



Thermopolis pilot dies in airplane crash

by Lara Love

The crash of a small aircraft in northern Wyoming claimed the life of Thermopolis pilot Grant Belden, 34, Wednesday, Dec. 7.

Belden was a pilot and wildlife specialist employed through the State of Wyoming Wildlife Services. They operate under the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Passenger, Miles Hausner, 56, of Worland was injured in the crash and transported to Billings.

The two men left the Worland airport on

Dec. 7 on a predator control reconnaissance flight. The Big Horn County Sheriff's Department received information regarding a downed aircraft in Big Horn County (BHC) at 11:22 a.m. A search for the men and crash investigation began immediately.

Several agencies including the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security, BHC Search and Rescue, BHC Emergency Management, BHC Sheriff's Office and BHC Coroners Office conducted the search with the assistance of REACH Air Medical Service, Park County Sheriff Scott Stewart, Park County Search and Rescue and Sky Aviation.

The downed aircraft was located in a rugged, remote location southwest of an area known as the Wardell reservoir, off of Dorsy Creek Road. The nearest town in the area is Otto, Wyo.

Once emergency personnel were on the scene, it was determined both occupants were trapped inside the plane and extraction efforts began. Belden died at the scene of the crash. Additional information on Hausner's condition was not available at press time.

The Federal Aviation Administration

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photos by Cindy Glasson and Dennis Nierzwicki

Sounds of the season

Hot Springs County High School and Thermopolis Middle School brought the sounds of the season to the auditorium last week with a pair of concerts. Above, the high school choir performs for a packed house while at left, Cole Christianson adds a special note with a solo at the middle school's program.



Spence trial rescheduled

by Mark Dykes

A Friday procedural issue in a case against Justin Spence means a trial that has already seen a couple delays will again be rescheduled for early 2017. Spence is on trial for incest, a felony charge that alleges in July of 2014 he molested a juvenile female.

As proceedings were set to get underway Friday morning,

Judge Robert Skar thanked the jury for their service and discharged them. Jury selection in the trial had gone beyond a full business day Wednesday.

Following opening arguments from prosecuting attorney Marcia Bean and defense attorney Travis Smith on Thursday, a large part of the day was spent on Bean's questioning of the alleged victim.

Though there was no further information regarding the exact issue that caused the trial to end early, during Thursday's proceedings Defense Attorney Travis Smith expressed concern he had not received all of the taped interviews of the alleged victim, and he was given time to review an interview. It is unknown if this was a cause for rescheduling the trial.

Settlement reached for asbestos removal at former refinery site

by Cindy Glasson

A settlement has finally been made between Sinclair Refining and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in regards to the removal of asbestos at the former Empire Oil Refinery site.

In 1974, the refinery was razed and much of the equipment sold to various other oil refining entities, including Little America, Sinclair's predecessor.

An assessment of the property by the EPA in 2011 identified a significant amount of asbestos at the site, contaminating the ground surface. The EPA determined it was caused from the large amount of asbestos-contaminated pipe insulation that was removed from the area during demolition.

In 2013, the EPA removed 4,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil from the site and replaced it with clean, native soil from a property near the site and re-seeded the area with natural

grasses.

Sinclair has agreed to pay the EPA \$655,000 to pay the response costs incurred.

The fine will be placed in a fund created by the Federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Recovery Act, a Superfund, to address cleanup needs at contaminated sites across the country.

Empire Oil began in Thermopolis in 1920 and was in production until 1969. The refinery and encompassing land was purchased by Husky Oil in 1971 before changing hands again to Ashland Oil in 1972, then Little America and finally Sinclair's Casper Refinery.

For those unfamiliar with the area, the Risen Son Church and Christian School are housed in the former Empire Oil office buildings. The brick structure directly across the street from the church is where the refinery's laboratories were, with the refinery itself on the property behind the lab.

Enjoy the People for People Tour of Homes Monday

by Mark Dykes

The annual Tour of Homes is Monday, Dec. 19, beginning at 5:30 p.m. This year's tour includes stops at the homes of: Hope and Tyler Mead, Dale and Ciley Andreen, Stephanie and Josh Conrad, Lily Hayes, Jason and Stephanie Owens, and Dan and Margaret Stansill.

Judy Carswell, with People for People, said residents participating on the tour go above and beyond their normal decorating, to make it a real treat for people. Tickets can be purchased from local businesses for \$6 each. The money from the fundraiser goes to feed people for a year through the People for People program.

In addition to the homes on the tour, there will also be a live Nativity at St. Paul Lutheran Church

on Highway 20 South. The tour is from 5:30-8 p.m. There is also a reception at Thermopolis Middle School starting at 6 p.m. School staff and students, as well as Peo-

ple for People is a small group of volunteers that provide free meals every Sunday for those in need in Thermopolis.

Carswell said the group is down to eight teams that provide the meals, though 12 is optimal. "Our teams," she explained, "consist of different entities in the community." For instance, the team she's on is the courthouse team; other teams might come from churches, the VFW or even a neighborhood.

Meal recipients are mainly those who can't get out, or may not be able to afford meals. "All they have to do is just call and say they want one," Carswell said, and right now they provide meals for about 70 people.



Margaret Stansill puts the finishing touches on her nutcracker collection for the Tour of Homes on Monday.

ple for People members, will provide refreshments.

There are some community donated items up for silent auction, Carswell said, and a memorial tree