



The I-70 Scout

Searching for news in Watkins, Bennett, Strasburg, Byers, Deer Trail, and Agate

Volume 22, Number 39

Tuesday, July 5, 2016

Bennett fire board seeks mill levy input

by **Abbie Mitchell**
Staff Writer

WATKINS — The Bennett Fire Protection District held a public meeting June 29 at Station 92 to help determine if a four-mill property

tax increase should appear on the November ballot.

If passed, the current 8.9 mill levy would be increased by two mills for facility improvement and two mills for operational service improvement.

“We hate to ask, we really do, but there is just not enough coming in,” said fire board president Jim Woods. “We have operated very well, we feel, with the money we have had, but we have finally reached the point where we just can’t stretch it anymore.”

The proposed levy increase would cost \$2.65 per month for a home with an assessed evaluation of \$100,000, and would commence Jan. 1, 2017. A home with an assessed value of

SEE BENNETT FIRE DISTRICT PAGE 4

Celebrating the **Red, White & Blue**

For more coverage, see pages 12 & 13



PHOTOS BY MICHELLE FORBIS/The I-70 Scout

The Fourth of July weekend got started along the I-70 Corridor with the fourth annual “Hats Off to the Red, White & Blue” celebration at Bennett Anythink library July 1. Clockwise from top, Ivan and Iris Heiter show their patriotism in their wagon pulled by grandpa; Kaelin Troutwine and her mom show off their flag-like garb; and D.J. Yeoman proudly displays his Fourth of July windsock.



Local mustang haven the result of a promise kept to a father

by **Abbie Mitchell**
Staff Writer

DEER TRAIL — A father’s dream has become a daughter’s 900-acre reality at the Great Escape Mustang Sanctuary near Deer Trail.

“It started with my dad,” executive director Michelle Sander said. “It was his lifelong vision and goal to have a sanctuary for mustangs. He passed away five years ago, and before he passed, I promised I would carry it on.”

Sander grew up with quarter and Arabian horses, and had little knowledge of mustangs. But after some research, she found her direction.

“When I dove into the mustang issue, I realized really quickly that if we were just a sanctuary, we would fill up in a second and be completely ineffective,” Sander said.

Sander reached out to the Bureau of Land Management to learn more about their Wild Horse and Burro Program, and learned no non-profit

SEE MUSTANGS PAGE 24

Sneaky Snakes

EMBER SEWARD-SORENSEN/The I-70 Scout

The abnormally wet spring and summer along the I-70 Corridor has appeared to push the area’s snakes to more open, public areas. Two recent examples are: right photo, this bull snake decided to sun himself on the card reader at the fuel pumps of the Roggen Elevator in Bennett June 20; and, below, this intimidating bull snake was found lounging around Valhalla Ranch northeast of Byers June 29.



SUBMITTED PHOTO



PHOTOS BY ABBIE MITCHELL/The I-70 Scout

Left photo, a volunteer from Great Escape Mustang Sanctuary near Deer Trail leads one of the equine residents to class. Right photo, part of the herd roams the sanctuary's pasture.

MUSTANGS

FROM PAGE 1

groups supported the program. Sander knew which organization her non-profit and sanctuary was going to back.

Sander began her search for a location in the high country, but did not find the right property. After a recommendation from a friend, she hesitantly turned her gaze east, to the plains.

"I didn't know anything about the eastern plains, but I started looking and found this property," Sander said. "It changed my mind."

The Palmer Divide location provides not only native grassland, but rolling hills, ponds, trees and other varied topography.

"It's amazing and I never knew that existed on the plains," Sander said.

Although the location was ideal, the remaining infrastructure was not.

"When we first got to the ranch, it was pretty run down," Sander said. "It had sat vacant for many years, so when we got there, it was clean up, clean up, clean up."

Sander's weekly routine soon became leaving her Longmont home, dropping her two boys off at school, driving down to the sanctuary to help with the work, then driving back home to pick up the boys after school was over.

After many long hours removing barbed wire fencing, redoing miles of fence, build-

ing intake corrals, arenas, round pens and more, the sanctuary was ready to house some hooved residents. And in 2012, the sanctuary welcomed ten mustangs to their new home.

Today, Great Escape works hand in hand with the BLM's Sand Wash Basin Herd Management Area to implement herd documentation, fertility control and other special range projects.

The sanctuary has also partnered with the Mustang Heritage Foundation to become Colorado's only Trainer Incentive Program trainer store front. The Mustang Heritage Program created the TIP, where they approve trainers that use natural horsemanship techniques to train horses and help find adopters.

"It's another avenue to get horses out of holding into homes, because adopting an untamed mustang is a really difficult thing to do," Sander said.

When a horse arrives at the sanctuary, they are evaluated to see if they are a good fit for the training program. If so, they horse around at Great Escape's training facility, working with sanctuary staff.

"I feel a successful adoption is going to happen when you adopt a trained horse," Sander said.

Horses that do not fit ideal training criteria are hardly



ABBIE MITCHELL/The I-70 Scout

Great Escape Mustang Sanctuary Executive Director and founder Michelle Sander parts the mane of a mustang in the training program at the facility near Deer Trail.

forgotten.

"If a horse isn't a good fit for the training program, or maybe too old, or does not show any signs of wanting to be around people, we turn them out onto the sanctuary pasture to live out their lives on the ranch," Sander said.

A close-knit herd of 19 Spanish and Sand Wash Basin mustangs now spend their days roaming freely on the vast 800-acre sanctuary.

Many burros have also found a safe haven at the sanctuary, and many have been adopted.

Animals aren't the only ones pampered at Great Escape. The sanctuary offers tours, field trips, overnight retreat programs, therapeutic programs and clinics.

Hooved friends easily outnumber the humans at Great Escape, which has two full-

time staffers — the ranch manager/lead trainer, and the programs director/office manager/trainer.

And although Sander runs the non-profit, spending part of her week at home and the other at the sanctuary, she has never received a paycheck.

"It's not about me, it's about the horses," Sander said.

One part-time employee drives from Strasburg, but the rest of the work is done by volunteers.

"Volunteers are hard to come by where we are," Sander said. "We get a lot of people that are interested that live in Denver or the Front Range, but to drive out and spend the day is really quite hard for them."

To ease the hassle, overnight facilities including

cabins are available for volunteers to sleep in. Living quarters are decorated by the skillful hand of Sander, who has a degree in interior design.

Sander admits that it is hard to find volunteers versed in training mustangs, but Great Escape will take any volunteer they can get.

"I would love to reach out to the community a little bit more and let them know we are here, and that we need help," Sander said.

Potential volunteers and mustang owners can get a taste of Great Escape at the open house and adoption event July 10 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the sanctuary, located at 42132 Ridge Road, Deer Trail. The event will feature riding and training demonstrations, food and drink, and 13 mustangs available for adoption.

The horses range from yearlings to five-year-olds, and the BLM will be on site to facilitate adoptions. The Mustang Heritage Foundation will also be present at the event.

Sander hopes the event will not only raise awareness, but create a stronger bond with the I-70 Corridor.

"Now that we have been down here a while and are getting to know the communities, we know it is such a unique spot, and I am super happy to be here," Sander said.

Pizza B's 3rd Anniversary Celebration!

Thank you to The I-70 Corridor for the AMAZING support over the past 3 years!

Saturday, July 9th from 11 am - 2 pm
we will be holding a **VENDOR FAIR** with raffles and activities for children!

Come support our local businesses and have a great time with a *special deal:
Buy one 12" pizza at regular price and get a second of equal or lesser value FREE!

**Offer only good July 9th*

303-644-5050 • 475 Palmer Ave., Bennett

Ocean Commotion
Diving into Noah's Flood

VBS at Strasburg Community Church
July 11-15, 2016 • 9 AM - 12 PM • Preschool - 6th Grade
Register at www.strasburgcc.org or call Jonathan 303-909-5521
July 16th, 10 AM - 2 PM - FREE PICNIC/CARNIVAL for families of VBS and Community.