

Airport grand opening taking shape

by Chandler Smith

The Hot Springs County Board of Commissioners took another step towards the grand opening of the new Hot Springs County airport during its meeting Tuesday.

The board heard from GDA engineer Jeremy Gilb as he reviewed various final steps that will need to be undertaken before the Nov. 7 grand opening, which will feature a fly-in by Governor Matt Mead.

Gilb informed the board of recent updates to the fifth phase of the airport construction plan, including a flight check and a forthcoming electrical inspection that will be undertaken

by the state. The board then chose to give a contract for the airport's under drain project to Mountain View Building of Sheridan for a total of \$103,352.20.

A final walkthrough with both state and Wyoming Department of Transportation officials will take place Oct. 22, and Gilb noted that the airport project as a whole is close to completion.

Among the items still being considered by the board are a Storm Water Prevention Plan, a Spill Prevention Countermeasure and Control Plan, the acquisition of fuel trucks, a quote for an air compressor and necessary piping, and

the installation of security cameras.

Gilb and the commissioners also discussed plans for the grand opening celebration, switching caterers from Chubby Cheeks to the local Incredible Edibles keeping with the original menu.

Other matters of business undertaken by the board included Steve Shay of the Thermopolis Police Department, who approached the commissioners for information regarding a Title 25 voucher, which would cover expenses of police officers called in to provide necessary security for the detention of a mentally ill patient in the Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital.



photo by Lara Love

The perfect pumpkin

Nicholas Arends looks to his dad for approval of the pumpkin he selected from Sheriff Lou's Pumpkin Patch Saturday.

School board approves several staffing recommendations

by Durward D. Jones

The October Hot Springs County School District Board meeting was short a few board members but was in good hands as Vice Chairwoman Melissa Johnson took the reins. Absent from the meeting was Chairman Tobi Johansen, Trustees Dan Pebbles and Dr. Travis Bomengen. Dr. Bomengen did arrive later after the board had moved into executive session.

Jacky Wright addressed the board about upcoming events the Greater Learning Foundation is sponsoring, giving an open invitation to the board to attend any event held in the school. Courtney Yarrington, the student body vice-president, presented the board with this month's activities. She commenting on the success of homecoming and mentioned three students are planning to attend a Close-Up trip to Washington D.C. in November.

Jim Lash, special services director, presented the board with a brief rundown of the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). The system is a preventative framework that integrates assessment, data-based decision making, researched based interventions and frequent monitoring to meet the needs and maximize academic achievement for students. Lash would like to see the program fully implemented in the district by next school year.

For monthly celebrations students Tyler Cornwell and Cody Bjorhus were recognized by the Wyoming High School Activities Association for

good sportsmanship. October staff of the month was Brandon Deromedi and teacher of the month was Shannon Hill.

A number of staffing recommendations were approved. The board approved resignations of Brenna Abel as head indoor track coach, Jena DeVries as paraprofessional and Candace Capelle as paraprofessional. The board approved to employ Jessica Benefiel as assistant middle school boys basketball coach, Steve Radabaugh as yearbook sponsor, Bailey Owsley as paraprofessional, Elisia Padilla as cook, Earl Knighten as RWE parking lot crossing guard and Jackie Price as bus paraprofessional.

Revisions to the Internet Use Agreement and the purchasing policy were approved on second and final reading. Revisions to the District Facility Use, Facility Use Request and Waiver of Liability policies were approved on first reading.

Vice-Chairwoman Johnson appointed Chairman Johansen as the Wyoming School Board Association voting delegate for 2015 and Treasurer Nichole Weyer as the alternate.

The board approved to accept a donation of a pallet of engines from Honda Engines valued at \$300 and a welder valued at over \$4,000 to the high school vocational department.

A motion to move into executive session to discuss personnel was made. The board went into executive session and finished over an hour later.

Colleen Anderson was instated as the business manager for the calendar year 2016. A motion

was moved by Dr. Bomengen and seconded by Jennifer Axtell all board members voted in favor of naming Anderson.

The meeting finished out with several reports from individual board members. Trustee Clay Van Antwerp reported on the Hot Springs County Recreation District. Currently the recreation district is working on an agreement with the Hot Springs County Fair Board and Joint Powers Board to control the ball fields and the armory. Vice Chairwoman Johnson had updates on NWBOCES.

Dr. Bomengen discussed the Curriculum Coordinating Council and shared that the group reviewed the academic program policy. He explained that in the past the review took two to three months to complete. Dr. Bomengen also encouraged the board to review the minutes from the Legislative Task Force's recalibration meeting.

Lastly, Superintendent Dustin Hunt gave his report. He shared a positive report of guest speaker Dr. Muhammad from Solution Tree, who addressed the majority of the school staff on Oct. 12. Hunt asked for board members who are planning to attend the PLC conference in Las Vegas in June to confirm they are going. Finally, he reminded the board the schools will be holding Veterans Day Assemblies on November 11.

Complete minutes of the HSCSD Board meeting can be found on the school district website at www.hotsprings1.org.

Town council hears objections to water rate increase

by Durward D. Jones

Tuesday's Thermopolis Town Council meeting was started with approving the agenda and then opening the floor for citizen participation.

It was after the second reading of the water rate increase ordinance that the meeting became an arena of discussion.

The Town Attorney Mike Messenger read the Water Rate Increase Ordinance for the second time. After the narration of the ordinance council member Tony Larson made a motion to approve the second reading of the ordinance, council member Dusty Lewis seconded the motion. Mayor Mike Mortimore then opened the floor for discussion. Mortimore recognized two representatives from other water districts, Neil Miller representing the South Thermopolis Water and Sewer District and Bart Bader for the Owl Creek Water District.

Miller started the discussion by asking point blank "is there an emergency in your budget?" Explaining he was trying to understand the new ordinance, and whether there is a budgetary emergency on the water budget.

Mortimore said even after raising the base rates \$5 in the last fiscal year the town still lost \$168,000 and the town has to raise the rates. Miller wanted to know why 40%, why not a more palatable number?

Miller asked the council how they think this rate is increase fair. He stated there is no real tier rate because it doesn't actually start until the user reaches over 800,000 gallons. He asked the council, "wouldn't that eliminate 95% of your population?" Miller estimated it would leave maybe one user that would use that much water. Assistant to the Mayor Fred Crosby explained there are several users who actually reach two million gallons of usage.

Mortimore said they are just charging everybody the same. "The people of Thermopolis have supplemented your rates," Mortimore explained to Miller. "We have been paying 125% for years, so you are completely wrong," Miller retorted. Mortimore stated the southern water district has never paid for the water plant, not like the residents inside the city limits do. Miller argued they do.

Miller asked if the town wanted to go to EDUs (equivalent dwelling units), setting a set number of water usage per resident. Councilman Tony Larson responded the town is not going to EDUs. Mortimore said residents are not going to like paying \$9 per thousand gallons, because that is what the average is.

The discussion continued as the council tried to explain the water plant has been under pressure to provide water to the town, and some of the super users tax the system to the point of just keeping up. Miller pointed out they are just the opposite and they have to try and prevent users from becoming super users to keep from taxing the water plant.

Mayor Mortimore continued explaining that the current ordinance is a compromise of several attempts to put together a new ordinance and that it was on the low end.

The town water plant is not "breaking even" as earlier reported. The town suffered a loss of over \$160,000 in the last fiscal year. The loss was not caused by any one reason, but various reasons throughout the year. This loss cannot be recouped.

Miller explained South Thermopolis Water and Sewer District's current base is about \$41 and now they will receive an \$18 increase on top of the \$41. "Are we paying for maintenance, are we paying for a new water plant, what are we paying for with that \$18? That is the big sixty four million dollar question," said Miller. Mortimore responded the water plant is the majority of the cost.

Miller said he is worried the town is putting excessive burden on the out of town users with the \$18 assessment. "I would like to think of us as outside users, we are a different color of cat," said Miller. He asked the council to reconsider the position towards the out of town users. Miller continued by suggesting the council ease into the rate over a two to three year period, not within the next sixty days.

"At some point there will be a hardship getting on the right track," Mortimore said. The plan is to treat everybody the same with the new ordinance.

Bart Bader from the Owl Creek District had one main concern. He asked if this will be enough of an increase to stay off raising the rate again in the future, thus allowing the Owl Creek District a chance to get their feet under them. "We have had rate increases three times already and we have been in business only a year," Bader explained.

Mortimore expressed a hope this rate increase should hold for a while, at least 2 years, but brought up there is always unforeseen expenses running the water plant. The next big project is to get the heavy load off the plant. They will be working on getting raw water to many of the super users. Taking the load off could extend plant life considerably. The Mayor did say he sees the burden the water districts are going through with this new ordinance.

There was some discussion about easing into the increase for the water districts. Bader said he thinks it would be better to get the sting over with so the district can deal with it and get their feet back under them. The Owl Creek district currently pays \$120 a month per user for their water.

After much discussion, the motion was passed for approving the second reading of the new water rate ordinance.

The council finished up the evening by passing a motion to opt out of the Joint Powers Board, leaving the remaining members of the Joint Powers Board in control of the board. The motion was modified to pay \$5,000 to the Recreation District and opt out of the board.