

Thermopolis
Hot Springs

Independent Record



Newly appointed Hot Springs County Clerk Nina Webber is sworn in by District Judge Robert Skar on Friday at the courthouse. The County Commission voted 3-0 to appoint Webber to the vacated position earlier that day. – Drew Foster photo

Webber named new county clerk

by Drew Foster

The Hot Springs County Commission on Friday afternoon unanimously voted Nina Webber the new county clerk.

Webber was sworn in by District Judge Robert E. Skar, replacing longtime Hot Springs County Clerk Hans Odde, who filed his resignation in January to join GDA Engineers in Cody.

The commissioners' decision was complicated Friday morning when one of the applicants, Brian Green, withdrew a half-hour before interviews began. The commissioners initially puzzled over whether selecting a replacement for Odde could be done with just two candidates.

"There's not a lot of case law on this," County Attorney Jerry Williams told the commissioners, explaining that he could find no statutory provision relating to an applicant dropping out of the selection process.

The commissioners mulled delaying the vote until this week, but decided to push forward so the new clerk would be able to attend election training in Cheyenne this week.

The three nominees had been selected by the Hot Springs County Republican Central Committee. Marianne Gular also was interviewed. The commissioners said they had a difficult time making the selection because both Webber and Gular were well qualified.

"The skill sets of both were impressive," Commission Chairman Mike Baker said.

Baker said the commission considered the nominees' attention to detail, technical know-how, human resource knowledge, budget-building abilities, filing and record keeping skills, understanding of titles, enthusiasm for the position and commitment to ongoing schooling and training, among other attributes.

Commissioner Brad Basse said he was most impressed with Webber's accounting and record-keeping background, and familiarity with the office.

Webber currently works for GRS, LLC in Thermop, a roustabout company owned by her husband, George. She has spent most of her life in Hot Springs County and holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of Mary.

Some of her initial challenges in the clerk's office will be preparing the county budget next month and organizing the upcoming primary election in August.

Chamber hears Travel and Tourism report, discusses signage

by Joe Sovo

Amanda Moeller, tourism director for Hot Springs Travel and Tourism – formerly the Hot Springs County Lodging Tax Board – gave a report to the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce during its regular meeting Thursday, March 13 in the hospital conference room. The board also discussed options for improved signage at the chamber/visitor center building on Park Street, leading into Hot Springs State Park, and heard a number of committee reports, input on the Wyoming Main Street program and a report on People of the Earth Days.

Since a housing project on Arapahoe Street is not going to proceed at this time, Moeller said Travel and Tourism was looking for other new housing options. "We need a labor force AND housing," she told the chamber board. "Housing is definitely an issue for us all." Specifically, that would be apartments or townhouses.

Moeller also said her board was moving ahead with options for new businesses in Thermopolis. "We're working on the downtown area and filling those (vacant) spaces," she said.

In terms of tourism, Moeller said a Travel and Tourism billboard east of Worland reads, "Rekindle Your Happilyeveropolis," and depicts Thermopolis as a "Biker Friendly Town." The signage promotes Hot Springs County as a prime visitor destination. Moeller said a digital billboard is "up and running" at Gillette, promoting county attractions and events.

In turn, the soon-to-be-refurbished billboard

board about five miles northwest of Thermop, on Highway 120, focuses on the hot springs. "Our hot springs is an attraction and we need to focus on that," Moeller said.

After discussion, the chamber board passed a motion to use some of the money from a \$7,500 certificate of deposit that had matured on signage for the west and south sides of the chamber/visitor center. The remainder of the CD money would go into chamber savings.

Center for Cowboy Ethics and Leadership workshop

Under old business, the chamber board discussed consideration to bring a Center for Cowboy Ethics and Leadership workshop to Thermopolis, called "Standing Tall." It is a thought-provoking shared experience anchored in the community principles of the Code of the West, and the belief that true integrity can only come from within. The board took no action on the workshop and it will be brought back to the table at a later date.

Chamber Executive Director Meri Ann Rush reported on the two-day Governor's Conference that she attended recently in Cheyenne, during the State Legislature Budget Session. "The networking was well worth the time I was down there," Rush said. Board member Frank Roling supported the event, saying Rush's contacts at the conference could start paying off within the next several years.

In new business, the board approved sending Rush to the Wyoming Chamber Partnership Spring Conference to be held

April 23-25 in Buffalo. During the conference, new chamber directors are partnered with veteran directors for "instant education" that would help with the operation of chambers of commerce. One of the presentations is, "157 Rules for Executive Success in Organization Management."

Rush recommended to the board that the chamber start using the "Aprivapay" system through Pinnacle Bank. With the system, chamber members would have the option of paying their dues by credit or debit card. Receipts would be emailed by the chamber. The system could also be used for other chamber monetary receipts. The board voted unanimously to set up and use Aprivapay.

Partnering with fire department

Later in the meeting, Rush reported that she had received a letter indicating an interest for the Thermopolis Volunteer Fire Department to partner with the chamber in receiving donations for the annual Fourth of July fireworks display, coordinated and conducted by the fire department.

Annual banquet in spotlight Saturday

There is still time to get your tickets for the 2014 Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet on Saturday night.

"Celebrating the Spirit of Community" is the theme for the evening that begins with social hour at 5:30 p.m. at the Hot Springs County Fair Building. Dinner starts at 6:30 p.m. and will feature your choice of prime rib or chicken cordon bleu.

A dance will follow at 9 p.m. with the "Sundowners" providing a variety of music.

The Citizen of the Year, Business of the Year and Non-Profit Organization of the Year will be announced during the evening.

Nominees for Citizen of the Year are: Amanda Moeller, Barb Rice, Barb Vietti, Ciley Andreen, Jacky Wright, Lorraine Quarberg, Robin Roling, Susan Lankford, Stevie Ann Jellis and Vern Dockter. Jacque Michel was also nominated but respectfully declined the nomination.

Non-Profit Organization of the Year nominees include: Big Horn Basin Children's Center, Gottsche Rehabilitation and Care Center, HSC Memorial Hospital, HSC Historical Museum and Cultural Center, Hot Springs Greater Learning Foundation, Hot Spot Car Rally, Hot Springs State Park and the Thermopolis Cowboy Rendezvous PRCA Rodeo.

Business of the Year nominees are: Blair's Super Market, Days Inn, Flying Eagle Gallery, Independent Record, Needful Things Emporium, One Stop Repair and Service Center, Owl Creek Graphics and Owl Lumber/ACE Hardware.

Advance tickets are \$35 per person, available at the chamber office, and \$40 at the door. Attire for the event is business casual or semi-formal.

Water, water everywhere

by Drew Foster

A combination of high precipitation, robust snowpack and warm weather is bolstering runoff totals and streamflow volumes in the Big Horn Basin and causing regional flooding.

Private property has been threatened by flooding both north and south of Thermopolis in the past month, said Dave Schlager, the county's Road and Bridge superintendent. He said runoff from melted snowpack raised the levels of several area creeks.

"The ground was frozen so it couldn't absorb the moisture, and it ran off," Schlager said.

Worland has been plagued by flooding, caused by massive ice blocks that have jammed bridges along the Big Horn River.

Schlager said the threat of local floods has likely passed. Though he said another week of freezing temperatures coupled with a few days of spring warmth could again raise the levels of local creeks.

"If we get a fast melt like that, you could have (flooding) anywhere in town," he said.

Boysen Reservoir also is on the rise. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent Wyoming Basin Outlook Report, Boysen was 93

percent full as of March 1. It was 80 percent full at the same time last year. The Bureau of Reclamation, however, has Boysen at 82.2 percent full as of March 16.

Either way, National Weather Service hydrologist Jim Fahey said Boysen should reach capacity this spring.

"The only cog in the wheel is if it gets hot and dry," Fahey said, adding that those conditions could mean large quantities of water would be released downstream.

February's precipitation was 189 percent of average in the Big Horn River Basin, the report stated, while year-to-date precipitation is 132 percent of average. Last month's precipitation was a continuation of a trend that started in fall of 2013.

"We had a really wet September, which only happens every 10 to 15 years," Fahey said.

He expects the wet weather to continue.

"April, May and June are our heavy months for precipitation," he said.

Mountain snowpack statewide was 120 to 135 percent of average in early March. Above-average streamflow conditions are expected to continue in the Wind River watershed, according to Fahey.

St. Patty's Day Dash & Bash



Gottsche Wellness sponsored the St. Patty's Day Dash & Bash on a beautiful Saturday evening at the VFW Club. Ellen Galyan, above, received the Best Dressed award. Bob Hill and Drew Foster shared Fastest Time honors while



Shannon O'Keefe got the Best Irish Dish award for her baked pasties. Above, Heather Morningstar pushes her son Gunner while walking with Amanda Flores, center, and Katie Payseno. – Joe Sovo photos