

Wanted man sought in town

As of Wednesday morning, the Thermopolis Police Department reported Jeremy Breeden was still at large. Breeden is wanted out of Kansas for attempted first-degree murder and is believed to be in the Thermopolis area. According to a Kansas news station, Breeden, his brother Cody and a third, unidentified subject are suspects in connection with the attempted murder of 19-year-old Trenton Penn of

Minneapolis, Kan., who was found at a hotel in Junction City, Kan. on March 29. Cody was arrested by U.S. Marshals in Fremont County, according to the Junction City Police Department. Alerts about Jeremy were initially issued by the Thermopolis Police Department on Sunday via social media. As of press time, officers would not meet with Independent Record staff to discuss the

hunt for Jeremy. It is recommended people keep their doors and vehicles locked and to not approach Breeden if he is spotted. Call 911 or 864-3114 immediately. Police are also investigating a rash of break ins around town, but were unavailable to comment at press time. Watch for updates on the Independent Record website at thermopir.com and on social media.



Event funding being phased out

by Mark Dykes

Those attending a meeting Monday night regarding the funding provided to special events from Hot Springs Travel and Tourism learned those funds will be reduced by 25 percent each of the forthcoming fiscal years. This means the funding will be completely gone by the summer of 2021.

Travel and Tourism Director Amanda Moeller, who headed the meeting along with board members Troy Dorman and Kevin Skates, said they recently received the lodging study done by Young Strategies, Inc. She explained they wanted to know how the town's doing with lodging, looking at information such as who is staying here and how long they're staying. The study was conducted from November through February, Moeller said.

Looking at the information, Moeller noted there has been no change in rooms available and no new motels since the Quality Inn was built in 1995. While the national occupancy rate has continued to rise since 2011, in Hot Springs County the rate rose from 53.3 percent in 2011 to 56 percent in 2012 and 56.9 percent in 2013. However, since then it has been on the decline, with 53.4 percent in 2014, 52.9 percent in 2015, 51.6 percent in 2016 and 49.5 percent in 2017.

Moeller noted the occupancy rate of 60 percent is the "make or break" line, with anything above that mark being great and anything below "not so much." According to the report, occupancy in the county hits above 60 percent from mid-May through early October. Moeller said this isn't much of a surprise, as winter months are typically slower.

Though lodging tax dollars have gone up, it is due to rates, which have consistently gone up from 2011 through 2017.

As to how this impacts special events, Moeller pointed out a few points in January through April of 2017 — such as the wrestling tournament and President's Day weekend — where occupancy was over 60 percent. Looking at events during the summer months, there is not much of an impact on occupancy. "What they found," Moeller said, "is that we're not really drawing more people to Thermopolis."

See Funding on page 8



photo by Mark Dykes

Behind the back

Zaniac Alex Zerbe shows off his juggling moves during a presentation at Ralph Witters Elementary. In addition to his public show at the auditorium, Zerbe visited the elementary and middle schools to not only entertain, but educate.

FFA members bring home awards

by Mark Dykes

Thermopolis FFA was named the reserve champion in the Agriculture Issues Forum at the 91st annual State Convention in Cheyenne April 18-21.

Team members include Mary Ryan, Jeffery VanAntwerp, Josi Thurgood, Lauren Reed, Tyne Vilapando, Kaitlyn Schmuck and Hannah Hurley. In a fun pre-session game, VanAntwerp was crowned Mr. FFA.

Regarding the chapter's title in the Agriculture Issues Forum, VanAntwerp said the team worked hard to prepare for the event, going over the script and their talking points day in and day out. Among those points were how families would be affected by the Harvest Box, how it could be integrated with current systems and how it would be dispersed to families. VanAntwerp said the team also had some good props and costumes, which not all the teams had, and everyone knew their parts well.

Overall, VanAntwerp said, the convention was a lot of fun and opened his eyes to the competition for next year. As for being named Mr. FFA, VanAntwerp said with a laugh that it was a great honor and he has his friends and family to thank for their support. Though given no official duties, he said he is responsible for the plastic tiara.

Also at the convention, Josi Thurgood won the Gold Diversified Agriculture

Production award and Jessie Pennoyer won the Gold Beef Production Placement Proficiency award.

The Agricultural Proficiency Awards honor FFA members who, through their SAEs (Supervised Agriculture Experiences), have developed specialized skills that they can apply toward their fu-

Kissel, Audrey Axtell and Rebekah Johnson placed 17th, with Kissel taking first in Female Selection and Daniels taking 11th in Reasons.

FFA Advisor Britton Van Heule explained Reasons are basically a two-minute speech about how a student placed a class of livestock and why.

Each student gives four sets of reasons, assigned by the contest. Female Selection is a regular class that has data with it to aid in placing. It comes with a scenario and students have to make the best choices.

The Environmental Natural Resources team of Riley Shaffer, Spencer Axtell, Logan Shumway and Remington Ferree placed 17th, and seventh in the team problem. The Meats team of Shaffer, Axtell and Ferree placed 18th.

The Greenhand Quizbowl team of Emme Norsworthy, Rebekah Johnson and Remington Ferree placed 18th and the Horse team of Norsworthy, Kiara Warman and Schmuck placed 30th though Van Heule noted they did not have a full team in either event.

Daniels, Vialpando and Schmuck also got their state FFA Degrees.

Van Heule stated, "I am very proud of our students. They were very competitive this year at a state convention that hosts 52 schools with 1,600 students from all over the state."

Outside convention competitions, students judged Hereford Bulls at Jeff Wards, went to a dairy in Carpenter, did a trolley tour of the Cheyenne downtown and toured a John Deere dealership.



Team members Jeffery VanAntwerp, Hannah Hurley, Lauren Reed, advisor Britton Van Heule, Kaitlyn Schmuck, Tyne Vilapando and Mary Ryan.

ture careers. Students can compete for awards in 47 areas covering everything from Agricultural Communications to Wildlife Management. Each award area also has two categories, placement and entrepreneurship.

Also during convention, the middle school Poultry team of McCoy Longwell, Jase Longwell, Anthony Sword and Roedy Farrell was named Reserve Champion Team.

The junior high Livestock team of Hadley Johnson, Will Clark, Autumn Brawley and Morgan Slover placed third, with Johnson placing eighth overall and Clark placing 10th overall. The high school Livestock team of Strite Daniels, Barb

Preliminary hearing set in assault case

by Mark Dykes

A hearing date of May 18 has been scheduled in a case against Aaron M. Munger, who faces two counts of aggravated assault and battery. The charges stem from a March 22 incident, during which Munger allegedly assaulted a female subject.

According to court documents, at 11:11 p.m. on March 22, officers were called to a report of a family fight. Upon arrival, a female subject approached them and said Munger was inside the home. The subject was asked if Munger had a gun, and she said he had hit her with it.

Entering the home and announcing their presence, the officers were unable to see Munger but could hear him in a back room. He was told to put down his gun and come out with his hands up, though Munger responded he didn't have a gun. Munger later came out where officers could see him, and followed instructions to get on his knees with his hands behind his back. After he was handcuffed and found to not have any guns on him, He said the gun — a .45 Springfield 1911 — was in a dresser in his bedroom.

Asked if he had any other weapons, Munger said he had a lot in his safe, a .22 pistol and a .44 Magnum in his truck and an AK-47 in his bedroom closet.

During further interview,

Munger said he had wanted to spend time with the female subject, though she decided to hang out elsewhere. After she returned home, they got into an argument during which he struck her with the end of the Springfield. Munger said he also threatened her with the gun but did not remember if he pointed it at her.

Later in the interview, Munger said the two got into a verbal argument and he went to the bedroom to get the pistol and leave the house. On his way to the truck, she said something that set him off. Munger added he did not remember what she said, as he blacked out.

Munger also said the woman was on probation for a previous incidence of driving under the influence and she had marijuana in the kitchen. An officer located paraphernalia with marijuana residue, and the woman said it was hers.

Munger led officers to the pistol and rifles in the bedroom. The Springfield was retrieved, along with an AK-47 and a .22 rifle with a scope. Munger was then informed he was under arrest for domestic battery.

During an interview with the female subject, she told officers that Munger told her she was not leaving him then attacked her from be-

See Assault on page 8