

Ascertainment of Issues

HEALTH

On World AIDS Day, health organizations around our state offered free HIV testing. Presently 140 people within Wyoming are living with AIDS and the numbers are growing daily. As county and state health departments and programs experience funding cuts, grave concerns are being expressed for the testing and treatment of these and other STDs and infectious diseases. A local health official estimates that '25% of Wyoming's population is living with AIDS and are not aware they are infected.'

Wyoming Medical Center doubled the number of tissue and organ donors over the past year and was honored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as one of the leading hospitals promoting tissue and organ donations. Only the top ten percent of hospitals within the United States receive the honor.

An outbreak of the infectious bacterial disease shigellosis resulted in 16 children being hospitalized. At least 78 others were diagnosed. The disease is spread through contact and eating contaminated food and water. Extreme care must be taken with hand washing with soap and general cleanliness to prevent the spread of the disease. Preschool and elementary school children are most severely affected. Initially a significant number of those stricken were among native American children but the disease quickly spread before the state health department publicized the treatment and need to stay at home if infected until the symptoms pass.

COMMUNITY

The Energy Share of Wyoming Program assists people who have exhausted all their resources for paying their utility bills. People who are at or above the federal poverty level are eligible for a one-time amount up to \$400 per household. Energy Share is administered by application and is funded by donations and contributions of Wyoming residents.

One of the perks of having a native son serving as the Vice President of the United States is seeing the big 757 jet parked at your local airport. Not only is it parked there but you are invited to shake hands and visit with the VP and get a peek inside the plane. Such was the opportunity of 14 junior high students from Casper who were all a part of the local school's leadership program. Many Wyoming residents who grew up with VP Cheney have observed the 'unloading of the Suburbans' whenever the Cheneys are in town and have become aware how many of the local city, county and state agencies are involved and are coordinating with the federal services whenever they wish to 'come home'. Vice President Cheney and his family were in Wyoming to campaign for local candidates as well as to help raise money for the state party.

The many historic attractions and the national park within Wyoming have made tourism the second largest industry. Two of our cities are among the nation's 'most Western towns'. Cheyenne and Sheridan are ranked back to back in the latest edition of *True West Magazine* due to the authenticity of the restorations and local color of the communities.

Special Olympics of Wyoming held its annual Festival of Trees. Numerous businesses and organizations decorated over 20 trees which were auctioned with the proceeds going to the organization. KCWY participates annually. Our tree sold for \$3100. We were proud. Total raised was over \$121,000.

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Wyoming cities found a way to deal with the legal ramifications of public display of documents that may be considered offensive and/or illegal such as The Ten Commandments by establishing a Historical Center display area. Documents such as the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence can be included. This approach has successful precedence through sustained court tests in the federal system.

Casper was privileged to hear a former Middle Eastern terrorist speak against the "Culture of Death". Walid Shoebat (not his real given name) speaks on the dangers America would face if we were to pull out of the war on terror. Mr. Shoebat is one of only three former members of the PLO speaking in America. He uses clips from a movie entitled *Obsession* which reveal the hatred against the west the radicals are teaching. Mr. Shoebat converted to Christianity and felt a pressing need to spread the word of this very real threat. He and his wife are now American citizens.

AGRICULTURE

Wyoming has been certified free of vesicular stomatitis, a viral disease that affects horses, cattle and other livestock. Canada had placed import restrictions on horses and cattle from Wyoming following the discovery of this disease this summer. Wyoming state veterinarian states that these restrictions can now be lifted.

The now 7-year drought in Wyoming has created a basic cause and effect chain reaction. The shortage in rain has caused ranchers to have a hay shortage resulting in no feed for their cattle resulting in a decrease in cattle production resulting in no income from sale of the cattle and a reduction in breeding stock resulting in loss of ranches and ranching. Even though in drought years some ranchers will actually sell off more cattle than in good years, this just further compounds the situation with less starter herd for the following year. Also, the market may be affected adversely with more cattle hitting the market.

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GOVERNMENT

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has offered a compromise to end the stand-off over wolf management in Wyoming. The federal agency proposes the establishment of a permanent region in northwest Wyoming where the state would manage wolves as trophy game animals. Any wolves found outside that area would be considered predators and could be killed on sight. Wyoming recently sued the federal government for rejecting its proposed wolf management plan.

Wyoming congress members scored the worst in the country with regard to 'saving the environment' according to the League of Conservation Voters. In their recently released report each state was scored on 19 environmental issues. The executive director of the Wyoming Conservation Voters stated that half of the state's land is owned by the federal government so, in many cases, "congress acts as a state legislature. They are making very local level decisions for us in Washington DC and our 3 folks who go back there year in and year out are siding with industry and against environmental conservation." All three elected congressman from Wyoming stand by their voting as in the best interests of Wyoming. They all indicate a balance between development, industry and conservation.

Wyoming was shocked and saddened to learn that senior Senator Craig Thomas was diagnosed with AML, the most common form of leukemia. Initially, Senator Thomas was admitted to the local hospital in Casper with pneumonia. It was thought that due to the excessively busy fall with elections and then the holidays that the senator was over tired.

The following morning he returned to Washington and was admitted to the Bethesda Medical Center in Maryland for additional tests. He is now receiving chemotherapy and all doctors expect that he will experience full remission and will probably be in attendance when the Senate reconvenes after the first of the year.

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EDUCATION

In honor of Business Awareness Day, hundreds of students from around the state received first hand advice from several professionals. Over 400 business students were addressed by local entrepreneurs. The theme for the annual event hosted by Casper College was 'Add a Bit of Flavor to Your Future'. Edward Hawkins, the CEO of Litehouse Foods, one of the largest producers of salad dressings in the world, was the keynote speaker. Among many interesting and helpful suggestions offered, Mr Hawkins spoke on how he grew his small family run business into a major independent nationwide company.

The Arp elementary School in Cheyenne was awarded the Blue Ribbon of Excellence by the US Department of Education. This award is based on the significant progress the school made during the past year with more than 40 percent of the enrolled students coming from disadvantaged families. Arp elementary is one of just 250 schools in the nation to be awarded the Blue Ribbon. Faculty members will be honored at a televised ceremony in Washington DC after the first of the year.

The highly controversial Interest Based Agreement Process committee finally opened its meetings to the public after some serious pressure from the media and community at large. IBAP had been meeting in closed sessions to discuss recommendations for the district school calendar for next year. The group is comprised of parents, educators and students from within the district. The committee is charged to submit a proposed school calendar by the end of this year to the school board for adoption.

CRIME

There may be more money necessary for the new state prison being built in Torrington. The state has already allocated 69 million dollars for the medium security facility but bids came in at nearly double that. The governor has suggested that 30 million more be earmarked.

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A staff member at the Camp Guernsey Youth Challenge Program has been accused of two counts each of sexual assault and indecent liberties with a minor. If convicted, Robert Fowler could face up to 20 years in prison for each sexual assault charge and 10 years for each indecent liberties charge. Mr. Fowler is currently on administrative leave. The program has been so highly successful and widely heralded as very effective for troubled teens. Officials state that the program is moving forward in the best interests of the enrollees. They can offer no explanation for this incident as all staff members are thoroughly investigated before hire.

Interstate 80 is the quickest way to cross Wyoming from west to east. It is also a very popular transit route for drug traffickers. Cocaine seizures have tripled within the last year according to the Wyoming Highway Patrol. So far most of these seizures are not destined for Wyoming delivery it appears. Rather, the traffickers are just using this stretch of interstate to get from one part of the country to another, possibly larger metro areas.

Kelly Timberman, Wyoming native and world NPRA bareback champion, was given probation for a guilty plea to two counts of child abuse. Timberman will serve 18 months supervised probation but will continue to compete on the rodeo circuit.

BUSINESS

The chief consulting economist for First Interstate Bank states that Wyoming's economy is doing very well as compared to the rest of the United States. However, next year may not be strong as this past year. For example, unemployment is very low but this is actually just a shortage of workers and that will slow the potential for expansion. Casper Economic Development Alliance recently returned from the Midwest where they attempted to attract workers.

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Wyoming has energy to spare and the state legislature is considering proposals on the best ways to distribute energy products and ways to create incentives for developing new projects and technologies, including power plants. Moving energy is essential to sustaining our economic success. From July 2005 to July 2006 Wyoming was fifth in the nation in non-agricultural job growth.

A Wyoming based commercial air line reported a 20 percent increase in passengers in one month. The airline serves most of the Midwest and Rocky Mountain region, connecting with United flight out of DIA (Denver International Air Port). The airline attributes this increase primarily to the energy boom.

Wyoming Trade Organization is forming a manufacturing network to represent the interests of the many manufacturers across Wyoming. They maintain in order to avoid the boom-bus cycles that have been a problem for Wyoming since the 1800s due to the heavy reliance on minerals and energy exploration and development, efforts must be focused on emerging industries. The group states that technology and manufacturing represent Wyoming's third largest industry in terms of gross state product.

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