

# Bridge, buffalo centennial celebration planned

by Mark Dykes

In 1916, a suspension bridge was built across the Bighorn River in Hot Springs State Park. Commonly referred to as “The Swinging Bridge,” it will get a new look for the evening hours in celebration of its 100 years.

Park Superintendent Kevin Skates said the Kiwanis discussed the idea of putting lights on the bridge, and partnered with the Hot Springs County Historical Society, park staff and the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce to turn the idea into reality.

Skates said the lights, which will be turned on for the first time June 15, would include floodlights on the high beams at either end of

the bridge. While rope lights on the cables were considered, Skates noted maintenance and vandalism on such a setup would be an issue.

Since the park closes at 10 p.m., the lights will be on some kind of timer. Park staff will be in charge of maintenance for the system.

2016 also marks the centennial for the park bison herd, and Skates noted another project is in the works to get some silhouettes of the animals set up, with lights that shine on them at night.

Skates noted staff is always working to make changes in the park, do something different and add to the park’s curb appeal.

The lighting is part of the June 15 re-dedi-

cation of the bridge. Though a definite schedule for the day’s events is still in the works, Pioneer Association President Ray Shaffer noted there is likely to be a few speeches, and they are working on providing some video from John Rankine, of the original building of the bridge.

The Pioneer Association is also working on a book detailing the bridge’s history. Shaffer said the Association had some money available that was initially planned for some signage on the bridge. However, the State Park is handling that matter so the book became

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photo by Dennis Nierzwicki

## Hopping in to help

Anthony Vargas helps his daughter, Matea, sort through her winnings from the Easter egg hunt sponsored by the Lions Club at Hot Springs State Park Sunday.

## Hospital board moves toward forming a district

by Mark Dykes

Tuesday evening, the Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital (HSCMH) Board approved resolutions regarding a Specific Purpose Sales and Use Excise Tax and formation of the Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital District.

The Specific Purpose Sales and Use Excise Tax is a one percent tax that would be a source of funding for renovation, construction, expansion, remodeling, furnishing and equipping of HSCMH. Cost for such is estimated at \$16.4 million, which includes the \$15.8 million cost and \$675 interest. The board will shop for the lowest interest rate, and if it has the support of the community they will apply for grants and other funding sources to bring the cost down.

The district resolution would require a three-mill levy. With the average Thermopolis home cost of \$150,000, CEO Robin Roling explained, it would result in an additional \$3.75 per month, or about \$42 per year for the homeowner. As valuations in the county go up and down, so does the amount of money generated from the district. Roling further explained the establishment of the district allows Thermopolis as a community to fund the hospital. It also provides for the election of a board of directors, rather than their appointment, and gives even more control to the people.

Funds from the district would be utilized to pay for equipment purchases, and ongoing operations such as physician and staff recruitment.

Board Chair Bill Williams said if both the tax and the district formation are approved by the community, it will allow for more leverage when negotiating an interest rate.

The resolutions will go before the Hot Springs County Commissioners and will be on the ballot in the November election.

Prior to approval of the resolutions, Roling presented information regarding affiliation with other facilities. Roling explained the hospital has to determine what is the best strategy to achieve its goals and vision and remain an asset to the community, while also assessing risks. While affiliation is not a goal, Roling said, it most certainly could be a strategy.

Among the hospitals looked at for partnerships was the clinic in Billings, Mont. HSCMH has done some partnering with Billings, in terms of electronic medical records. However, differences in culture — such as Billings nurses being specific to one area where Thermopolis nurses are well versed in several areas — and other issues made this a challenge.

In affiliation discussions over the past couple years, Roling said among the entities considered were Wyoming Medical Center, St. Vincent’s, SageWest and Billings. Roling said each of the medical facilities considered for partnership is great to work with. However, some chose not to partner with HSCMH, or provided no firm promise of capital toward the renovation and

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## Boosters aim to localize 3-on-3

by Mark Dykes

Over Memorial Day weekend, Thermopolis will be home to the Hot City Summer Slam 3-on-3 basketball tournament. While the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce has hosted a 3-on-3 since 1994, this year’s tourney is headed up by the Bobcat Boosters.

The Boosters partnered with the Hot Springs County Recreational Department, Hot Springs County School District Activities Director Brandon Deromedi said, with the rec. department purchasing baskets and the Boosters providing coaches, along with parents and other volunteer help. Any proceeds, he noted, will go to the Boosters and therefore stay in the community.

Toddi Darlington, a former Thermopolis Chamber of Commerce director, stated in an email that the tournament was “once the largest outdoor sporting event in Wyoming and second only in size to an indoor event at the Casper Event Center.” At one point, there was even 480 teams, compared to Casper’s 520.

“It was at that point,” Darlington stated, “that the chamber board decided the event was large enough, based on the work load for the chamber compared to the fundraising revenue generated.”

Darlington further noted at the peak of the tournament all of Thermopolis’ hotels and motels were full, and there was 80 percent occupancy on the campgrounds. “We filled Shoshoni, Worland and Tensleep motels/hotels and had started to overflow to Riverton and Meeteetse.”

The weather only turned bad one year during Darlington’s time as director, with the exception of a few wind squalls in the afternoons that would shut the tournament down for a few hours. “When people would ask what we would do if the weather was bad, we would answer we’ll go to Plan B.” That plan was to “wing it,” as there was no chance to move a tournament of this size.

“It sure was a fun event,” Darlington stated, “and I worked it long enough to see first generation players come back to coach and watch their children play. Our motto during my years as tournament director was, ‘God Loves Basketball and God loves Thermopolis, and God Loves Watching Basketball in Thermopolis.’”

The tournament itself is set up in a “double-elimination style,” Deromedi said, but he hopes each team gets at least three games. Divisions are by age, with: 11 and Up, 12 and Up, 13 and Up, 14 and Up, 15 and Up, 16 and Up, 17 and Up, 18-30, and 30 and Up. Though ages of any team might be a mixed bag, they will play in the division of the oldest member.

For instance, if there is a team of two 11-year-olds and a 13-year-old, they play in the 13 and Up division. Each team can also have two substitutions.

Champions in each division for ages 17 and under will receive basketballs, and champs in the adult divisions will receive shirts.

Speaking to some recent controversy, Deromedi explained a company that used to operate here is working with Casper to put on a tournament there at the same time. He encourages everyone to attend the local event, emphasizing any proceeds will stay local.

The registration deadline for the tournament is May 20, and teams can register via the “Thermopolis Threethree” Facebook page. Fliers will also be available at the

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## County unemployment rate remains high at 5.6 percent

by April S. Kelley

The Hot Springs County unemployment rate for the month of February was 5.6 percent, only .1 percent down from January’s percentage of 5.7. February 2015, however, had an unemployment rate of only 4.4 percent.

The statewide decline in the oil, coal and natural gas industry is affecting a number of companies. One company in Hot Springs County tied to the oil industry said they had laid-off two individuals recently, while another said they had no layoffs. Other local companies in the oil industry were contacted and may have contributed to the rise of the unemployment rate, but they declined to comment. However, information obtained from former employees of oilfield companies in Hot Springs County indicated there have been several layoffs. Part of the rise in HSC unemployment may include county residents that were employed elsewhere.

The Wyoming state unemployment rate has risen to 5 percent in February 2016. According to The Research & Planning

section of the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, the state unemployment rate increased from 4.7 percent in January to 5 percent in February.

In Hot Springs County, the unemployment rate has not declined between January and February, but there is no significant improvement either. The labor force for February was 2,339 and 2,340 in January. There were 2,208 employed individuals in February and 2,207 in January. The number of unemployed individuals for February was 131 compared to 133 in January.

In comparison to February 2015’s labor force of 2,383, the number of employed individuals at 2,277 and the number of unemployed individuals at 106, the decline in employment and the rise of the unemployment rate is a hit to the local economy and the livelihood of residents.

The Independent Record would like to know your story. If you are a county resident, in any industry, that has recently been laid off due to declining business, please contact us at 864-2328.