

State, county tourism increases

by Durward D. Jones

Wyoming tourism economy made some great leaps in the fiscal year of 2014-15. According to the Wyoming Office of Tourism, the state had a record of 10.5 million people visit, this is up from the 10.1 million visitors in 2014.

Travel spending in the state grew to just under \$3.4 billion in 2015, an increase of \$9 million over the previous year. Visitor spending directly affects Wyoming's economy by generating \$175 million in local and state

tax revenues, up from \$163 million in 2014. Since 2005, tax revenues generated by the tourism and hospitality industry have grown by more than 86 percent.

Hot Springs County also has seen a rise in lodging tax money in the county from tourism. The county had an 11 percent increase in 2015 from the previous year.

According to Amanda Moeller, Travel and Tourism Director, the county has seen the effect of these numbers. Hot Springs County has extended to Gillette and surround-

ing areas with advertising and has seen an increase in visitors from Campbell County.

Moeller has increased TV advertising with Billings and Casper stations. "The money that is received from the local lodging tax is used to promote Thermopolis and bring more people to stay and play in our community," Said Moeller.

The lodging tax is paid by visitors that spend the night in lodging establishments such as a motel, RV park or vacation rental. Any stay that is less than 30 days is taxed.



photo by Dennis Nierzwicki

Hey, hey we're the monkeys

The playground during recess at Ralph Witters Elementary was teaming with children eager to play in the unusually warm February weather. Left to right, Lilly Quintanilla, Chloe Owsley and Trysten DeVries show off their hanging and climbing skills on the jungle gym.

Shinost found guilty on three counts

by Cindy Glasson

Jurors in Washakie County deliberated just under eight and a half hours before bringing back a guilty verdict on three counts against Thermopolis man, Cody Shinost, in the 2014 roll-over accident that claimed the life of Madisen "Maddie" Price, left her sister, Delanie Price in a coma for months with severe head trauma and caused extreme injuries to a third passenger, Dylan Balstad.

The trial began in Washakie County Fifth Judicial Court on Monday, Feb. 1 after Shinost's public defender, Richard Hopkinson, asked for a change of venue from Hot Springs County.

Closing arguments were completed by Hopkinson and Hot Springs County Attorney Jerry Williams, representing the State of Wyoming in the case, by 1 p.m. on Thursday.

The jury returned to the courtroom just before 9:30 p.m. Thursday night with a guilty verdict on count one; aggravated vehicular homicide while under the influence of alcohol, count two; control of a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol resulting in serious bodily injury to Delanie Price, and count three; control of a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, resulting in serious bodily injury to Dylan Balstad.

Count one, a felony, carries a possible 20-year sentence and/or \$10,000 fine. Counts two and three carry a possible 10-year sentence for each charge. The sentencing phase of the trial should begin in approximately two weeks ac-

cording to Williams.

A special investigative crash team from the Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP) was called into service the night of the accident.

That team, using GPS technology, was able to pinpoint the exact point where Shinost's late model Mustang left the road, where Delanie Price was ejected from the vehicle, how many times it rolled before coming to a stop on its wheels and at what point Maddie Price was ejected, landing behind the vehicle.

Every beer can and bottle found on the scene as well as bits and pieces of wreckage were also scanned with the GPS and loaded into a computer which calculated speed, distance and other elements of the crash, eliminating the possibility of human error with the investigation.

During testimony, members of the crash team told the jury marks on the roadway above the crash site showed Shinost had not attempted to brake before the car left the pavement.

Witnesses for the prosecution included Weston and Heather Jones, the first people to reach the crash site.

Weston Jones said he was returning

from a fair board meeting that night when he noticed the car in the ditch, and at first, thought they had just slid off the road, even though the roads were dry.

After reaching home about a half mile down the road, Jones had his wife, Heather, call Hot Springs County dispatch before returning with her to the scene to check on the accident.

The Joneses climbed down to the car and spoke with Shinost and Balstad before finding Maddie Price behind the vehicle.

Delanie Price was found approximately 10 minutes later by then Hot Springs County Sheriff's Deputy Rick Brill when he arrived on scene. Delanie was face down near the edge of the road above the accident, still wearing her Bobcat girls basketball

team shirt.

Wyoming Highway Patrolman Jeremy Pittsley arrived next, followed by Hot Springs County School District Special Services Director and EMT, Jim Lash. Lash had had all four of the victims as students and recognized them immediately.

Lash did the initial assessment on

the victims, telling the jury he knew Maddie was deceased at that time. This was later confirmed by Hot Springs County Coroner, Mark Mortimore.

Crystal Spatol, EMT with Mortimore Ambulance Service, testified Shinost was in the front passenger seat when ambulances arrived. Her assessment of him showed bruises and abrasions to his hands, but she also checked him for head trauma based on his aggressiveness and combative nature while on the way to the hospital.

Spatol noted his pupils were equal but sluggish, ruling out a head injury, but pointing toward intoxication. Shinost's blood alcohol level was .186, more than double the legal limit of .08.

Medical personnel at the hospital, including doctors and nurses, confirmed the intoxication diagnosis. Shinost also had reduced lung sounds which Dr. Jason Weyer, who worked on Shinost in the emergency room, testified was the result of pulmonary contusions, bruising of the lungs, caused by blunt force trauma to the chest. Weyer said the bruising could have been caused from contact with the steering wheel.

The steering wheel, upon inspection, had moved 3/4 of an inch from its primary driving position.

In the days that followed the accident, the WHP crash team had the vehicle examined extensively by Wyoming Department of Transportation field mechanic Brandon Blakesley.

Fireman's Ball set for Saturday

by Durward D. Jones

The Thermopolis Volunteer Fire Department will present the annual Fireman's Ball at the VFW Post 2281 Saturday, Feb. 13.

Doors open at the conclusion of the firefighters' awards banquet, which begins at 6 p.m., and is not open to the public. The band begins playing at 9 p.m.

Raffle tickets will be sold at the door for guests to purchase for a chance to win several door prizes.

First place is a gift certificate for \$300, second place is \$200, third is \$100 and fourth and fifth are \$50 each.

The gift certificates are redeemable at any business in Hot Springs County.

The ball is free to the public, but donations are accepted, volunteer Fire Chief Mark Collins said. Last year's event raised just under \$7,000.

Live music will be provided by Sundowners.

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