

WATCH



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AIR OLATHE - Seth Felix of the Olathe Spray Service buzzed over the DeVries farm corn maze after treating the rural fields near Olathe, in this still from a video of Olathe Spray Service planes working the 2014 season by Watch reporter William Woody. See the video at watchnewspapers.com.



Telluride Gay Ski Week Looking Good for 2015

Agreement Could Be Signed This Week

BY ALLISON PERRY

MOUNTAIN VILLAGE – Following a period of uncertainty due to protracted negotiations over specific contract terms, the Telluride Mountain Village Owners Assn. appears to be just one step away from signing a finalized agreement with StraightOut Media and Marketing to provide funding for Telluride Gay Ski Week 2015.

TMVOA President Greg Pope stated via email on Aug. 11, “An agreement was reached this afternoon,” and said in a follow-up email the next morning that he would be able to confirm the event “once an agreement is signed, I expect today or tomorrow.”

Although TMVOA voted 3-1 to approve \$66,000 in funding for Gay Ski Week 2015 at a Feb. 19 meeting, TMVOA and StraightOut were unable to solidify the

see **GSW 2015** on page 16

From Crops to SAR, 45 Years of Service

BY WILLIAM WOODY

MONTROSE – The familiar yellow airplanes and helicopters of the Olathe Spray Service are essential to the agricultural vitality of the Western Slope, as well as an added resource for law enforcement throughout the region.

Every summer, Olathe Spray Service Air Tractor planes and Bell helicopters buzz over rural farmlands of the Western Slope, helping farmers reach their yields through aerial applications of herbicide and insecticide to decrease

invasive weeds and insects.

Pilot and founder Leonard Felix co-owns and operates the business with his sons, Devin and Seth, from a small airfield east of Colorado Highway 50, between Montrose and Olathe.

Using ground-spotters, pilots align their aircraft before deploying either the chemicals. Descending to just a few feet above-ground, pilots turn on their applicators over the first rows of corn and turn them off just as the last rows are sprayed, pulling out of their runs with sharp turns and steep banking so as to

line up for the next pass.

The OSS does not spray near harvest crews or fields containing honeybee hives.

Felix, who began the OSS in 1969, has expanded beyond Montrose to the counties of Delta, Mesa, Gunnison and Pitkin and south to Ouray San Juan and San Miguel counties (it is one of roughly 1,600 aerial application businesses in 46 states).

Along with crop dusting, Felix and his two sons have flown firefighting missions for the Bureau of Land Management, win-

ter aerial photography near Craig and Steamboat Springs and wildlife surveying.

“We’ve been involved with crop dusting here for about 45 years,” Felix said. “Eventually when we got into bigger aircraft we got into firefighting, assisting local fire departments, and working for the BLM.”

At the midsummer high point, all three pilots once worked nearly 100,000 acres across the Western

see **DUSTING** on page 16

Telluride Region Real Estate Market Accelerates

BY GUS JARVIS

TELLURIDE – Reaching six-year highs in both the number of sales and the dollar volume of those sales, buyers have returned to a Telluride area real estate market that has been described as nothing less than hot during the first seven months of 2014.

From January through July in all of San Miguel County, according to a report by Telluride Consulting, a total of 260 single-family home and condo sales marked a 29 percent increase from the 207 sales during that

same period of time in 2013. The dollar volume of the 268 sales this year reached \$227.9 million, equaling a 58 percent increase over the \$144.5 million in 2013.

Both the number and the dollar volume of sales in the first seven months of 2014 are at six-year highs.

“The numbers are really impressive,” Telluride Consulting’s Judi Kiernan said. “Momentum breeds momentum. When people see things are selling, they become motivated to buy. I think the market is in for a nice curve upward.”

This year, according to Ki-

ernan, homes and condos within the Town of Telluride have been the most wanted commodity in the region with a total of 101 sales worth approximately \$109.7 million. Mountain Village has seen 95 sales worth nearly \$72.7 million.

“Homes in Telluride are selling fast,” she said. “Homes in Mountain Village are still a little slow.”

As Telluride Sotheby’s International Realty broker Lars Carlson explained, since the bumpy rebound from the real estate mar-

see **REAL ESTATE** on page 16



STRONG TOWN MARKET – Since the 2008 real estate market crash, the focus of buyers has shifted, causing sales within the Town of Telluride to strengthen. (File photo)

COMMUNITY

Tour, Symposium Plumb Riches of Ouray's Geology

OURAY COUNTY – Two dozen geology buffs from around the region journeyed well over a billion years back in time last Wednesday, Aug. 6, on the second annual Geology Tour offered by the Ouray County Historical Society.

The guided day-long tour, led by Ouray geologists Larry Meckel and Robert Stoufer, took participants on a geologic trail along the northwestern San Juan Mountains that started at the glacial moraines and fault zones of the Ridgway area, traveled through the glacier-carved remnants of the heavily mineralized Silverton Caldera and concluded on Coal Bank Pass, covering 1.7 billion years of geologic events along the way.

“I’m still dazed by the sweep of geological time we witnessed on the tour, as well as the grandeur of the San Juan Mountains,” said Anne Eggebroten, who offered these “surprising facts” she learned along the way:

At Bear Creek Falls and other spots along Highway 550, there’s a 1.3 billion year gap between one rock layer and the next. The Precambrian rock there is roughly 1.4 billion years old, and on top of it lies the San Juan Tuff, only 27 million years old. Because the Uncompahgre River cuts through the ancient rock, it’s known as the Uncompahgre Formation.

There were 15 stratovolcanoes in the San Juan area between 33 and 23 million years ago, and they erupted with pyroclastic debris flows extending to New Mexico, central Colorado, and near the Utah border.

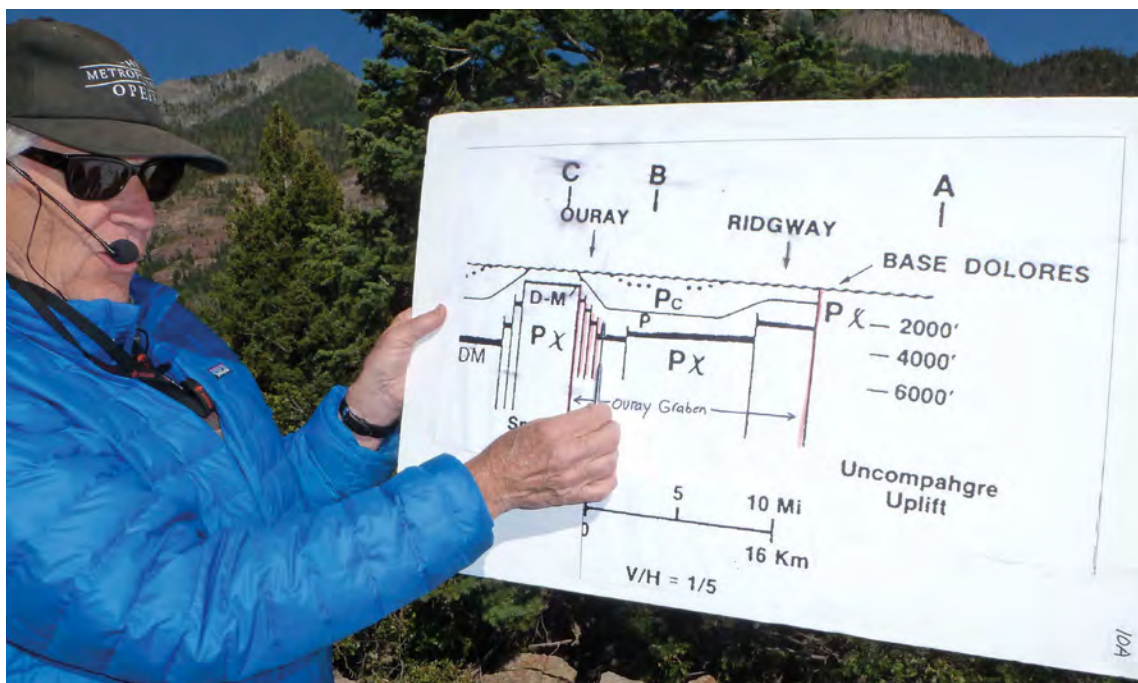
Telluride is on the eastern edge of the Paradox Basin, geologically speaking. When the Uncompahgre Plateau rose up during the late Paleozoic era, the basin to its west went down. Red and white rocks of Paleo- and Mesozoic eras were deposited in it.

The Telluride Conglomerate is hard to follow from place to place because it was deposited by a system of river channels flowing out of mountains to the east. Rocks from the Grenadier Mountains are among the many pebbles and large rocks found in it.

The whole erosional surface that extended over much of Colorado about 50 million years ago is sometimes called the Telluride Unconformity – also the Eocene Unconformity and the Great Unconformity. Volcanic rocks were laid down on it, and then glaciers arrived.

There are sea shell fossils on Molas Pass near Andrews Lake in the Leadville Limestone formation from the Mississippian era, 350 million years ago.

The Ridgway Fault runs east-



GEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING – Ouray-based geologist Larry Meckel explained details of Ouray’s geology during a geologic tour sponsored by the Ouray County Historical Society last Wednesday. (Photo by Samantha Wright)

west along the foot of Log Hill and marks the southern end of the Uncompahgre uplift, known locally as Dallas Divide. “Uncompahgre” was one of two island ranges of the ancestral Rockies.

Red Mountain is part of the debris that fell back into the 10-mile-wide hole made when the Silverton supervolcano erupted about 27.6 million years ago. It’s red because later hydrothermal

pressures were able to intrude the crushed rock with minerals that weathered to iron oxides. Layers of volcanic rock outside the caldera resisted this intrusion.

The geology tour was a fundraiser for OCHS, and was made possible with contributions of local sponsors including Gregg Pieper of San Juan Scenic Jeep Tours; Larry and Barbara Meckel; Michael Underwood of Better

Real Estate Services Inc.; Gary Lindberg of Colorado West Rentals and Jeep Tours; Mickie and Joe Dziubasik of the Matterhorn Motel; Lora Slawitschka of Ouray Chalet Inn; Robert Stoufer of Buckskin Book Sellers and Colorado Minerals.com; and Matt and Jackie Genuit of Ouray Liquors.

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cluded in the voting process. We will have to work on compromises in order to have a progressive outcome.”

Joseph’s study attempted to give representatives from around the region renewed hope that a solution can still be reached if the City of Montrose is included.

FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVES

The RTA feasibility study addressed the costs, benefits and challenges of building and funding a public transportation system that would serve Montrose, Telluride and Mountain Village.

“This study came about from a meeting with council members from Mountain Village, Telluride and Montrose,” Joseph explained. “We met this past November and agreed that these three towns need a dependable, safe and cost effective cross-county public transit system.”

Joseph took care to clarify that his report was not about tourists or tourism, but that his study was focused on determining whether a transit system would be supported by residents and local businesses and business owners.

As part of his study Joseph posted a survey on the City of Montrose’s website and reported that over a two-week period he was able to get feedback from over 40 businesses and 228 individuals. According to Joseph, 50 percent of busi-

ness owners surveyed said that they would be willing to subsidize transportation costs for their employees, especially if it was structured as a monthly fee and they would receive discounted costs for participation.

Although the survey was primarily geared toward businesses and business owners, Joseph said a significant number of returned surveys included individual comments indicating support of a public transportation system for reasons beyond simply commuting.

“I know many people in Montrose who would love to hop on a bus and come up to Telluride or Mountain Village without worrying about driving,” Joseph said. “From a tourism standpoint also there would be incredible benefits.”

“Right now only 10 percent of the population can really afford to visit Telluride,” he added. “So last ski season we experimented with a program where we had a shuttle in Montrose to bring people to Telluride. The program was relatively successful and people really enjoyed being able to come up here and ski, but then stay in a more affordable town. And it didn’t take away from Telluride’s tourism base, just put more skiers on the mountain who would then stay after and spend money.”

Joseph went on to list several funding options for the transportation system, noting that although an RTA could be an option, Montrose does not favor an RTA at this time.

He speculated that “eventually if we fund this project another way and it works people will see how successful it is and might be more likely to want to buy into the idea of an RTA, but for now we need alternatives.”

Some of the alternatives he identified were a sales tax, a transportation impact fee or funding drawn from existing tourism budgets. The latter rests on the proposition that each town contributes some of their revenue to the transit program so no one entity would shoulder the burden.

Joseph also discussed the possibility of other funding options such as relying on advertising fees for placing ads on bus stops and buses and revenues from fares.

The first option would be to develop a short-term task force, which would be comprised of representatives from each of the three communities impacted by the transportation system. The task force would meet for 90-100 days, and would be responsible for figuring out minutiae such as scheduling, determining a funding formula, preparing a pilot program, and collaborating with other existing regional transit companies and perhaps seeking route extensions. Once the task force had completed its work it would prepare a report for each of the three town councils and based upon that report a format for a quasi-governmental body that would steward the program would be generated.

The second option Joseph ad-

ressed was simply to design an economic impact study, perhaps using the format of the previous experiment involving shuttling people from Montrose to Telluride and Mountain Village. Joseph concluded by stating “the time to do this is right now. There are many factors pushing us toward public transit including the economic upside and tourism, but it won’t happen unless the government steps in. We are in a Catch-22 of sorts, where there is enough demand throughout the region to really need to do something, but there is not enough demand for the private sector to step in.”

WILL MONTROSE BE THE GAME CHANGER?

Aside from a few logistical questions, councilors and commissioners generally seemed receptive to the study, and all agreed it was something that needed to be taken into consideration in future discussions about creating an RTA or any other mechanism by which public transportation could be improved.

San Miguel County Administrator Lynn Black stressed the importance of ratcheting up the discussion about a better transportation system.

“We need to work hard to include people who are important to the community, whether its getting them here by bus or improving the gondola,” Black said. “Everyone realizes how important a regional transportation system is, especially for getting people who don’t live here to town. Furthermore, we seem to brush aside the employees that are important to the community.”

In contrast to comments made in May, when he strongly opposed forming an RTA because “it could incorporate the gondola without a deep discussion, lead to tax increases and risk Telluride’s currently efficient transit system,” Telluride Councilor Thom Carnevale stated, “This sounds like a very reasonable solution to a problem we face, which includes moving people back and forth from Montrose.”

San Miguel County Commissioner Joan May recognized that “the Montrose government has been even more resistant to government led coordination than we have been,

which has been challenging,” but optimistically continued that “I love the concept and I love Montrose, and perhaps if Montrose is on board we can really get something done.”

Nina Kothe, who serves as a county representative on the transit committee, identified some potential problems with Joseph’s proposed sources of funding for the project.

She began by observing that San Miguel County, particularly resort towns like Telluride and Mountain Village, are ahead of the game in recognizing how important transportation is, citing the gondola and the bus and shuttle systems already in place as examples.

“Now we are trying to bring in our neighbors,” she continued, “and although we already have some help from the county, like the Telluride Express from Montrose and Mountain Village operating services to Cortez and Norwood, we have to be really coordinated and working together as much as we can if we want to successfully get funding for an RTA.”

Kothe explained that the Colorado Department of Transportation, which has been providing all the grant money to fund different transportation efforts in the region, is getting nervous about doling out such a large amount of money to a region that is relatively sparse in population. “CDOT would like to see an RTA for our region because they like to deal with one centralized entity where we work together amongst ourselves and then apply for grants after defining one set of yearly goals,” Kothe said.

Joseph said that grants were intentionally eliminated from his list of possible sources of funding because he is aware that CDOT is nervous about funding the region.

Kothe also voiced concern that fares may seem an attractive way to produce revenue, but that “this has diminished returns, especially when fares are raised and people decide just to go back to their cars and at least have the scheduling flexibility that affords.”

“We can’t rely on fares as funding,” she warned, to which Joseph harkened back to his findings that businesses would be willing to subsidize travel for employees as long as certain conditions existed.

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Sharlow is volunteering his time to teach students about the engineering process and the principles behind bridge building. The finale will include the construction of the footbridge on the Valley Floor, which is not only something the kids will have made, but something that the kids can show their parents and be proud of, and that will continue to benefit the community.

Klotka notes that tuition assistance makes the program available to all kids.

“We can offer support through our community supporters,” she explains. “And we are even able to consider arrangements that include an exchange of services or goods...we love helping people out and it’s great when they can help us

out too and everyone can benefit.”

Could Bridge Camp grow to the point that kids are building a suspension bridge?

“There could be a Bridge Camp 2,” Klotka says. “There is definitely more than one spot that needs a bridge around this town.”

“Hopefully this can open the door for future bridges.”

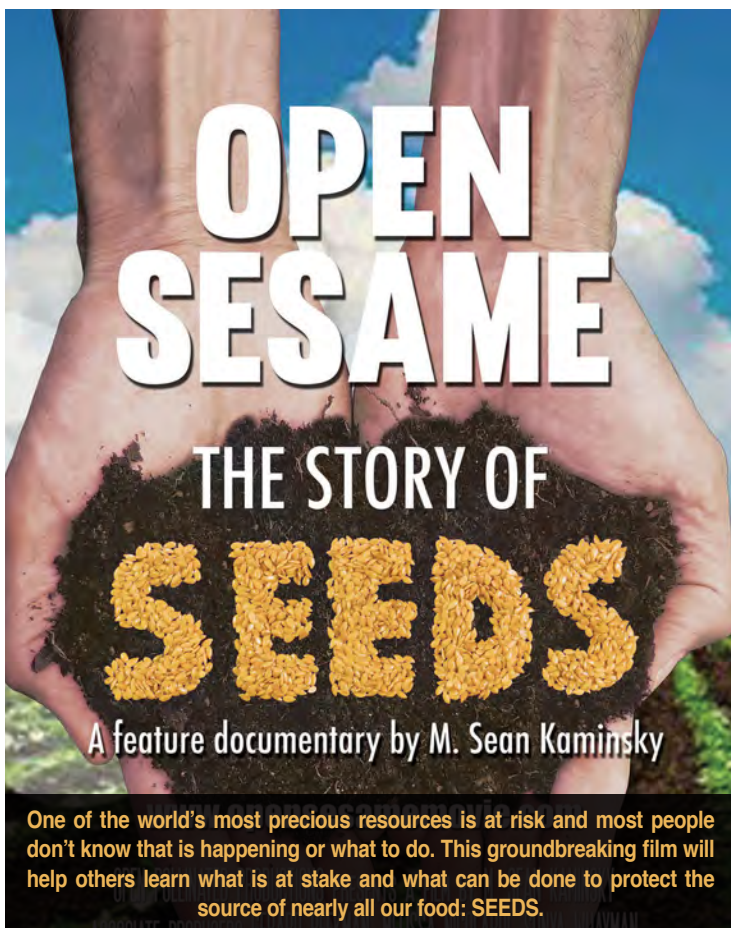
Bridge Camp runs August 11-15 from 9 a.m. to noon at Pinhead Headquarters. The camp is for students ages 8 and older. There is still space available. Tuition is \$200/student. To enroll students can register on the Pinhead website or call the Pinhead office.

Bridge Camp is the final summer camp offered in Pinhead’s “Mini Mission” series. To learn more about the Pinhead Institute visit: www.pinheadinstitute.org or call 970-369-5190.

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