

Record number of new voter registrations

by Cindy Glasson

Now that the dust has settled with election season, Hot Springs County Clerk Nina Webber is able to give us break down as to the voter turnout in county.

Webber said her office still has hundreds of new and same-day registrations to put into the Wyoming Registration system. Those votes were, of course, counted in the election, but all must be entered in the state's registration system within 30 days of the election.

The original general election results have now been deemed official by the clerk's office.

As for total voter turnout, this is the high-

est voter turnout in recent history for an election in Hot Springs County with 2,644 ballots cast. According to voter turn out numbers printed in the Independent Record over the last decade, this is the highest voter turnout for at least the past ten years.

Voter turnout in the General Election in 2008 comes the closest to 2016 with 2,563 votes that year.

There was also a very high number of absentee ballots sent out this year. The clerk's office prepared 659 absentee ballots with 634 returned for counting.

There were so many voters they actually

ran out of ballots for District 3 - Precinct 3, the rural district.

Weeks before each election, the clerk's office has to determine how many voters they think they will have and order that amount of ballots from the printer. In spite of ordering more than the usual number, figuring there would be a high turnout for this election, they still had to photocopy 26 ballots in order to have enough.

The photocopied ballots had to be hand counted since they were on regular paper rather than the thicker paper recognized by the voting machines.

Tree sale raises money for backpack food program



photo by Lara Love

Admiring the trees

Audrey Philips and Judy Carswell admire the trees up for silent auction Saturday at Thermopolis Middle School during the People for People Tree Lot Sale benefitting the backpack food program.

The Tree Lot Sale Saturday at Thermopolis Middle School featured 20 trees, a variety of wreaths and other Christmas décor offered at silent auction.

The sale is a fundraiser for the People for People Backpack Program, which provides kids in need with food to see them through the weekends.

Judy Carswell, with People for People, explained they utilize donated trees and wreaths, many of which come from people throughout the year and then the remainder are purchased.

The weekend before the sale, the trees are put up and decorated by volunteers. Carswell explains there is a story behind each tree. The Cowpokes 4-H tree featured all handmade ornaments made by the members. Lily Hayes decorated a paper doll themed tree. Hayes spent hours playing paper dolls with her sisters as a child. Jennifer Miller donated a tree decorated with ornaments which all belonged to her mother. Miller topped the tree with a purple ribbon to show awareness for Alzheimers.

The high selling tree was the outdoor themed antler tree made by Carswell and her family featuring antlers, handmade ornaments and a pinecone tree topper.

There were several wreaths of various themes and other décor available also.

The event raised over \$4,000 for the backpack program which is in its third year. Carswell said about \$10,000 to \$12,000 is spent annually on the program.

Physician residency discussed

by Mark Dykes

Tuesday, Nov. 15, the Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital Board of Trustees met. Among the items for action was the audit, presented by Michael Wright. The board approved the audit, and Interim CEO Marge Molitor noted there was nothing out of the ordinary with regard to the report and it was done to accounting standards.

Chief Financial Officer Shelly Larson explained the cost report to the board, which approved it. Molitor said the report is done every year, explaining HSCMH, as a critical access hospital, is reimbursed. She further explained the hospital is currently reimbursed 99 percent of their cost, with sequestration, from Medicare.

"You want that number to be as small as possible," Molitor said, "so that you don't have big adjustments at the end of the year, plus or minus." This year, there was a \$71,000 positive adjustment, which is fairly small, she said, and shows the hospital has been doing a good job tracking what is expected from Medicare through the year. The adjustment means for the past year, Medicare should have paid \$71,000 more than they did. Larson noted a settlement check is then sent to the hospital for that amount.

A representative group of employees along with Senior Leadership reviews the hospital benefit package annually. Larson expressed her appreciation to the Group Health Insurance Committee and welcomed committee member Isabelle Wilson.

Wilson and Larson explained the health insurance benefits offered to eligible employees and corresponding premiums associated with the coverage. Wilson shared that the average increase to premiums this year is 15-20 percent. The initial quote came in at 13 percent. Due to employees using the wellness programs and a low run rate this year, the insurance representative was able to negotiate the increase down to 7.92 percent without any change to benefits. The committee was pleased with the increase compared to the national average. The dental insurance was also reviewed, showing a two percent increase in premiums without any change in benefits.

A voluntary vision plan with employees paying the

entire premium was introduced. Wilson shared the committee's recommendation to approve the benefit package, and it was approved.

Red Rock as well as other key players from University of Wyoming and the Casper family practice residency were scheduled to come Wednesday, Nov. 16 to discuss a rural track residency program based in Thermopolis. If approved, Red Rock Family Practice hopes to host two- and three-year residents.

Molitor explained Casper currently accepts eight residents every year, each on a three-year residency, to train them to be family physicians. Red Rock is proposing to have a second- and a third-year resident out here, in Thermopolis, for an entire year.

This would be a positive for the community in many ways, Molitor said, as it helps with future recruitment and retention, as doctors get new professional challenges by being not only providers but teachers. For the residents, it gives them a chance to really see what rural medicine is like and learn things they might not in more urban settings. The residents, who are licensed physicians, would see patients in conjunction with Dr. Travis Bomengen and Dr. Jason Weyer.

If the rural track program is launched, it would be the first for Wyoming.

The board discussed the transition from a memorial hospital to a hospital district. As one of the first steps in the construction project, they decided to invite financial advising companies such as Piper Jaffery and Lancaster Pollard, as well as additional companies, to submit written proposals which will be reviewed at the next board meeting. At that time they will narrow the selection and invite the finalists to present to the board in person at a special meeting February 1, 2017 at noon.

The Avera e-Pharmacy contract was amended to extend the service and allow for more favorable terms. Avera is used to help review orders written by physicians when pharmacists are not available. The amended contract now provides for 700 orders per month before there is an overage charge; the previous contracts allowed for only 300 orders.

The next board meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 20.



photo by Cindy Glasson

Early morning crash

A Hot Springs County High School senior was involved in a single car rollover on Missouri Flat Road just after 8 a.m. on Monday morning. The teen was life flighted to Casper and according to her parents is off the ventilator and breathing on her own. According to information from the Hot Springs County Sheriff's Office, there is no suspected drug or alcohol use in the accident.