USDA, which could take several months because of various requirements the district must complete, Miller said.

It also is unknown what affect a water rate increase from the district's water provider, the Town of Thermopolis, may have with the district's ability to secure a loan or how it will affect the district's grant/loan ratio from USDA.

During a meeting Jan. 13, the district board discussed scenarios regarding the ability to pay back a loan from USDA, which took into account the amount of revenue from the district's water

See Water on page 11

by Joe Sov

Each year, local organization Four for Fun and Funding kicks off summer with a big event. Last year, it was Stagecoach Days, and this year School Days will be in the spotlight Saturday, June 4 at the Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center in Thermopolis.

Four for Fun and Funding consists of the Hot Springs County Museum, Historical Society and Pioneer Association, and Friends of the Museum.

It will be a one-day event this year instead of two, according to museum and cultural center director Ross Rhodes.

“The first day we didn't get many people,” he said of Stagecoach Days the first weekend of June in 2010. “It was too much work for what little we got out of it.”

This year, the museum committee is concentrating on a plethora of events and activities for one day rather than two.

During Stagecoach Days, there was one big tent on Seventh Street, between the museum and annex.

While celebrating School

Days, plans are for two large tents—one primarily for the roast pig dinner Saturday evening and the other for some of the many School Days activities.

Classes at Middleton School

Featured during the annual event will be Middleton School, now located at the museum annex. It was built in 1920, Rhodes said, and moved to Thermopolis after consolidation around the middle of the 20th century. There will be classes held at the school beginning at 9 a.m. June 4, replicating education from a century ago. Other class sessions start at 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

“The school (district) is getting a lot of history for us,” Rhodes said, and committee members are contacting school organizations and clubs for their involvement in School Days.

The event is the first weekend after the end of the school year, which will allow families with school-age children an opportunity to attend before summer vacations.

Rhodes said there will be “traditional” games for the kids,

dating back to pre-20th century times.

“I think it's going to be fun,” he said of School Days.

Included will be a scavenger hunt, open photo shoot, horse-shoeing demonstration and pie and ice cream sale.

Past school personnel will be honored shortly before the pig roast.

Capping School Days will be skits coordinated by Hot Springs County School District drama coach Eric Kay.

Focus toward county's centennial

Rhodes noted School Days will focus on history from the late-1800s through 1911. Next year, they will pick up with what was happening from 1912 until later in the century.

Museum events this year and in 2012 will lead up to 2013, when the Hot Springs County centennial will be celebrated—marking 100 years since the county was established.

More information on 2011 School Days will be publicized as Four for Fun and Funding finalizes details.

Legislature updates

Fuel tax hike law may not make it to floor

by Joe Sov

Lawmakers are considering a bill that would result in a 10 cent per gallon hike in the state fuel tax in the 61st Wyoming Legislature, but Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-HD28) indicated Tuesday there could be an alternative.

Quarberg said House Bill 22 would mean the increase in the fuel tax would be phased in over a three-year period. The legislation came out of the House

Transportation, Highways and Military Affairs Committee that she chairs, but had not been heard by the Committee of the Whole.

“Leadership is looking at other ways” of providing additional funding for highways without raising the fuel tax,” Quarberg said. “There is adequate revenue available in the state to send to WYDOT (Wyoming

See Quarberg on page 11

Geis opposes concealed weapon change

by Karla Pomeroy

Two bills pertaining to concealed weapons came before the Committee of the Whole in the Wyoming Legislature last week, one approved by the Senate and the other soundly defeated.

Sen. Gerald Geis (R-Worland, SD20) reported Monday that he was among the 21 senators who voted against Sen-

ate File 97 to allow retired law enforcement officers to carry a concealed weapon without a permit. He said there was concern about law enforcement outside the state that move to Wyoming and would be allowed to carry a concealed weapon. He said there was no way to know anything about the officers or

See Geis on page 11

Morning moon



A full moon begins its decent behind the mountains last Thursday morning from a view west of Thermopolis.
— Lara Love photo