



## PREMIUM PAIN

### Health insurance increases burden local governments

Mary Stroka  
NLJ Reporter

The cost of insurance premiums for employees of government entities in Weston County has increased

consistently over the past decade, and it accounts for millions of dollars in spending each year. Many local governments are anticipating that the cost of this employee benefit will rise again as they prepare budgets for the

coming year.

The News Letter Journal reached out to local governments to find out how much the costs have increased and how the various entities have distributed the costs for those

increases between themselves and their employees over the years.

#### School districts

Weston County School District No. 1's business manager, Angela Holliday,

said in an email on March 21 that the school district pays 70% of insurance premiums, while employees pay the remaining portion. Ninety-six

— See Insurance, Page 6

### In the rhythm



Photo by Amy Menerey/NLJ

Freshman Adalyn Olson finished in fifth place in the 100 Meter Hurdles in her first ever varsity track meet Thursday, at the Laura Chord Memorial Track Meet in Newcastle. With her time of 19.40 seconds, she is already knocking on the door of state qualification in that event. See more about the event and Newcastle High School's standings on pages 9 and 10.

## Pondering pavement

### Commissioners reconsidering Old Highway 85 project

Alexis Barker  
NLJ News Editor

The Board of Weston County Commissioners is reconsidering the future of Old Highway 85 east of Newcastle, citing an increase in costs associated with paving a portion of the road. The board plans to hold a public discussion during its regular meeting on April 2, according to County Clerk Becky Hadlock, although a time is not yet set.

Originally, the board had decided to use the CRIP, or Commission Road Improvement Program, through the Wyoming Department of Transportation to complete a full-depth reclamation with an October 2022 estimated cost of \$869,083. At the time, Scott Taylor, WYDOT district engineer for District 4, had informed the board that the

project would be funded 85% by the CRIP program, with a 15% match from the county.

According to Taylor, original preliminary estimates ranged from \$135,000 for leaving the entire stretch a gravel road to approximately \$2 million to perform a pavement overlay on the 3.63 mile stretch.

The current scope of work in 2022, Taylor said on Sept. 7, is to pave from the edge of city limits to Greenhouse Road. From Greenhouse Road to the replacement bridge was scheduled to have full-depth reclamation completed.

After hearing concerns from the public, however, the commissioners decided to reconsider the project's scope in October 2022. After public discussion, the

— See Bridge, Page 2

## 'Learning opportunity'

### Hospital board reacts to challenging letter

Mary Stroka  
NLJ Reporter

After Weston County Health District board President Dorothy Briggs shared a letter from News Letter Journal publisher Bob Bonnar at the board's March 21 meeting, the board discussed its reaction to the letter in the context of the entity's challenges.

Briggs said at the meeting that she was sorry that the agenda for the March 11 special meeting was unclear.

Walter Sprague, the photographer and art and culture reporter for the News Letter Journal, and William Curley, a resident, said they unsuccessful-

“Hopefully, this is a team-building exercise. I don't know if it's too late for that, but what I see is that we need to communicate better as a board to each other. We need to communicate better to the public. I think we're learning.”

— Nick Johnson, Trustee,  
WCHS Board

fully attempted to attend the March 11 meeting, which was described in a notice as featuring “a H&H Leadership Solutions Proposal Presentation Potential Executive Session under Wyoming Statute 16-4-405(a)(ii).”

At that meeting, the board unanimously approved paying consultant H&H Leadership Solutions \$45,000 for three months of advisory solutions and operational review work and roughly \$108,000, for an interim chief human resources officer, for roughly 65 billable days.

“There was a piece where we thought

— See Hospital, Page 2

## The one-pill kill

Lydia Pongratz  
NLJ Reporter

From powder to pill, fentanyl walks alongside other opioids in powering the United States' most enormous drug distress in all of history,

according to a presentation by Ryan Cox, the commander of WIAT, ICAC, Headquarters and Cold Case Teams for the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation. Cox made his presentation to a public audience at the Cambria

Room of the Newcastle Lodge and Convention Center in Newcastle, Wyoming on Thursday, March 21, 2024. The event was hosted by the 21 Wellness Coalition, and Cox repeated the presentation in Upton later that evening.

With little to no awareness of the truth behind the drug, community members in Newcastle are falling victim to its deadly grasp, day after day, Cox said.

— See Pills, Page 7

#### WEATHER FORECAST

Thursday  
Mostly Cloudy  
Hi 58, Lo 33



Friday  
Mostly Cloudy  
Hi 51, Lo 30



Saturday  
Cloudy  
Hi 46, Lo 33



Sunday  
Rain/Snow  
Hi 43 Lo 26



Monday  
AM Snow  
Hi 40 Lo 23



Tuesday  
Sunny  
Hi 52, Lo 30

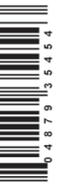


Wednesday  
Mostly Sunny  
Hi 55 Lo 33



#### INSIDE

- Judge search, Page 2
- Easter, Page 6
- Test tossing, Page 7
- Fire restrictions, Page 8



# GOOD CITIZENS

MARCH 2024

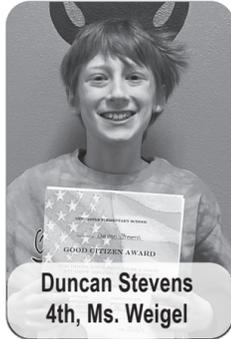
American Legion Post # 3 proudly presents Good Citizen Certificates to these Newcastle Elementary School students



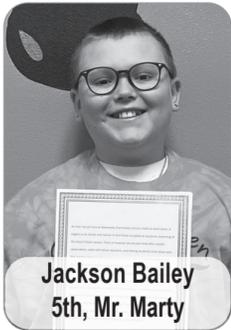
Cloey Krause  
3rd, Mrs. Back

As our winter winds down and spring is approaching us, the third grade March Good Citizen adds a fresh bright feel to our class. Always a bright smile to start each day, and a warm, friendly greeting follows. First and foremost, the character trait that comes to mind when thinking of this student is caring and compassion. This student shows their caring side daily by always being there to help others. The classmates in our class have noticed that they are always the first to pick others up and the last to leave their side. This classmate is always helping others by giving others pep talks to make them feel better, or congratulating them on their successes. This third grade student is the first to share when others do not have something, from snacks to money for cookie day, or to spin the wheel in the library. This individual works hard continually to be a better person. Our class also notices that this student is always on task, trying to do their best and doesn't get in trouble. We are lucky to have such a caring girl as March's Good Citizen in our class, CONGRATULATIONS to this outstanding student, Cloey Krause!

In room 130, there is a student who is exactly what you imagine when thinking of a good citizen. This fourth-grader works hard on all work, no matter if it's a test or simple tasks. They enter the room in the morning politely and with a great attitude ready to take on the day. I can truly say I have never witnessed this student have a negative attitude toward anything or anyone. He always uses his manners and is always kind. He will be a friend to anyone and is more than willing to help in any way. This is a student I know I could ask to help at any time, and he eagerly would say yes. Being a hard worker is a huge part of being a good citizen, but the most important is being kind, and this young man is one of the kindest students I have ever had the pleasure of teaching — and I've had the honor to teach him twice! He is the definition of a nice kid. Being a good citizen also goes beyond the classroom and extends outside of school. This student speaks so kindly of his family and loves his baby sister. When choosing the Good Citizen for March there was no question that the recipient should be Duncan Stevens.



Duncan Stevens  
4th, Ms. Weigel



Jackson Bailey  
5th, Mr. Marty

As their tenure here at Newcastle Elementary school starts to wind down it begins to be harder and harder to find those exceptional students deserving of the Good Citizen award. There is, however, one student that, after careful observation, visiting with fellow teachers, and having students write down who they believe deserves the award, stands out. It is hard to believe that this considerate, hard-working, responsible student has not received this award until now. This student takes his school work very seriously and tries his best in all work. He is eager to help and lend a hand when needed. When spoken to in passing, this student will stop and have a conversation with adults as well as students when most will simply say hello. This is just one example of the maturity he shows in daily routines. These are just a few of the traits that he exhibits that carry with him into the future. This is why I am extremely proud to give this month's Good Citizen award to Jackson Bailey.

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# Judge search begins

## Legislature funds fourth judge for Sixth Judicial District

Alexis Barker  
NLJ News Editor

The ink from the governor's signature on a bill that authorized a new judge for northeast Wyoming was barely dry when the newly created vacancy was announced.

Wyoming's Judicial Nominating Commission announced a vacancy in the District Court for the Sixth Judicial District, covering Campbell, Crook and Weston counties via press release on March 18.

According to the release, Wyoming Supreme Court Justice Kate M. Fox, chair of the Judicial Nominating Commission, announced the vacancy after a fourth judge had been authorized and funded by the 2024 Wyoming Legislature. The bill was signed into law by Gov. Mark Gordon on March 15, and potential applicants will have one month to throw their hats in the ring.

The Judicial Nominating Commission will accept "expressions of interest" from qualified persons through Monday, April 15. These forms can be obtained from the Wyoming Supreme Court's website, courts.state.wy.us/Administration/Careers. The completed form

must be received by the office of Chief Justice Fox no later than 5 p.m. on April 15.

The commission asks that interested parties do not submit letters of recommendation as they will not be considered. The release notes that the commission will only review documents specifically required in the expression of interest.

"To serve as a district court judge, one must be a qualified elector of the state and authorized to practice law in Wyoming," the release says.

The commission will be responsible for submitting three names from the field of applicants to Gov. Gordon, who will appoint the new judge from those recommendations. Serving on the commission are Fox, three lawyers elected by the Wyoming State Bar — Devon O'Connell of Laramie, Mandy Good of Cheyenne and Clint Langer of Sheridan — and three non-lawyers appointed by the governor — Dan Kirkbride of Chugwater, Lisa Anderson of Shell and Rick Fagnant of Lander.

The salary for the judge will be \$171,200 with Wyoming state insurance benefits, a Wyoming Retirement 457 plan and a generous judicial pension, the release says.

The position will be filled on or before July 18.

## Bridge from Page 1

board decided to change the project's scope from full-depth reclamation and gravel to complete reconstruction, Taylor said on March 6.

According to Taylor, this change in scope initially increased the cost to roughly \$3 million, and that cost has now increased to just under \$4 million. Because of the way the CRIP project is funded, with a maximum of \$3 million funded by the state, the county has seen an estimated increase in costs of \$662,000 for the project that is now slated for 2028.

Commissioner Nathan Todd cited the \$662,000 increase as a reason the board should reconsider the scope of the project, noting that the costs to the county could increase substantially by the time the project is undertaken in 2028.

Taylor acknowledged the increase, explaining that he did inform the board at the time of the reconsideration that the change in scope would significantly increase the costs associated with the project.

When asked by Todd what the county would be responsible for

if the commissioners were to decide they could not afford the project, Taylor said the county would be responsible for preliminary engineering fees, per the signed agreement.

It was noted by Taylor that the project could be paused or delayed as well.

"I agree with Commissioner Todd. I think we need to relook at it," Commissioner Vera Huber said, noting that she can't imagine what increases the county could see in costs

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between 2024 and 2028.

Commissioner Ed Wagoner agreed, stating that he would like to know how much the county was "on the hook for" when it came to preliminary engineering costs.

Chairman Don Taylor also agreed that the board should look at the project again, although he acknowledged the "double-edged" sword of potentially delaying the project and allowing the road to deteriorate more.

Following the discussion with Taylor, the board decided to revisit the subject on March 19, and that is when Todd reported that the county would be responsible for only \$7,000 in engineering costs if it were to change the scope or cancel the project.

"We are not in the hole by any means," Todd said, adding that he thinks the county needs to hold another public discussion on the subject.

He noted that while the public previously stated they would like the road paved, no other county has paved roads. Todd said that the public would have the opportunity to speak but that the board doesn't have to necessarily do what the public wants.

He added that he wants the public to know that their concerns are valid and that they are part of the conversation.

## Hospital from Page 1

that we were going to have an exec piece of the meeting, and it was decided last minute — and not by any executive committee as stated in Mr. Bonnar's letter because we don't even have an executive committee — but it was decided that we do the personnel piece first and get that off the table so that H&H could do their presentation," Briggs said at the March 21 meeting.

According to Briggs, H&H and the board on March 11 discussed "personnel information" in the executive session, which "was totally appropriate," before coming out into a public meeting. The agenda should have described the H&H item as "consideration to adopt" the contract with H&H.

She said at the March 21 meeting that the board will meet on Mondays and make sure its agendas are clear for regular and special meetings. The reason the board has had "a ton" of special meetings is because it "has been through a lot," with the hiring of two new CEOs, "a lot of" personnel transitions, "issues" with the clinic and morale challenges, according to Briggs.

Hospital district leadership also responded to Bonnar's concern about what appeared to be a single-source contract with someone who appeared to have ties to CEO Randy Lindauer.

"We do always try to talk about doing two bids, and we didn't do that this time," said trustee Ann Slagle, who noted that "time was of the essence" and that the district had experienced one provider quitting "over this."

Trustee Karen Drost said that it costs at least \$10,000 to receive another quote.

Lindauer said at the meeting that he had mentioned other firms that were around \$300,000 and \$225,000.

"Hopefully, this is a team-building exercise. I don't know if it's too late for that, but what I see is that we need to communicate better as a board to each other. We need to communicate better to the public. I think we're learning," trustee Nick Johnson said.

He said that the board hired H&H so it could receive an outsider's perspective, and H&H has witnessed turmoil at a lot of different hospitals. The board will encounter criticism, and it needs to "move forward" so staff can follow the board's lead and work in a way that builds trust, according to Johnson.

"This is a learning opportunity for what we did wrong and what we have got to do better at. Everything in there, do we agree with? Probably not. But how do we move forward in a way that gets us to where we want to be?" he said.



## Do you really want the fox watching the henhouse?

June 28, 2021

Former Pavilion clerk charged again with stealing from town

Clair McFarland | Riverton Ranger

Originally charged with stealing more than \$34,000 from the Town of Pavillion, the municipality's former clerk was charged again last week, after more unexplained expenditures were discovered.

The newly discovered bank account charges date back to 2013 and appear to have funded a wedding in Kentucky.

Aug 15, 2022

Former city employee arrested on felony theft charge, allegedly stealing city property

Margaret O'Hara | The Sheridan Press

Sheridan County Sheriff's Office officials took former city of Sheridan Utility Maintenance Division Superintendent Kenneth Hirschman, 53, into custody Aug. 11 for felony theft of city property.

Court documents allege Hirschman took 949 pounds of brass scrap metal belonging to the city without authorization; transported it to Billings in his personal vehicle on three separate occasions from July 2020 to March 2022; and sold it for \$1,543, a sum he did not repay to the city. Hirschman allegedly used the proceeds to purchase steaks and brats for team-building lunches for his staff and refuel his truck for a fishing trip.

July 27, 2023

Green River city official arrested

Hannah Romero | Green River Star

The City of Green River's former URA/Main Street Administrator, Jennifer "Jennie" Melvin, was arrested on two counts of alleged theft over \$1,000 and is being tried for suspected embezzlement from the Green River Urban Renewal Agency and Flaming Gorge Days.

According to the probable cause affidavit from the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), "a total of \$42,942.55 was stolen out of the FGD account by Melvin between June 8, 2022 and May 21, 2023" and "a total of \$34,551.53 was stolen from the URA account by Melvin between January 14, 2021 and May 30, 2023."

Charges from the FGD account included withdrawals from local ATMs — including the ATM at Wyoming Downs Off Track Betting in Rock Springs — and charges from supermarkets, gas stations, restaurants, Amazon, rental store companies, and hotels.

The ending balance for the FGD account in December 2021 was \$48,391.51, while the ending balance for December 2022 was \$4,487.41, according to the affidavit. By May 2023, the account had a balance of -\$345.95.

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# nlj IDEAS

News Letter Journal:  
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Siri Karr: Office Manager  
Amy Menerey: Graphic Design  
Ann Cottrell: Circulation  
Donna Darnell: Accounting/Copy Editor  
Katelynn Slamot Reporter  
Summer Bonnar Reporter

## WHAT

We strive to cover all the news and entertainment important to the people of Weston County, Wyoming. Our entire staff takes part in the decision-making process of what appears in these pages and all content is locally generated. If you have a story idea please contact any of the people you see here. NLJ editorials appear in the upper left hand corner of this page and are written from the position of the newspaper, usually with the influence of several people, and in the hope that they will carry the weight of our 100-plus years of leadership. The personal columns and letters appearing elsewhere on this page, and others, represent the opinions of single individuals and do not necessarily reflect the position of the newspaper. The NLJ welcomes and encourages your Letter to the Editor. We will print all signed, original letters of local interest. Please provide a phone number for verification. We will not publish letters that are libelous or scurrilous in nature. Letters of thanks are offered at a reduced price in our classified section.

## WHERE

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## WHY

To serve the best interests of the people of Weston County by providing informative news and entertainment.



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# Managing fears and anxieties

Are you looking for all of the answers on how to reduce your persistent fears and anxieties?

Fear and anxiety can ruin your life if you do not know how to overcome it.

As a result, here is a brief list of techniques that a person can use to help manage their everyday anxieties, stresses, and fears.

1. Take your fears apart: When facing a current or upcoming task that overwhelms you with a lot of anxiety, divide the task into a series of smaller steps and then complete each of the smaller tasks one step at a time. Completing these smaller activities will make the stress more manageable and increases your chances of success.

2. Take a break: Sometimes we get stressed out when everything happens all at once. When this happens, take a deep breath and try to find something to do for a few minutes to get your mind off of the problem. A person can get some fresh air, listen to some music, or do an activity that will give them a

fresh perspective on things.

3. Get all of the facts of the situation: Gathering the facts of a certain event can prevent us from relying on exaggerated and fearful assumptions. By focusing on the facts, a person can rely on what is reality and what is not. This is a great way to take control of your mental health.

4. Use Self-Visualization: Sometimes, we can get anxious over a task that we will have to perform in the near future. When this happens, visualize yourself doing the task in your mind. For instance, you have to play in the championship volleyball game in front of a large group of people in the next few days. Before the big day comes, imagine yourself playing the game in your mind. By doing this, you will be better prepared when the time comes.

5. You can't predict the future: While the consequences of a particular fear may seem real, there are usually other factors that cannot be anticipated and can affect the results of any situation. We may be ninety-nine percent correct in

predicting the future, but all it takes is for that one percent to make a world of difference.

6. Think of a red stop sign: At times, a person might encounter a fearful thought that may be difficult to manage. When this happens, visualize a red stop sign, which can serve as a reminder to stop thinking about that thought. Regardless of how scary the thought may be, do not dwell on it. This technique is great in dealing with your negative thinking and will help reduce your fears.

7. Get some help: Sometimes, it helps to be able to talk to someone about your stressful situations. Talking to a trusted friend, counselor, or clergyman can give you additional advice and insights on how to deal with your current problem. Overcoming fear and anxiety takes practice. In time, you will become better able to deal with your stressful problems.

Stan is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" which covers a variety of techniques that can drastically improve your mental health. For more information, please visit Stan's website at <http://www.managingfear.com>



Stanley Popovich  
Managing Fear

## POLL of the WEEK

QUESTION:  
Do you feel welcome in local churches?

- Yes
- No

Go to [newslj.com](http://newslj.com) to vote! Look for results in next week's News Letter Journal.

RESULTS:  
Should Vladimir Putin be our ally or our enemy?

- Enemy ..... 100% (3 votes)
- Ally ..... 0% (0 vote)

We love hearing your opinion! Send your letters to the editor to [editor@newslj.com](mailto:editor@newslj.com). Please note, all letters must include name and contact information for verification. Sometimes we receive great letters, but we need to verify your identity. For more information, call (307) 746-2777.

## Letter to the Editor

### What about the bridge?

To the Editor:  
I am just wondering if anyone remembers a letter I wrote a couple years ago about the bridge to nowhere controversy.

I think I might have mentioned that it might be that the commissioners would find a better use for the money than fixing a useless bridge. The price has increased and the need has diminished.

If the bridge is just abandoned and the BN can take care of it if is in their way, then let them do it. If we have to have an unguarded crossing it can happen. There is already one across

the highway from Gray addition which seems to work out ok.

— Don Thorson, Newcastle

### Now we're talkin'!

To the Editor:  
What a good paper last week! I am so happy that this subject came up and two whole pages of information for everyone to learn from. I am not sorry for any of the information — it got the ball rolling to talk about this problem publicly, and spread the word that there is help and there will be more avenues to get quicker and better treatment.

If anyone has gone through an addiction treatment program or helped

someone to get into treatment, it is not an easy process. Most don't just let a person walk in. It can take up to 30-60 (or longer) days to find a vacant spot. If you are lucky to have insurance, you may get in quicker, but not necessarily.

An assessment physical has to be done beforehand. Aftercare is crucial for success, and we lack that here.

Bigger places have more resources. We have some here, but they are not consistent and we usually send a person out of town a lot. Money is a big issue, too. It takes a lot, it's not all free. Stigma is the worst enemy — it

can beat the person up even more.

Awareness of the problem is what we accomplished this week! And that's a good thing. We are all human beings and some day we all will be judged. We all know more than we did a week ago about addiction and getting good and proper care and getting the word out. If we can help even one person, then it's all worth it.

P.S. Looks like I struck a nerve in the newspaper business — I am looking forward to hearing the Gazette's defense article.

Thanks,

— Barb Riggs



Deadline for letters is noon on Friday.

# Steinmetz: Legislature should convene a Special Session

Even though we just finished our Budget Session, and I am home trying to enjoy the day with my grandchildren, Legislative responsibilities have just exploded

again as the Governor finalized actions on several key bills. In response, I am calling for a special session. Please see the following letter submitted to Leadership today.

Dear President Driskill,

Majority Floor Leader Hicks and Vice President Kinskey,

Please consider this my formal request that leadership convene a special session or conduct of a poll of the membership

under Joint Rule 18-1 of the Wyoming Legislature to call itself into special session.

How can we truly say we are a co-equal branch of government if we do not maintain the ability to check the overreach

of the Executive branch? At this critical time, bills and issues of great importance to the citizens of Wyoming, which were overwhelmingly passed by a veto proof majority of the Legislature, have been vetoed by the Governor. See the following as examples:

SF0054 Property tax exemption House vote: Aye 61, Nay 1 Senate vote: Aye 29, Nay 2

This legislation would have provided \$220 million dollars in immediate tax relief to Wyoming citizens rather than

keep it in the government coffers.

HB0125 Repeal of gun free zones House vote: Aye 54, Nay 8, Ex 1 Senate vote: Aye 22, Nay 7, Ex 1

These are just a two of the actions taken by the Chief Executive in our absence that require our attention. The Governor vetoed eight bills and line item vetoed five which includes the budget bill. Many sage Legislators warned we should never leave town without the Governor completing his work and the

Legislative veto intact. I would say we learned our lesson. I call on leadership to convene a special session.

Senator Steinmetz represents Goshen, Niobrara, and Weston counties. She is serving as Chairman of the Agriculture State and Public Lands & Water Resources Committee, Chairman of the Select Water Committee, Vice Chairman of the Education Committee and is a member of the Capitol Finance and Investments Committee.

## Rejecting calls for Special Session: Insights from Legislative Leadership

Following the release of Governor Gordon's vetoes on bills passed during the 2024 Budget Session, we have read requests from certain members of the Legislature to convene a special session. As the Presiding Officers of the 67th Legislature, we are also disappointed in the Governor's liberal use of his veto authority and tone of his veto messages. However, a special session is unlikely to effectively address the Governor's vetoes.

The Legislature cannot simply meet for one day in a special session to vote to override vetoes. With the Majority Floor Leaders in both chambers motioning to adjourn "sine die" and gaining approval from the members present, all bills and actions of the 2024 Budget Session by the Legislature are finished.

We do not recall the legislators who are now clamoring for a special session formally asking us or the chambers to utilize our three extra days. The very

legislators who are asking for a special session created delay after delay during the budget session by asking for roll call votes, trying to resurrect zombie bills, bringing procedural motions, and filibustering debate.

Simply put, they squandered precious time in a budget session where time is our enemy. We had plenty of time in our established calendar to pass bills and do veto overrides. In fact, we created a calendar where budget debate began on the first week of session, for the very purpose of having enough time to resolve our differences in a conference committee and do veto overrides on the budget.

In a special session, unless the rules of the Legislature are suspended, there would be no control over the bills brought to the session. Bills must follow the standard legislative process: introduced, referred to committee, and heard on three separate days in each house. Then a joint conference

committee must resolve differences before bills return to the Governor for his signature or veto. The Legislature would need to be in session to receive any veto message and then vote by two-thirds majority to override any vetoes of bills adopted during the special session.

Realistically, a special session would require eight to ten days and cost approximately \$35,000 a day. Should we spend \$350,000 of taxpayer money because we couldn't get our job done within the calendar that we had agreed upon? This call for a special session appears to be political grandstanding for upcoming campaigns, not responsible governance. Wyoming taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for that.

As we mentioned on Friday, after the Governor's veto of Senate File 54, we cannot call a special session fast enough for the Department of Revenue and the counties to effectuate additional property tax relief this year. Due to the fact that property tax relief cannot be addressed in a special session, we cannot justify calling ourselves into one for matters better suited to the 2025

General Session.

In Wyoming, we are committed to our citizen legislature. Meeting in special session for two weeks is a burden on legislators, staff and their families and should only be called upon when a critical need requires it.

What is needed now is not to come into special session to rehash old ideas, but to charge our legislative interim committees with developing bills with input from all interested parties and address the needs of Wyoming.

Management Council will meet on April 1 to begin that process of developing sound legislation for introduction at the 2025 General Session. We look forward to our legislative committees working around the state this interim, taking your input and suggestions to find Wyoming solutions for Wyoming problems.

Albert Sommers is the Speaker of the House and has served in the Legislature since 2013. Ogden Driskill is the President of the Senate and has served in the Wyoming Legislature since 2011.

### Guest Column

Sen. Ogden Driskill & Rep. Albert Sommers

### Guest Column

Sen. Cheri Steinmetz

**Obituaries**

**ELIZABETH GRACE (PILLEN) HAWLEY**

Oct. 30, 1978–March 20, 2024

Elizabeth Grace (Pillen) Hawley, 45, has fulfilled her required time in this world.

Beth, as everybody called her, had a special gift from God to find and love children who needed someone special in their lives. She was a dedicated teacher who loved all her children in the classroom, in the community, and in her home.

Beth was born Oct. 30, 1978, in Newcastle, Wyoming, to loving parents. She was the third oldest out of six children. Her family did a bit of moving when she was younger, but Newcastle and Upton, Wyoming, were always "home."

She graduated from Upton High School in 1997 and attended Sheridan College and The University of Wyoming, where she graduated with a degree in elementary education.

Beth was a natural debater and won multiple national collegiate speech and debate awards while in college and high school. It was a well-known maxim in the family: Don't ever try to get into a debate with Beth, you will lose.

Beth was offered a job working for the Walt Disney Company's animation studio in Florida, but she married Richard Hawley on Feb. 14, 2003, instead. They were sealed in the Billings Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints a year later on Feb. 21, 2004.

Beth's greatest love was children, though she was never able to have any of her own. Beth and Richard tried every legal means available to have children, without success. So, they turned to fostering instead, taking in more than 30 children and adopting two children out of the system, Trevor and Rachel. Two older children, Marterio and Heidi, also adopted Beth as a surrogate mother. Beth was named national foster parent of the year multiple times through various organizations, and was celebrated in the marbled halls of Washington, D.C. She also co-owned or ran two preschools and a full-service restaurant over the years.

Beth loyally followed her husband Richard for his work and ended up teaching in Lovell, Powell, Evanston, Casper, and Prince George's County, Maryland. She loved every child in her room, bringing home many of them after school hours to work on science projects or help with homework. She could barely walk by the cafeteria of her school without the entire first grade screaming, "Mrs. Hawley!" and clearing the tables for hugs.

Her work in infertility and the foster

system led to a nationwide non-profit, and her work was featured on the ABC News magazine 20/20, twice, as well as the Katie Couric Show.

Beth was a fierce advocate for the less fortunate. Once when teaching in Maryland, her kids could see the U.S. Capitol from the school window. They complained and wondered what it was like to go in. Beth asked why they had never been there, let alone inside, since it was a public building. They said they couldn't go in because they were black. Using her husband Richard's connections, who at the time was a staffer for Sen. Mike Enzi, not only did they go on the first field trip in the school's memory, but she forced one of the U.S. senators from Maryland to sit down with the kids and talk to them. Nobody argued with Beth Hawley.

Life was hard for Beth, who struggled with poor health all of her adult life. She went under anesthesia more than 40 times for surgery on her fragile body.

On March 20, 2024, Beth fell asleep and never woke up. She was an organ donor, and her gifts will keep on giving.

She is survived by her eternal companion, Richard; her parents, Corey and Julia Pillen of Newcastle; her siblings, Michael (Sondra) Reid of Oklahoma, Christina (Gareth) Robertson of Lovell, Wyoming, Jennifer (Cody) Ingram of Evanston,

Wyoming, Amanda (Amasa) Mecham of Green River, Wyoming, and Joseph (Farrah Joe) Pillen of Evansville, Wyoming; her four children, Marterio (Sarah) Fuller of Powell, Wyoming, Heidi (Bryan Sanders) Dickerson of Casper, Wyoming, Trevor and Rachel of Byron; two granddaughters; many nieces and nephews; grandparents, Helen and Sam Dower; and the many hundreds of kids that she took care of over the years.

Due to publication deadlines, up-to-date funeral arrangements can be found at [haskellfuneralhome.com](http://haskellfuneralhome.com).

**IDA WANNER**

Dec. 19, 1926–March 1, 2024

Ida Wanner, 97, passed away peacefully in the care of hospice, at home in Lakewood, Colorado, on March 1, 2024.

Ida was born Dec. 19, 1926, at Wishek, North Dakota, the daughter of Christian and Christina (Schilling) Unruh.

On Nov. 16, 1947, Ida married Ferdinand (Fred) Wanner in Wishek. They moved to Jamestown, North Dakota, where they lived for many years and raised five children.

In April 1996, they moved to the Black Hills of South Dakota. They became members of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Newcastle, Wyoming. Ida was active in her neighborhood, local elementary school and church. She enjoyed

walks, Yahtzee, watching wildlife, growing geraniums with saucer size red blooms, Red Hats, and hosting neighbors, friends and family.

In 2015, she moved to Colorado.

She is survived by her children, Bernice (Ronald) Hjort, Oakland, Oregon, Phyllis (Jim) Johnson, Lakewood, Ralph (Patricia) Wanner, Carbondale, Colorado, Dwight Wanner, Mesa, Arizona; six grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; as well as two sisters and two brothers.

She was preceded in death by husband, Fred; daughter, Linda; her parents; seven brothers; and two sisters.

In lieu of flowers, her family requests memorial donations for Bethlehem Early Learning Center, 2100 Wadsworth Blvd, Lakewood, CO 80214, the Alzheimer's Association "Care & Support," 455 N Sherman St, Ste 500, Denver, CO 80202, [EmmausCatholicHospice.org](http://EmmausCatholicHospice.org) or Christ the King Lutheran Church, 224 W Rd, Newcastle, WY 82401.

A celebration of Ida's life is scheduled at 11 a.m., June 26, at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Newcastle, with a luncheon to follow.



Elizabeth Hawley



Ida Wanner

*Family legends I know*

I'm using "legend" as a verb rather than a noun as a chapter title in the book I'm writing. In the Dictionary According to Rhonda, "legend" means a story, recollection or action, or all of the above.

In my heart, all of my predecessors earned the recognition that comes with the other meaning of that term. They have a right to own it. They are each the compilation of experiences and actions across all generations back to Eve. They broke new trails, braved every kind of trial, every extreme of weather, dealt with untamed predators (animal and human). They faced every unknown — and they did it successfully!

I wish I could have known the earliest of my family legends. Knowing or not knowing ancestors has no bearing on their blood that gives us life and their genes that shape and drive us, mentally and physically. The One who matters is the Maker — of them and all who came before, of me, and of all who

will come later.

He's my Tutor, Planner, Provider, Consultant, Guide, Leader, Protector — ever present, ever attentive, ever able. He has also been each of those things to every ancestor of mine, whether or not they chose to acknowledge him and what he was doing.

Therein lies the key to joy along the way. I didn't say "glee" or "laughter." He serves up "joy" in the midst of whatever mess we may be in, whether we survive on this side or not.

Only by consistently being "doer's of the Word" can we say we "follow him." Only by the constancy of his guiding hand can we be either a "doer of the Word" or a "follower of his." We never walk alone, unless we purposely choose to take a sideroad or a shortcut.

To get back to the title of this writing — I knew when I typed it that I'm convinced every individual I know who's

part of my family on either side (or of the one I married into and wear the name of) is a hero. Every one of them has or will walk or ride a horse on the face of this earth. Each one has or will do their best or their worst, and has or lacks many talents. Each will be or not be where God designates him or her to be while eternity rolls on.



Rhonda Sedgwick-Stearns Nods to Neighbors

we "follow him." Only by the constancy of His guiding hand can we be either a "doer of the Word" or a "follower of his."

I wish I could have known the earliest of my family legends, but only in Daddy's Thompson line did I get past two generations ... with tiny Great-grandma Ida, who never lost her German accent or tidy ways.

Not getting to know the

others was obviously the will of God. Knowing or not knowing ancestors has no bearing on their blood that gives us life and their genes that shape and drive us, mentally and physically. The One-Who-matters is the Maker — of them and all who came before; and of me.

Walking with him is the key to joy along the way. I didn't say "glee" or "laughter." He serves up "joy" in the midst of whatever mess we may be in, whether we survive on this side or not.

I always ask him to let me be right here, in Wyoming! I'm convinced there is no place better, an' the Bible says heaven is gon'na come through the clouds down here, "Oh give me a home, where the deer an' the antelope play; where seldom is heard, a discouraging word, an' the skies are not cloudy all day! Home, home on the range! where the deer an' the antelope play ... where seldom is heard a discouraging word, an' the skies are not cloudy all day. ..."

**WHAT'S UP CALENDAR**

Send your events to [design@newsfj.com](mailto:design@newsfj.com) for the News Letter Journal's weekly What's Up Calendar

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**faith & values**

**Daily Devotional Reading**

- March 29 John 3:29
  - March 30 Matthew 3:30
  - March 31 Romans 3:31
  - April 1 Philipians 4:1
  - April 2 Ephesians 4:2
  - April 3 Daniel 4:3
  - April 4 Luke 4:4
- Scriptures Selected by the American Bible Society*

- **ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH:** Rev. Norm Brotzman, 216 S. Seneca, 746-2249. Call to Worship 9:30 am; Faith Rally Sunday 6 pm
- **BAHAI FAITH:** Firesides (open to all) 1st & 3rd Fridays 7:30 pm at 15 Skyview Dr; 746-3826
- **CAMBRIA COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH:** 19 Stampede St. 746-2321. Sunday School 9:15 am; Worship 10:30 am; Youth (6-12 grades) and Adult Bible Study Sunday Evening 6-7 pm; Wednesday Night Youth and Adult Bible Study 6 pm; Life Recovery Bible Study Sunday Night 7 pm
- **CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH:** Fr. Steve Christy, S. Summit & Winthrop Streets. 746-9684. [christchurchnewcastle@gmail.com](mailto:christchurchnewcastle@gmail.com). Service time: Sunday 10 am
- **CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH:** Pastor Rob Carr, 224 West Road, West of Dow Park, 746-2415. Sunday Worship 9 am
- **CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS:** Bishop Ty Checketts, 120 Ash, 746-4131. Sunday Sacrament Mtg 9 am; Sunday School 10:20 am; Relief Society & Priesthood Mtg 11:15 am
- **CHURCH ON THE HILL:** Pastor Wayne Wilson, 301 Delaware, 746-9663. Adult Sunday School 9:30 am; Prayer 10:15 am; Worship 10:45 am; Prayer Service Tuesday 6 pm; Undeafated Youth/children's ministry (3 years old-12th Grade) Wednesday 6 pm
- **CORPUS CHRISTI CATHOLIC CHURCH:** Father Brian Hess, 19 W. Winthrop, 746-4219. Saturday Mass 5 pm; Sunday Mass 8 am; Weekday Mass 7 am
- **COUNTRY CHURCH:** Four Corners, Pastor Bill Haley and Micah Popma, 746-9712, Worship 10 am
- **FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH:** Pastor Ben Roberts, 903 S. Summit, 746-2188. Sunday School 9:15 am; Worship Service 10:30 am; AWANA Clubs Wednesday 6:30 pm
- **FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:** Rev. Calvin Hill, 23 N. Seneca, 746-4119. Adult Bible Study 8:45 am; Traditional Church Services 10 am; 10:15 am Children's Church
- **GATEWAY FELLOWSHIP:** Pastor Jon Anderson, 12 Old Hwy, 85, Evangelical Free Church, Bible Study 9:15 am, Worship 10:30 am. Call 746-8091
- **KINGDOM HALL OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES:** 5018 US Hwy 16, 746-2319 or 746-4517. Tuesday 7 pm. Congregation Bible Study, Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting, Sunday Public Talk 10 am; Watchtower 11 am
- **NEWCASTLE FOURSQUARE CHURCH:** Pastor Mick Bohn, 1525 S. Summit, 746-3818. Sun. Worship 10 am; Wed. Night Prayer
- **OSAGE COMMUNITY CHURCH:** 348 Sheridan St. in Osage, 465-2341. Sunday School 10 am; Worship 11 am
- **SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST:** Pastor Lester Bentley 612-240-7536, 78 Old Hwy 85, Saturday Sabbath School 9:30 am; Worship 11 am
- **ST. ANTHONY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH:** Father Brian Hess, Upton. Sunday Mass 5 pm
- **UPTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:** Pastor Donnie Holt, 834 Pine, Upton, 468-9302. Worship 9 am; Fellowship 10 am

For the director of music. A psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ~ Psalms 19:1



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# Some Time Ago

## 25 Years Ago April 1, 1999

Oil producers breathed a sigh of relief last week as crude prices made a significant comeback after months of decline. "If things had continued the way they were the industry would have had to let people go," said oilman Doug Brown. Wyoming Crude rang in at \$12.50 per barrel last week, a significant improvement from the eight and nine dollar prices of recent months.

The Newcastle Area Chamber of Commerce has put a new twist on having bigger and better events, while maintaining a bolstering bank roll for future Chamber activity. Vice-President Norma Shelton, of B&B Enterprise, devised the plan that benefits the chamber as well as its business partners. "What we're doing is asking for help with Sagebrush Festival and the Lighted Holiday Parade from the businesses who serve the community. The support we're looking for isn't only financial. We want their participation as well," explained Shelton.

It's shaping up as a dry spring this year, and more than a dozen wildfires have already scorched several hundred acres of timber and grassland. Brian Daunt, assistant fire management officer at the Black Hills National Forest Newcastle office, said below normal snowpack combined with warm temperatures have exposed large areas of dry fuel.

## 50 Years Ago March 28, 1974

Bill Whitney, Newcastle Saddle and Sirloin chapter member, received one of the scholarships offered to FFA members by Sheridan Community College, Saturday. David Soppe of Burns received the second \$300 scholarship.

## From the vault ...



Photo courtesy of WC Historical Society/  
Norma June Watt Collection

**This is a photograph of the big oil rig belonging to Southwest Oil Co., in 1918. This picture is located north of Croxtons place, west of Thornton.**

The Newcastle Fire Department and the Newcastle Jaycees today announced a new fire safety program called Operation Red Ball. The Fire Department and Jaycees will be distributing Red Ball stickers to every home in the community on Thursday, Apr. 4. These stickers are to be placed in the upper left hand corner of the bedroom in which a child, invalid, mentally retarded, or physically handicapped person is confined.

A class for senior life saving and water safety instructors is being offered at the high school swimming pool, according to Pete Kozisek, pool manager. Anyone eligible is welcome to take the course.

Some 140 Newcastle boys and girls will be honored Friday evening, Mar. 29, at an athletic awards banquet. Steve Cockreham, University of Wyoming Cowboy football quarterback, will be the featured speaker.

State officials aren't too worried about the gasoline

situation for next fall's big game hunting seasons. Nonresident hunters don't seem overly concerned either since out-of-state elk applications were way up this year and already half of the available 40,000 nonresident deer licenses have been sold.

Russell Christensen says they killed nine foxes recently; there must be quite an interesting tale with this fact. Right Russ?

A coffee was held for Mrs. Darrel Repshire at the home of Mrs. Nels J. Smith in Newcastle Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Repshire was a Home Economics teacher in the Newcastle High School for several years. She was in town with her husband attending the meeting of the Wyoming FFA Alumni Association, of which Mr. Repshire is president.

## 100 Years Ago March 27, 1924

The News Letter publisher made a trip to Osage Wednesday morning and while there took occasion to look

over the U.S. Oil and Refining Company plant. A little more than six months ago, we made a similar inspection of the place and we were certainly surprised at the growth of the plant since our last trip.

A representative of the parties interested in the Shaw well at the Experimental Farm informs us that the future of the operation depends on whether or not certain agreements can be made between the operators and local creditors. If such arrangements can be made, the work will continue.

Chicago, March 20 — On the first lap of a 2,000-mile "tag" trip, little Valerie Lake Tennon, 9 years old, arrived in Chicago from Moorcroft, Wyo., Wednesday morning. The child was unaccompanied and is making the journey from the Wyoming town to Philadelphia, Pa., in charge of successive trainmen.

The drive made in the interest of the Methodist church by sixteen teams last Sunday met with decided good success. The budget of two thousand five hundred dollars was nearly three-fifths subscribed with many others yet to be seen.

Another one of those men's get-together supper meetings was held Monday night at the parsonage. A terrible blizzard was raging but the promise of a chicken supper served by the famous Ladies Aid was one of the reasons for sixteen men to meet at 6:30.

It has been reported that there are a number of horses grazing in Greenwood cemetery, and which can do much damage to the graves.

It is understood that John Sedgwick is contemplating a trip to the Longmont Lumber Co. a lumber camp near Portland, Ore., with a view to establish himself in business at that place, if suited.

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## WESTON COUNTY MUSEUM DISTRICT

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# DAR EXHIBIT

## DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The Fort Caspar Museum has loaned a temporary exhibit to the Anna Miller Museum and will be available to the public

April 1st-April 30th.

The DAR Inyan Kara Chapter was organized by the Organizing Regent Mrs. Jessie Berry Webster with 12 charter members in 1921. Mrs. Webster went on to organize chapters in Thermopolis and Rock Springs, Wyoming. In the early years, the Inyan Kara Chapter traveled to Inyan Kara for several occasions. Today, most of the members reside in Gillette and meetings are held there. DAR members sponsor outstanding American history students and DAR Good Citizens from five local schools.



For more information, call 307-746-4188.

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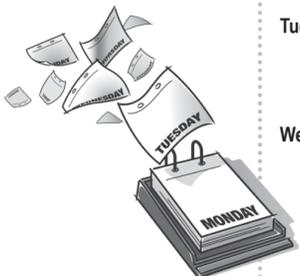
## WESTON COUNTY MEETINGS & EVENTS CALENDAR

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## LET US KNOW WHAT'S UP!

Is your group or organization hosting an event? Send your event listings to [design@newsj.com](mailto:design@newsj.com) for inclusion in the News Letter Journal's weekly What's Up Calendar, sponsored by Pinnacle Bank.



Thu. March 28	7AM	T.O.P.S. #218	WC Senior Center
	NOON	WCHS Foundation Mtg	WC Senior Center
Fri. March 29	1PM	Bridge	WC Senior Center
	5:30PM	Mass of the Lord's Supper	Corpus Christi Catholic Church
	6PM	Maundy Thursday Service	Christ the King Lutheran Church
	6PM	Maundy Thursday Service	First United Methodist Church
	7PM	Soup & Pie Supper with "Singsparation"	
	7PM	Alcoholics Anonymous	WC Senior Center
Sat. March 30	9AM	Caramel Rolls	WC Senior Center
	1PM	Bridge	WC Senior Center
	1PM	Good Friday - Newcastle Ministerial	Foursquare Lighthouse Church
	3PM	Good Friday Mass	Corpus Christi Catholic Church
	3PM	Good Friday Service	First United Methodist Church
	5:30PM	Bingo	VFW
	6PM	Good Friday Service	Christ the King Lutheran Church
	6PM	Easter Vigil	Christ the King Lutheran Church
Sun. March 31	8:15PM	Easter Vigil	Corpus Christi Catholic Church
	6:30AM	Sunrise Service - First United Methodist	Cemetery
	6:40AM	Sunrise Service - Gateway Fellowship	104 Musser Rd.
	7AM	Easter Service	Christ the King Lutheran Church
	7AM	Easter Mass	Corpus Christi Catholic Church
	8-10AM	Easter Breakfast	Four Corners Country Church
	9AM	Easter Service	Christ the King Lutheran Church
	9AM	Easter Mass	St. Anthony's, Upton
	10AM	Easter Service	First United Methodist Church
	10AM	Easter Service	Four Corners Country Church
	10AM	Worship Service	Gateway Fellowship Church
	10:30AM	Easter Service	Newcastle First Baptist Church
	Mon. April 1	9AM	Exercise Class
1PM		Computer Clinic	WC Senior Center
5:30PM		Friends of WC Fair Mtg	Fairgrounds, Event Center
7PM		Newcastle City Council	City Council Chambers
7PM		Alcoholics Anonymous	WC Senior Center
Tue. April 2	9AM	WC Commissioners	WC Courthouse
	11AM	Story Time	WC Library
	1PM	Bridge/Dominoes	WC Senior Center
	4PM	T.O.P.S. #135	First United Methodist Church
Wed. April 3	6:30-8:30AM	Wellness Wednesday	WC Health Services
	7-9AM	Wellness Wednesday	Upton Medical Clinic
	9AM	Exercise Class	WC Senior Center
	9AM	Toe Nail Clinic	WC Senior Center
	9AM-1PM	GiGi's Closet	First United Methodist Church
	9:30AM	Friends of Fair Yard Sale Set Up	Fairgrounds, Event Center
	10AM	Cribbage	WC Senior Center

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# press

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## Easter fun

The Newcastle Area Chamber of Commerce held its annual Easter Carnival on Saturday, March 23. The event was held at the Cambria Room of the Newcastle Lodge and Convention Center, where volunteers helped children as they played games to win prizes and sweet treats in celebration of the upcoming Easter holiday. At left, 4-year-old Kimber McIlvain decorates a cookie with icing and sprinkles. Above, Morgan Heiman and her 7-year-old son, Lincoln, help Novia Zinda, age 6, and her sister Kiara, age 3, in selecting lollipops to see if they win extra prizes. At right, Braylee Borton helps and watches as Adeline Drury, 4, fishes for a prize.

Photos by Walter Sprague/NLJ



## Insurance

from Page 1

employees receive coverage through the district. The current annualized premium is \$1,676,604.

Holliday said that premiums increased 16% for fiscal year 2024-25 and 13.5% for fiscal 2023-24. Five years ago, there was no increase. There was a 4% increase 10 years ago.

Whether the district passes the costs along to the employees “depends year to year on the budget,” according to Holliday.

For the \$1,500 deductible insurance plan, individual coverage costs the employee \$217.20 monthly, while the district pays \$506.80, she said. Employee plus spouse coverage costs the employee \$433.20 while the district pays \$1,010.80. For employee plus dependent coverage, the employee pays \$386.10 and the district pays \$900.90. The monthly cost for family coverage is \$603.30 for the employee and \$1,407.70 for the district.

For the \$2,500 deductible plan, singles pay \$199.80 while the district pays \$466.20. Employees who want coverage for themselves and a spouse pay \$398.40 while the district pays \$929.60. The cost to an employee who chooses insurance coverage for themselves and a dependent is \$355.20 while the district pays \$828.80. Family coverage is \$555 for the employee and \$1,295 for the district.

Weston County School District No. 7 Superintendent Clark Coberly said in an email on March 18 that the district pays 92% of the insurance premium for employees and the total cost per year to the district is about \$889,000.

Coberly said in an email on March 25 that while the district’s business manager, who keeps the data is out of the office for the week, he believes that 51 out of 65 eligible employees receive insurance benefits through the district.

The board sets the salary and benefits package annually, he said in the March 18 email.

“To the best of my recollection, the board has taken on the full increase in insurance premiums since 2017 at least,” Coberly said. “This is part of the total compensation package.”

Monthly, the district pays \$716 for single individual coverage while the employee pays \$63; \$1,250 for employee and child coverage while the employee pays \$110; \$1,434 for employee and spouse coverage while the employee pays \$126; and \$1,966 for family coverage while the employee pays \$173, according to Coberly.

The costs have increased every July since 2015, except for in 2016, 2020 and 2021, Coberly said. The rates increased 13% in 2015, 4% in 2017, 6% in 2018, 3% in 2019, 2% in 2022, 7.5% in 2023 and 13% in 2024.

### Weston County Health Services

Some of the lowest premiums were reported for employees at the local hospital. Weston County Health Services CEO Randy Lindauer said in an email on March 19 that the amount that the costs for the entity and the employee for the premiums depend on the health plan the employee chooses. However, per person, per pay period, on average, the entity pays an average of \$428 while the employee pays \$171.

“Family and spouse coverage vary,” Lindauer said, regarding both what employees pay and what the entity pays.

On average, the cost of premiums has risen 72% since 20 years ago, 58% since 15 years ago, 47% since 10 years ago and 22% since five years ago, compared with a national average increase of around 4.5% per year, according to Lindauer.

The hospital district does not always pass the increases along to employees, he said. It’s up to the board of trustees.

“To my knowledge, the hospital absorbed last year’s increase,” WCHS President Dorothy Briggs said in an email on March 20.

Briggs, who joined the board in September 2022, said that the board of trustees, “as per usual,” reviews with administrators an increase that will be proposed for 2025.

“To my knowledge, in 2021 it was absorbed by the hospital and in 2022 the hospital split it 50/50 with the employees,” Briggs said. “It is important to remember, we are a governing

board, not a managing board. We trust our CEO, and his team will look at the appropriate plans for the employees and then bring the finance piece back to the board.”

### Weston County

Weston County Clerk Becky Hadlock said in a March 25 letter responding to a public records request that health care premium costs rose 9% in fiscal 2021, 8% in fiscal 2022, 14% in fiscal 2023, 15.5% in fiscal 2024 and 8% in fiscal 2025. Costs before fiscal 2021 are not accessible, she said.

“(Whether the county passes along increases to employees or covers it from the general fund) depends on the year and how the County feels they are financially for the upcoming fiscal year,” she said.

Employees can choose a Blue Cross Blue Shield medical insurance plan with a \$1,500 deductible or a \$2,500 deductible, according to the documentation she provided. Under the \$1,500 deductible plan, employees pay \$186.93 for single coverage while the county pays \$894.07, \$284.04 for adult and one dependent coverage while the county pays \$1,357.96, \$367.09 for coverage for two adults while the county pays \$1,757.91 or \$506.55 for a family plan while the county pays \$2,176.45. The \$2,500 deductible plan requires the employee to choose to pay \$60.27 for single coverage while the county pays \$933.73, \$170.04 for adult and one dependent coverage while the county pays \$1,340.96, \$220.09 for coverage for two adults while the county pays \$1,734.91 or \$320.55 for family coverage while the county pays \$2,147.45. The county pays for employees’ vision and dental insurance premiums.

### Newcastle

The City of Newcastle has been part of the Wyoming Educators’ Benefit Trust since 2005, according to documentation that the city’s clerk-treasurer, Stacy Haggerty, emailed to the News Letter Journal on March 18.

According to the nonprofit health benefit trust’s website,

it uses Blue Cross Blue Shield, Delta Dental of Wyoming and Vision Service Plan as its third-party administrators.

The paperwork that Haggerty provided showed that the current benefits the city offers are a \$1,500 deductible plan, with 80/20 sharing, up to \$7,500, with a \$40 office co-pay.

In fiscal 2023, the city paid \$416,994.01 in contributions for insurance premiums.

Haggerty said in an email on March 25 that the city pays its 28 employees’ entire monthly premiums for medical and dental insurance. The monthly premiums are \$807 for single coverage, \$1,622 for coverage for two adults, \$1,380 for the employee and a dependent, and \$2,154 for family coverage. Beginning July 1, those costs will rise to \$912, \$1,833, \$1,559 and \$2,434, respectively. The current dental insurance monthly premiums are \$34 for singles, \$87 for two adults, \$95 for an adult and a dependent, and \$117 for family coverage. Starting July 1, the rates will rise to \$35, \$89, \$97 and \$119, respectively.

The health care premiums rose 6% in July 2018 and 5% in July 2019, according to the documentation. In July 2020, July 2021, July 2022 and July 2023, the rates rose 10%, 4%, 6% and 13.5%, respectively, with premiums rounded to the nearest whole dollar. Dental premiums have risen from \$26.91 for a single in the first half of 2017.

### Upton

The Town of Upton has felt the sting of insurance cost increases also, but, due to a number of factors, may have fared better than its counterparts in some respects.

Upton Clerk-Treasurer Kelley Millar said in an email on March 18 that the town of Upton currently pays the full insurance premium for eight full-time employees and employees’ dependents.

The town is among 68 cities, towns and joint powers boards that take part in the pool-funded Wyoming Association of Municipalities Joint Powers Insurance Coverage, she said. Individual entities fit into one of several tiers based on factors

such as how the group’s claims compare with those of the whole pool. The pool offers different deductible limits, including a high-deductible health plan.

“This board takes a very conservative approach to keeping the pool in good financial health with careful membership consideration, thoughtful rate adjustments, benefit adjustments in line with the ACA requirements, and a sound claims reserve,” Millar said. “We just had our FYE 2025 rate setting meeting last week where it was determined (with actuarial support of course) that the program would not need rate increases for any of the offered plans for the upcoming fiscal year, and the board is also able to offer a premium holiday for all groups in the pool. For Upton, that will be a savings of approximately \$15,069.32.”

Upton provides insurance coverage that includes health, dental and vision care, through Blue Cross Blue Shield and Davis Vision, she said. The insurance premium cost is \$1,921.35 monthly for a family of four, \$1,219.91 monthly for an employee and child, \$1,403.37 monthly for an employee and spouse, and \$701.82 monthly for single coverage. Millar said that the town also covers an accidental death and dismemberment life insurance premium for the employee and dependents, at a monthly cost of \$3.67 per family or \$3.30 per single. Overall, the town pays a total of \$12,443.02 monthly.

Before fiscal 2022 ended, the town paid 95% of health and dental premiums, according to Millar.

“At that time, the full-time employees forwent salary increases to have the Town bump up to 100% for the insurance premiums and we requested that continue in FYE 2024, and will again in FYE 2025 as well,” she said.

From fiscal 2023 to fiscal 2024, the pool, overall, experienced a 3% increase, but the town dropped a tier, so its costs went down 5%, according to Millar. The town has dropped from tier 12 to tier 10 over her tenure with the town.

The town was in a “healthier group,” compared with the overall pool, she said in an email on March 25.

“We’ve probably seen an aggregate premium increase around 5% since 2015, but rates have remained very stable in the big picture for us,” Millar said in the March 18 email.

She said the cost of premiums will not increase from the end of fiscal 2024 to the end of fiscal 2025.

For fiscal 2024, the town paid \$148,968.36 overall, and the town has budgeted about \$180,831.84 for fiscal 2025, she said. The actual cost will depend on any employee plan changes, such as new hires.

Millar said in the email on March 25 that the projected increase considers possible new employees in the police department and a possible change in part-time to full-time employment for a public works employee.

“When we budget for an unknown new hire, we budget their benefits package at a family plan,” she said. “We are in our preliminary budget work, so we will always budget for highest expense case scenario when we don’t know the exact particulars. We can make adjustments in the following budgets as to the actual benefits package and cost, or change the plan for employment entirely as to full-time, part-time or contract work if that’s determined to be what is best for the good of the order.”

All benefits for all employees are allocated in percentages to the departments they work in, she said. Increases in the cost of premiums are allocated to funds based on how employees’ time is dedicated.

“For example, my time is split between General Fund accounts that include general government operations, public safety, parks, streets, etc. and the Enterprise Fund accounts of water, sewer, sanitation and landfill. Currently, any premium increases would increase to each of those funds in correlation with the percentage of my time that is allocated to the fund,” she said.

# Test tossing

## Growing number of parents opting children out of national test

**Mary Stroka**  
NLJ Reporter

So many Newcastle school parents opted to have their children skip out taking a national test that it drew some discussion at the Weston County School District's March 13 board meeting.

The test is the National Center for Education Statistics' National Assessment of Educational Progress, or "The Nation's Report Card," and educators in Newcastle have joined in with a growing number of parents who question its value. Newcastle Middle School Principal Tyler Bartlett said at the March 13

meeting that with parent permission, in writing, students can opt out of taking the test. This year, especially, a lot of students did. "My impression from the state rep is that we were leading the charge in opt-outs. I just need you guys to know that I don't know how to convince somebody to take more tests," he said. "I have a hard enough time getting kids motivated to do that WY-TOPP test, so if parents don't want their kid to do another one that they never get the results from and don't have any meaning whatsoever to them in their instruction in the classroom, I'm not helping us (convince them)."

### THE NATION'S REPORT CARD

According to the website of The National Center for Education Statistics, the National Assessment of Educational Progress has "provided meaningful results to improve education policy and practice since 1969." Reports typically show state, regional and national results.

"Because NAEP is a large-group assessment, each student takes only a small part of the overall assessment. In most schools, only a small portion of the total grade enrollment is selected to take the assessment, and these students may not reliably or validly represent their total school population," a portion of an FAQ web page says. "Only when the student scores are aggregated at the state or national level are the data considered reliable and valid estimates of what students know and can do in the content area."

The NCES website says that school districts that receive Title I funds and are selected for the NAEP sample are also required to participate in NAEP reading and mathematics assessments at fourth and eighth grades. Schools are selected for the assessment based on whether they are "statistically representative" of a state's schools, and students who are picked to take the test are chosen at random to represent the country's students, according to NCES.

The Wyoming Department of Education's website, which shares data collected from past years' tests, said that this test is the only nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the country and that it compares achievement data between states and demographic groups. The Every Student Succeeds Act requires that every state tests students in grades four and eight every two years, according to the department. States can also assess students in these grades every fourth year, in either writing or science. Students may opt out. It is illegal for NAEP to maintain or report information on individual students or schools. State-by-state NAEP assessments began in 1990.

Bartlett said in an email on March 18 that staff "obviously" value assessments at the middle school and in the district, but he believes this particular test is problematic. In his experience, the NAEP, unlike classroom projects and assessments and "even" the WY-TOPP, isn't tied to the school's specific standards and doesn't help teachers better meet a given student's needs because it can't be analyzed at the level of an individual student. "If parents choose to opt their child out of the NAEP test, I have a hard time finding a reason to try to talk them back into taking it, especially with all the testing we already do," he said in the email.

Newcastle Elementary School

### SCHOOL SHORTS

Notes from the March 13, 2024, meeting of Weston County School District No. 1

- The Wyoming Department of Education wants stakeholders, including families, to provide their feedback regarding literacy as the department prepares a state literacy plan. The 2024 Literacy Needs Assessment Stakeholder Survey is due at 5 p.m. April 12.
- Superintendent Brad LaCroix said that administrators are not ready to provide the board with an update regarding what caused the lockdown/lockout that occurred on March 8 because of potential legal action against the caller who triggered the event, and the possibility that the district may be asking to press charges locally or nationally.
- Newcastle High School Principal Bryce Hoffman said that the school's science teachers are planning to participate in Gov. Mark Gordon's Reimagining and Innovating the Delivery of Education program for 2024-25. Computer science and STEM classes would explore creating student-centered learning classes that will be based around self-paced, project-based mastery of skills.

Principal Brandy Holmes said at the meeting that a record number of parents at her school also decided to opt out this year, and in the 2022-23 school year, Holmes decided to opt the school out of the test entirely because there were too many challenges to try to get it rescheduled around weather challenges. She said that she received a couple of phone calls "from the higher-ups" because she opted the school out, but there weren't repercussions. "And I'll tell you, we didn't miss anything by not doing it," she said. "We don't get any kind of information from that. I know in the past I've shared with you that I really push with staff that if we're going to give an assessment, it needs to ... we need to be able to get information out of it to drive instruction. This is one of those tests that we tack on a million that we're already doing, and we don't get anything that helps us

improve what we're doing out of it." Holmes said she wasn't requesting specific action from the board, but Bartlett said that if he has board support, he's willing to push for the middle school to opt out of taking the NAEP. "If you guys will give us the blessing to just say no, by all means, I'll go down that road. I just, I'm not quite that rebellious yet. But with nine people behind me, I can be a fighter," Bartlett said. Board Chair Dana Mann-Tavegia said at the meeting that she is disappointed that the test has not provided value, but she felt the board could not take action that night because it needs more information about the repercussions of opting out. She also said the item was not on the meeting agenda, and shouldn't be considered as an action item that evening. "We do hear you," Mann-Tavegia said.

## Pills

from Page 1



Photo by Walter Sprague

**Commander Ryan Cox of the State of Wyoming, Office of Attorney General, Division of Criminal Investigation, gives a slide show and lecture, "Drug Trends & Breaking the Cycle" at the Cambria Room, Newcastle Lodge and Convention Center, on Thursday, March 21, 2024. The presentation was sponsored by 21 Wellness Coalition.**

"It's just a little shocking how much fentanyl is coming into Wyoming and through Wyoming," Cox said.

He was brought in by 21 Wellness to share the reality behind drug trafficking, and reveal some of the trends in drug investigations. He told the audience that knowledge is the key to living a healthy, intentional lifestyle. Educating yourself on the dangers that lie on the other side of just one use, is crucial in today's world.

"While there is a lot of education regarding fentanyl, there can always be more," Cox said.

"Being 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine is just a representation of how fatal one dosage is."

According to Cox, it is impor-

tant to know that there are many different types of fentanyl. They are all deadly with even a miniscule dose, but it is essential to understand that there are specific variations of fentanyl that have been proved more deadly than the next.

"Carenal fentanyl, it is an elephant tranquilizer. So we talk about how deadly fentanyl is, you know, carenal fentanyl is substantially worse," Cox said. "We have recently seized carenal fentanyl in the state of Wyoming."

According to Cox and his research, popular fentanyl pills called blues or street oxy's have become the rave of this century. Cox and his team were shocked to see, in the spring of 2023, powdered

fentanyl making a comeback.

"We go from 2020 to 2023 and we are just seeing the blues, we haven't seen any powder. And then all of a sudden in spring of 2023, we start seeing powdered fentanyl again. And about the same time we started seeing other stimulants mixed with powdered fentanyl, most commonly cocaine. This was the upcoming trend in 2023, and that wasn't just for the state of Wyoming; that was nationwide," Cox said.

With such a deadly drug roaming the streets, Cox is making these types of presentations because raising awareness in Wyoming communities is key to preventing you or your loved ones from encountering a fatal incident.

"As fentanyl acts as a depressant for the body, and cocaine or methamphetamine work as stimulants, this combination, when taken out of proportion, leads to deadly overdoses," Cox reported.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Association has stated that "one pill could kill," and Cox reinforced that warning about fentanyl last week. He said it is important to keep in mind that only a small dosage is deadly, so it is crucial for people to be aware of what they are consuming.

Powder or pill, the risk is far grander than one could ever imagine.

As drug trends shift, Cox explained, fentanyl prices shift along with it. According to the Wyoming Department of Health, in the United States, and more specifically in the state of Wyoming, fentanyl is becoming more readily accessible, as well as affordable.

"Someone can spend \$2,000 for one kilo of fentanyl powder and convert it into pill form, which would give you 666,000 fentanyl pills from that \$2,000 purchase. And then sell those pills for \$1.50 to \$20 per pill. It's less than that now," Cox said. "We are nowhere near \$20 a pill. At one point in Wyoming, we were seeing even \$35. Now we will see it as low as \$1.50, but on average it's about \$4."

Price is probably just one of the factors contributing to the increase in fentanyl use in Wyoming. According to the Wyoming Prevention Action Alliance foundation (WPAA), there are many different reasons why people experiment with drugs to begin with, from rebellion to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

"November of 2022 was when

we really started seeing a skyrocket effect here in Wyoming," and it continues on into 2023," Cox said.

When the urge becomes strong enough that you or your loved ones are putting a pre-cious life on the line, that's when it's time to take action.

"One guy I came in contact with, had to be 20 or 22 years old, you know. What are you doing? How did you get here? And I just know it's because of drugs because of the work I've

done," Cox said.

Fortunately help is available in all corners of the town you call home, at all times. WYWETALK is a local support system in Wyoming that offers education and prevention programs for people struggling with addiction, and the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children is another branch of support.

The National DEC develops coordinated, nationwide efforts to touch on legal or illegal

substance abuse and misuse affecting people of all ages, including children and families. Help, hope and support is quickly spread when choosing to seek help for you and your family's highest interest, according to the National DEC.

The Weston Country Public Health website constructed by public health professionals, such as Angela Phillips, also offers reliable resources about opioid overdose prevention for individuals and families.

## LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL REGISTRATION

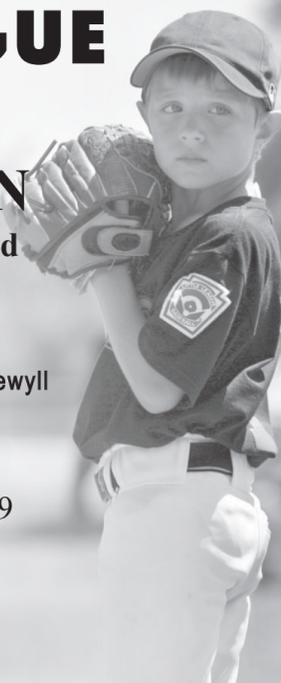
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### CONTACT:

Newcastle Little League  
Kandice Mefford (307) 746-5349  
Brian Mefford (307) 746-6180

GIRLS & BOYS  
AGES 4 - 12



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Photo by Kim Dean/NLJ

**A crowd of multiple law enforcement agencies attended 21 Wellness Coalition's luncheon and community presentation on fentanyl. Here, Weston County Sheriff Deputies Brice Remus and Kevin Stolz register and visit with Kristi Lipp, 21 Wellness Coalition, and Andrea Gregory, Wyoming Department of Corrections Probation and Parole.**



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## Gun show



Eric Johnson and Dan Mark sit at a booth selling raffle tickets for the Weston County Sportsman's Club on Saturday, March 16. The club sponsors the annual gun show, held at Weston County Senior Services center.

Photos by Stefanie Shirk/NLJ

# Open burn restrictions in effect

**Alexis Barker**  
NLJ News Editor

An increase in drought and lack of moisture has led both the Weston County fire warden and Bureau of Land Management officials to implement open burning restrictions across Weston County, according to recent releases.

"Due to a potentially severe to extreme fire situation throughout Weston County, created by heavy fuel load and dry conditions, which could create situations that over-extend the fire-fighting capability of local government, the Open Burning Restrictions will take effect March 20, 2024," the notice from Fire Warden Daniel

Tysdal says.

Almost simultaneously, BLM implemented stage 1 fire restrictions for BLM-administered public lands in Crook, Weston and Niobrara counties effective March 22, a release dated the same day states.

"Last summer's moisture and cool weather brought an abundance of grass and other fuels to public lands within the district," said Craig Short, High Plains District fire management officer, in the release. "This, in combination with the lack of moisture and warm, windy weather we're experiencing, has created an environment susceptible to wildfire."

The dry situations being experienced across northeast Wyoming have arisen suddenly, as the U.S. Drought Monitor shows that 100% of Weston County is currently listed as being in at least D0 drought or abnormally dry, while three months ago 100% of the county was drought free. At the same time, Crook County is listed as being 100% in drought, while 70.80% of Niobrara County is listed as being in drought.

A further breakdown shows that 63.1% of Weston County is listed as D1 or moderate drought and 7.01% is listed as D2 or severe drought.

According to the National Weather Service, D0 drought is categorized as "going into drought, short-term dryness slowing planting, growth of crops and pastures; fire risk above average. Coming out of drought, some lingering water deficits, pastures or crops not fully recovered."

D1 drought is listed as "some damage to crops, pastures, fire risk high; streams, reservoirs or wells low, some water shortage

developing or imminent, voluntary water use restrictions requested," and D2 drought is described as "crop or pasture loss likely, fire risk very high, water shortages common, water restrictions imposed."

Under open burn stage 1 restrictions, Weston County does not allow the discharge of fireworks and prohibits all outdoor fires in "unimproved" areas of the county, except as provided:

- Only campfires at residences or campsites, within a fire ring centered within a minimum of a 15-foot- cleared radius of burnable materials are permitted.
- Trash or refuse fires between the hours of 6 p.m. and 8 a.m., inside containers provided with a spark arrester and located within a cleared radius of a minimum of 15 feet of burnable materials are permitted.
- Charcoal fires within enclosed grills are permitted.
- Use of acetylene cutting, electric arc welders, or metal grinding in a cleared radius of 15 feet of burnable materials is permitted.
- The use of portable stoves, lanterns using gas, jellied petroleum, pressurized liquid fuel or fully enclosed (shepherd type) stove and open fire branding activities in a cleared radius of 15 feet of burnable materials is permitted.

Some persons are exempt from the imposed restrictions, including federal, state or local officers engaged in fire, emergency and law enforcement activities and any member of rescue or fire-fighting force engaged in the performance of an official duty.

Further exemptions to these restrictions and closures can be made by the Weston County commissioners, the

notice states.

"These restrictions do not include the areas within incorporated cities and towns in Weston County or federal and state lands, as these entities may impose more or less restrictive regulations," the notice states.

Anyone violating these restrictions may be in violation of Wyoming Statute 35-9-304, punishable by up to 30 days in jail and up to a \$100 fine or both. Punishment may also include restitution for the cost of fire suppression and damages caused to others.

BLM restrictions prohibited, according to the press release, are:

- Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire or campfire except within agency-provided fire grates at developed recreation sites, or within fully enclosed stoves with a quarter-inch spark arrester-type screen, or within fully enclosed grills, or in stoves using pressurized liquid or gas.
- Smoking, except in an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site, or while stopped in an area at least 3 feet in diameter that is barren or cleared of all flammable materials.
- Operating a chain saw without a USDA- or SAE-approved spark arrester properly installed and working, a chemical fire extinguisher of not less than 8 ounces capacity by weight, and one round point shovel with an overall length of at least 36 inches.
- Using a welder, either arc or gas, or operating an acetylene or other torch with open flame, except in cleared areas of at least 10 feet in diameter with a chemical pressurized fire extinguisher of not less than eight ounces capacity.

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# Sports

## News Letter Journal

### SPORTS SCHEDULE

#### NEWCASTLE HIGH SCHOOL

Mens Soccer		
4/2	Gering HS	A 6PM
4/6	Worland HS	H NOON
4/11	Douglas HS	H 4PM
4/13	Rawlins HS	A NOON

Ladies Soccer		
4/2	Gering HS	A 4PM
4/6	Worland HS	H 2PM
4/11	Douglas HS	H 4PM
4/13	Rawlins HS	A NOON

Track & Field		
3/28	Wheatland HS	A TBA
4/5	Spearfish HS	A TBA
4/11	Belle Fourche HS	A TBA
4/19	Douglas HS	A TBA

## March Madness indeed

I do love me some March Madness, and it got under way Thursday with a flurry of NCAA games throughout the course of the weekend.

I was over-served with basketball games for four days, flipping my television channels from one game to another, and I couldn't have been happier.

As per usual, I filled out a couple of brackets this year — one with favorites winning their way to the championship, and the other with some favorites and some long shots, too.

After the field of 64 teams was whittled down to 16 on Sunday night, both of my brackets went south.

Literally. As I watched the games play out, and watched lower seeds get the better of top seeds, I cringed as almost my entire south region bracket became busted!

As I sat there on Sunday night at 9:25 p.m. with 10.1 seconds to play in the Houston/Texas A&M game (Houston being the No. 1-ranked team in the south), and with the Cougars only leading the Aggies by three points, my heart was racing.

The only south team I had left on my favorites bracket (also my

— See Karpe, Page 16

## And, they're off

Sonja Karp  
 NLJ Sports Editor

For the first time in three years, Newcastle was able to host the Laura Chord Memorial track meet to open up the outdoor track season on Thursday. With both high school and middle school teams competing, the day was jam-packed with contestants for all of the track and field events, and new head Dogie track coach Matt Conzelman was pleased with how his team got out of the blocks.

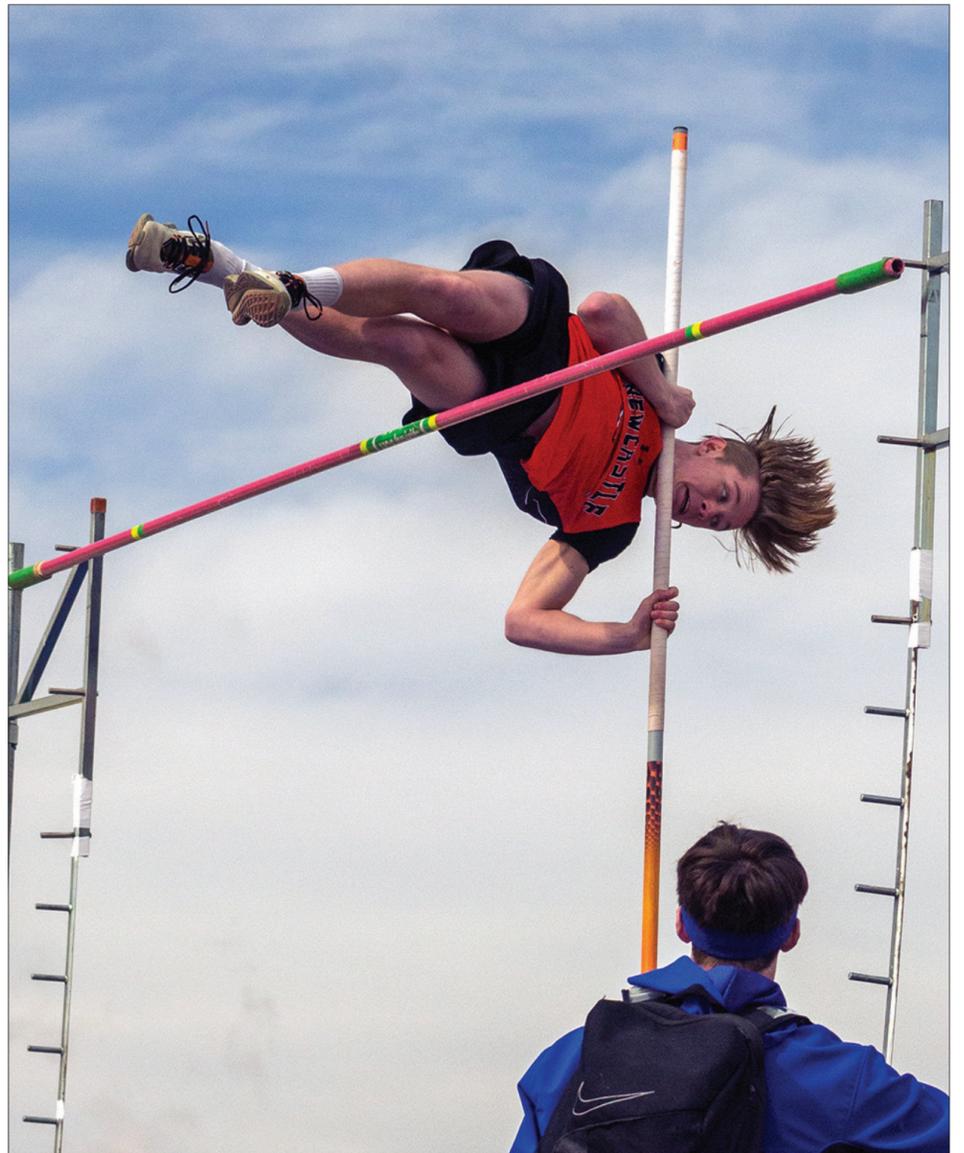
"It was fun to be able to host the meet, because we've had rough weather to start the season the last few years," Conzelman said. "I thought that all of our athletes went out and competed and it was cool to see how many kids came out and ran [personal records] over what they did last year. It was great to see where we stand right away."

Weight events kicked off the day at 9 a.m. while the running events began at 11. With 13 teams in attendance representing schools from 1A to 4A, there was no lack of competition for all athletes at every level.

Dogies came out of the gates with a good showing, competing hard and posting many personal bests on the day.

Returning Dogie athletes who started off their season posting PRs included sophomore Collin McConkey, senior Casey Matthews and sophomore Drew

— See Track, Page 11



Casey Matthews flies over the bar in the pole vault event Thursday in Newcastle. The senior cleared 9-06, which tied him in sixth place.

Photo by Amy Menerrey/NLJ

## Dogies are off to a strong start

Sonja Karp  
 NLJ Sports Editor

The Dogie Soccer team may not have a lot of numbers, but what they don't lack is talent. Head coach Sally Hoover's crew proved they have a great deal of potential for a state berth as they kicked off their season going 3-1 at the Pinnacle Cup tournament Friday and Saturday in Worland.

"It was a great way to start the season!" said Hoover. "We had not played a game yet, and we went

up against a team who had played several in our first match-up, so it could have been a bit of a mismatch. But, we handled it pretty well overall to get our first win of the season."

The Dogies did indeed start the weekend off with a win in their first contest on Friday against Pinedale. Though regulation time ended with a 0-0 tie, the Dogies took the win in a do-or-die shootout situation to secure the 3-1 victory.

"We were a little sluggish in the first half as we were trying to

figure things out," Hoover said. "They were also pretty physical and didn't play great soccer, which was something we had to adjust to. We did look better in the second half and possessed the ball more, so that was good."

Jacob Abu Zhara put in the first goal of the contest with his penalty kick in overtime. Pinedale also made their first attempt, and then Jacob Powers put the Dogies up 2-1 with his PK. Pinedale bounced their second attempt off the post, while Colter Christensen just missed by

also hitting the post on his attempt.

Caden Esposito went next after Pinedale missed their third attempt, and he found the back of the net to give Newcastle the 3-1 lead. Pinedale missed their fourth attempt, giving the win to the Dogies.

In their second contest of the day, the Dogies were tasked with taking on the fourth-ranked Torrington Trailblazers who were coming in with fresh legs as it was their first

— See Boys, Page 11

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The parking lot at Schoonmaker Field, left, was full early Thursday morning, with dozens of busses and cars as student-athletes, coaches, volunteers, family and fans gathered for the Laura Chord Memorial Track Meet at Newcastle High School. Above, Chad Ostenson talks on the radio as events prepare to get under way. Below left, middle school students kicked off field events at 9 a.m. Here, the shot put just leaves the fingertips of Newcastle Middle School sixth-grader Annaliese Butler. Below, Junior Geisness in a field of fellow athletes takes off from the starting line.

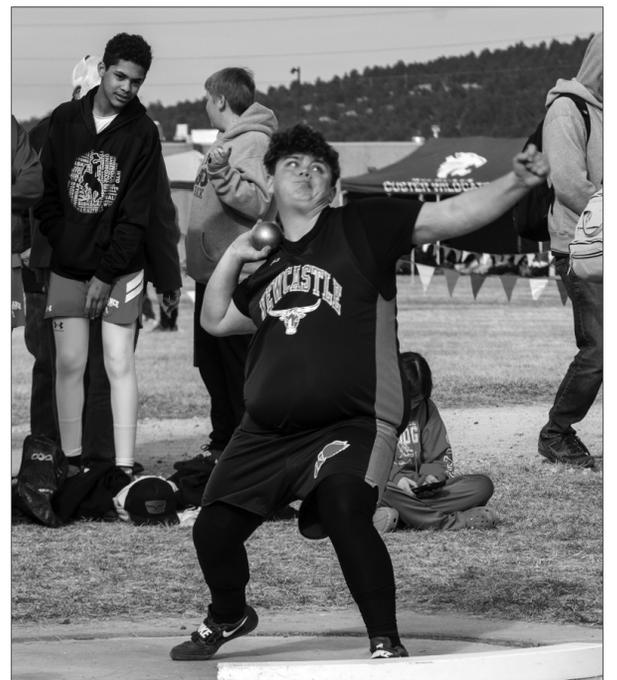
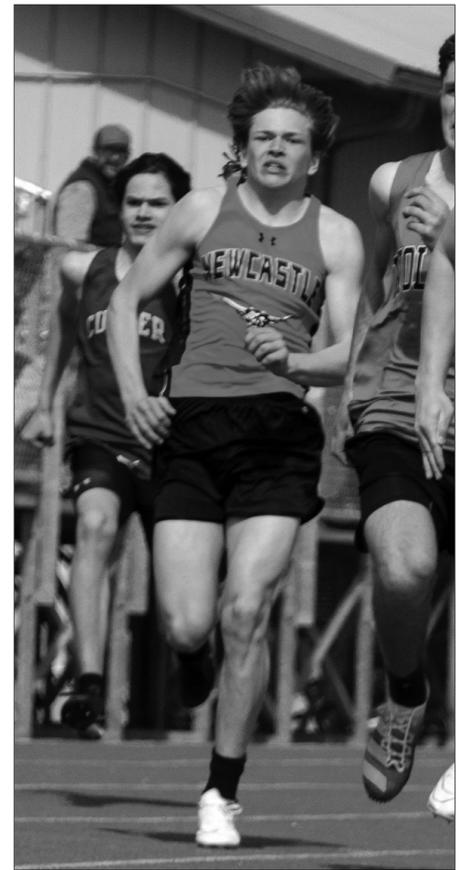


# LAURA CHORD MEMORIAL TRACK MEET

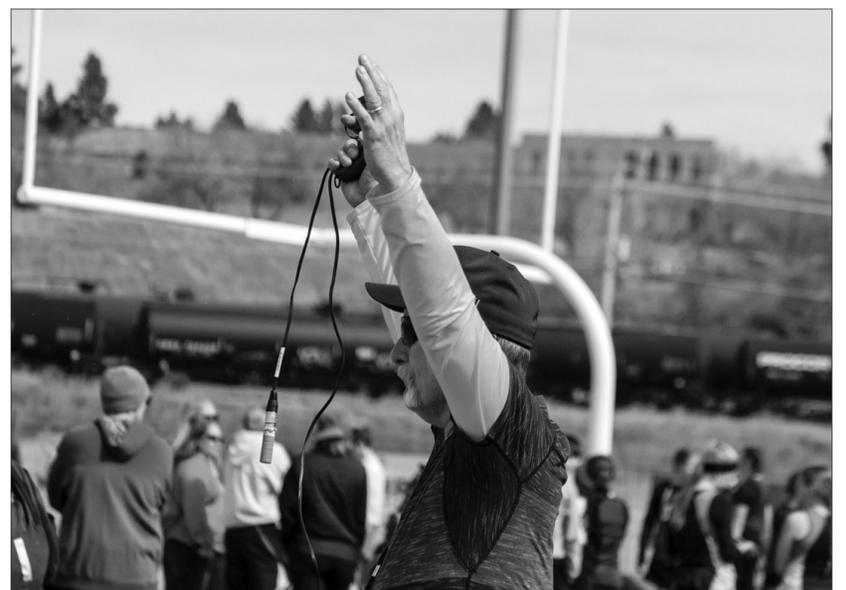
**T**he Laura Chord Memorial Track Meet was held on Thursday, March 21, where 13 high school teams and 12 middle school teams competed. The meet, named in honor of Newcastle High School junior and student-athlete Laura Chord, who passed away on May 3, 2016, is generally a very busy one, however, this was the first year in a few featuring a full round of participants, since weather in recent years has either cancelled the meet or hindered the number of athletes in attendance.

“NHS tracksters did a lot of great things at the Laura Chord Memorial Track Meet,” said coach Matt Conzelman. “We had 40 personal records for the boys and 21 personal records for the girls from last year’s results!”

With a full parking lot and stands, the student-athletes from Wyoming and South Dakota kept all the coaches and volunteers busy throughout the day, from 8 in the morning until nearly 5:30 p.m. All events appeared to run smoothly, even though some races featured as many as 35 participants running at the same time, and several events had more than 70 athletes competing.



Above left, a group of youngsters — too young to participate in the day’s events — take off at the sound of the starting pistol in a race of their own behind the bleachers. Above right, Connor Kitch, Newcastle Middle School eighth-grader, prepares to launch the shot put. The bleachers were filled with fans cheering student-athletes from Wyoming and Custer. Plenty of devoted fans came to cheer on the home team as well. Below left, consummate Dogie fan Homer Hastings, pointing, talks with Craig Overman. To his left is Michelle Ausmann, and to Overman’s right is Craig Ausmann. Volunteers, along with the many coaches and assistant coaches, kept the meet in motion. Below right, Pat Neely of Wright readies to fire the starting pistol to begin one of the many races of the day.



# Track



Photo by Amy Menerey/NLJ

**Sam Cunningham started his varsity track career off with two impressive performances in the mile and two-mile races. He finished 10th in the mile and was just seven seconds away from running a state qualifying time, and he crossed the finish line first in the grueling two-mile race.**

Conzelman in the 100 Meter Dash. In addition to clocking a PR in the first meet of the season, McConkey also was just half a second off the state qualifying time in the 100 with his 11.93-second sixth-place finish.

Though senior Colton Vanderpool Mobley did not beat his previous best in the 100, he ran an 11.95-second race with his seventh-place finish, so is also just half a second away from qualifying in that event.

Vanderpool Mobley and McConkey also competed well in the 200 Meter race, finishing 10th and 11th with times of 24.19 and 24.60, respectively. Junior Aidan Butler posted a PR in the 200 with his 26.10-second finish.

"Collin and Colton looked really good," Conzelman said. "They are so close in both the 100 and 200 that it really comes down to just little things like reaching for the line and getting off to a quicker start, so I feel really good about them

making it back to the state meet again this year."

Butler also threw two new PRs in the Shot Put and the Discus with a 37-06 toss in the shot and a 103-06 hurl in the disc.

Junior Eli Morrill ran an 18.42 in the 110 Meter Hurdles, which earned him a new PR and a third-place finish in that event. He also leaped 16-02.50 in the Long Jump for a PR there.

Junior Jayden Corley posted personal bests in the Triple Jump and the Shot Put, sophomore Archer Ohnstad ran PRs in the 800 Meter and 1600 Meter races and threw a PR in Discus, senior Thomas Prell posted a PR in the 400 Meter Dash, sophomore Rurick Herrberg ran a personal best in the 300 Meter Hurdles, while sophomore Drew Conzelman jumped a PR in Long Jump.

Granted, as many of the Dogies and Lady Dogies are freshmen or first time track and field participants, all finishes will be personal bests

given this was their first shot competing at the varsity level, however, there were a few times achieved that were within striking distance of being state qualifiers.

Freshman Adalyn Olson started her debut season off right with a 12th-place finish in the 100 Meter Dash, a fifth-place finish in the 100 Meter Hurdles and a seventh-place finish in the 300 Meter Hurdles. All of her times put her in the vicinity of state qualifying times, which bodes well for her to punch her ticket to the Big Dance in May.

"Adalyn ran well for her first time running varsity track," Conzelman said. "After she gets used to the height of the hurdles and gets her footwork down, I think she's going to get those times pretty easily."

First time trackster Sam Cunningham is just seven seconds away from qualifying in the mile and less than seven seconds away from punching his ticket in the two mile race. "Sam really ran well," said



Photo by Amy Menerey/NLJ

**Alysha Engle, Newcastle High School athletic director, and Jackie Materi of Upton keep track of runners during the Laura Chord Memorial Track Meet on Thursday.**

Newcastle @ Laura Chord Invite 3/21/24			NHS Track & Field		
<b>Women's Team Results:</b>			<b>Men's Team Results:</b>		
1. Thunder Basin 188	2. Custer 158	3. Upton 55	1. Thunder Basin 209.5	2. Custer 80	3. Hill City 74
4. Hill City 55	5. Wright 35	6. Lead-Deadwood 30	4. Upton 48	5. Newcastle 39.5	6. Sundance 30
7. Newcastle 18.66	8. Hulet 17	9. Moorcroft 9	7. Wright 26	8. Lead-Deadwood 24	9. Midwest 22
10. Sundance 7	11. Arvada-Clearmont 6	12. Edgemont 4.33	10. Upton 48	11. Edgemont 18	12. Moorcroft 11.5
13. Midwest 1	<b>Women's Individual Results:</b>		<b>Men's Individual Results:</b>		
100M:	12. Adalyn Olson 13.70 PR	30. Julie Morris 14.95	100M:	6. Collin McConkey 11.93 PR	7. Colton Vanderpool Mobley 11.95
200M:	39. Faith Dixon 33.14 PR	47. Ashlynn Shroyer 34.85 PR	200M:	26. Junior Geisness 12.72 PR	38. Casey Matthews 12.94 PR
400M:	49. Netanya Prell 35.37 PR	17. Faith Dixon 1:18.15 PR	400M:	63. Drew Conzelman 13.92 PR	71. Denali Davis 14.35 PR
800M:	5. Adalyn Olson 19.40 PR	100M Hurdles:	800M:	77. Daxton Phillips 14.84 PR	200M:
1600M:	7. Adalyn Olson 53.65 PR	300M Hurdles:	1600M:	10. Colton Vanderpool Mobley 24.19	21T. Junior Geisness 16-11 PR
3200M:	16. Hollie Swentesky 1:00.92 PR	4x100M Relay:	3200M:	11. Collin McConkey 24.60	28. Eli Morrill 16-02.50 PR
4x100M Relay:	1. Aspen Bloom 13:11	4x800M Relay:	4x100M Relay:	26. Rurick Herrberg 25.70 PR	31. Drew Conzelman 15-08 PR
56:38	4. Julie Morris, Hollie Swentesky, Delainey Dresen, Adalyn Olson	9:47	4x100M Relay:	30. Aidan Butler 26.10 PR	Triple Jump:
8T. Hollie Swentesky 4-00 PR	8T. McKenzie Rose 4-00 PR	NH. Lillie Morrill	4x800M Relay:	32. Junior Geisness 26.16 PR	11. Elijah Morrill 38-5
6. Delainey Dresen 14-02.25 PR	6. Delainey Dresen 14-02.25 PR	6. Delainey Dresen 14-02.25 PR	4x800M Relay:	33. CJ Hardy 26.24 PR	13. Jayden Corley 37-01 PR
			4x800M Relay:	52. Adam Butler 27.51 PR	ND. Cole Erb
			4x800M Relay:	60. Thomas Prell 28.37	ND. Drew Conzelman
			4x800M Relay:	63. Troy Donner 28.64 PR	Pole Vault:
			4x800M Relay:	69. Denali Davis 29.69 PR	6T. Casey Matthews 9-06
			4x800M Relay:	400M:	NH. Nate White
			4x800M Relay:	29. Adam Butler 1:02.93 PR	NH. Adam Butler
			4x800M Relay:	31. Thomas Prell 1:03.57 PR	NH. Thomas Prell
			4x800M Relay:	800M:	Shot Put:
			4x800M Relay:	18. Archer Ohnstad 2:37.34 PR	9. Aidan Butler 37-06 PR
			4x800M Relay:	1600M:	21. Jayden Corley 32-10 PR
			4x800M Relay:	10. Sam Cunningham 4:51.43 PR	27. Troy Donner 31-01 PR
			4x800M Relay:	23. Archer Ohnstad 5:23.88 PR	30. Daymon Oliver 29-07 PR
			4x800M Relay:	3200M:	32. Tayshaun Bynum 28-00 PR
			4x800M Relay:	1. Sam Cunningham 11:23 PR	37. Thomas Dixon 26-07 PR
			4x800M Relay:	Lane Carter 13:28	43. Dagan Thompson 24-10.50 PR
			4x800M Relay:	110M Hurdles:	44. Josiah Martinez 24-06 PR
			4x800M Relay:	3. Elijah Morrill 18.42 PR	56. Evan Lyle 15-06 PR
			4x800M Relay:	6. Adam Butler 20.05 PR	ND. Cole Erb
			4x800M Relay:	300M Hurdles:	Discus:
			4x800M Relay:	5. Rurick Herrberg 47.33 PR	11. Nate Strickland 109-03
			4x800M Relay:	4x100M Relay: 46.81	17. Aiden Butler 103-06 PR
			4x800M Relay:	4. Junior Geisness, Collin McConkey, Rurick Herrberg, Colton Vanderpool Mobley	30. Douglas Pritchard 77-11
			4x800M Relay:	4x800M Relay: 9:47	32. Archer Ohnstad 77-01 PR
			4x800M Relay:	2. Sam Cunningham, Archer Ohnstad, Lane Carter, Teegan Hatheway	41. Thomas Dixon 67-09 PR
			4x800M Relay:	High Jump:	43. Tayshaun Bynum 67-01
			4x800M Relay:	6. CJ Hardy 5-10	45. Dagan Thompson 66-02 PR
			4x800M Relay:	NH. Troy Donner	48. Daymon Oliver 59-06 PR
			4x800M Relay:	Long Jump:	53. Josiah Martinez 58-05 PR
			4x800M Relay:		58. Evan Lyle 45-00 PR



Photo by Amy Menerey/NLJ

**McKenzie Rose takes off in attempt to clear the bar in the high jump. The senior cleared 4-0 in her debut of varsity track and field during the Laura Chord Memorial Track Meet on Thursday.**

Conzelman. "I was really impressed with his two mile time because he had just come off of running two tough races with the mile and the 4x800 relay."

It's looking like this week will finish with warmer temperatures, so Conzelman and crew are gearing up for their second opportunity to shave some time off their races and

punch their ticket to the state meet. They will get that chance Thursday and they will also get to see some 3A action as they head to Wheatland for a meet there.

# Boys

contest of the weekend. Their speed ended up being too much for the Dogies, so they cruised to a 6-0 win over Newcastle.

After seeing how the 'Blazers ended the weekend, Hoover predicted that they would move up in the rankings.

The 'Blazers started fast, scoring their first goal in the first couple of minutes of the game.

"They have a couple of really fast kids and we were tired after playing that first game," Hoover admitted. "After they scored their first goal, they were able to capture the momentum and they didn't let it go for the rest of the game."

Between Torrington's momentum and the Dogies' fatigue, the 'Blazers were able to possess the ball more than Newcastle, however, the Dogies held them to just two goals in the first half of play.

"We kind of settled in and things went better," Hoover said. "But then they came out in the second half and scored within two minutes, and things went downhill from there."

The 'Blazers methodically put in three more goals, one with only 48 seconds remaining to shut the Dogies out.

After a good night's rest, the Dogies came out firing on all cylinders on Saturday. Their first match-up was against Lyman, who Hoover admitted was a little down this year. However, the Dogies didn't back down against the Bulldogs and put it to them, defeating them 7-0.

Esposito would get the Dogies on the board with two minutes remaining in the first half when he found the back of the net on an assist from Abu Zhara. With that goal, the Dogies went into the break with the 1-0 lead over Lyman.

"Jacob came off the field at half-time saying we needed to beat them 10-0," Hoover chuckled. "He took it seriously and scored four goals in the second half!"

Abu Zhara ended the contest with a hat trick plus one as he went 4-8 in shots on goal. Powers also scored a goal in the second half, while Christensen got his first goal of the year off a header from an Abu Zhara assist.

In their final match-up of the tournament, Newcastle was pitted against the No. 3-ranked Powell Panthers for the consolation championship. The Dogies were ready for the Panthers and dominated the contest securing the 4-2 victory and the consolation title.

"We knew that it would be a tough game since it was our fourth in two days," Hoover said. "But we went out really strong and possessed

really well throughout the game. We moved the ball well, we used our drops, our wings, and our crosses, and we really kind of dominated them."

Abu Zhara scored two of the Dogies' four goals, Esposito found the back of the net for one goal, and freshman Gabe Hoover scored his first varsity goal of his career to round out the scoring for the Dogies.

"It was probably the best game I've ever seen us play for the most part," Hoover said. "We communicated better than I've ever seen us before and we just kept attacking them."

The Dogies have the week off because of the Easter holiday, but will be back in action next Tuesday as they head to Gering to take on the Nebraska team. Then on Saturday, April 6, they will host the Worland Warriors in their home opener.

NHS Boys Soccer	
<b>Newcastle @ Pinnacle Cup in Worland 3/22-23/24</b>	
<b>Newcastle v. Pinedale 3/22/24 3-1 in Shootout</b>	
Jacob Abu Zhara: 1-1 PK, 0-1 shot on goal	Jacob Powers: 1-1 PK
Caden Esposito: 1-1 PK, 0-2 shots on goal	Colter Christensen: 0-1 PK, 0-2 shots on goal
Gabe Hoover: 0-1 shot on goal	Will Beastrom: 7 saves
<b>Newcastle v. Torrington 3/22/24 0-6</b>	
Jacob Abu Zhara: 0-1 shot on goal	Caden Esposito: 0-2 shots on goal
Zach Orsbom: 0-1 shot on goal	Will Beastrom: 13 saves
<b>Newcastle v. Lyman 3/23/24 7-0</b>	
Jacob Abu Zhara: 2-4 shots on goal	Jacob Powers: 1-3 shots on goal
Caden Esposito: 1-2 shots on goal, 1 assist	Colter Christensen: 1-4 shots on goal
Zach Orsbom: 0-1 shot on goal	Ben Carter: 0-1 shot on goal
Will Beastrom: 3 saves	
<b>Newcastle v. Powell 3/23/24 4-2</b>	
Jacob Abu Zhara: 2-4 shots on goal	Jacob Powers: 0-2 shots on goal
Caden Esposito: 1-6 shots on goal	Gabe Hoover: 1-1 shot on goal
Zach Orsbom: 0-1 shot on goal	Will Beastrom: 11 saves



**Legal Notice**

**IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF THE STATE OF WYOMING IN AND FOR WESTON COUNTY**

**IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF: JUDITH KAY SITTA KENNEDY DECEASED PROBATE NO. CV-2276**

**ORDER SETTING HEARING AND NOTICE OF PROCEEDINGS TO DETERMINE HEIRSHIP**

To: All creditors, heirs, devisees, and other persons interested in the Estate of JUDITH KAY SITTA KENNEDY, deceased ("Decedent").

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that a Petition to Determine Heirship has been filed in the above-referenced District Court by Petitioner; that the decedent died on October 3, 1995, and was at the time of her death a resident of Scottsdale, Arizona. The Petition requests that the Court make a determination as to heirship of what is believed to be a one-fifth (1/5) interest the following described mineral interests located in Weston County, Wyoming, to-wit:

All Located Finn-Shurley Field, Weston County, Wyoming as follows:  
The Finn #8 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: NW¼NE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Finn #9 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: SW¼NW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Finn #10 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: NE¼NW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Finn #11 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: SE¼NW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Finn #12 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 8: NE¼SE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Grieves #3 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 19: NE¼NW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

U.S. Oil and Gas lease W-037878- A insofar as it covers the following land, designated as Western Federal J-1 Lease: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 3: SW¼NW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Finn #13 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 8: NW¼SE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Grieves #4 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: NE¼SE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Grieves #5 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: SW¼SE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Grieves #6 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 10: NE¼SW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

U.S. Oil and Gas lease # W 037878-A insofar as it covers the following land, designated as Western Federal K-1 Lease: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 3: NW¼NW¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Finn #15 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 8: NW¼NE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

The Collins #3 Lease Covering: Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 7: NE¼NE¼ 12.5% Working Interest

Finn #6 Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: SW¼NE¼ 5.5% Working Interest

Finn #7 Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 9: NE¼NE¼ 5.5% Working Interest

Grieves #2 Township 42 North, Range 64 West, 6th P.M. Section 18: Lot 3 24,999 Undivided working interest (Hereinafter "Property").

It is hereby ordered that a hearing on this matter is scheduled for the 16th day of April, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. for fifteen (15) minutes at the District Courtroom, located in the Weston County Courthouse, 1 West Main Street, Newcastle, Wyoming 82701, at which time the Court will sign an Order Determining the Heirship of Decedent. Dated this 14th Day of March By District Court Judge:

(Publish March 21 and 28 and April 4 and 11, 2024)

**Cowboy State Look-In**

Courtesy of the Wyoming News Exchange



**Store closures announced**

POWELL (WNE) — While the future corporate ownership of the Powell and Cody Albertsons remain up in the air, another large company with area stores is announcing changes. In a recent press release, Dollar Tree Inc. announced the company would be closing 600 stores in the first half of fiscal year 2024 and 400 more in the next several years. The company has not released where the Dollar Tree and Family Dollar stores are that will face closure. Dollar Tree Inc. also opened more than 600 new stores in the last fiscal year, and the company maintains more than 16,000 stores in

the Lower 48 and in Canada. There are Family Dollar stores in Powell and Lovell and a Dollar Tree in Cody. During the fourth quarter of fiscal 2023, the company announced that it had initiated a comprehensive store portfolio optimization review, according to the press release, which involved identifying stores for closure, relocation, or re-bannering based on an evaluation of current market conditions and individual store performance, among other factors.

*This story was published on March 21, 2024.*

**Bill establishes cold-case database**

POWELL (WNE) — In July of 2021, Cody resident Danell Bennett went missing. It's been three years since her disappearance and the case has gone cold. Once House Bill 29 goes into effect, Bennett's case and all other Wyoming cold cases could get a boost toward being solved due to new state resources. "We have several cold cases around the state," said Park County Sheriff Darrell Steward. "[The database] would help draw extra resources to the division to help the locals." After overwhelming support in the Legislature, HB 29 was signed Friday by Gov. Mark

Gordon. The bill will go into effect on July 1 and grants \$150,000 to the attorney general's office. The money will fund the development of a database for cold cases and help with case investigations. Cases that have remained unsolved for two or more years can be submitted to the database with the hope of providing new potential leads. "I believe that it is important that law enforcement have the tools they need to solve one of the [most] heinous crimes committed," said Rep. Rachel Rodriguez-Williams (R-Cody), vice chairman of the Judicial House Committee. "Databases

do add value to the public by sharing the information and for neighboring law enforcement jurisdictions." There are an estimated 150 cold cases in Wyoming, including numerous cases in Park County and the rest of the Big Horn Basin. "Once DCI gets that database up and running, if it passes, then we all will be submitting as much information as we can," Steward said. "We would like to get these people found and their loved ones notified. Hopefully, they're in good health somewhere else." *This story was published on March 21, 2024.*

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**One of the world's biggest carbon capture projects coming to Wyoming**

CASPER (WNE) — New Mexico-based climate tech company Spiritus this week announced plans to build a large-scale direct air capture project in central Wyoming, adding to the Cowboy State's growing portfolio of carbon capture initiatives. The "Carbon Orchard" project will be among the most ambitious DAC projects on the planet, with the potential to capture and sequester up to two megatons of CO2 from the atmosphere annually — at a fraction of the current market cost, the company claims. The project's promise rests on an advanced sorbent technology; different from first generation carbon capture practices, whose energy intensive absorption and desorption cycles have stymied commercial application. The proprietary Spiritus system is able to arrest and sequester carbon dioxide using lower-temperature cycles, lowering the cost dramatically, the company contends. But it's not just about capturing technology: Location and geologic expertise are decisive

factors too. Wyoming's forefront position in the realm of geologic storage makes it a prime destination for large scale DAC projects. As one of only two U.S. states with "primacy" to regulate Class VI wells — an exclusive category of deep geologic formations necessary to permanently store carbon dioxide safely — the Cowboy State is an easy choice for sequestration investments like the "Orchard One." The project could put Wyoming at the center of a burgeoning carbon credit market, by which states, businesses, and even individual millionaires purchase carbon allowances to offset emissions to satisfy climate goals. "Establishing Orchard One in the state of Wyoming marks a major advancement in our global journey towards net-zero," said Charles Cadieu, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer at Spiritus. "Our approach, a first in the industry, brings high-efficiency carbon removal within the economic reach of broader markets." *This story was published on March 21, 2024.*

**Search continues for missing woman**

GILLETTE (WNE) — Search and rescue efforts continue for a 55-year-old woman who went missing Saturday evening south of Gillette. Tami Lynn Sturgeon, of Gillette, was reported missing at about 7 p.m. Saturday by her 60-year-old husband. She has not been found as of Monday morning. Sheriff's Sgt. Gary Sams said the two were south of Bishop Road in the Yellow Hammer Buttes area shed hunting when Sturgeon lost her cellphone. She

and her husband went back to search for her phone and the two became separated. "She discovered her phone was missing and they went back to that area to search for it and then they got separated," Sams said, adding that the snow and cold weather complicated the search. Sams said the woman was dressed for the weather Saturday and the two had a backpack with some supplies, but that pack was not with Sturgeon. Multiple agencies have joined

the search including search and rescue teams from Sheridan, Crook and Johnson counties, Sheriff Scott Matheny said. Drones were also used and on Sunday a request for a Black Hawk helicopter was approved. The plan was to use the helicopter to search the area Monday. "It's open but it's a rough area and it's hard to navigate in that area," Matheny said. *This story was published on March 25, 2024.*

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 Andrea Thorson

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A more complete Position Description is available on-line at the City of Newcastle Website at newcastlewyoing.org under Job Opportunities.

If you have any questions regarding our application process, please contact Chuck Bartlett at (307)746-3535.



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# Girls split on opening weekend

**Sonja Karp**  
 NLJ Sports Editor

The Lady Dogies kicked off their soccer season at the Pinnacle Cup tournament in Worland Friday and Saturday. Though they started a little slow with losses in their first two contests, head coach Cami Willyard was pleased to see her team finish strong with two wins to close things out.

“I was pleasantly surprised by how we did over the weekend,” Willyard said. “And it wasn’t just that we got two wins, but by how we continually improved each half of each game, which is our goal this year.”

The first game of the season for the Lady Dogies had them taking on a challenging Green River team that fields an extremely talented sophomore player who was just too much for Willyard’s crew.

“She is legit,” Willyard said. “She is amazing to watch and is one of the top goal scorers in the state — and she took it to us a little bit.”

The Wolves were able to score four goals against the Lady Dogies in the first half, and then three more in the second frame of play. Of those seven goals, the sophomore scored six, and she assisted on the one goal she didn’t knock in.

“We tried what we could to slow her down,” Willyard said. “We started man-marking her after her first shot on goal, but it didn’t seem to do much. We were able to hold them scoreless for the first 15 minutes of the second half, though, so that was good.”

Newcastle was able to create some scoring opportunities for themselves, but just weren’t able to convert on those.

“Hailey [Beastrom] had three shots on goal, and a few others were testing and getting through their back line, but didn’t quite get a shot off on frame,” Willyard said. “So really, it wasn’t as bad as the 0-7 score indicates.”

Freshman Christine Swentesky started her varsity career off as goalkeeper with a baptism by fire in this contest. Despite missing on seven shots, she was able to make nine saves against what will probably be the best player she will see on the pitch this season.

“Christine got to show off her keeper

### NHS Girls Soccer

**Newcastle @ Pinnacle Cup in Worland 3/22-23/24**  
 Newcastle v. Green River 3/22/24 0-7  
 Hailey Beastrom: 0-3 shots on goal  
 Kathryn Huber: 1 save  
 Christine Swentesky: 9 saves

**Newcastle v. Douglas 3/23/24 0-4**  
 Christine Swentesky: 13 saves  
 Newcastle v. Torrington 3/23/24 3-0  
 Hailey Beastrom: 2-3 shots on goal  
 Kendra Merchen: 0-1 shot on goal  
 Scottlyn Hildebrandt: 1-1 shot on goal  
 Kathryn Huber: 2 saves, 1 shutout  
 Christine Swentesky: 0-1 shot on goal, 1 shutout

**Newcastle v. Pinedale 3/23/24 2-0**  
 Hailey Beastrom: 0-3 shots on goal, 1 assist  
 Taylor Conklin: 0-1 shot on goal  
 Kendra Merchen: 1-2 shots on goal  
 Scottlyn Hildebrandt: 0-1 shot on goal  
 Kathryn Huber: 1 shutout  
 Christine Swentesky: 1-2 shots on goal, 1 shutout

skills this weekend, which is really fun to watch,” Willyard said. “She is quick, she anticipates, and she is not afraid to sacrifice her body.”

Saturday was a full day for the Lady Dogies, with three games on the schedule. First up were the fourth-ranked Lady Bearcats of Douglas, who Willyard described as a very sound team with a variety of scoring potential.

Despite dropping the contest 4-0, the Lady Dogies once again showed marked improvement from the first half of play to the second.

“They had 11 shots on goal and two scores in the first half, but then only got six shots on goal and two scores in the second,” Willyard explained. “I was impressed with our defense and our back line of Emi [Lichtenberger], Sage [Lichtenberger] and Kathryn [Huber], along with Ruth [Rose] and Hailey [Beastrom] who dropped back to help, really did a great job.”

As keeper, Swentesky ended this contest with 13 saves in the goal.

“Not only did she have those 13 saves, but she really had more than that,” Willyard said. “When they would try to send a cross pass, she would come out and snag the ball, which kept them from even being able to attempt a shot.”

Game two of the day was against the Torrington Lady Trailblazers, who, like Douglas, are a conference team Newcastle will meet again later in the season.

Willyard admitted being a little concerned as her team started the contest a little slow, with neither team getting a single shot on goal in the first half.

Willyard pulled Swentesky out of the goal in the second half to take advantage of her fresh legs. The freshman added a spark to the Lady Dogies, which they used to get six shots off, and finished on three of those — two by Beastrom and one by Scottlyn Hildebrandt.

Beastrom scored the first goal of the game off a corner kick, Hildebrandt scored the next goal, and in the final minute of the contest, Beastrom scored on a beautiful free kick to the top right corner.

“It was great to get a win over Torrington,” Willyard said. “And it was great to get our first win of the season!”

In their third, and final game of the day, the Lady Dogies were up against Pinedale.

“We were tired for this game, and rightly so,” Willyard said. “Once again, there were no shots on goal by either team in the first half, but once again, we got better in the second half.”

Swentesky came out of the goal in the second half and reignited the Lady Dogies. Kendra Merchen used that spark to punch in the first goal of the contest, and the first of her varsity career, to put Newcastle on the board.

“It was pretty cool to see Kendra score,” Willyard said. “Though she is a senior, this is her first year playing soccer, so to see her picking up the game so quickly is awesome.”

In her time on the pitch, Swentesky also got her first goal of the season, and her varsity career, to extend the Lady Dogies’ lead to 2-0, which they would hold as time expired.

“I was so glad to see the girls step up their offensive game in the second half, but I can’t say enough about our defense,” Willyard said. “They were unbreakable and allowed no shots on goal through the whole game.”

This week, the Lady Dogies are open and will get back into action on Tuesday as they head to Gering, Nebraska, for a contest there. Then they will host the Lady Warriors of Worland in their home opener on Saturday, April 6.

## Karpe from Page 9

best bracket) was Houston making their way to the championship. If they lost, I knew there was no hope for a decent finish.

Granted, I also know that the strange turn of events in the south region has messed with a LOT of people’s brackets, but on my long-shot bracket, I already lost one of the teams in the championship (Wisconsin), and if Houston

lost, I’d lose another one on my favorites bracket.

So, with 1.2 seconds to play, I was on the edge of my seat with my eyes glued to the TV.

The Aggies were inbound the ball under their own basket. Houston was all over their best three-point shooter, denying him the ball. The ball was entered and passed, and Andersson Garcia let it fly on a fadeaway shot from the top of the key. He released, the buzzer blew, and the ball found the bottom of the net, sending the game into overtime.

When Garcia made the shot, though I still wanted Houston to win, I had to admit that I wouldn’t have been mad if Texas A&M pulled out the upset.

After all, Cinderella stories are what make this time of year a little bit magical.

Houston went on to pull out the win, so saved what was

left of my bracket, but it was a great game to watch!

Saturday night’s last game of the night was also one for the history books. This one was in the midwest bracket and it had the No. 3-ranked Bluejays of Creighton battling it out into double overtime to defeat the No. 11-ranked Oregon Ducks in what has been deemed the best game of the tournament (the Houston game notwithstanding).

The Ducks were in control of the game for most of the contest, but there was never more than a six point differential between the two teams throughout regulation and overtime number one. Creighton was down two, but hit a shot to force the game to its first OT, then Oregon hit a well-contested three-pointer to send the game into double OT.

By that time, the Ducks had run out of gas against a much deeper Bluejay bench,

so Creighton extended their lead to take the hard-fought victory.

But, again, it was a fantastic game that had fans on the edges of their seats waiting to see if there could be an upset sending Oregon to the Sweet 16.

After the dust from the weekend settled and with all of the upsets and unexpected drama played out, a pretty rare situation is unfolding in the NCAA tournament, and could bode well for my favorites bracket.

Even after 11 of the lower seeds got first round upset wins (five of those being in the south bracket), for only the fifth time since the NCAA tournament began seeding in 1979, all eight teams seeded number one and number two are advancing to the Sweet 16.

I can’t wait for Thursday to see how much madness this next round has in store for us.

## Adventures in Learning Night

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