



Marbleton warms up to ice-fishing fundraiser

By Joy Ufford, jufford@subletteexaminer.com

MARBLETON – At the start of the Marbleton Town Council’s meeting on Monday, Feb. 4, Mayor Jim Robinson invited everyone to come to the annual mushers’ dinner.

And most, if not all, Marbleton employees and councilmembers including Robinson and his wife Fran showed up that night to welcome 18 tired mushers who were racing from the Middle Piney parking lot the next morning.

First, though, Jeff McCormick, BJ Meador, Mack Bradley and Robinson worked through the Marbleton Town Council’s business at hand. Attorney Thayne Peterson and Councilmember Roger McMannis were absent.

After hearing this year’s quotes from Tegeler & Associates’ new agent Zach Wenz, Robinson asked him about cybersecurity insurance to protect their computers and data.

Wenz said the City of Gillette “got hijacked several times” and paid ransom to a hacker for access to their frozen accounts.

“We are a small town; if we were frozen, we could still pay our bills but I would like to be proactive,” the mayor said.

Sheriff K.C. Lehr said his office receives a lot of calls about scams around the state but so far, no one had cyber-attacked Sublette County.

The council moved to approve the 2020 policy with Wenz to take effect on March 5 and to have him report back on costs for cybersecurity.

The council also heard from Rick Mair who presented Dominion Energy’s proposal

to upgrade existing customers’ natural gas lines.

“Our engineer is continually evaluating areas and decided Marbleton is an area where it is a benefit to upgrade our system,” Mair said, with hopes to start in mid April depending on weather.

Old pipes will be located with GPS and replaced with plastic pipes that have a metal wire running through them so they can be located again before digging, he explained.

He said no town services would be obstructed and Rocky Mountain Line Company will work with one crew, one block at a time. Public works supervisor Todd Brown asked him to have the contractor build a relationship with Town Hall to ensure ordinances are followed.

Robinson asked if new services could be installed now; Mair said that is a separate process.

“If anyone wants a new gas line, reach out to me,” Mair said. “We are in talks with the Public Service Commission, trying to change the process for communities so it is easier to get new services.”

A discussion was tabled about the town’s wireless equipment leases with NGL and LR Communications, with Town Clerk Shannon McCormick announcing that LR Communications just announced it purchased NGL as of Jan. 1.

An all-ages ice-fishing derby at the Marbleton Town Pond was requested by Aimee Davison as a fundraiser for the Big Piney-Marbleton Economic Community Development Committee.



Joy Ufford photo

From left, Fran and Mayor Jim Robinson visit with musher Alix Crittenden, from Bondurant, and handlers father Barry Pearson and Jess Moore at Marbleton’s Meet the Mushers dinner on Monday, Feb. 3. The Marbleton Town Council met earlier that day so staff and families could go to the dinner.

She proposed the Feb. 29 derby to run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. with entrants buying three “rounds” of fishing holes. There would be a three-fish limit and participants will have the option to catch and release fish they don’t want to keep.

There will be a bonfire and prizes and lunch plans are in the works, she said.

“It’s a great thing,” Robinson said. “This is exactly why we put this (pond) together.” In other Marbleton news:

• The next Marbleton Town Council meeting is set for Monday, March 2, at 5 p.m. at the Marbleton Town Hall.

• Todd Brown asked that residents keep running their streams of water to keep pipes from freezing.

• Mike Orham asked to buy a snow blower, “nothing fancy,” for the Flicks ‘N Pins sidewalks. December was very busy there with the very popular “Star Wars” and “Frozen” movies.

At an impasse – how will health care be managed?

By Robert Galbreath, rgalbreath@subletteexaminer.com

PINEDALE – The various boards gathered at a Feb. 7 meeting on the future of health care in Sublette County agreed to additional discussions and laid out several new proposals on how to move forward.

The Sublette County Rural Health Care District (SCRHCD) and Sublette Center, however, remained deadlocked over what form their partnership will take.

The devil in the detail centered on how health care in the county would be managed. The SCRHCD, Sublette Center and members of the Board of County Commissioners each presented different proposals at the meeting facilitated by Dr. Bernadine Craft. The meeting was open to the public and other elected officials.

After Craft divided the board members and public into small discussion groups, three management options were put on the table. The first option involved combining the Sublette Center and SCRHCD into one entity governed by the SCRHCD. The Sublette Center offered a counterproposal for a health-care system that would eventually be governed by the SCRHCD and a separate senior health-care services district under a joint powers board.

A third option involved the creation of a hospital district with a new board of trustees to oversee both a critical access hospital and a long-term care facility. The boards did not reach an agreement on what course of action to take at the meeting.

David Burnett, chairman of the Sublette

County Board of County Commissioners, suggested that the chairs of all three boards hold a separate meeting to have a “more cordial, candid conversation” on the proposals and come up with a memorandum of understanding on how to proceed. The chairs agreed to a meeting on Monday, Feb. 10, and to present the results to their individual boards and attorneys.

The three boards also decided to come together again on Feb. 17 for a second round of public meetings.

The original proposal from the SCRHCD Dave Doorn, administrative director at the SCRHCD, presented a proposal to “merge” the district and Sublette Center into one organization “owned by” the SCRHCD. The end

goal was to construct a new critical access hospital, long-term care facility and memory unit in a shared building at the site of the Pinedale Clinic.

Both the SCRHCD and the Sublette Center are “on financially unsustainable paths” without a critical access hospital, Doorn said.

“We’re teetering on the edge, trading water. We’re spending every cent we bring in. The question is how do we create a future for both our organizations?”

The answer lays in \$7 million of projected revenue from cost reimbursement through Medicare and private insurance for services offered by a hospital, said Doorn. That projection came from a financial “draft summary”

See Health care, page 3

Whisler Sales • Parts • Service. Cadillac logo. “We do business one way, your way” 307-362-5677 2200 Foothill Blvd., Rock Springs www.whislerchevy.com CHEVROLET logo. M - F 8:00 am - 6:00 pm • Sat. 9:00 am - 5:00 pm • Closed Sunday

Health care Continued from page 1

released by Eide Bailly that Doorn produced at the meeting. The financial reports also showed the SCRHCD generating twice the amount of revenue they needed to service the debt for the project, a positive debt ratio necessary for a loan application through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Doorn placed a "conservative estimate" of project costs for the entire facility at \$51 million, a figure he believed would drop as interest rates through the USDA continue to go down.

Under the district's proposed "merger," he continued, the Sublette Center would become part of a government entity and eligible for federal funding and no longer dependent on the county's mill levy.

Other benefits that Doorn listed included less competition between the organizations for employees, liability protection for the long-term care facility and better county benefits for employees working in the long-term care facility.

**Financial cold feet**

Attorneys Nick Healey of Crowley and Fleck in Cheyenne, and Gaston Gosar of Pinedale, raised concerns about the financial projections presented by the SCRHCD.

Healey raised the prospect that if the Sublette Center is "acquired" by the SCRHCD, and the USDA loan is rejected, the Sublette Center could become a financial burden to the district.

"This could jeopardize the future of senior care in Sublette County," he said. "It is better for the Sublette Center to have the independent ability to levy funds and come under the county's existing 12 mill levy. We have a fiduciary and ethical obligation to ensure that the Center and the seniors have a voice in their health care."

Gosar worried about the future of Sublette County's economy and population as oil and gas revenues drop. The county lost 10 percent of its population, Gosar continued, and projections show a continued decrease.

"The revenues that we look at in our county alone have decreased by more than half in the last couple of years, and that model is only going to continue," he said.

Gosar also cited the presence of high numbers of people without health insurance in the community. St. John's Medical Center in Jackson spent millions to compensate for "charity care," an issue complicated by the fact that Wyoming did not sign onto Medicare Expansion, he said.

These downward trends and problems are everyday realities that must be taken into consideration when discussing a "sustainable" health care system in Sublette County that will last beyond the seven-year budget projections from the SCRHCD, he said.

Pinedale Mayor Matt Murdock replied that the economic picture looked positive in Pinedale. The number of permit requests is higher this year than in the past three years combined, he said. The airport received a \$13-million

grant for improvements, and with the introduction of high-speed broadband Internet, "we are seeing an influx of business."

"We need to have some optimism in Sublette County," said Doorn. "We've had these (financial) projections done – I think this is our third or fourth time – and they have all come back with the same results. They show that yes, we do have the population and the services to make a CAH work." A hospital would provide more services, more jobs and diversify the economy, he added.

**The Sublette Center – a new proposal**

Healey outlined a proposal to turn the center into a "county memorial hospital" funded by the county under a governing board appointed by the commissioners. The county memorial hospital was only a temporary step to the center's eventual goal of forming a senior health care services district, Healey said. While state statutes exist to form rural health care districts and hospital districts, there is no law in place to create a senior health care services district.

A bill allowing the creation of the latter passed through the Wyoming State House last year, but failed in the Senate. An amended bill to establish these districts passed through the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Interim Committee this fall. The bill is expected to be introduced in the upcoming 2020 legislative session but must pass through the legislative process before becoming law.

The SCRHCD and senior health care services district would remain separate entities under the umbrella of a joint powers board consisting of members from the SCRHCD, the Sublette Center and County Commissioners.

Burnett said that as county revenues are projected to drop, maintaining a county memorial hospital under 12 mills would be a challenge in the face of budget cuts.

**A third approach**

Following small group discussions, County Commissioner Tom Noble stated that his group came up with a plan to form a special hospital district.

State statute allows for an elected board of five to seven trustees to govern a hospital district and levy up to 6 mills. Noble explained that a proposed hospital district must go before the public on a ballot in November. Upon approval of a hospital district by the County and then the voters, the SCRHCD and Sublette Center boards would dissolve, Noble explained.

Burnett stated that a realistic goal was to start with 3 mills to fund a hospital district. He added that the plan will "solve the governance issue" by creating a single board to operate both a critical access hospital and long-term care facility.

In the meantime, before the issue went to ballot, the SCRHCD and Sublette Center could sign a memorandum of understanding for a special hospital district. The SCRHCD can also move forward with its loan application to the USDA and start construction on the

hospital.

Mike Pompy, trustee on the SCRHCD board, raised concern about the additional taxes involved in creating a hospital district. A hospital board existed in Sublette County that was created by the commissioners, not the voters, Pompy said. When funding dried up about 25 years ago, commissioners stopped funding and dissolved the board.

Residents voted to create the SCRHCD, Pompy continued, in order to maintain their health care. Pompy believed that the SCRHCD could remain financially solvent without the need of additional tax revenue. He cited the Eide Bailly financial reports that estimated an additional \$7 million in revenue once a hospital is built. Between the hopes for a USDA loan and the revenue projections, "our income will increase enough to stay in the black without the tax dollars" for a hospital district.

**Frustration over the timeline**

Officials and board members at the meeting stressed the need for action rather than more discussion.

Murdock said that the Town of Pinedale has "committed a lot of money" into the process, specifically related to moving the ball fields.

"The school district is very concerned that if there is not an agreement amongst these boards, the idea of moving new ball fields will get paused," he said. "If that gets paused, our ball fields will not be available this summer for anything. Please, let's come to an agreement. I don't want this can kicked down the road any further."

Bill Johnson, a trustee on the SCRHCD board, agreed with the mayor that Pinedale and the school district are waiting for the SCRHCD and Sublette Center to come together. Johnson worried that if action is not taken soon, the timeline for building the critical access hospital will be pushed out indefinitely. He said that the loan process through the USDA could take several months. If the loan application is accepted, Johnson estimated another three to four months to put the process out to bid. That meant delaying the project until the middle of summer.

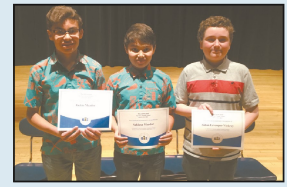
He stressed the importance of getting groundwork done and the steel frame up that summer so work could continue in the winter. This was more urgent with the impending national elections, Johnson said.

"This country is divided right down the middle," he said. "Anything can happen. We need to get our hospital going ... so we can be in control of our destinies."

Members of the public expressed frustration with the speed of negotiations between the Sublette Center and the SCRHCD.

"We want to hear what the Sublette Center has to say," said Louann Heydt. "You are the tightest group and we don't know what you think."

Kenda Tanner, secretary and treasurer on the Sublette Center board, stated that her board was committed to moving forward, but are



COURTESY PHOTO

**The winners of the Big Piney Middle School spelling bee include, from left, Jackie Meador, Saki Meador and Aiden Levesque-Vickrey.**

**Top spellers**

**BIG PINEY** – It's spelling season again! Eight students at Big Piney Middle School put on their thinking caps for the local spelling bee on Wednesday, Feb. 5. When the dust settled, eighth-grader Jackie Meador won. Sixth-grader Saki Meador took second place and seventh-grader Aiden Levesque-Vickrey came in third place.

Jackie Meador, Saki Meador and Levesque-Vickrey now have the chance to compete at the State Spelling Bee hosted by Western Wyoming Community College in Rock Springs on Saturday, March 28. The winners of the state bee will advance to the Scripps National Spelling Bee in late May in Washington D.C. Both Jackie Meador and Saki Meador are past State Champions and competed in the National Spelling Bee. Jackie Meador represented Big Piney last year in Washington, D.C.

"Still trying to figure out the details" of what a hospital district might look like. The center's board had also not fully discussed the creation of a memorial hospital funded by the county, nor have they brought the proposal to the commissioners, she added.

"We have to do what's best for our seniors," she said. "We want to make sure we make good choices now so that the (Sublette Center) is still successful 10 years down the road. And there are a lot of things we don't know. We don't know what the assumptions were that the Eide Bailly report is based on. We're not taking this lightly. Give us a little more time. We need to do more research, learn more about the hospital district."

"This is not just a simple decision that we make willy-nilly based upon numbers and (pulling) opinions out of the air," said Gosar. "We're trying to make a (health) care decision that's likely to have an impact on every one of us down the road."

"We're at an impasse," said SCRHCD board chair Wendy Boman. "What are we going to do to fix it? It's time to do what we have to do to make this work. I'm tired of waiting."

The opinions expressed on the editorial pages are not necessarily those of the *Sublette Examiner*. Letters will be run and edited at the discretion of the *Sublette Examiner*. Letters to the editor should be limited to 350 words, be signed, state the town/city you live in and include a phone number for verification. Letters are due Fridays by noon. No thank yous.

WRITE TO:  
P.O. Box 1539, Pinedale, Wyo. 82941  
OR E-MAIL:  
editor@subletteexaminer.com.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY, AT  
41 S. Lake Ave, Pinedale,  
Sublette County, Wyoming 82941  
by Wyoming Newspapers, Inc.  
Periodical postage paid at Pinedale, WY,  
USPS 019-784 and other locations.  
Copyright, Sublette Examiner, 2012.

**SUBLETTE EXAMINER**

WYOMING PRESS ASSOCIATION MEMBER 2016 2015 Award-winning Newspaper

"To sin by silence, when one should protest, makes cowards out of men."  
—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

PUBLISHER  
Mark Tesoro

OFFICE MANAGER  
Starr Avery-Kuhn  
saverykuhn@subletteexaminer.com

EDITOR  
Holly Dabb  
editor@subletteexaminer.com

REPORTER  
Joy Ufford  
jufford@subletteexaminer.com

DESIGN  
Kelsie Liechty

Robert Galbreath  
rgalbreath@subletteexaminer.com

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

<b>In County</b>	<b>Out of County</b>
One Year ..... \$43.00	One Year ..... \$55.00
26 Weeks ..... \$22.00	26 Weeks ..... \$28.00
13 Weeks ..... \$12.00	13 Weeks ..... \$15.00

POSTMASTER, SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:  
Sublette Examiner, P.O. Box 1539,  
Pinedale, Wyo. 82941.  
(307) 367-3203, FAX: (307) 367-3209  
saverykuhn@subletteexaminer.com