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THE CHRONICLE-NEWS

50 CENTS
TRINIDAD, COLORADO

Proudly Serving Southeastern Colorado and Northeastern New Mexico

Inside Jan. 2

Beginning Friday, Jan. 2, *The Chronicle-News* will feature Parade magazine in our weekend edition.



THE FINE PRINT

City Council

Trinidad City Council will meet for their work session at 1:30 p.m. today at the City Hall Council Chambers, third floor, City Hall.

Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus will meet at 7 p.m. tonight in the K of C Hall on South Commercial St. in Trinidad.

Masonic Lodge meeting

A.F. and A.M. Trinidad Masonic Lodge No. 28 will meet at 7:30 p.m. tonight at 132 E. Main St. 2B1ASK1.

County closures

The Las Animas County offices will be closed tomorrow and Thursday in celebration of Christmas. Normal office hours will resume on Friday.

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WEATHER WATCH

Today: A chance of rain and snow before 11 a.m., then a slight chance of rain between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., then a slight chance of snow after 3 p.m. Cloudy, with a high near 41. Windy, with a west wind 15 to 20 mph increasing to between 25 and 30 mph. Winds could gust as high as 40 mph. Chance of precipitation is 30 percent. New snow accumulation of less than a half inch possible.



Tonight: A 30 percent chance of snow, mainly before 11 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 11. Wind chill values between -5 and 5. Breezy, with a west northwest wind 20 to 25 mph decreasing to between 10 and 15 mph. Winds could gust as high as 35 mph. New snow accumulation of less than a half inch possible.

Tomorrow: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 38. Wind chill values between zero and 10. West wind 5 to 15 mph becoming south-south-east.

Tomorrow Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 18. West southwest wind between 10 and 15 mph.

RIVER CALL

Purgatoire River Call as of 12/22/08. Hoehne Priority No. 9 as of 1/1/1864.

Trinidad Lake Accounting: Release, .13 acre ft.; Inflow, 61.07 acre ft.; Evaporation, .94 acre ft.; Content, 18,838 acre ft.; Elevation, 6,178.41; Precipitation, 0.

Downstream River Call, Winter Storage as of 3/10/1910.

(Provided by Division of Water Resources)



Trinidad State Junior College Gunsmithing School professors Speedy Gonzalez, from left, Keith Gipson and Dave Nolan pose in front of the many unique firearms their students have made in class this past semester. (Photo by Mike Garrett)

TSJC's famous gunsmithing school still attaining lofty aims

By MIKE GARRETT
The Chronicle-News

Shots heard around the world have often originated from collector-competition-quality firearms made by students from around the country attending Trinidad State Junior College's world-renowned 61-year-old gunsmithing school.

The TSJC gunsmithing school is a sparkling crown jewel within a jewel, only their uniquely produced rifles

and pistols are instead polished and re-polished by the students. Head instructor Professor Keith Gipson, 21 years at TSJC, Professor Dave Nolan, 14 years here and world-record-holder shooter Speedy Gonzalez, who joined the staff last year after winning 13 national shooting championships, have kept the famous gunsmithing school's tradition and reputation alive and well - if you want to know everything there is to know about making a rifle or pistol

from any era of history or learn gunsmithing as a career, TSJC still offers the best gunsmithing school in the nation. The three instructors combined have nearly 90 diverse years in the gunsmithing and or competitive shooting professions.

What separates TSJC gunsmithing from other schools?

"I think first and foremost it's our longtime reputation," said Nolan. "We

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RuthAnn Woods

TSJC President RuthAnn Woods to retire

Courtesy of Trinidad State Junior College
Special to the Chronicle

RuthAnn Woods, President of Trinidad State Junior College, has announced her retirement effective Dec. 31, 2008. However, she will return Feb. 1, 2009 to serve a 110-day contract as TSJC President until June 30. A new president will be named July 1.

Commenting on Woods' retirement, Dr. Nancy McCallin, President of the Colorado Community College System said, "RuthAnn is a master at creativity and innovation. She has taken limited resources and produced outstanding partnerships that stretched those resources to enrich students' lives and provide critical economic development opportunities for the community and state. Her colleagues and I will miss this entrepreneurial spirit but we know she will always be just a phone call away."

Woods became the first woman president of TSJC in 2005, after serving as Interim Chief Administrative Officer and Vice President for the TSJC Valley Campus in Alamosa. She became president at a time when a combination of TSJC enrollment losses and decreased State funding to colleges and universities

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Spell-off adds excitement to Kearny Elementary spelling bee

By LAURA L. BREWER
The Chronicle-News

Last Thursday, the Kearny Elementary School held a preliminary spelling bee to determine which students will represent the school at the county spelling bee in January. From all of the students in fifth grade, sixteen spelling champions were selected to compete in the school's spelling bee, which was held on Friday. One student, Clair Willden, was allowed to simply observe the proceedings because she had scored so many points from the preliminary rounds that it wasn't necessary for her to compete in the final rounds.

From the initial sixteen champions, six advanced to the county competition after several rounds of spelling sometimes difficult words. The selection process, which would normally take only a few rounds, lasted considerably longer because two students, Moss Saccamanno and Forrest McConnell were in a tie-breaking spell-off for several rounds. In order to advance to the next round, each student must spell two consecutive words correctly. Both students stayed in the

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Kearny Elementary Spelling Bee Team is heading to county competition in January. Pictured are: Back Row - Fifth grade teacher Joelyn Pafford, Alicia Thompson, Clair Willden, Lara Salazar, July Hunnicutt, Forrest McConnell, Adrian Perez, and Fifth grade teacher, Bob Stuart. Front Row - Fifth Grade Teacher Shannon Pierce, first alternate, Moss Saccamanno and second alternate, Juan Prieto-Archuleta. (Photo by Laura L. Brewer)

Commissioners formally approve \$29.9 million 2009 budget

By MIKE GARRETT
The Chronicle-News

The Las Animas Board of County Commissioners took care of year-end business at a special Monday meeting by unanimously passing the fiscal 2009 county appropriations budget resolutions while establishing and certifying the assessed values of county taxing entities.

The final 2009 operating budget will be \$29,901,840, somewhat higher than the \$27,833,127 that had been proposed in a draft budget a month earlier. The final budget is based on the recently-released county 2008 assessed valuation of \$691 million, up \$71 million from 2007's \$620 million.

County Administrator Bill Cordova has emphasized that the 2009 operating budget is frugal in every respect in terms of what the county can expect in property tax revenues based on its assessed valuation.

But anticipated expenditures are often educated guesses since no one can predict how severe a winter might be and the expenses associated with assisting farmers

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Missing aircraft located on Vermejo Peak in southern Colorado

Courtesy of the Colorado Wing, Civil Air Patrol
United States Air Force Auxiliary Special to the Chronicle

The aircraft which had been the focus of a search since Saturday evening was found early Sunday afternoon crashed on the side of Vermejo Peak in southern Colorado. A US Air Force helicopter crew from Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. spotted the wreckage on the northeast face of the mountain. There were no survivors. Vermejo Peak is located in Costilla County about 38 miles west of Trinidad.

Winds which hampered the search are also making recovery difficult. Personnel from the Las Animas County Sheriff's Office, El Paso County Search and Rescue (SAR), Custer County SAR and the Colorado Division of Wildlife are making their way to the crash site on foot and by snow machines. The Costilla County Sheriff's Office is in charge of the recovery effort. The Civil Air Patrol, Alamosa SAR and the Army National Guard and Air National Guard also partici-

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Holiday deadlines

The Chronicle-News will be closed on **Wednesday, Dec. 24, Thursday, Dec. 25, Wednesday, Dec. 31 and Thursday, Jan. 1** in observance of the Christmas and New Year holidays.

We will also have **early holiday deadlines:** All classified and display ads will be due by 10 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 23 for the Friday, Dec. 26 edition.

All classified and display ads will be due by 10 a.m. on Monday, Dec. 29 for the Wednesday, Dec. 31-Jan. 1 edition and by 10 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 30 for the Friday, Jan. 2 edition.



LOCAL NEWS



These ornate percussion pistols modeled after those originally manufactured in the 1830s and 1840s, were part of a TSJC Gunsmithing School class project this semester. Gunsmithing students are pictured here showing off their masterpieces.



This picture shows a very simplified but finely-finished model of an actual rifle dating back to the 14th century, the first actual firearm using ammunition ever invented.



Here is a sampling of intricate bolt-action rifles from the basic stock to the finished product. TSJC Gunsmithing School students can easily spend 300 or more hours crafting their unique rifles, shotguns and pistols to ensure the bolt action is precise and the stock properly polished, engraved and checkered.

TSJC Gunsmithing School student Bob Campbell shows off the original precision bolt-action Hanganne military mauser rifle it took him three semesters to perfect. (Photos by Mike Garrett)



TSJC's famous gunsmithing school still attaining lofty aims

Continued from page 1
are known across the United States and the world as being the best at what we do here."

"This would be akin to going to Harvard or Yale as far as gunsmithing schools are concerned," added Gonzalez. "Typically, when you speak to anyone who has gone to another school, they say they wanted to go to Trinidad, but..."

"It's our reputation, our facilities, our program of instruction and the equipment in our shops is second to none," added Gipson. "We've got more stuff here than probably any two or three other schools put together."

Gonzalez noted that at Brownell Inc., the world's

largest supplier of gunsmithing tools and supplies, annual job fair in Iowa last year, which was attended by students from all other U.S. gunsmithing schools, "came to our booth and were just pining for what we do here. We kept hearing from them that they didn't get to do all the things at their schools that we do here."

Gipson said those same students were just amazed at the unique firearm projects they took to the job fair. "They were just outside the realm of what they were able to do at their schools. It's just our diverse backgrounds that let's us do that, as well as the facilities and equipment we have here."

Brownell is one of TSJC's Captains of Industry for donating lathes, a CNC Mill and other precision equipment to the school. When it came time to engrave a special rifle awarded to Brownell's one-millionth customer, the engraving work on that gun was done at TSJC. Federal Perkins grants have also contributed to firearms making machines, lathes, mills and other tooling purchases. Unlike computers, most gun tooling, milling machines and lathe equipment can be used almost indefinitely, requiring only an occasional rebuild job, the three instructors noted.

As time and curriculum have permitted, TSJC has also built guns over the years for police national championship shooting competitions and some that were used as props in various movies.

Gipson pointed out that the school tries to keep up with the latest gunsmithing technology and advances and refinements

in materials and firearms-making techniques that have changed in recent years. But the basic hand skill levels and actual machine work has remained virtually the same over the years. A factory manufactured Colt 45 from 50-100 years ago may be equal to or actually be in some ways superior in overall quality to a factory made gun today, he noted.

But the overall quality of a student produced firearm is largely dependent on how many hours that student wants to put into his project, they say. A custom gunsmith may produce a rifle worth \$10,000 but it may have taken 300-plus hours to do it.

"The level of precision and the understanding of those firearms has really risen greatly over the years," said Gonzalez. "We can incorporate all of the new theories and practices that weren't available 50 years ago."

"The level of expectations is higher today, the part-fitting machines are better, the finish-off machines are better," said Nolan.

The school started in January 1947, making the TSJC gunsmithing school the oldest and largest of the nine gunsmithing schools in the country. Students enroll here from all over the U.S. from as far as Alaska to New York State to Florida. Current gun laws and certain restrictions have made it a lot tougher for students from abroad to attend the school, Nolan noted. Only one or two of those nine (in North Carolina and Oklahoma) even come close to offering the complete facilities, equipment and

instruction found in Trinidad, he said.

The school currently has 45 students enrolled and climbing although numbers were down a bit in recent years.

Gipson said the curriculum offers every aspect of the gunsmithing trade, teaching students to construct a rifle or pistol from its basic building materials to a precisely-measured showpiece instrument that can be worth lots of money to gun collectors and fanciers. Shaping and perfecting and checking the stock to engraving and upgrading a rifle's bolt action are all taught at TSJC, he said. The bottom line is that TSJC gunsmithing school graduates almost always get fairly lucrative jobs in their career choices right out of college.

Gonzalez pointed out that the school gives students a good basic foundation the first year until the last semester when they can specialize in an area where they have a special interest. "Some students like shotguns more and some like rifles and pistols more."

"It's an educational concept that when people come to school, we give them what they need to survive in the trade that they're going into," said Nolan. "But you still only gain the experience you need by actually doing it." And what they learn at TSJC is likely going to be in their formal educational process since no four-year colleges currently offer a gunsmithing program.

While most TSJC gunsmithing students are there to learn it as a trade and career, Gipson said there is some overlap among those students who

also want to be better hunters, marksmen and like Gonzalez, possibly win national shooting competitions. Gipson compared it to a race car driver who excels at driving a race car 200 miles per hour but wouldn't be qualified as a mechanic to work on that car. Yet he still wants to understand the concepts of what makes his racecar run so fast.

Occasionally, a student will also come along who also wants to learn how to better protect themselves by being proficient with a gun. Usually course work like this is handled through the National Rifle Association through NRA shooting classes or through gunshops. But Gonzalez certainly has the world-class qualifications to instruct that and is willing to teach his students some of the techniques he has learned from 30 years as an award-winning competitive professional shooter.

Gonzalez said he only got into gunsmithing after his career as a competitive shooter "when it got to the point where I couldn't have what I needed manufactured and built to my specifications. So I just had to take it upon myself to do it." He noted that he was able to make a pretty good living by winning national and international competitions. But like any professional, he had to be among the world's elite to earn the big paychecks.

Both in gunsmithing and shooting competitions, the precision difference between a mistake and success can be measured in one one-hundredth of an inch. If a bolt-action calibration is off even 1/32nd of an

inch, the gun might as well be scrapped, said Nolan.

Of course any school program is measured by how many students it graduates. TSJC gunsmithing school graduates about 66 percent of its students who enroll in the program, said Nolan. "On the national level, students who enter a two-year college and actually make it into the second year are only about 35 to 50 percent. So our graduation rate is pretty high. And over the past 5-6 years we've had about a 96 percent job placement rate. So they are going out of here and getting jobs. Of the 33 percent who didn't make it through, I'll bet half of them ended up with a life change where maybe mom, dad or the wife got sick and they had to go back home or they had money problems. It's usually not because they're a screw-up and don't want to be here."

He said any dedicated students can get through the program with lots of tutorial help available if needed. "As long as they really want it, we can get them through."

A low-end or entry level gunsmith just out of college can earn around \$30,000 a year with benefits, Nolan said. High-end gunsmiths working at a high-profile gunshop can earn all kinds of money. All three TSJC instructors could probably write their own tickets to much higher salaries if they so desired. But as Gonzalez noted, "I've already done what I've wanted to do so I'm ready to pass on what I've learned. Money has never been everything to me."

Gonzalez won his 13 national championships in the bench-rest (group shooting) division of the NBSRA and the hunter class division three times. "That makes me the only competitive shooter in our organization who has ever won a national championship in both divisions. And there are some world records added in there somewhere. I've also had my own shop for 17 years in the Dallas-Fort Worth area."

The U.S. Bench-rest Hall of Famer said that all his mentors had stressed the need to pass their knowledge on to somebody else before they met their demise. "So before I meet my demise I wanted to pass all that on before I forget it all. So that's why I'm here." He will have been at TSJC two years Jan. 2. "Now I want to relive all this stuff through their (students) eyes with all their accomplishments. That's how I get my adrenaline nowadays."

Dedication and focus are the key words, he said, for any TSJC student who aspires to where he has been, Gonzales said. The rest is up to them.

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