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Holidays at the YMCA

- Several extra events, free fitness assessment available this week

By Kelly Koltiska

Youth reporter

During the holidays, Sheridan's YMCA is hosting several special events as well as its everyday activities.

Today and Friday, various activities will be available to children, including dodgeball, movies and crafts. On Thursday, a dodgeball tournament will take place at the Y starting at 4:30 p.m. Family teams or ages 16 and older can participate.

Health and Fitness Program Director Jodi Moseley explains about the tournament: "You can get signed up for that right now. It's \$10 per team, six people on a team, and we're actually having a tournament with prizes."

A free fitness assessment is available to the community over the holidays.

Moseley encourages, "Come down and get program information about anything from social activities to physical activities to weight-management programs, and we have a couple of programs that are free to the community that they can come down and check out."

She adds, "Kids that are back from college can get a month worth of membership if they wish to utilize the facility."

Adult fitness, youth fitness and sports programs will restart on Monday. For a complete list of classes, stop in at 417 N. Jefferson St. and pick up an information sheet.

The game room, open 10 a.m. to

5:30 p.m. daily, and day care center are available for parents to leave kids while at work. The game room, for children over age 6, has pool tables, computer games, chess, foosball tables, pingpong, and much more.

It also has planned activities such as musical chairs and capture the flag.

Game room supervisor and Sheridan High School senior Amy Farlinger comments on the game room, "The kids like that they can come here and be around their friends and that there are plenty of fun activities for them to do. ..."

"They know that it's a safe environment for them and they're

not going to be bullied here. Parents are given a peace of mind. They know that their kids can be safe and that they're not going to be doing anything that they wouldn't approve of."

Eleven-year-old Forest DeBolt, who says he comes to the YMCA game room six times a week, observes, "It's fun because it gives you a chance to come here and see kids from other schools."

In addition, the YMCA has a daily open swim from 1 to 3 p.m. Children under age 8 must be accompanied by an adult.

The healthy kitchen is open for lunch and sells nutritious foods such as salads and sandwiches. Basketball, soccer, volleyball and floor hockey are available for both kids and adults.

The workout room is open for anyone over age 15. High school students appreciate the convenience, cleanliness and variety of fitness offered at the Y.

Senior Candice Ashworth says she goes "all the time" and enjoys "that I can go there pretty much anytime I want" and "that there's a large variety of exercise programs that you can get into."

The YMCA has programs for all ages. It will be closed Saturday and Sunday for New Year's. For more information, call 674-7488.





YMCA game room regulars enjoy a game of chess. From left are John Rodriguez, Forrest Debolt, Dalen O'Connell (standing), Brandon Baglin, Harrison Garner (standing), and Dalton Jones.

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City to consider funding federal literacy program

By Josh Mitchell

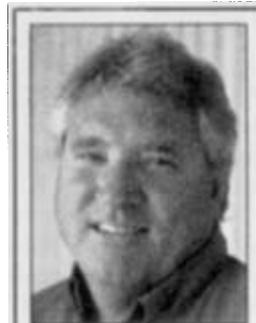
Staff reporter

The City Council tonight will consider allocating almost \$8,000 to a federal literacy program that lost funding from a private donor recently.

The funding contribution was tabled at the last City Council meeting after some members expressed concern that giving money to Sheridan County Even Start could set a precedent of local taxpayers funding federal programs.

Even Start lost funding from the Scott Foundation of Sheridan and is asking the city to shore up the loss. The money, which would come from the 1 Percent Optional Sales Tax Fund, is needed to pay a preschool teacher's salary for the rest of the year.

Councilman Duane Farley told the director of Even Start to request the funding from the school district and the state Department of Education.



Duane Farley
City Councilman

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Councilwoman Mona Hansen favors giving the money to Even Start. She said she has seen the program benefits firsthand with her daughter attending.

Even Start targets families with below-average incomes.

In other business, the council will consider granting zoning approval for a 24-lot "affordable housing" subdivision called Blue Sky Estates Planned Unit Development that would be located

on close to three acres in the 1600 block of South Sheridan Avenue.

Developer Steve Grimshaw said the dwellings will be twin homes — dwellings that share a wall — and will be priced around \$150,000 for each home.

A massive development that is proposed to bring an additional 95,000 square feet of office space, 45,000 square feet of retail and 36 residences — including town homes and single-family homes — will be up for final zoning approval tonight.

The Whitney Benefits project would be located near the intersection of Grinnell Avenue and Connor Street and has received unanimous approval thus far. Infrastructure for the project started about a month ago.

The City Council will also consider giving the Sheridan Arts Council \$2,000 to help fund various community art programs.

And the council will consider a request by the Sheridan County Liquor Dealers Association for extended hours on St. Patrick's Day, the WYO Rodeo, Halloween and New Year's Eve.

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Wright tornado tops state stories in 2005

News-Record
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By The Associated Press

CHEYENNE — A midsummer tornado that tore through the town of Wright, killing two people and damaging or destroying one-third of the town's homes, was voted Wyoming's top news story of 2005 in balloting by newspaper and broadcast members of The Associated Press and by the wire service's staff.

Trent Blankenship's resignation as state superintendent of public instruction — along with the tension leading up to his resignation, and the bizarre period where he officially held two jobs — was a close second. The state's burgeoning coffers and the programs that money has helped to fund also made the list.

But the tornado was one of just two stories to appear on all eight ballots, and was listed no lower than fourth on any ballot. The Blankenship saga won more first-place votes — four of eight — but ranked lower on other ballots.

1. WRIGHT TORNADO: The twister struck with little warning the afternoon of Aug. 12 with winds estimated at 113 to 130 mph.

Two people were killed — Etienne Iriberry Sr., 53, died after his home was hit; Connie L. Allen, 97, died later at Campbell County Memorial Hospital in Gillette — and Gov. Dave Freudenthal's request for federal disaster assistance reported 60 homes destroyed and another 59 damaged so badly that residents would need to find temporary housing.

"It's just total devastation of homes. There's just nothing left," Campbell County Undersheriff Scott Matheny said the following morning. "There are some homes that weren't even touched, but there's camper trailers turned upside down, and there's property and valuables strewn everywhere."

For more than a week, state and local officials worried that the Federal Emergency Management Agency would overlook the town. Three years earlier, no federal disaster declaration was made after a flood destroyed one-third of the homes in Kaycee. But President Bush signed the Wright disaster declaration on Aug. 22 — just a week before Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast.

2. BLANKENSHIP: There was no love lost between Blankenship and Freudenthal, but their working relationship took a turn for the bizarre when Blankenship reported that Freudenthal had once threatened him. According to Blankenship, the governor said: "Don't ever cross me, or your head will be in your lap before you even know I've drawn my knife."

Freudenthal said he didn't remember the quote, but that he might have said it in jest. Blankenship said there was no kidding about it — that it was a threat. Politicians weighed in on both sides. And

that was just the beginning.

In June, Blankenship announced he would leave his post to become superintendent of the North Slope Borough School District in Alaska, the nation's northernmost district. He said he would hold both jobs during the month of July, but that his new job wouldn't interfere with his responsibilities in Wyoming.

An Associated Press investigation proved otherwise, showing that Blankenship worked only nine days in July, and that even on days his calendar showed him working in Wyoming, he did not attend meetings he was scheduled to attend. At least two newspapers called for Blankenship to repay the state his salary for July.

3. HATHAWAY SCHOLARSHIPS: The Legislature approved the creation of a \$400 million trust fund to pay for scholarships for Wyoming high school graduates who attend Wyoming community colleges or the University of Wyoming.

A special task force spent much of the summer and fall working out details for the scholarship program, which was named after former Gov. Stan Hathaway. Those details, and the funding of the program, will go before the Legislature in 2006.

4. NEW PRISON: Lawmakers approved the construction of a new medium-security prison in Torrington, despite objections from finalists Rawlins and Riverton that many of the jobs and much of the economic benefit would go to people in Scottsbluff, Neb., just across the border.

The facility is expected to create 325 new jobs and should help Wyoming bring back prisoners who currently are housed in other states.

5. BUDGET SURPLUS: The 2005 Legislature had an estimated \$1.2 billion surplus to play with; in the 2006 budget session, the surplus was expected to reach \$1.8 billion.

That surplus has helped the state set aside hundreds of millions of dollars for college scholarships, endowed faculty positions, wildlife preservation and other projects. But it also has sparked debates among politicians about how much the state should spend in its immediate needs — road construction, sales tax relief and mitigating the effects of energy development — versus how much should be saved in the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund and other accounts.

6. GOV. HATHAWAY DIES: Former Gov. Hathaway died at his home on Oct. 4 after a long illness. He was 81.

During his two terms as governor, from 1967-75, Hathaway had a profound impact on Wyoming, enacting the state's first severance tax on minerals mined and pumped from





Wyoming and creating a permanent trust fund where severance tax money is kept and invested, earning enough to run a major portion of the state's daily government operations today.

7. E-BINGO: The game was up Jan. 5, when Laramie County District Judge E. James Burke ruled that electronic bingo machines were illegal gambling devices.

Within days, bingo parlors across the state were closed down. Attempts in the Legislature to resurrect the game died when the House passed a bill specifically outlawing electronic bingo.

8. ARAPAHO CASINO: Wyoming's long legal fight against another form of gambling came to an end in July when the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a previous ruling that the state had negotiated in bad faith.

The ruling allowed the Northern Arapaho Tribe to go ahead with plans for a Las Vegas-style casino on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

9. LeDOUX DIES: Country music star and world champion bareback rider Chris LeDoux died March 9 from complications of liver cancer. He was 56.

The 1976 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association bareback champion, LeDoux used to pass out tapes of his music at rodeos, earning him a loyal fan base.

10. EDUCATION AUDIT: Just days after Blankenship announced his resignation, an audit of his department revealed possible nepotism, poorly documented budget, apparent circumvention of state purchasing rules and improper reimbursement for training.

Blankenship dismissed the audit's findings, saying it was political, a claim disputed by State Auditor Max Maxfield and others.

OTHER TOP STORIES: The Legislature created a panel to review medical malpractice lawsuits; a new law creates penalties for public officials who improperly close public meetings; rain and snow help relieve the drought that had gripped parts of northern and northeastern Wyoming; state education officials and lawmakers begin to crack down on unaccredited colleges; despite returning 19 starters from a 7-5 team that won the Las Vegas Bowl, the University of Wyoming football team fell flat, losing its last six games to finish the season 4-7.

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WYOMING'S PAST TOP STORIES

Here is a look at some of the recent top stories in Wyoming:

- **2004:** Fiery pileup on I-80 kills seven, injures 29
- **2003:** War in Iraq claims six servicemen with Wyoming ties
- **2002:** Freudenthal's win ends eight-year GOP lock
- **2001:** East Coast terrorist attacks reverberate in Wyoming
- **2000:** Dick Cheney returns to

politics, wins vice presidency

- **1999:** Two men sent to prison for murder of Matthew Shepard
- **1998:** Beating death of Matthew Shepard draws international condemnation
- **1997:** Legislature approves plan for education finance reform
- **1996:** Mike Enzi wins bid to replace Al Simpson in U.S. Senate
- **1995:** Wyoming Supreme Court

rules K-12 funding system unconstitutional

- **1994:** GOP sweeps state office, congressional races
- **1993:** Four Sheridan schoolchildren injured by gunman
- **1992:** Mark Hopkinson executed for ordering murder while awaiting trial
- **1991:** Reapportionment plan overturned by federal court

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Education Classrooms and courtrooms

Resolving the long-running school funding lawsuit this year is the dream of some Wyoming leaders.

"We need to get out of court and on with the business of educating children," said Sen. Grant Larson, R-Jackson.

Education was the most talked-about item among people interviewed for the Star-Tribune's 2006 "Wyoming Wish List" project. Some of their ideas:

■ Ashley Bright, executive officer of the Boys and Girls Club of Central Wyoming, said Wyoming should lower the high school dropout rate by supporting higher education programs.

■ "We should cut education spending, not increase it," said Bob Davis, an oil producer in Upton. "That money rarely trickles down to teachers."

■ U.S. District Court Judge William F. Downes suggested creating an after-school mentoring program, using senior citizens to tutor

kids. "We should take advantage of the wealth of experience and talents our seniors have."

■ Teacher in-service days should be held in summer when teachers are already off, said Clif McCrady of Casper. Also: "We need another university in northern Wyoming."

With 2006 an election year, some elected leaders feel pressure to get the state's Hathaway Scholarship program running in time to help the high school class of 2006 pay for college.

When the Hathaway trust fund was created last year, it wasn't expected to start disbursing scholarship money so soon. Thanks to a hefty budget surplus, Gov. Dave Freudenthal has proposed jump-starting the program.

"It makes no sense to skip a whole year of students just because we couldn't act quickly enough," said Jim McBride, state superintendent of public instruction.



Members of the Kelly Walsh High School Science Bowl team celebrate a correct answer at a competition in February. Education is a 2006 priority for people interviewed for the 'Wyoming Wish List.'

Health care Making health care affordable

Affordable health care should be a priority for Wyoming in 2006, some Wyoming leaders say.

"Wyoming should lead the country in affordable health care," said Pastor Milo Miller of Highland Park Community Church. "We should pass legislation to give every resident affordable

health care."

Health care was on the minds of many Wyomingites interviewed for the "Wyoming Wish List." Several advocated state support for health coverage:

■ Wyoming should provide health insurance for those not covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or group insurance and who cannot afford individual coverage, said Diane Noton, a Saratoga physician.

■ "All Wyoming residents deserve affordable health care," said Dan Neal of the Equality State Policy Center. "Wyoming should look at other states with similar plans like Vermont and Maine."

■ The state needs to subsidize health-care premiums statewide to help stabilize costs, said Lesley Wischmann of the Alliance for





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Historic Wyoming.

Another priority mentioned by Wish List participants includes providing medical environments that attract and retain high-quality medical personnel. University of Wyoming President Thomas

Buchanan noted the university's role in improving health care.

"UW's family practice residency centers and our programs in the health sciences and medical education are significant parts of this effort," he said.



Health care will be a key topic in 2006, according to people interviewed for the 'Wyoming Wish List.' Above, nurse Marc Miller administers intravenous drug therapy for James Gillum at the Wyoming Medical Center.

Energy Harnessing the energy boom

While some Wyomingites focus on helping to satisfy America's energy cravings in 2006, others talk about holding onto the things that make the state special.

Here are some of the diverse ideas voiced by people interviewed for the Star-Tribune's 2006 "Wyoming Wish List":

■ "The state should be an ally with mineral producers rather than an adversary," said Bob Davis, an oil producer in Upton. "Mineral producers have 14 different agencies that we have to fight with. We're plugging an average of four oil wells a day in Wyoming. Oil production is dropping. There's plenty of oil in the state, but no incentive to drill."

■ "Those corporations that mine our coal and drill for gas are guests," said Vickie Goodwin of the Powder River Basin Resource Council. "Yes, they pay their way, but we need to insist that they act

responsibly and treat our home with respect."

■ Pat O'Toole, president of Family Farm Alliance, said the state should create long-term planning for renewable resources and consider energy impacts on small towns and the rural landscape.

■ Wyoming should develop a renewable energy program that allows for sustainable communities, said Mark Price, executive director of the Wyoming Outdoor Coalition.

■ "Our energy production will eventually drop down to nothing and force the state to rely on tourism or some other income," said Arlie Roberts, a retired Casper Amoco worker.



Journalists tour a wind farm near Evanston in July. Energy development was mentioned as a key 2006 topic by 'Wyoming Wish List' participants.





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Drugs

State aims to kick meth habit

Fighting the addiction and crime that result from methamphetamine use will continue to be a priority for Wyoming in 2006.

"We need to get a handle on the meth situation," said Pat Thorson, chair of the Natrona County Republican party. "We are already seeing its impact on our workforce."

People interviewed for the 2006 "Wyoming Wish List" offered several ideas, including stronger law enforcement:

■ Mike Blonigen, the Natrona County district attorney, said the state needs to create a felony drug court to deal with both treatment and punishment. The state also needs to help children who were raised in meth environments, he said. "We need to keep the cycle from perpetuating itself."

■ Natrona County Sheriff Mark

Benton said Wyoming needs to develop an integrated justice system in which every law enforcement agency has access to the same criminal histories to better track individuals.

■ Wyoming needs a meth lab cleanup bill and a statewide plan for fighting meth, said Lt. Mike Moore of the Casper Police Department.

■ The state should continue its efforts on a local level by creating community initiatives and community-based solutions to fight meth abuse, said Casper Mayor Guy Padgett.



Decontamination specialists Todd Huff, left, and Kim Perry look for evidence of methamphetamine manufacturing in a Casper kitchen in April. Participants in the 'Wyoming Wish List' identified meth as an important challenge for 2006.

Wildlife

Money for wildlife?

A number of Wyomingites with ties to wildlife management would like to see the state secure more money for wildlife-related projects in 2006.

"The revenue stream is not adequate for current and future needs," said Terry Cleveland, director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Cleveland said the state needs to find other funding besides user fees to pay for wildlife management.

Barry Reiswig, National Elk

Refuge director, echoed that sentiment. Even with the state's huge surplus from energy development, Game and Fish is strapped for funding, he said.

Securing funding wasn't the only wildlife-related priority for people interviewed for the "Wyoming Wish List." Some other comments related to fish and wildlife:

■ Delisting the grizzly bear and working toward delisting wolves in Wyoming are priorities for Bob Wharff, the Wyoming director for Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife.

■ State Attorney General Pat Crank said he wants to obtain some closure on a number of pending Endangered Species Act cases, including wolves, grizzlies and the Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

■ "We need to balance the needs of our environment and culture," said Gov. Dave Freudenthal.

■ The state will need a multi-faceted approach to address wildlife diseases, including brucellosis, chronic wasting disease and whirling disease, Cleveland said.





■ Del Kinswoman, a Casper massage therapist, said the state needs to prioritize how it spends the taxpayers' money and better explain to the public why it needs to do things like research for diseases.



Endangered species will continue to be an issue in 2006. Above, a grizzly sow forages near Teton Park's Moran Junction.

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Sarah Beth Barnett, Star-Tribune

Natrona County High School senior Cooper Cheatham and his mother, Vicki, work with Wit's End Photography owner Bob Treick to order Cheatham's senior photos. Depending on whether Wyoming lawmakers step up funding for the Hathaway Scholarship program, Cheatham and his fellow 2006 graduates could get some welcome aid in paying for college next fall.

About the survey

The "Wyoming Wish List" is by no means a scientific survey. Instead, it's a sharing of ideas from a diverse selection of Wyoming leaders and private citizens. We simply asked, "What does Wyoming need?" Each of the 56 participants was asked to name three priorities for the coming year. Their full answers are available at www.casperstartribune.net.

Here's who we talked to: Stewart Anderson, Natrona County emergency management coordinator ■ Liz Barron, Casper Self-Help Center ■ Mark Benton, Natrona County sheriff ■ Mike Blonigen, Natrona County district attorney ■ Lynne Boomgaarden, director of the State Lands and Investments ■ Leslie Bower, Casper real estate sales associate ■ Ashley Bright, executive officer, Boys and Girls Club of Central Wyoming ■ Thomas Buchanan, University of Wyoming president ■ Terry Cleveland, director of the Wyoming Game and Fish department ■ Pat Crank, state attorney general ■ Bob Davis, oil producer in Upton ■ Judge William F. Downes, U.S. District Court ■ U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi ■ Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal ■ Deanna Frey, executive director of the Wyoming Children's Action Alliance ■ Liz Gentile, Wyoming Off-track Betting, former state legislator ■ Vickie Goodwin, Powder River Basin Resource Council ■ District Court Judge Edward L. Grant ■ Cliff Hansen, former Wyoming governor ■ District Court Judge Gary Hartman ■ Rob Hurless, energy and telecommunications director for the governor ■ R.C. Johnson, secretary of the Natrona County Democratic party

Opportunities and risks in 2006

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This is a great year to be in Wyoming. The new year arrives today with tremendous opportunities, thanks to a prosperous economy and a \$1.8 billion state budget surplus.

If Wyoming's leaders make the right decisions in 2006, they can help ensure the good times will continue, as we take care of some long-delayed school construction needs, address problems in our health-care system, diversify our economy and enhance our labor force.

But the year also poses significant risks.

If we tear down schools that we shouldn't, we can damage communities beyond repair.

If we use our surplus to fund ongoing programs, we may find later that the funds aren't there to continue them.

As energy development keeps our economy chugging along, we must be certain that it's done responsibly and not at the expense of our wildlife and the environment.

Today's edition features a "Wyoming Wish List." It's compiled from responses by a wide range of people to the question, "What does Wyoming need?"

Our own answer to that question includes many of the items mentioned by people who took part in our informal survey. We hope the Legislature can address these issues during its budget session, which begins next month:

Lawmakers should do what they can to give low-income people a break, as higher heating and fuel costs lighten their wallets. One way is to pass Rep. Ann Robinson's "heat and eat" bill, which would exempt both food and residential utilities from the state's sales tax, while ensuring local governments do not lose revenue from the tax

exemptions.

A proposal to expand the state's KidCare program to as many as 3,700 adults could significantly reduce Wyoming's uninsured population, while taking advantage of \$3.5 million in federal funds. The state's share would be less than half that amount.

The Legislature should make certain the Hathaway Scholarship Program is available

for high school graduates beginning this year. One of Wyoming's biggest needs is higher education opportunities for students, to help them graduate and work here. It's time to stop exporting our best and brightest to other states.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal's proposal to spend \$100 million to aid the towns most affected by Wyoming's energy boom should also get serious consideration, and perhaps be expanded.

Economic development is essential to the diversification of our economy. But the governor and legislators should do more than just funnel money to communities through the Wyoming Business Council. Money spent on infrastructure will be wasted unless we have a well-articulated vision and a coordinated effort. Programs at the University of Wyoming and our community colleges to develop our labor force are a key component.

On the crime front, we need to take action to address the huge economic and human costs of our state's methamphetamine epidemic. The creation of felony drug courts for repeat offenders is one answer that should be explored.

All of these ideas have one thing in common: They can improve the quality of life for Wyoming residents. Not only for this year, but for generations to come.

Our view

Our state budget surplus creates many opportunities to improve Wyoming's quality of life, if we use the funds wisely.

What do you think?

We welcome viewpoints from our readers on this and other issues.

