



Men sentenced to prison on heroin charges

by Mark Dykes

On Jan. 20 in the United States District Court of Wyoming, Darrel Demas, 27, and Justin Dvorak, 30, formerly of Thermopolis, were sentenced to prison terms for providing heroin which resulted in the death of Alexander Herdt in Thermopolis.

According to court documents, Demas was sentenced to 48 months and Dvorak was sentenced to 24 months on individual charges of distribution of heroin resulting in death. The two were also charged with conspiracy to distribute heroin resulting in death, though the charges were dismissed as part of their plea agreements — Dvorak pled guilty on Oct. 26, 2016, while

Demas pled guilty nine days later, Nov. 4.

According to documents, on or about July 2013 through Oct. 2014 Demas and Dvorak were part of conspiracy in which they obtained heroin for redistribution in central Wyoming and elsewhere, and collected money from others and pooled it with their own to purchase heroin for themselves and for redistribution. The two planned to meet in Wheatland and elsewhere with Christopher Koegl and Justin Dix, who would obtain the drug from sources in northern Colorado.

Documents further state on or about June 25 and 27, 2014, Dvorak and Demas knowingly, intentionally and unlawfully distributed a

mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of heroin, the use of which resulted in Herdt's death. Herdt, who was 26, passed away June 29, 2014.

Thermopolis Police Department asked the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation to investigate Herdt's death.

In addition to their prison time, Dvorak and Demas must each pay \$500 in community restitution and \$100 special assessment fees. Upon their release they are subject to three years supervised probation.

Dix, who pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute heroin resulting in death, received a 48-month

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photo by Mark Dykes

Fishing for a name

Using rods made from dowels, string and paper clips, kids at the Ralph Witters Elementary Pre-K night fish for the letters to make their names. While the kindergarten/kinder boost team kept children occupied with activities, parents at the event received information about the programs.

Agar staying focused at legislature

by Mark Dykes

Tuesday morning, Senate District 20 representative Wyatt Agar attended a Corporations Committee meeting. The meeting was to hear testimony on Senate File 71, regarding electricity production standards.

Additionally, he noted there was debate regarding SF 17, dealing with extra-territorial jurisdiction. Regarding this latter, he said the important thing to keep in mind is this is a bill that deals with counties that have planning and zoning "so while there are some worries around it for our mayors, it does not impact on them."

However, is does try to address individuals who live outside city limits, but fall under city jurisdiction. Agar voiced his support of SF 17, though it and SF 71 both failed.

Agar has lately been active with the Corporations Committee, having recently worked a group of bills pertaining to liquor statutes to make them more user-friendly. Most of what has been handled, Agar explained, have been cleaning up statutes, with the exception of SF 17 and 71.

He stated, jokingly, "that most of the hot button issues start in the house." He further added, "We had the first house bills read in today, so by the end of the week we will be into them."

School funding deficit hits small schools hard

by Cindy Glasson

If House Bill 233 (HB233) should pass this legislative session, teachers on all levels, from local educators to the University of Wyoming and community colleges could be facing a salary and benefit reduction across the board beginning July 1, 2017.

According to the bill, the Board of Trustees in each school district shall "require any employment contract with a school district employee to provide that the employee's salary and benefits are subject to reduction as part of any general compensation reduction approved by the legislature."

The above also applies to the University of Wyoming and all community colleges in the state.

The bill would allow the legislature to determine what teachers are paid.

The legislature knew last session there would be

a financial deficit in school funding, but they had no idea how large that deficit was going to be. Now they know that deficit will be \$760 million over the next two years. Small schools in the state will be hit the hardest because of the deficit, including our Hot Springs County School District.

"I want small schools to be held harmless," Representative Nathan Winters said. "This is just one of four bills that approach school funding and we're going to have to take a really good look at all of them."

According to Winters, cuts were made last year, knowing a deficit was coming, including 82 state agency positions, 202 from the University of Wyoming, 98 from community colleges and an additional 233 other positions.

Fifty-three more have now been cut with 75 recommended positions on the line.

"Looking across the spectrum, a total of 743 positions were eliminated," Winters said. "That reduced a lot of programs."

"I fought hard two years ago for teacher salary cost adjustments. Now we've dipped into the 'rainy day' fund as well as the education department's 'rainy day' fund."

"We spend over a billion dollars a year on education in Wyoming which amounts to about \$14,000 per pupil."

Historically, Wyoming has a "boom and bust" economy, and with education depending heavily on minerals like oil and gas, things have been tight before.

During the 90's there was a gradual downturn

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Mathewson found guilty on multiple charges

by Mark Dykes

The afternoon of Thursday, Jan. 26 in Hot Springs District Court, following almost three hours of deliberation, a jury returned a verdict of guilty on six charges against Paul Mathewson. The trial began Monday, Jan. 23.

Among the charges on which Mathewson was found guilty were two counts of possession of methamphetamine, use of meth and possession of marijuana, stemming from a May 1, 2015 incident; trespassing from a Sept. 16, 2015 incident; and driving with a suspended license, stemming from Dec. 14, 2015.

The jury also found Mathewson not guilty of delivery of meth and possession of methadone.

Prior to the jury's reconvening after lunch on Wednesday, Jan. 25, Mathewson's attorney Devon Petersen argued for acquittal on all charges, and specifically addressed many of the drug charges and the trespassing charge. During his argument, Petersen said there was no sufficient basis on the charges for the trial to move forward. However, Judge John G. Fenn decided to the contrary and proceedings would continue.

Also prior to the jury being called back, Mathewson voiced his decision to not present any evidence, nor call any witnesses. Mathewson further stated he felt prejudiced against by both the Court and by Judge Fenn, and he was having issues regarding his counsel as

well. Though Judge Fenn said the decorum followed in the courtroom was for Mathewson's protection, Mathewson elected to not call witnesses or present evidence, and the defense rested shortly after the prosecution.

During his closing arguments, County Attorney Jerry Williams stated cases begin with a fact, and form as additional facts are gathered and compiled.

The first fact in this case, he said, is when a deputy saw suspicious activity from a subject known to be on probation. During a follow-up with the subject, and search of the residence where she was at, drugs and paraphernalia are found and another subject, Kenneth Smith, was arrested.

After already knowing his sentence, Smith provided information with regard to Mathewson. Williams said Smith chose to do this in an effort to break his own cycle of addiction and use. Amidst his testimony, Smith provided information about a purchase of meth from Mathewson, including description of the interior and exterior of Mathewson's property, as well as specific paraphernalia items later found upon execution of a search warrant.

As to the definition of possession, Williams noted it does not mean it has to be in a person's pocket. The property in which various drugs and paraphernalia were found was under

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