

Hospital acquires Red Rock Family Practice

by Mark Dykes

Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital has announced that on December 7, Red Rock Family Practice (RRFP) joined Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital. This is the culmination of several months of discussion and consideration on how best to provide healthcare to Hot Springs County.

A press release from the hospital states, “In order to strengthen our healthcare foundation and protect the future of healthcare in Hot Springs County, it was important that we partner with primary care physicians. As healthcare regulations increase, independent physicians are being pulled away from the

bedside. To mitigate this concern, the trend is for physicians to find partners who will ease their administrative role so they can spend more time providing patient care. This was a strong determinant for RRFP physicians Travis Bomengen, MD, Jason Weyer, DO, FAAFP, Kevin Mahoney, MD and Hallie Bischoff, DO.

“We feel this new relationship will enhance our services by allowing a higher level of collaboration with the physicians which will benefit Thermopolis and ensure the continuation of exceptional healthcare in Hot Springs County both now and into the future. For example, physician recruitment will also be strengthened. Mattson Mathey, MD, a Wyo-

ming native and third year resident has verbally accepted an offer of employment. He will provide some ER coverage in the next year and begin full time providing family practice, obstetrics and emergency care next October.

“After the transition, Colleen Hanson, PA-C will be providing in house Emergency Department coverage and hospitalist coverage during the week. This change will allow more dedicated physician time in the clinic while still having someone in the hospital to provide more access to patients and their families. This should be a win/win/win for

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photo by Dennis Nierzwicki

Merry mobiles

Nine different holiday campers and vehicles set the stage for a colorful and festive Broadway Street Saturday during People for People’s Tour of Homes Christmas Campers event. Each of the tiny homes were crafted to allow the public to enter, view and vote on each unique holiday display with Stacy Hesselthaler’s camper winning top pick.



HSSP hosts day hike

by Cindy Glasson

Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites and Trails will be hosting “First Day Hikes” throughout the state on January 1.

Hot Springs State Park will be hosting one, too, starting at 11 a.m.

Participants should meet at the Kiwanis shelter where the group will divide into two, one group taking the river walk, which is about a half-mile, while the more adventurous group will take the Spirit Trail, which is about a mile long.

“There is nothing more rejuvenating than sharing a brisk hike with Wyoming State Park staff in some of the most amazing parks and historic sites in the country,” State Parks Administrator Domenic Bravo said.

Boysen State Park will also host a day hike through moderate to difficult terrain. The hike begins at park headquarters at 10 a.m. Dogs on leashes will be permitted.

Park staff and volunteers will lead the hikes.

For more information, please call the park at 864-2176.

Pioneer Home facing privatization push

by Cindy Glasson

In 1947, the Wyoming Pioneer Home was established in Thermopolis as an assisted living facility. Owned and operated by the Wyoming Department of Health, under the department’s Aging Division, the Pioneer Home has been home to countless seniors over the past 70 years.

The Pioneer Home and the Wyoming Retirement Center in Basin are both under the purvey of Tom Forslund, Health Department Director. Lisa Osvold is under Forsland as the Aging Division Director.

Funding cuts by the state put the Pioneer Home under intense scrutiny and the threat of privatization a few years ago, something that still looms over its halls.

The Pioneer Home itself has a budget from the State of about \$2.3 million a year to pay wages for 30 local employees who provide services that range from medication assistance to nutrition therapy, balance and fall prevention and other essential health care services.

Senator Bruce Burns, the Republican senator from District 21 (Sheridan), is pushing the idea of privatization again because he is concerned the state is spending too much money on the facilities they oversee.

If one looks at the resident’s costs at the Pioneer Home, you will see they are considerably lower than they would be if the resident were to be in a privately run facility.

Monthly costs at the Pioneer

Home are based on current assets, capping out at \$2,400 per month.

Average costs for privately owned assisted living facilities is \$3,900 per patient, per month. Wyoming falls among the most expensive states for long-term senior care.

Using the average income, per capita, of Hot Springs County residents at \$24,025 per year, subtracted from the \$46,800 (\$3,900 x 12 months) per year cost of private assisted living, you will find a difference of \$22,596 per year, an amount a majority of retirees in Wyoming do not have saved for their golden years.

Conversely, taking the high end of the costs at the Wyoming Pioneer Home (\$2,400 x 12 months), \$28,800, the difference in the cost per year a retiree would need to have saved for a year’s worth of expenses would be \$4,776, a much more reasonable number.

Governor Matt Mead would like to see the budget for the Department of Health increased by \$48 million this year and is against the privatization of the Pioneer Home.

Mead expressed his concern about the seniors in frail health being put on a bus and shipped to another facility, a solution he said is not a practical one in his mind.

In spite of the Governor’s wishes, the privatization issue is still in the hands of the legislators and Sharon Skiver, director of the Pioneer Home, as well as the Hot Springs County Commissioners have addressed the

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Eclipse economic impact summary

Though nearly four months past, the total eclipse across Wyoming and the country is still being talked about and likely will be for months to come.

The Wyoming Office of Tourism recently released the 2017 Eclipse Economic Impact Study Summary of Findings, and according to the report, Hot Springs County saw 2,000 visitors staying at hotels and motels, 3,900 who were camping, 1,200 staying at private homes with friends or relatives and 800 that made other arrangements.

There were a total 7,800 overnight visitors and 800 day visitors, for a total 8,500, according to the report. Visitor spending by type of accommodation was: \$270 for hotel/motel, \$290 for camping, \$60 for private homes and \$110 for others. The total \$720 for overnight visitors and \$40 for day visitors.

It should be noted that, due to rounding, numbers may not add up precisely to the totals.

As for eclipse-related tax receipts and earnings for the county, spending was \$760,000 and earnings were \$140,000.

Also according to the report, a total of 261,100 people traveled in Wyoming for the solar eclipse. A total of \$63.5 million in travel expenditures — including travel, lodging, meals and shopping — was spent in Wyoming during a five-day period due to the 2017 solar eclipse.

Local tax revenues garnered from eclipse-related spending resulted in \$2.3 million for Wyoming’s state government and \$1.4 million for local governments. Media coverage of the eclipse in Wyoming provided an estimated editorial value of \$6.77 million. Nearly 44 percent of respondents indicated that they would come back to Wyoming in the next two years

An estimated 29,000 international travelers came to Wyoming to view the eclipse.

A copy of the impact study is available online travelwyoming.com/research/eclipse