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Thermopolis
Hot Springs

Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

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County valuation comes in at \$223 million for 2011

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Assessor's Office has released the final county valuation information for 2011, showing Hot Springs County ranked 17th out of the 23 counties in Wyoming.

A total valuation of \$223,190,330 is due in large part to the 10 largest taxpayers in the county, including the number-one taxpayer, Merit Energy Company.

Also in the top 10 are Marathon Oil, Phoenix Production, Legacy Reserves, Citation Oil and Gas, Saga Petroleum, Wyben, Fidelity Exploration and Production, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad and SM Energy.

As a comparison, Campbell County is ranked first in assessed valuation in the state with \$5,425,565,207 in taxes for 2011. Niobrara County comes in last on the list with just \$89,983,319 for the county to work with for 2011.

Land ownership

The assessor's office breaks down land ownership within the county as part of the valuation process.

Forty percent of the land within Hot Springs County is owned by the Bureau of Land Management, followed by 30 percent agricultural land ownership.

Reservation and U.S. In Trust land accounts for 19 percent of land ownership with state lands comprising 6 percent and national forest lands, at 4 percent.

Actual residential, commercial and industrial land ownership is a mere one percent of land owned in Hot Springs County.

Top taxpayers

The top three taxpayers in the county have remained the same from 2009-11; however, the dollar amounts paid to the county coffers have varied drastically, sometimes in the millions of dollars.

For example, Merit Energy, Marathon Oil and Phoenix Production paid a total of

\$12,706,297 in taxes to Hot Springs County during 2009, compared to \$7,831,744 in 2010, a difference of nearly \$5 million.

Although still lower than the 2009 assessment, the same three companies will be paying \$9,302,939 for their 2011 assessment, almost \$1.5 million more than in 2010.

Valuation changes

As the taxes paid by the top earners in the county have changed over the years, so has the valuation of the county itself.

In looking over the county's valuation as far back as 1977, one can see the ups and downs created by the boom and bust economy of oil production.

Right now, Hot Springs County is about \$81 million behind the all-time high valuation of \$303,920,594 in 1982, when 92 percent of our valuation came from oil production.

Things were a little tight in 1999 when the county's valuation dropped to just \$65,466,986, with oil production at its lowest level in more than 20 years.

For 2011, oil production accounts for just over 75 percent of the county's valuation with natural gas, solid minerals, public utilities, railroads and pipelines accounting for another 4 percent.

Twenty percent of the valuation in the form of agricultural lands and improvements, other land and personal property.

The value of hard minerals, sand, gravel and bentonite have more than doubled in the last year, going from \$573,770 in 2010 to \$1,830,242 for 2011.

Oil prices skyrocketed 58 percent from 2008 to 2009, going from an average of \$45.82 per barrel to \$76.14 per barrel. That dropped 38 percent per barrel in 2010, but gained back 19 percent in 2011 at \$59.42 per barrel on average.

Complete information on the county's valuation may be found through the assessor's office on the Internet at www.hscounty.com.

Spirit of Veterans Day



Thermopolis Middle School fifth graders Tori Williams, Akira LaBoy, Jaden Schierkolk and Alexandria Krueger join their classmates, teachers, parents and veterans in

holding their hands up high while God Bless the USA plays during a Veterans Day presentation last Friday. - J.D. Stetson photo

Commissioners ask Marathon for support of hospital district

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners met with representatives from Marathon Oil in Cody early this week and discussed the results during their meeting Tuesday afternoon.

The meeting was scheduled with Marathon Oil to discuss the possibility of them supporting a hospital district in Hot Springs County. As the largest taxpayer in the county, the commissioners felt backing of a district by Marathon could get the question on the ballot for the next election.

One of the questions raised by the oil company was the actual number of current or retired employees living in the county that could benefit from a hospital district.

While the commissioners did not have concrete numbers, they assured Marathon

their business would benefit from backing the proposal.

Marathon is currently fighting an additional tax burden from several years ago and indicated to the commissioners they would have a better idea of where they stand after reconciliation of the tax issue.

In the meantime, the commissioners are drafting a letter thanking the company for the meeting and inviting them to come to Thermopolis to look over the current hospital and hear about future plans for the facility.

Energy review

During their Nov. 1 meeting, the commissioners were approached by the Ennovate Corporation with an offer to do an energy review for the county buildings in an effort to save the county money on their

energy costs.

After reviewing the proposal, the commissioners have agreed to allow the company to start the free energy review Dec. 12, with a final report to be presented to the commissioners by mid-January.

Ennovate engineers will do an extensive tour of the county buildings, and develop a plan for upgrades and retrofits that would save on energy costs, then present it to the commissioners at no cost.

The commissioners also received a similar offer from the Rocky Mountain District of Trane, Inc.

In the interest of the county, the commissioners agreed to have Trane, Inc. do an energy analysis as well and will compare the possible energy savings presented by both companies.

Early deadline for Nov. 24 issue

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, next week's Thermopolis Independent Record will be published a day early. The Nov. 24 issue will go to press on Tuesday rather than Wednesday and will be available around town Tuesday evening.

Most mailed copies will arrive in post office boxes and on county rural routes Wednesday morning.

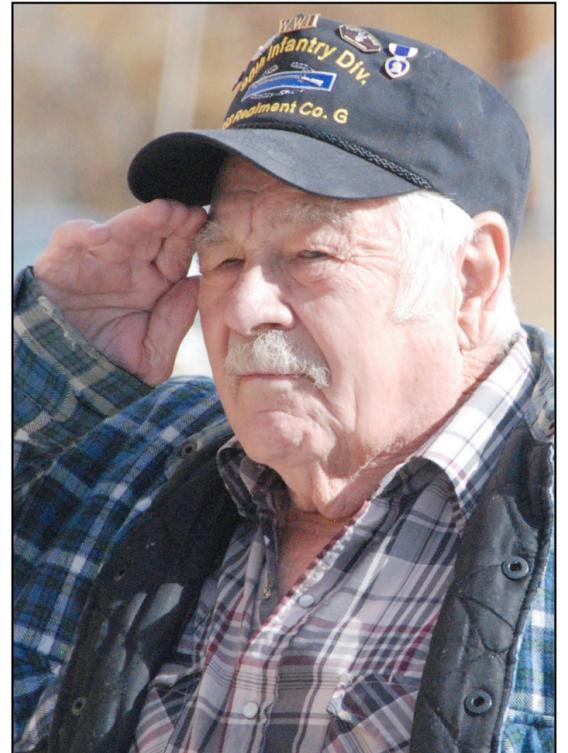
Display advertising and public notices deadline for the Nov. 24 issue will be 5 p.m. Friday. Deadline for classified ads

is noon Monday.

The deadline for submission of information for stories will be noon Monday.

Our office will be closed Thanksgiving Day, but will be open Friday, Nov. 25 for regular hours.

Saluting fellow veterans



Darrell Petty salutes his fellow veterans as "Taps" plays during the VFW Post 2281 Veterans Day Memorial Ceremony on Friday. - J.D. Stetson photo

Adbay.com unveils advertising campaign

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Lodging Tax Board has revealed its new advertising campaign for Thermopolis and Hot Springs County, developed by adbay.com of Casper.

Focusing the start of the campaign on television ads, the company has created four separate 15-second commercials featuring panoramic views of the area, the mineral springs and pools as well as the Wyoming Dinosaur Center.

Playing on the word "Thermopolis," the company changed the first few letters for each ad, creating "Viewopolis," "Happyopolis," "Steamopolis" and "Timeopolis."

The ads are currently available to view online through YouTube by going to the com-

pany's website, adbay.com, and looking for the link to the ads on the right-hand side of the page.

Accounting questions

During Tuesday's board meeting, there was some discussion on which checking account the various bills for the Lodging Tax Board and the Chamber of Commerce should be written.

Currently, monies are given to the Chamber from the Lodging Tax Board, which are placed in the Chamber's account. Bills are then paid from the Chamber's account with no paper trail for the Lodging Tax Board.

While the board is agreeable to giving the money to the Chamber for various bills,

the payments need to be made from the appropriate checking accounts in order to keep records straight for both entities.

Chamber president Donna Nally and Chamber Interim Executive Director Michelle Lue agreed to pass the request on to the accounting firm that handles both accounts.

Billboards

The board has noticed a large increase in the cost for maintaining a billboard just outside Cheyenne and has been attempting to negotiate a better price with the firm that owns the sign.

One option would be a one-year contract based on a flat rate that would not include free production of the vinyl covering the billboard.

A second option would be a three-year flat rate contract, again, with no extras, or the third option, a three-year contract on a sliding scale that would include production of the vinyl as well as replacement of the vinyl as needed.

The third option would mean a 3-percent rise in costs for the second and third years.

The board approved the third option, agreeing the cost of replacing the vinyl, about \$1,500 each time, made up for the cost increases as they sometimes need replacing within six months of being put up due to wind and other weather conditions.

There will be no December meeting of the Lodging Tax Board, but it will resume meetings on Jan. 17, 2012.