



THURSDAY
DECEMBER 3, 2009

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THE CHRONICLE-NEWS

50 CENTS
TRINIDAD, COLORADO

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THE FINE PRINT

Please see page 8 for all SCHOOL EVENTS

THURSDAY – Dec 3rd

Quilt Club

Bound Together Quilt Club - 9:30 a.m. Every other Thursday Beginning Oct 22 – County Fairgrounds. Information: 719-846-3855 (Sandy)

Trinidad Rotary Club

Weekly Luncheon and Meeting – Thurs. at 12 p.m. at the Holiday Inn.

SPPRCD Meeting

Spanish Peaks Purgatoire River Conservation District will meet at 1 p.m. on Thursday in the District Office.

Elks Lodge

Trinidad Order of Elks, Lodge 181 Meeting - Thursday 8 p.m. - home on South Maple St.

FRIDAY & WEEKEND

Dec. 4th – 7th EVENTS

“A Christmas Carol” live at the Shuler Theater in Raton first & second weekends of December. Fri. & Sat. / Dec. 4 & 5 at 7 p.m. and Sun. Dec 6 at 2 p.m. The following weekend performances will be Fri. & Sat. / Dec.11 & 12 at 7 p.m. Tickets are available in advance or at the door. Adults \$8, Seniors \$7 & students \$4. Call 575-445-4746 for information.

FRIDAY – 4th

Al-Anon Family

Family Group meets at 6 p.m. Fridays, Presbyterian Church, 801 San Pedro, in the basement. Info call: Sharone 719-846-9999. No charge.

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WEATHER WATCH

Today: Snow. The snow could be heavy at times. High near 19. East northeast wind around 5 mph. Chance of precipitation is 90%. New snow accumulation of 1 to 3 inches possible.

Tonight: A 40 percent chance of snow, mainly before 11 p.m. Mostly cloudy, then gradually becoming mostly clear, with a low around 4. Wind chill values between -5 and zero. North northwest wind between 5 and 10 mph.

Tomorrow: Mostly sunny, with a high near 33. West southwest wind around 5 mph.

Tomorrow Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 9. Southwest wind around 10 mph.

RIVER CALL

Purgatoire River Call-as of 12/2/09 Chilili Priority #7 4/30/1862

Trinidad Lake accounting: Release-.04 acre ft.; Inflow-37.45 acre ft.; Evaporation-2.41 acre ft.; Content-16,262 acre ft.; Elevation-6,174.26; Precipitation-0

Downstream River Call-JMR 12/31/1948

(Provided by Division of Water Resources)



Photo by Richard Sitts

This is the sign in the window at Francesca's Unique Gifts & Furniture at 212 N. Commercial in downtown Trinidad. Anyone with information about the kitten can call the store at 845-8508. In a recent photograph, submitted by Fran Villani, Sweet Baby sits in the middle of a Christmas wreath.

Missing kitten is a mystery story waiting for a happy ending

By RICHARD SITTS
The Chronicle News

Two women, each carrying a large shopping bag, came into the store Monday afternoon between two and three. One set her bag down and remained in the front room, not far from the cash register. The other woman carried her bag with her into the next room. They browsed for a while, each in a different room, and then left the store with their bags without buying anything.

Minding the store, Francesca's Unique Gifts & Furniture, was 100-year-old Lucy Villani. Her daughter and the shop's proprietor, Fran Villani, had had to make a trip to Denver with her daughter.

When the two shoppers entered the store, Lucy had been sitting down with the store's newest attraction sitting on her lap, a friendly, trusting, three-month-old kitten that had taken up residence in the store for the past three weeks. They called her "Sweet Baby." Lucy put the black kitten down so she could get up and wait on the two women. She stayed in the front room with the woman who had set her bag down.

Lucy, who has been in the retail business since she was 22, and has lived in Trinidad for about the past 80

years, told Fran that she did not recognize the women. "She's not senile, but she's not as mobile as she used to be," Fran said. "We don't watch our customers, there's no need to. We're very welcoming here." In nine years of business, Fran said there have been only two instances of anything being stolen from the shop. Monday, there may have been two missing items – a small wooden rocking horse priced at 25-cents and a candle worth about \$8, closer to \$6 with the 20-percent discount.

But as soon as the women left, Sweet Baby was gone, too. She had been a feral cat living under a shed behind the shop. The week before, Fran had let her out the back door and she scurried under the shed, her old home. But a short time later, upon hearing Fran's voice, the kitten immediately came out to be picked up.

Lucy assured Fran that she did not see the women take the kitten, so it's possible that Sweet Baby slipped out the door when the women left. Fran says she wants to give the women the benefit of a doubt, but that it's hard to do. She said she has given up on the possibility that the kitten is back in its former haunt, hanging out behind the store. Since Monday, she has seen the

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Council votes 4-2 to increase city electric rates despite community opposition

By MIKE GARRETT
The Chronicle-News

The Trinidad City Council didn't exactly light up the lives of the city's residents and retail businesses by voting 4-2 Tuesday night for a 4.8 percent average electricity rate hike effective Jan. 1, 2010. But those who voted for the rate increase were put into a no-win situation, in which the city power and light department would have faced a \$235,000 operating deficit in 2010 and probably more in 2011 if status quo rates were maintained.

Several residents and business owners expressed their strong opposition to any rate increase at Tuesday night's regular council meeting. They were joined by councilman John Rino and councilwoman Linda Velasquez in agreement that now is not the time to ask recession suffering and economically struggling residents and businesses to pay higher utility bills when they say so many are now unable to or don't pay their bills on time.

But Trinidad Power and Light Superintendent Dave Brunelli, in a 45-minute slide and question-answer presentation to the council and its audience, made it clear that it was a pay a little more now or risk paying a lot more later scenario for the city to consider. He said his purchase price for electrical power has doubled from 4 1/2 to 9 cents per kilowatt hour since 2004 and his operating costs have also risen an average of 3 percent or \$33,000 every year since. Brunelli said he is dealing with an aging electrical substation, bucket and line trucks and equipment that will have to be replaced or upgraded substantially over the next four years.

And, he said the department runs the risk of depleting its cash reserves within the next two years if rate adjustments aren't made for the 2010 budget year, based on a recent rate study by city consultant Phil Euler. "We've been living off of our reserve funds the last 2-3 years and I don't believe we should be dipping into our reserve funds as much as we have," he said.

Brunelli said his department is only earning an extra \$27,000 a year based on its eight-year load growth average of a 1.6 percent increase in revenues. With projected city growth hindered by the recession and gas industry pull-out, revenues have remained flat. Brunelli expects the 4.8 percent rate

hike to generate an additional \$200,000 in revenues for 2010. With no rate increase, the city could face up to a 21 percent negative return on investment by 2011. Brunelli also vowed to put off some capital improvement project spending for another 3-4 years.

He also wondered how long his department could continue paying \$68,000 a year or more for street and backyard safety lights throughout the city.

But Rino asked why the city electrical department couldn't take a \$200,000-plus hit next year and continue to take money out of its reserve funds until council can get a clearer picture of where and which budget cutbacks will need to be made due to an expected \$300,000 decline in city sales tax revenues this year. "We had to go into our General Fund reserves to balance our budget this year. It's crunch time and I think the timing is very poor for this rate increase."

Resident Glen Davis said many Trinidad citizens, especially seniors and those on fixed incomes, are also having to dip into their savings and cash reserves. "To pay another \$5 to \$10 a month on their utility bills may make a difference in not being able to pay for some of their medical prescriptions or putting gas in their cars." And when local businesses are having to pay higher rates, he said they will pass those higher operating costs on to their customers. "Fewer people are shopping as it is. Now is not the time to increase rates."

Hops and Vines owner Luis Lopez agreed, noting that his business is struggling now to turn a profit as it becomes more expensive to operate, with utility costs to keep his inventory cold being such a prominent factor in cutting into profits.

Business and building owner Fran Villani said she was struggling to make ends meet and keep her business open and that most any Trinidad retail business right now would oppose any electric rate increase.

Businessman-developer Tim Peters said he had heard at a recent meeting with area merchants that up to 40 percent of city electric customers don't pay their electric bills at all. If that figure were cut in half, maybe the power and light department would not need a rate increase, he said.

But City Attorney Jerod Beatty said

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Area teams ready to run in 74th TSJC Invite

By DAVID J. SANTISTEVAN JR.
The Chronicle-News

The NCAA has "March Madness" and the first week in December in Trinidad has the "Trinidad State Junior College Hoop-la." It's that time of year again as the high school winter sports season kicks off in a big way with the 74th Annual TSJC Boys Invitational Basketball Tournament. This weekend some of the best high school boys basketball teams from Class 4A, 3A, 2A and 1A in Colorado and three northern New Mexico Schools will delight the crowds with their up-and-down, full-court fun-and-run style of basketball.

Also, four cheerleading squads will compete for the spirit award this year, along with eight young ladies looking to become the TSJC Tournament Queen.

Past winners of the tourney include Holy Trinity, 1937, 1948, and 1949; and Sopris, a three-time winner in 1939, 1960 and 1962. Trinidad "B" has won the tourney four times.

In the upper division, Colorado Springs School (CSS) is back to defend its title after a big win over Manitou Springs in the championship game last

Thursday Games	
Local Teams	
Aguilar vs. Trinidad "B," 9 a.m.	
HTA vs. John Mall, 3 p.m.	
Primer vs. Wagon Mound, 7:30 p.m.	
Hoehne vs. Trinidad High, 9:30 p.m.	
Other Games	
Canon City vs. DHPH, 10:30 a.m.	
Maxwell vs. Sierra Grande, noon	
La Veta vs. Manitou Springs, 1:30 p.m.	
Rye vs. CSS, 6 p.m.	

year. CSS (23-2) returns five seniors from a team that won the Class 2A state crown, Coach Dave Cortez has ties to the Trinidad area and he returns arguably Class 2A's best player, 6'5" Senior DeLovell Earls, who averaged 25 PPG and grabbed 12 rebounds a game.

Class 3A Manitou Springs (8-11) might also contest for the title again. Rye (11-9) is always a team to watch, having won the TSJC crown four times, the last time back in 2006.

The Trinidad Miners (4-16) will open up with

Hoehne (13-9). The Miners will have a new look and style under new head coach Mike Ridolfi, who knows the game and coached most of the kids on the team back in junior high. Trinidad could be a dark horse team in the upper division.

Hoehne also has a first-year head coach, Dallen Philpott, who takes over for the successful Manuel Navarette. The Farmers might be in a rebuilding year.


La Veta (11-11) is strong and this tough field of teams should help them down the road.

DHPH (16-8) could surprise some teams and could place in the top three.

The lower division will not have the five time (2004-2008) defending champion who beat the Primero Bulldogs in the final last year. Primero has won the tourney four times, the last one back in 1987. Willie Bryant, one of Class A's best all-around hoopsters, will excite the crowd down at Scott Gym on Coach Jim Toupal Court this weekend.

The Bulldogs are ranked in the top four in Class 1A and are the favorite to win this year's lower division title.

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Trinidad Trout Unlimited group seeks support for creating river habitats

By MIKE GARRETT
The Chronicle-News

A new group of fishing and environmental aficionados hope to make Trinidad and the Purgatoire River a more desirable place to cast a line or walk along the riverbank.

Three-year-old national Trout Unlimited recently organized a growing Trinidad Anglers chapter of 20 members that is seeking to improve local community quality of life, and fishing and tourism experiences in Las Animas County, according to Trinidad automotive business owner and chapter President Howard Lackey, who is spearheading the local effort.

Lackey addressed the Trinidad City Council Tuesday night, seeking support and endorsement for the group's efforts to attract \$10,000 from the TU national chapter. Lackey said that funding would be used to design a fish and wildlife habitat along the river corridor.

"It's amazing how much interest there has been generated in this project," said Lackey. "They (Trout Unlimited, which has 400 chapters and 160,000 volunteers nationwide) would love to see the Purgatoire River become a viable habitat fishery and wildlife corridor here in Trinidad." The TU organization seeks to preserve and protect the nation's fisheries and watersheds.

Council votes 4-2 to increase city electric rates despite community opposition

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that 40 percent figure is not at all accurate. If bills remain unpaid, he said the city begins the collection process. City Manager Jim Soltis added that the city shuts off power to a residence or commercial customer if bills remain unpaid after two months.

With Mayor Joe Reorda and Councilwomen Liz Aragon and Nancy Ellis voting for the rate increase as unfortunately being necessary, despite the hardships it may cause, the swing vote appeared to fall into

The new Trinidad group has been in contact with nature conservancy district organizations, Trinidad and state parks and the city planning department to engage a state habitat control company to determine what can be done to improve the Purgatoire watershed area, Lackey said. "We've had the company down here once and they see a lot of potential here. Department of Wildlife fisheries have also been down here to look at it, take water quality samples and see what river habitat projects might be viable."

All of the habitat data collected will evolve into a plan on what can be done with various sections of the river and trail systems to improve its habitat look and become more of a community draw, Lackey noted. He pointed to recent annual community riverbank cleanup campaigns that have uncovered lots of trash and undesirable items that have been accumulating along the riverbanks. He said future conservation efforts should greatly decrease the need for community cleanups.

Eco-tourism has been growing in recent years and Trinidad needs to take advantage of more tourists and fishermen coming into the area who want to hike or fish along its river trails and walks. He said the average fisherman spends almost \$200 a day in the community for items like licenses, bait, food, lodging

and sightseeing.

"It will increase community awareness about restoring and conserving the Purgatoire River with trout fisheries. And there is a large section of that river that looks exactly the way it did 200 years ago with native plants and species," said Lackey. "We've got a really good base of building blocks of cottonwoods and willows throughout the whole river corridor that you don't find too often."

Initial project planning efforts will be focused on making habitat improvements from Trinidad Lake Dam to the Santa Fe Trail bypass. "The long-term goal is to improve the quality of life in the city of Trinidad by increasing recreational use of the Purgatoire River, increasing the use of the river trail system and increasing tourism," Lackey said. "Also, we want to increase the sense of pride within the community, that we can say this is what we have done as a community."

CORRECTION

In the edition for Monday, Nov. 30, the picture of the "Freedom Float" in the Christmas Parade of Lights was incorrectly labeled. This beautiful patriot float was, in fact, the work of Red Wing Electric of Trinidad and they won 1st place in the small business category.

Councilman Jim Toupal's lap. In explaining his yes vote, Toupal noted that politically, it would not be smart and would be an unpopular vote. "But I just think it's imperative that the city do all it can to protect its substation and not run the risk of it failing."

Brunelli had noted earlier that the Trinidad power substation was the heart of the city's electrical grid system and it was going to need major upgrades and equipment replacement within the next few years that would have to be put off without a rate increase.

How many Trinidad businesses will still be around to get power generated from that substation remains to be seen.



Photo by David Santistevan Jr.

This residence at 315 Stonewall in Trinidad features a yard full of lights and ornaments that herald the Christmas season.

Semi driver injured, cited after rear-ending snowplow

CN STAFF REPORT

A semi-tractor trailer rear-ended a Colorado Department of Transportation plow truck while it was plowing snow at about 9:45 a.m. Wednesday, according to the Colorado State Patrol. The accident occurred about 19 miles north of Trinidad on Interstate-25.

Kyle Somers, 21, of Rutherglen, Va., was traveling southbound in the left lane when he struck the CDOT plow, which was also traveling in the left lane. Somers attempted to avoid rear-ending the plow and maneuvered to the right, but collided with the plow on the driver's side of the tractor, according to police.

Somers was transported to Mt. San Rafael hospital in Trinidad with multiple

injuries. His passenger, Felicia Somers, 18, also of Rutherglen, was also transported with minor injuries.

Ralph Trujillo, 51, of

Trinidad, was operating the snowplow and was not injured. No alcohol or drugs are suspected. Somers was cited for careless driving.

Area teams ready to run in 74th TSJC Invite

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Sierra Grande will run, and Wagon Mound (14-13), with three seniors, just may be back in the title game.

HTA and Aguilar are young but have the area's most exciting players. Both R.J. Carter (HTA) and Aaron Dalrick (Aguilar) can put the ball in the hole and light it up from any-

where on the floor.

Dave Harriman always has a well-coached team with John Mall and the Panthers could also see action Saturday night.

It should be a fun weekend of high school hoops. Area fans should get out and support all the local schools and students.

Missing kitten is a mystery story waiting for a happy ending

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kitten's littermate, another black kitten that she intends to trap and care for until it is old enough to be spayed or neutered. Fran said that Sweet Baby would've been with the littermate, had she been around. She speaks from experience. As president of Noah's Ark Animal Welfare Shelter, Fran

has been involved in programs that trap, sterilize and release feral cats.

"She drank a lot of water and was very thin and always hungry," Fran said. "She needs to be tested and have some medical attention." Fran said she was going to take the kitten to a local vet this week to have tests done. "My concern is that they would be kind enough to return the cat so I can get it the help it needs. I would like them to return the kitten rather than cast it out because of health problems." On why she contacted the Chronicle-News, Fran said, "I feel like I have to give it a shot."

"Why would you take a cat?" Fran asked, slowly shaking her head while staring straight ahead. And then she answers her own question, describing

how cute and loving the kitten was.

Sweet Baby already had a growing fan club among those who came into the shop, Fran said, adding that several different people expressed interest in adopting her. For a feral cat, she said it was unusual as to how friendly and inquisitive it was. The cat would go up to anyone who came into the store. "If you sat down, she would be up in your lap in two shakes."

Lending to the theory of theft, Fran said it's entirely possible that Sweet Baby could have been picked up and placed into a shopping bag without so much as a purr. Feral cats are silent animals because they need to be to avoid detection, Fran said. In an urban setting, feral cats serve the important purpose of keeping down the

rodent population, she added.

Lucy told Fran that she was not sure of the women's race or ages, though she guessed the latter to be around 50. One had on a long blue skirt, a blue top, had curly black hair and was wearing long earrings. The other was wearing tan slacks, an ivory-colored top and had very short hair.

"I can't tell you that they took the cat because I didn't see them take the cat," Lucy told Fran.

If there's a logical explanation, it hasn't surfaced yet. However, if there was a theft committed, there were no witnesses and the evidence has vanished.

Anyone with information can call the store at 845-8508, or 845-0955.

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