

Dunks, Messick enter guilty pleas

by Mark Dykes

Two suspects who were pursued through Thermopolis on a stolen motorcycle have entered pleas to charges against them, though official sentencing has yet to happen in Hot Springs County Fifth Judicial District Court.

Jerome Dunks pleaded guilty to a felony charge of wrongful receiving, concealing or disposing of property, in exchange for a sentence of 2.5 to four years at the Wyoming State Penitentiary, with credit for time served, as well as a \$3,000 fine to be suspended. Dunks also pleaded guilty to fleeing or attempting to elude police officers, and interference with an

officer, in exchange for 180 days on each charge, served concurrently with the prison sentence. A second fleeing charge was dismissed.

Samantha Messick pleaded to conspiracy to wrongful receiving, concealing or disposing of property and interference with a peace officer. A third charge of possession of a controlled substance was dismissed.

Messick's guilty pleas are in exchange for a sentence of 2.5 to four years in prison, which could be suspended for three years of supervised probation on the conspiracy charge. A \$3,000 fine could also be suspended. As for the interference charge, it could result in eight

months probation when she is sentenced.

In circuit court, Dunks was already sentenced to 20 days for driving under suspension, failure to stop a vehicle where an accident involves damage to attended vehicle and failure to stop vehicle where accident involves personal injury. Over 10 additional charges against him were dismissed.

Dunks and Messick were arrested June 30 after a lengthy chase in Thermopolis involving several traffic violations. Though the stolen bike they were riding was found abandoned, Dunks and Messick were both picked up a short time later.



photo by Mark Dykes

Visual aid

A dummy is violently ejected from a rollover simulator during an assembly for Hot Springs County High School students. The device was used to demonstrate injuries that can happen to people if they don't buckle up.

Students lead belt battle

by Mark Dykes

This month, Thermopolis is going head-to-head against Worland, in a competition to see who has the safest drivers in the 2016 Battle of the Belts. The challenge focuses on making communities safer places to live, not just for students but for all travelers on Wyoming roadways.

Tom Cunningham, the safety education coordinator for Injury Prevention Resources and Safe Communities coordinator for WYDOT District 5, recently performed a series of Seat Belt Observational Surveys, during which he observed 100 vehicles coming into the high school parking lots at Thermopolis and Worland.

According to these surveys, 67 percent of Thermopolis drivers were buckled up, compared to Worland's 54 percent. Though the percentage of Thermopolis students buckled up was 72, compared to 51 in Worland, only 50 percent of Thermopolis adults were buckled up, compared to Worland's 65 percent.

Cunningham noted 67 percent is still a long way from 100, and he challenged the students to get that last 33 percent.

During an assembly Thursday, Injury Prevention Resources Executive Director Noel Cooper explained to students the most likely way for people between ages 5 and 35 to die is in a vehicle, and his agency is about eliminating that threat through promoting seat belt use and educating about the dangers of texting or drinking and driving.

Cooper, who is from Fremont County, said there were 17 deaths on that county's roadways last year, and all 17 people were not wearing seatbelts; 14 of them were impaired.

"Every one of those people meant something to somebody," he said. He further added buckling a seatbelt is one of the simplest things people can do to save their lives.

"After reviewing the first round of results, it is staggering to think that only about over half of our local high school students are wearing seatbelts," Cooper stated. "I ask that parents really take a minute to see if their child is buckling up. You are four times more likely to survive a roll over crash when buckled. Add that to the fact that a rollover crash is the most common type of crash in Wyoming and you realize that we have a lot of teens on our roads at risk of death and serious injury."

Later this month, another round of surveys will be done, and results will be compared to determine an overall increase for the schools' safety. The winner will receive the championship belt, and bragging rights until the 2018 Battle.

Hot Springs County Deputy Daniel Eggli said in today's world sometimes people don't have a choice, but putting on a seat belt is an easy decision to make.

Changes made to district food service program

Hot Springs County School District #1 has made some changes to the food service program for the 2016-17 school year.

The changes include a structural change moving from one food service director to three head cooks as well as using more recipes that are built from scratch to avoid feeding students processed food. The district has also removed considerable paperwork from the duties of the cooks to ensure more of their time is devoted to quality meals for students.

Superintendent Dustin Hunt shared the importance of the meal program, "We have to look at the whole child, and nutrition and health are a huge part of the equation."

The structural change to three head cooks creates opportunities for the team to share ideas, while also being able to cater more to the age and tastes of the students. Each school is able to offer different menus.

The head cooks are Tammy Redland at Hot Springs County High School, Jan Sharp at Thermopolis Middle School, and Jean Anderson at Ralph Witters Elementary.

"We are excited for the food service team, and we have great confidence that they will continue to grow as food service professionals." The head cooks are meeting regularly with business manager Chauncy Johnson to streamline orders, share recipes and to share successes and challenges.

The restructured program has suffered a few hiccups in the first few weeks of school but each one has been a learning experience for all involved.

"The best way to get better, is to learn together and they are doing great," shared Superintendent Hunt.

The district hopes to double the positives by serving food prepared from scratch. First, serving students less pro-

cessed food is a priority for health reasons. Second, the district, through the work of the cooks, hopes to reduce costs for better meals. An example given by business manager Chauncy Johnson was pancakes. He compared the cost of a box of pre-prepared pancakes, to a bag of pancake mix. "Our cooks can put a scratch pancake on the tray much cheaper and with comparable labor, and our cooks scratch cooking tastes better as well," said Johnson.

Scratch cooking tastes better and the saved funding will improve the food service budget that has traditionally had to be supplemented by the district as much as \$125,000 in overages. However, the entire goal is not just to reduce costs. The district has plans to utilize some of the savings to invest in the program.

"Food is a part of culture, and if we want the best culture in our schools, we will have to continue to improve and invest in the future of our program to provide healthy options that taste good," said Hunt.

Making changes to the food service program is not an easy task. First Lady Obama championed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (H.H.F.K. 2010), that changed regulations and standards for food served. The act also dramatically raised food prices and labor costs.

Each ingredient from every meal must be entered into a database to ensure that the district meets requirements. Annually, the district is audited to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations. This means that each scratch meal created for students must be entered into the database.

Some of the meals served may have a catchy name for good reason. The cooks have been encouraged to share personal favorites, as well as those from staff

members to create ownership in the food program. One example, "Suzy-Q" casserole is a favorite recipe from RWE secretary Susan Little and is a hit with the students. Ralph Witters has even begun discussion about having students nominate some recipes.

"Nobody wants to put love into these meals more than our cooks, and we want them to feel ownership in the program so they can build it to be the best it can be," shared superintendent Hunt.

Hunt added, "Jim Collins wrote that good is the enemy of great, and when it comes to our kids, we need to leave good behind and be chasing great with not just academics, but nutrition, health, and all facets of our students."

Hunt pointed to a community that does an amazing job looking after student needs when it comes to feeding them. "We have snack time built into schedules, we write grants for free fruits and vegetables, our teachers purchase snacks for their rooms in case a student is hungry, our parents sign up to bring snacks to the classroom, our staff volunteers for the People for People Backpack Program that provides students who qualify, food for the weekend at no cost, our food service staff feeds summer school kids, and for the last two years our food service staff has run a community food program for families to come in and eat at the school during summer break."

Chauncy Johnson Hot Springs County Business Manager who supervises the food service program shared, "It has been a lot of work, and it will continue to be, but it is absolutely worth it. We have great people, and we will work through the obstacles and hurdles to making change for our kids."

Johnson encouraged parents that have questions regarding the food service program to contact him at 864-6580.

Be part of the BHB Nature and Discovery Center's future

by Lara Love

Interested Hot Springs County residents are being asked to apply to serve as the county representative on the Big Horn Basin Nature & Discovery Center Joint Powers Board.

The Big Horn Basin Nature & Discovery Center JPB meets regularly to work toward the placement of the Discovery Center in Hot Springs State Park. The JPB holds a lease on the piece of property that was the old Rio Drive Inn, next to where the Chamber of Commerce office is located.

Members of the JPB served on the steering committee of the Hot Springs State Park Master Plan. That plan is in the process of being finalized. Once finalized, the JPB will begin work placing a Children's Nature & Discovery Center Discovery Park on the piece of property. This park will be phase one of the planned building phases. The JPB hopes to construct the park in spring of 2017. The JPB, in working with the Hot Springs Greater Learning Foundation has obtained the needed funds to build the Children's Discovery Park.

Members of the JPB will then continue work toward placing the Discovery Center on the property. The Discovery Center, which is included in the Master Plan, will include a State Park Interpretive area and will also house different sciences and arts

events, classes and programs. These events are put on by the Greater Learning Foundation.

The JPB received legislative money to conduct a sustainability study. This study proved the need for a Discovery Center. "We are finding that we just don't have the facility to grow the arts in Hot Springs County and the Big Horn Basin without some sort of infrastructure," said Toddi Darlington, chairman for the Big Horn Basin Nature & Discovery Center. "It has become a challenge as more and more artists have begun offering classes. We really do not have an appropriate facility to hold these classes. We are also challenged with appropriate space to show case area artists."

The Big Horn Basin Folk Festival is another area that will need a building to work from, if it continues to grow. The studies that have been conducted all show that the Discovery Center will be good for Wyoming and for the Big Horn Basin.

County residents interested in applying to serve on the board should submit a county board questionnaire, available at www.hscounty.com or at the county clerk's office, to the clerk's office no later than 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 30. Applications will be considered and appointments made by the Hot Springs County Commissioners at their meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 4.