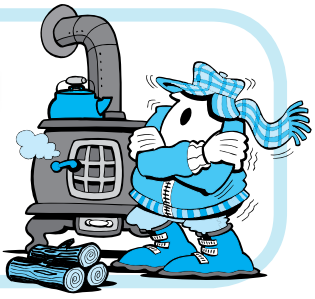


Rocky Horror Picture Show raises funds for Ritz Theater **3**

Wrestlers win titles; hoop teams top Riverside **6-7**

Bitter Cold Departing

The National Weather Service says the "brutally cold Arctic express" in the Big Horn Basin will be "shortlived" after a low of nearly 30 below zero Tuesday night. After temperatures possibly as low Wednesday night, look for more "seasonable" weather later this week.



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100th day of school



Ralph Witters Elementary kindergarten student Mesa Allen wears a cape made of colorful balloons in teacher Lauren Lewandowski's class to celebrate the 100th Day of School last Friday. Students in the other classes at RWE also has special activities, such as cup stacking and guessing games. — Joe Sova photo

Hospital operating in the red halfway through fiscal year

by Drew Foster

Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital operated at more than \$373,000 in the red halfway through the 2014 fiscal year, but bucked the trend in November and December by posting its first profitable months since March 2013.

According to an executive financial summary presented during the hospital board's Jan. 28 meeting, the hospital's net revenue and expenses was -\$373,836 as of Dec. 31, which marked the halfway point of the current fiscal year. The hospital had originally budgeted an \$8,005 surplus at the six-month mark.

"We're always aware of these things, and we have some concern," board chairman Bill Williams said. "With six months to go, there's always a chance this thing can turn around."

The not-for-profit hospital aims to end each fiscal year with a 1.22-percent operating margin in order to invest in equipment upgrades and additional staff, hospital CEO Robin Roling said. The hospital ended the 2013 fiscal year with a surplus of \$310,991, or a 2.24 percent profit margin.

The hospital posted net losses during the first four months of fiscal year 2014, which began in July. November and December saw surpluses of \$44,765 and \$62,961, respectively. Roling hopes that trend continues through the last half of the fiscal year.

Electronic medical record system

Roling attributed much of the financial shortfalls to the hospital's implementation of a new electronic medical record system last year and a drop in patient volume. Both Roling and Williams said installing the new system required extensive staff training, which fueled overtime pay.

Now that the system is in place, Roling expects the hospital's finances to continue moving back toward the black.

"I'm anticipating (net revenue and expenses are) going to get better in pretty short order," Roling said, adding that the hospital saw a significant drop in overtime pay in the latter part of 2013.

An infusion of state and federal grants, considered nonoperating revenue, in December also helped bolster the hospital's positive cash flow in that month, Roling added.

The hospital is operating with a "core staff," or the minimum number of employees to effectively run the facility, so Roling said layoffs of full-time employees would be an unlikely option for reducing spending. Instead, she said the hospital would look at contract labor, billing procedures, vacation and sick leave practices and pricing levels as ways to offset the deficit. The hospital spent \$45,642 on contracted labor in December, down from a fiscal year high of \$123,208 in September. Total operating revenue reached a fiscal year high in December of nearly \$1.34 million compared to a fiscal year low of about \$1 million in August.

Roling lamented the defeat of the hospital district initiative during last year's election, saying it would have generated roughly \$749,000 using 2012 Hot Springs County property values.

If the hospital finishes the fiscal year with a deficit, Roling said board members would likely have to ask the county for additional funding or significantly reduce contracted labor. Williams said the hospital might have to forego equipment upgrades as well.

"My personal opinion is we're probably not as bad off on these figures as it appears we are now," Williams said. "We're not in stampede mode."

Winters brings summer of committee work to legislative session

by Cindy Glasson

Monday marks opening day for the Wyoming State Legislature and features a joint session of the legislature in Cheyenne as well as the State of the State address by Gov. Matt Mead, starting at 10 a.m.

Rep. Nathan Winters, legislator for House District 28 which encompasses Hot Springs, Big Horn and parts of Park and Fremont counties, will be starting his second year in Cheyenne as a member of the five committees — the House Agriculture, State and Public Lands & Water Resources; House Minerals, Business and Economic Development; Select

Investigative; Communications, Financial Services & Interstate Commerce; and CSG West Health.

"As you may remember from the news, last year was one of the most challenging years in which to participate in the Wyoming Legislature," Winters said. "Many of the issues we debated are still in the news."

One such issue is Senate File 104 that effectively stripped Superintendent of Public Instruction Cindy Hill of much of her power. The Wyoming Supreme Court recently declared the bill unconstitutional.

"With the overturning of Senate File

104 called the 'Hill Bill,' I felt vindicated with the arguments I brought forward against it last year. Legislation that makes such sweeping changes to a constitutional office would normally have had much study, which just didn't happen," he said.

Summer of committee work

Winters is looking forward to returning to his legislative duties, having spent much of the summer working with the Minerals and Agriculture committees on several bills that will be brought forth during this session.

"In Agriculture, we touched on sev-

eral issues that moves government out of the way of citizens and also addresses some serious concern regarding the spread of brucellosis in game animals," Winters said.

One bill that many communities in Wyoming are concerned about is House Bill (HB)0034, which deals with landfills.

"In the Minerals committee, solid waste has been a topic for a number of years," Winters said. "Because of a change in regulation from the federal EPA, some of our communities are struggling with what to do with their landfills."

"The legislature worked to assist cities and counties with this last year and

this year we are bringing a bill to allocate that money for the various projects. This bill also authorizes funds to help Hot Springs County with remediation projects necessary for our landfill."

Another issue Winters is looking forward to digging into is the loss of revenue by the state due to lands being held by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

"Two bills from the Minerals committee are of particular interest and both deal with the transfer of federal lands into state hands," he said. "Several western states are working toward this right

See Winters on page 8

Geis sponsors bill to allow anyone to change a light bulb

by Karla Pomeroy
Basin Republican-Rustler

While the focus of the 2014 Wyoming Legislature will be the budget session, there are already 135 bills prefiled.

Sen. Gerald Geis (R-SD20, Worland) said the Legislative Service Office is expecting about 250 to 300 bills to be prefiled. "That's a lot of bills to try and mess with in 20 days," he said, adding that two years ago 100 pieces of legislation were passed by the Legislature and signed into law. Last year, a nonbudget session, there were more than 225 pieces

of legislation signed into law.

During the budget session, which begins next Monday, Feb. 10, nonbudgetary bills require two-thirds majority vote from the originating house to be introduced. Geis said at least 90 percent of the committee bills will receive introduction. "It takes two-thirds to introduce it and we have three minutes to sell it," Geis said.

While the budget bill hasn't been prefiled yet, Geis said having served on the Joint Appropriations Committee previously he usually goes along with 99 percent of their recommendation. He said

he does support the governor's request for additional funding for local governments, but noted that counties will receive Payment in Lieu of Taxes funding at least for one more year under the new federal Farm Bill.

"I'll support sending the money down to (county commissioners and local councils) and let them spend it where they need it," Geis said.

Changing light bulbs

Geis is sponsoring a few bills on his own this year including one that would

allow employees at state facilities to change light bulbs on their own.

Current statute states only licensed electricians "shall install all electrical equipment" on any building, not just a state building. He said the new state fire marshal notified state facilities, including the Wyoming Pioneer Home in Thermopolis and Wyoming Retirement Center in Basin, that they would have to have a certified electrician change light bulbs as that is considered electrical equipment.

He said the facilities were notified in

the fall and he contacted Sen. Cale Case, chairman of the Corporations committee asking if something could be done. Case agreed it should be "straightened out" but was sponsoring too many bills (only three are allowed) so Geis took on the legislation.

The legislation grants a waiver for "persons making routine replacement of light bulbs or lamps when the replacement does not require any changes or repairs to associated electrical wiring."

See Geis on page 8

Fireman's Ball Feb. 15

The Thermopolis Volunteer Fire Department's annual Fireman's Ball will be held Saturday, Feb. 15 at the VFW.

Doors open at the conclusion of the firefighters' awards banquet, which begins at 6 p.m., and is not open to the public. The band begins playing at 9 p.m.

Tickets for the fundraiser drawing are \$2 apiece and can be purchased at the door. Attendance to the ball is free, but donations are accepted, volunteer Fire Chief Mark Collins said, adding that last year's event raised roughly \$9,000.

The drawing should be held either that evening or the following morning. Prizes include gift certificates ranging from \$300 to \$50 and are redeemable at any business in Hot Springs County.



Pinewood Derby excitement

Luke Dickey, a Bear Cub from local Pack 53, reacts while watching his Pinewood Derby car race on Saturday at the Hot Springs County Fair Building.

— Photo by Drew Foster