

OURAY COUNTY

Fraud, criminal aspects of tire flood called into question

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT

samantha@ouraynews.com

Ridgway resident John Esty thanked the Board of County Commissioners at its most recent meeting in late August for "insisting the Sheriff's Department follow up on the tire flood."

"I thought it was strange they treated it as a joke," Esty said.

He also expressed hope that the Ouray County Sheriff's Department can work with all of the law enforcement and regulatory agencies that are now involved in the investigation of the illegal tire burial ground that was recently discovered on Butch Gunn's land near Cow Creek, from which the "tire flood" originated.

"I would expect that the initiative would come from them (the Sheriff's Department), not the BOCC," Esty said. "I fully support your concern that the Ouray County Sheriff's Department should be the enforcement branch (of county government). I hope the Sheriff's Department does work with law enforcement people in Montrose County to prosecute the people who were actually transporting tires to the site. It raises questions about what consumers are paying disposal fees for, when the tires have ended up in a landfill here in Ouray County."

"I think your point is well

taken," BOCC Chair Heidi Albritton acknowledged. "We're not an investigative body; however, we do feel a moral obligation as a board to follow through and make sure they (the Sheriff's Department) are doing their job; we want everyone who should be acting to act promptly; we are seeing there is some disconnect among various agencies."

Albritton said the BOCC intends to follow up on the matter as investigations continue. "Hopefully there will be a post-mortem," she said. "At that point we can communicate gaps or miscommunications among various agencies. The whole thing has been a learning experience ... This has been one of those jobs where you learn the hard way."

Commissioner Lynn Padgett pointed to the fire danger posed by illegal tire landfills, a danger which rural areas like Ouray County are particularly ill-equipped to handle.

Albritton added that the criminal or fraud aspect of the case will be particularly challenging to tackle. "Whose jurisdiction is it to have the notion of accepting fees for proper disposal and have that not happen? Clearly that has to go somewhere," she said. "It's going to be interesting. And I don't mean good interesting."

■ Road and Bridge Department

employee David Ficco reported to the BOCC that work on County Road 17, which was closed for a portion of the summer, is completed and that the road is now open.

"We were right on the ball," he said. "Everything came out the way we wanted and on budget. It was a really successful job."

■ Commissioners praised the Road and Bridge Department for coming in on budget, and for the special attention that went into preparing the stretch of road for Mt. Sneffels Marathon and Half-Marathon runners in mid-August.

"We went through with a grader and a roller to make sure there would be no broken ankles," Ficco said.

Work on County Road 1, meanwhile, is now well underway.

■ The BOCC convened briefly as the Board of Equalization to approve minutes from the County Board of Equalization (CBOE) following property valuation appeals in July.

"We do err on side of trying to help the taxpayers," Albritton noted, pointing out that in several cases the CBOE ruled in favor of taxpayers protesting that their valuations and property taxes were too high. "The perception is that the county is raising taxes to raise revenues, and that is not the case," she said. "They (property taxes) are as low as evidence will allow

them to be."

■ Social Services Director Allan Gerstle reported that so far, budget cuts in Washington have not led to any assistance programs utilized by the county being cut, "but with the (congressional) super-committee convening (on the matter of budget cuts at the federal level), I can't imagine how some things will not be on chopping block," he said. "We're going to see national policy affect local benefits starting this winter with the LEAP program."

LEAP is a federally funded program, heavily utilized in recent years in Ouray County, which helps needy families and individuals to pay their heating bills in the winter. The eligibility level used to be 185 percent of poverty, Gerstle said, but it has recently dropped to 150 percent of poverty level. "We'll lose a few households that have been eligible in Ouray County in the past," he said.

Gerstle recommended that the county should track those families between 150 and 185 percent of poverty level, and when budget season comes around, "maybe put funds aside to help families."

Padgett also suggested working with the Town of Ridgway to take advantage of preseason weatherization opportunities, "rather than putting in dollars to give to an energy utility."

To be considered at the poverty level, a family of four must have an annual income of no more than \$18,000-19,000, Gerstle said.

■ The BOCC approved a request from the Ouray County Sheriff's Department to fill a vacancy for a deputy position. When fully staffed, the Sheriff's Department has four deputies, but right now due to a recent resignation, the department is down one deputy. Filling the position will "allow for increasing the visibility" of the Sheriff's Department, Sheriff Junior Mattivi said. "By filling the position, we can have someone on the road more often." The position will not be advertised, at least initially, because the Sheriff's Department will utilize an existing applicant pool and call the top people from that pool.

■ Commissioners considered the merits of combining resources with the Town of Ridgway to hire a joint building inspector who would work for both the county and its northernmost municipality. The county's former building inspector has just retired.

The BOCC agreed to defer the matter until a Sept. 7 work session, at which issues surrounding the Panoramic Heights EPA clean-up and the ongoing Valentine lawsuit will also be discussed.

Table tax proposed by PARC

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT

samantha@ouraynews.com

The City of Ouray's Parks and Recreation Committee has been discussing the idea of raising revenues for PARC improvement projects via a "table tax" on restaurants. The table tax would be similar in concept to the Lodging Occupation Tax (LOT) currently levied on lodging establishments in town and, per the TABOR Amendment, would have to be approved by voters prior to being implemented.

"The impact to local taxpayers would be next to nothing," said PARC's council liaison Joe Kersen at the Aug. 22 council meeting. "Most of the people putting up the money would be tourists."

Kersen suggested setting the matter as a council discussion item in the near future. "I see no harm in trying," he said. "One

way or another, we've got to find a revenue source (for parks and recreation projects). Selling hot dogs won't make it. It's a lot of work for little return. There's got to be a better way."

PARC has been holding fundraisers throughout the summer to raise money for various projects to improve the City of Ouray's parks and recreation facilities and programs, including an ambitious project to dramatically improve the ice rink at Rotary Park.

In other news from the city of Ouray: city staff members have been working with grant writer Danika Gilbert to submit a GOCO grant application for acquisition funds to purchase a parcel of land in the Ouray Ice Park from the Forest Service. The deadline for submission was last Friday.

Tire investigation update

BY JESSI MARLATT

jessi@ouraynews.com

No charges have been filed, civil or criminal, as of Aug. 31 in regard to the Burro Creek tire flood that took place on July 26.

According to preliminary findings by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Keith Maynes, owner of Maynes Tire of Montrose, supplied Laurence "Butch" Gunn with thousands of tires over the past 15 years. Authorities conducted a site visit to Gunn's property on Aug. 12 and determined that roughly 1,000

tires flowed down Burro Creek, into Cow Creek and eventually into the Uncompahgre River during the flash flood. They found roughly 4,000 more tires partially buried in an arroyo on the property.

According to Jeannine Natterman, Public Health Officer for the CDPHE, the Inspection Report created by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has been completed and is currently under review by management.

Maynes declined to comment, and the Plaindealer has not been able to reach Gunn for comment.



Ron Smith
Financial Advisor
970-252-1819
701 E Main St Ste F, Montrose, CO 81401

Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

ARE YOU SERIOUS?

Need a 2nd opinion?

Let's talk

www.edwardjones.com Member SIPC

WE'RE NOT FOR EVERYBODY.

Four out of 5 riff-raffs surveyed prefer being thrown out of The Mr. Grumpy Pants Brewing Co. to the other McBrewpubs they've been thrown out of.



Nice proof reading guys, like no one's going to notice the two prepositions used to end that sentence with.

**THE MR. GRUMPY PANTS
BREWING COMPANY, LTD**

Hours: 5 pm-ish to close-ish - Daily
215 7th Ave. • Ouray

Exquisite Specialty Cocktails \$6

300 Wine Vintages from
Around the World!



Thursday, Friday & Saturday Night
Reserve the Lounge Any Night for your Private Party

Woodoo Lounge

2nd Floor - Historic Beaumont Hotel - 5th Avenue & Main Street