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Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

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Interest rates down, home sales up in Thermop area

Numbers in 2010 up 13 percent from 2009

by Joe Sov

Many people believe winter is not a good time to purchase a home, but that might not be the case in many areas that experience cold weather this time of year.

With interest rates dipping to well under 5 percent nationwide, it appears we're in a "buyer's market" that could also benefit home sellers.

The Thermopolis, Wyo., Real Estate Year End Review indicates units sold in 2010 outperformed 2009 by 13 percent and are expected to continue growing in 2011. Low mortgage rates and aggressive and creative marketing is expected to boost the sales in the spring selling season.

The year-end review indicated the average price of homes sold stayed basically the same with the average price in 2009 being \$133,500 and the average in 2010 at \$131,385. There have been very few bank-owned homes in Hot Springs County.

As of late last week, there were 64 homes on the market in the county – ranging in price from \$25,000 to \$595,000. The 22 commercial properties listed ranged in asking price of \$63,500 to \$292,000.

"Units are definitely up. There is more happening as far as commercial property is concerned," said RE/MAX All-Star Realtors broker/co-owner Jody Coleman. "It's an aggressive and creative market. We're working with what people have."

Other realtors in the county include Properties

West, Roundtop Real Estate, Matt Brown Real Estate and Silver Spur Realty.

RE/MAX All-Star Realtors had 57 units listed from Jan. 1, 2010 to Dec. 31, 2010 in Hot Springs County, according to MLS (Multiple Listing Service). Properties West was next with 52 and Roundtop Real Estate had 20, followed by Silver Spur Realty, Hake Realty and Home Source Realty. The volume was just more than \$17.6 million for 135 listings, an average of about \$130,000.

In many areas, especially outside Hot Springs County, agents are "behind the 8-ball competing with bank-owned properties," Coleman said of repossessions.

For decades, Lander had been known as a community with higher priced properties than surrounding areas, but Coleman said the agents there are getting "hungry enough" and aggressive in finding buyers. "What is the property worth and what does the seller have to do" is a lot of the mindset there during the economic downturn.

"Sellers are in a price war and beauty war and marketing war, and the seller has to win on all three accounts," Coleman said.

Good time to buy

It's an attractive time to buy with interest rates as much as 2 percentage points lower than just a couple of years ago. Wyoming Community Development Association has offered first-time buyers – and people who have not owned a home for at least three years – an interest rate of as low as

See Housing on page 11

RWE celebrates 100th day



Seth Weyer, a kindergartner at Ralph Witters Elementary, happily celebrates the 100th day of school on Feb. 3. Each of the schools had different activities to celebrate the milestone.
—Cindy Glasson photo

Commissioners discuss survey issues, fire numbering system

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners held a conference call regarding land survey issues near the fairgrounds, discussed the county fire-numbering system and talked about some budgeting issues during their Feb. 1 meeting.

At the request of the Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources Division, a review was conducted on the land survey done in 2001 to ensure the leases for the armory building and the fairgrounds were marked appropriately.

According to surveyor Rick Hudson, the state has apparently been using boundary descriptions which date back to 1957, rather than a revised version, creating some question as to which land is actually being leased by whom, the joint powers board or the fair board.

The newest survey by Hudson, including a site visit in early

January, shows 25.7 acres that include everything in the general area with the exception of the county's weed and pest, the original armory tract, the former WYDOT building and county road and bridge.

Katherine Palmer with Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources concessionaires division said her office was not prepared for the conference call and requested all the information from Hudson be sent to her office for further review.

Palmer said right now the state wants to make sure money is not being "double dipped" from the leases.

All the information the state needs along with Hudson's latest surveys will be hand delivered next week by commissioner Mike Baker.

Road and bridge supervisor Ray Shaffer told the commissioners they are still trying to work out all the details with WYDOT

regarding a new fire numbering system in the county.

Shaffer said there are other counties having issues with the new system and each of those counties does it differently, creating confusion.

WYDOT has suggested numbering based on a mileage system. In driving around the county, Shaffer said he has found several discrepancies in the current numbering system.

Changing the numbers as WYDOT suggests could change a lot of addresses in the county, something the commissioners are sure the public would resist.

"If we don't make it right at some point," Shaffer said, "it could be a bad thing for fire or emergency services."

The commissioners suggested Shaffer continue to work with WYDOT to come to some kind of agreement, but also said a public hearing on the issue might be needed down the road.

Canyon crash claims life of Colorado man

by J.D. Stetson

Wyoming Highway Patrol troopers have identified Frank M. King, 39, of Rifle, Colo., as the man who died in a fatal crash Friday morning in Wind River Canyon near Boysen Reservoir Dam.

Hot Springs County firefighters, Highway Patrol troopers, EMTs and Fremont County authorities responded to the crash at 9 a.m. Friday after receiving a call from local fishermen of a vehicle on fire about 300 yards from the dam.

When authorities arrived, they saw the vehicle, a 2008 Ford pickup, fully engulfed in flame at the bottom of the canyon near the BNSF Railway.

The ambulance and fire trucks were able to get to the wreck by using a Boysen State Park road and crossing the railroad tracks.

According to a Highway Patrol release, King was driving his vehicle south on U.S. Highway 20 and drove straight as he entered a curve near the dam and went off the right side of the road. The vehicle went off a 74-foot embankment and traveled 220 feet, then hit a large boulder and caught fire.

Troopers do not know why King went off the highway and there were no marks to indicate he had attempted to brake before leaving the roadway.

Fremont County Coroner Edward R. McAuslan said identifying people who perish in similar incidents is difficult.

"In this case, we were able to determine the vehicle was a company truck and there was only one employee in this area for that company," McAuslan said.

Authorities also found a receipt from a store in Basin dated Friday morning. Authorities confirmed King was the person who made the purchase when the store employee identified him.

King also had rented a room in Thermopolis, which put him in the area. Before



Hot Springs County Firefighters inspect the wreckage of a 2008 Ford pickup after it went off a 70-foot embankment and caught fire Friday near the Boysen Reservoir Dam in the Wind River Canyon. Authorities do not know why the driver, Frank M. King, went off the road.
— J.D. Stetson photo

the crash, King had talked on the phone to a business in Riverton and had said he was going there to pick up material for a job site, McAuslan said.

McAuslan discussed the information from the investigation with King's wife, who acknowledged the information was

correct.

She added her husband called her on a regular basis and she had not heard from him since the crash.

McAuslan added King previously lived in Evanston before moving to Colorado where his family lives.

Legislature update

Education bills abound in House

by Joe Sov

Bills pertaining to education have been taking considerable time in State House and Senate committees during the 61st Wyoming Legislature in Cheyenne, and some of the legislation is not making it to the respective house floor.

Monday was the last day for bills to be heard by the Committee of the Whole in the house of origin. Tuesday was the final day for second reading on bills where they originated, and Wednesday was the last day for third reading.

Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-HD28) said Senate File 110, reorganization of the School Facilities Commission, would

definitely be moving forward. It was on General File in the House this week.

"The original (law) had a lot of autonomy, it answered to nobody," Quarberg said Tuesday. "The commission will answer to the governor."

"They've (the commission) had a tough go in terms of their ability to be accountable and prioritize projects."

She said the Senate was finishing up the teacher tenure bill on third reading and it was expected to move to the House for debate. The Senate Education Committee has begun work on the recalibration bill, which

See Quarberg on page 11

Tenure bill scrutinized by Senate

by Karla Pomeroy

As of Monday morning the Wyoming Senate had lain back second reading of Senate File 52 twice. The bill would remove tenure or continuing contract status for teachers.

Sen. Gerald Geis (R-SD20, Worland) said, "I think (the leadership) is waiting to see what happens with SF146. If it passes Committee of the Whole then I doubt if SF52 will pass. But, it's never over 'til it's over,"

Senate File 146 – Teacher Accountability Act would require school district teacher performance evaluations to be based in part upon student achievement; direct the state board of education to establish performance criteria

based upon educational accountability measures to be established by law; establishes performance as a basis for contract determinations; modifies grounds for teacher suspension dismissal and termination.

Big Horn County School Dist. No. 4 Supt. Mary Fisher said they are developing an evaluation plan based on the McRel model of evaluation, which incorporates student achievement based on chosen assessments. Work on the evaluations began last March and includes parental and staff involvement.

SF146, which Geis strongly favors, was up on General File

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