

Local News

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SUPERFUND SITE

EPA soil test requests expand

Letters asking for yard sampling going beyond Eilers to the Grove, Bessemer

BY PETER ROPER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Some residents in the Bessemer area and down in the Grove neighborhood were surprised to get letters from the Environmental Protection Agency in recent weeks, asking permission to sample the soil in yards for lead and arsenic contamination.

Those areas are in a

half-mile radius of the Eilers neighborhood, which is now on the federal Superfund list for cleanup by the EPA. Officials believe the old Colorado Smelter site in the Eilers area is the primary source of the toxins found in the soil.

Letters asking to sample yards were sent to 2,600 property owners in November and more than 450 residents

have granted permission. That effort was discussed Tuesday night at a community meeting of about 50 residents at the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library.

Sabrina Forrest, EPA's project director, said letters cast a wide net to help identify the extent of the contamination. The mile-circle drawn around Eilers includes 1,900 houses as well as

businesses.

"We've had about 450 responses (granting permission) but we're going to be following up on some of those addresses this week to make sure that renters in those buildings understand what we intend," she said.

Forrest said the EPA contractor will begin testing this spring, targeting an initial 300

properties. The tests are done at EPA's expense.

A draft map of the mailing and responses shows that property owners granting permission for testing are pretty evenly spread around the entire circle, but reaches significantly beyond the small Eilers area.

David Webb, a member of the Community Advisory Group working on the Eilers issue,

underlined that many people in the community don't realize how broad an area EPA is studying.

"This is going to affect more people in Bessemer than in Eilers," he said.

One resident asked what happens to homeowners who don't participate in testing and was told the EPA won't force people to do so.

SEE EILERS, 2B

LOOK AT THOSE CHEEKS!



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Chaseley Wright, 8 months, smiles as she gets a swing by her mother Lauren Keen as they enjoy Pueblo weather on Monday at City Park.

COLORADO SNOWPACK as of February 2, 2015



WEATHER

Snow not quite picture perfect

Twists and turns likely this warm-cold, wet-dry winter

BY CHRIS WOODKA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

If this were a postcard winter, it would be the kind in which a polar bear in sunglasses was enjoying a tropical drink and a lot of the words in the message were crossed out and scribbled over.

On paper, everything looks pretty average. But there have been twists of extreme cold and higher-than-normal temps, snowpack that built up early and began to dwindle and the typical uncertainty of how things will play come springtime.

Snowpack for Colorado as a whole was just 81 percent of median as of Tuesday, but that's no indication of how it will turn out or even of how it is in any given part of the state.

Most of the snowpack is clustered over the central mountains at the top of watersheds that feed into the Arkansas, Colorado and South Platte basins — all of which are almost at normal levels.

The outlying parts of the state are drier than normal.

"What's unusual is

We've had very warm nights for this time of year. Normally that's not a factor. But even with the low sun angle, we're seeing some melting. It's unusual to have significant melting this time of year.

CHARLES KUSTER

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that we normally see very cold weather in the December-February time period," said Charles Kuster, who watches the weather closely in the Leadville area. "This year, I've only recorded 26 days with lows of 0 degrees (Fahrenheit), and the average is usually about 60 days of those type of temperatures."

The high temperature in Leadville was 50 degrees on Jan. 26, and the lows were 7 degrees above average overall.

SEE SNOWPACK, 2B

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Sheriff's staffers, volunteers honored

Annual awards recognize those who exemplify Service Over Self philosophy

BY ANTHONY A. MESTAS
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

The Pueblo County Sheriff's Office recently recognized several of its own and members of the public at the agency's annual awards banquet.

Sheriff's officials said Tuesday that awards are most often given to members who exemplify the Service Over Self philosophy that is embossed on every badge worn by the men and women of the agency.

Mitchell Campbell received the Citizen of the Year Award for his quick thinking and ability to

provide critical information to the 911 center during an aggravated robbery and kidnapping in August.

Sgt. Allen Medina and Sgt. Brian Ziolkowski were recognized as Detention Officers of the Year.

Medina is the leader of the Special Tactics and Techniques Team. His authorities said he is a quick, persuasive and effective communicator making him tops at de-escalating situations in the detention facility.

Officials said Ziolkowski is equally skilled in mentoring and educat-

ing the people he works with. Known for his vast knowledge of policy and procedure, along with his ability to solve problems, and enthusiasm, Ziolkowski is a staff favorite, officials said.

The Law Enforcement Officers of the Year are Detective Caitlin Howard and Detective Gregory Drake.

Officials said sex assault cases are among the most difficult for any law enforcement officer to investigate and/or solve.

Department officials said both detectives are

SEE SHERIFF, 2B



COURTESY PHOTO/PUEBLO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Pueblo County Sheriff's Office recognized the criminal justice records technicians with the 2014 Unit Meritorious Award recently.

CRIME

Resident fires on home intruders

Three arrested; no one hurt in gunfire exchange

BY MATT HILDNER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

ALAMOSA — Two men and a juvenile male were arrested last week after allegedly breaking into a home and exchanging gunfire with one of its residents.

Cedrick McNeal, 19, of Alamosa, and Estifanos Ogbaselasie, 19, of Aurora, both face charges of first-degree attempted murder, burglary, assault and

menacing.

The 17-year-old juvenile, whose name was not released by authorities, faces the same charges and is being held in the San Luis Valley Youth Detention Center, according to an Alamosa Police Department press release.

Police were called to a home on the 400 block of 11th Street following reports of shots fired and a burglary.

Residents told police three males forced their

way into the home. Two were armed with handguns and a third was armed with a shotgun, according to McNeal's arrest affidavit.

Shortly after the call, McNeal was arrested on the 800 block of Eighth Street after a foot chase.

Authorities said he had a .40-caliber, semi-automatic handgun. A casing matching the firearm was found in the home.

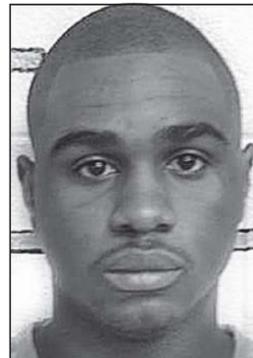
Ogbaselasie and the juvenile were found in an

alley behind the victim's residence where they were about to get into a car.

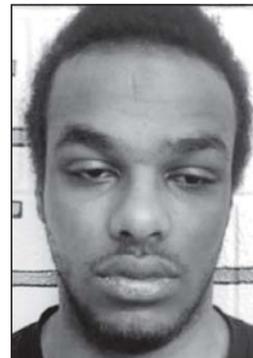
Officers saw a camouflaged-colored shotgun in the back seat of the car matching a description given by the victims.

One of the home's residents told police he shot at the intruders eight times with a 9 mm handgun and that one of the suspects had also fired his weapon.

No one was injured by the gunfire.
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Cedrick McNeal



Estifanos Ogbaselasie



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE

A golfer practices his putting near the clubhouse at Shadow Hills Golf Course in Canon City.

RECREATION

Canon golf course tries to stay open

Shadow Hills owners willing to lease property to city for \$1

BY TRACY HARMON
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

CANON CITY — The 56-year-old public Shadow Hills Golf Course could close March 1 unless its owners can find someone to take over the 18-hole golf course.

Beth Holt Madone and her family own the golf course as well as Holt Family Funeral Home. The longtime Canon City family purchased the golf course out of receivership in 2010 for \$750,000 during an online auction when the beleaguered property had been appraised for \$1.6 million.

"Being a part of this community since the early 1900s, we didn't want to see Canon City lose a golf course used for family recreation," Madone said.

But fast-forward five years later and the golf course is struggling. Op-

erating costs are exceeding revenue, she said.

"Our golf course is suffering the same circumstances a lot of golf courses in the U.S. are experiencing. People are not playing golf as much as they used to," Madone said.

"We are offering to lease the course to the city for the coming year for \$1," Madone said. "The main cost to run the course is utilities and manpower."

Madone said the city has staff, equipment and already is buying in bulk things like seed and fertilizer for the parks.

"I do think the city is very concerned about the course closing. They don't want a liability for the taxpayers and on the other hand they see the value in a municipal golf course," Madone explained.

City officials plan to

start the golf course discussion at a 4 p.m. general government committee meeting today. Madone said she and her staff have been amassing numbers for the city such as rounds of golf played and operating costs.

Shadow Hills opened as a private club in 1959 with a nine-hole course. Another nine holes were added in 1995.

A 12,800-square-foot clubhouse was built in 2003 featuring a restaurant and a wrap-around deck overlooking the front nine. The Holt family plans to keep the restaurant and banquet room running.

"We have an agreement with Mike Merlino so we serve all the Belvedere's recipes from handmade pasta, meatballs and sausage to the steaks," Madone said.
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That has played havoc with a snowpack that built up generously in November and December, but suffered in January. Kuster recorded just a foot of snow last month, about 17 inches below normal.

"We've had very warm nights for this time of year," he said. "Normally that's not a factor. But even with the low sun angle, we're seeing some

melting. It's unusual to have significant melting this time of year."

Still, some sites in the Leadville area remain well above normal, such as Fremont Pass, which is sitting at 123 percent of median in snowpack and 124 percent of average precipitation since October.

The Rio Grande basin is just at 65 percent of median snowpack, the

driest area of the state.

Colorado's Southeastern corner still is in severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's three-month outlook is calling for above-average precipitation and below-average temperatures for Southeastern Colorado.
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very talented and were honored for their patience, compassion and determination.

The Emergency Services Member of the Year went to 911 communication officer Daniell Perea. Officials said Perea is exceptional in all aspects of the trade.

SWAT team medic Doug Cullison took home the Volunteer of the Year Award. He logged more than 250 volunteer hours in 2014. As SWAT medic he responds to high danger level call-outs with the team.

The Nonuniformed Member of the Year Award went to Brenda Scheid. Officials said her determination, persis-

tence and organization skills were key in the detention center's ACA reaccreditation.

The sheriff's criminal justice records technicians team won the Unit Meritorious Award.

Officials said the team is the backbone to the office.

The Medal of Valor went to Detective Michael Hecht. Hecht was recognized for his bravery during an altercation that occurred while assisting the Pueblo Police Department. Hecht recognized the legitimacy of a threat and without hesitation came to the aid of fellow officers in danger.

The Sheriff's Com-

mendation was given to Detective Steve Bryant for his leadership of the PCSO charity Heart of the Badge, Sgt. Chris Kilpatrick for his dedication to his multiyear task force assignment, Sgt. Jeremy Cardona for his initiative and uplifting influence with the inmates in the detention center, the emergency services center design team for their effort and influence in the construction of the new facility and the judicial building transition team for the planning that went into the nearly seamless transition from the old judicial facility to the new one.
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LEGISLATURE

Bill would bring judge to region

San Luis Valley courts operating at 72 percent of full staffing

BY MATT HILDNER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

ALAMOSA — The San Luis Valley's delegation at the state Legislature is seeking to add a fourth district court judge in the 12th Judicial District.

"The reality is we are understaffed in the San Luis Valley," Sen. Larry Crowder, R-Alamosa, said. "The people of the area, they require, and rightly so, that they should have their day in court in a timely fashion."

The judicial district is currently operating at 72 percent of its full staffing requirement, the low-

est among all the state's judicial districts.

New filings in district court averaged between 2,600 and 2,700 annually as of last year.

In addition to adding a judge's position, the fiscal note for House Bill 15-1034 assumes three full-time staff members would be added to the judicial district's staff.

So far, the bill has made it through the House Judiciary and House Appropriations committees.

It moves next to the floor of the House of Representatives where, since it is a statutory bill, will require approval

from 44 members or three-quarters of the chamber.

"I don't see a problem with it," Rep. Ed Vigil, D-Alamosa, said. "I hope Senator Crowder can help with his side of the aisle so we can get to 44."

The judicial district takes in all six of the valley's counties and last added a member to the district court bench in 2007.

District courts have jurisdiction over felony criminal, civil claims, domestic relations, juvenile, mental health and probate cases.

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SAN LUIS VALLEY

Pot growers get new water rate

Costilla commissioners hope to grow industry, revenues

BY MATT HILDNER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

SAN LUIS — The Costilla County commissioners approved a new water rate for marijuana growers Tuesday, hoping to foster the industry while also drawing more funds for an aging water system.

"I definitely want to make sure we deal with both ends and try to find that happy medium," Commissioner Lawrence Pacheco said.

The commissioners approved a tap fee of \$6,000 with a monthly rate of \$175 per 14,000 gallons. The new rate also includes a fee of \$100 per every 1,000 gallons of use above 14,000 gallons a month.

That's up from a tap fee of \$1,300 and a monthly

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fee of \$39 per 14,000 gallons that commercial users are currently charged.

The county has approved licenses for three grow operations and its regulations allow for up to 10 in operation at a time.

But as of Tuesday, only one grower was set to come on the county's water system which takes in all of the southeastern corner of the county, excluding the town of San Luis, and has approximately 265 users.

Grower Fernando Martinez had asked the county for a tap fee of \$5,000 and a \$117 monthly rate but didn't argue against the commissioners' higher proposal.

He added, however, that getting it done quickly was important since he couldn't get move-in approval without a water source.

"I can't do anything in there without a certificate of occupancy and the hinderance around that is access to water," he said.

The commissioners are trying to boost revenue for repairs to the system, which was installed in the 1960s.

At the same time, the county also will need funding to buy surface water should the state engineer issue rules that require groundwater users to replace the depletions caused by their pumping.

The Costilla system draws all of its supply from six wells.
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"Hopefully as they see other people cooperating, they will decide to take part," Forrest said.

EPA officials have said in other meetings that only properties that are cleaned can get certified as such. Properties where access isn't allowed have that noted as

well.

One man asked whether the Eilers cleanup would take a decade or longer and Forrest answered that she hoped to finish all site sampling in three years.

"The (advisory committee) wants us to finish everything in five

years and that may be tricky," she said. "But this is not a low-priority project for EPA."

The Pueblo City-County Health Department has been given an EPA grant to do indoor lead testing as well.
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