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The Humboldt Sun

Winnemucca, Nevada

Your Source for Community News

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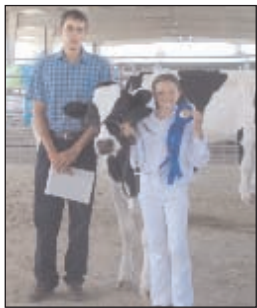
WEEKDAY EDITION



FAMILY MATTERS

The Dufurrena family has a long history in Humboldt County.

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IN FOCUS

Members of the Winnemucca Aggies recently attended the Churchill County Dairy Show in Fallon.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

The Humboldt County Library Book Club begins again Aug. 18, the third Tuesday of the month. They meet in the Nevada room from 7 p.m. — 8 p.m. The August selection is "Snow Flower and the Secret Fan."

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Local Weather

Tue 8/11 95/54 Mainly sunny. High around 95°. Winds SSW at 5 to 10 mph.

Wed 8/12 94/55 Sunny. Highs in the mid 90s and lows in the mid 50s.

Thu 8/13 91/54 Plenty of sun. Highs in the low 90s and lows in the low 50s.

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HEATHER GULA • The Humboldt Sun

Left to right, Wildfire Support Group Firefighter John Falen, Bureau of Land Management Fire Management Officer Paul Petersen, BLM District Manager Gene Seidlitz, WSG founder Jan Schade and WSG Firefighter Mike Whalen were presented with a framed copy of the Nevada Legislative Resolution supporting the group during the Aug. 3 Humboldt County Commission meeting.

New program earning praise

Wildfire Support Group honored for innovative, collaborative efforts

By Heather Gula
The Humboldt Sun

WINNEMUCCA — Humboldt County ranchers have received recognition from the state legislature and local representatives of federal agencies for their innovation in developing a collaborative agreement to help mitigate wildfire danger in the rural communities of Nevada.

During the Aug. 3 Humboldt County Commission meeting, the Wildfire Support Group

(WSG) was presented with a framed copy of Nevada State Legislature Concurrent Resolution 5, outlining the benefits they provide to their local community.

According to the resolution, the employment of such a volunteer base is essential for the rural areas to protect their private and public lands, considering the state of Nevada is listed as one of the states most affected by wildfire. In addition, almost one quarter of the communities in Nevada are ranked as having a high to extreme hazard of wildfire, leaving wildlife habitat, grazing lands, water sheds and scenic resources vulnerable to devastation by fire.

The legislature used the resolution to commend ranchers in Humboldt County for proposing the idea of assisting the BLM Winnemucca Field Office in response to a particularly destructive fire season in 1999.

The initial concept eventually became the Wildfire Support Group, comprised of ranchers in Humboldt County who have been trained in basic wildfire suppression to provide additional resources for initial response to fire.

The resolution recognized that members of the WSG are often first on the scene, providing invaluable assistance and improving the ability of the BLM to locate, read and subdue wildfires in remote areas and save valuable time and resources for state and federal agencies. In addition, local government is able to use their personnel and resources more effectively because of the group's efforts.

According to the resolution, the WSG simultaneously benefits ranchers and livestock operations and reduces hazardous fuel loads in the wildland urban

— See HONOR, Page 10 —



JEN ANDERSON • The Humboldt Sun

Local attorney John Doyle talks to members of the Winnemucca City Council during the council's Aug. 4 meeting. Doyle discussed the possibility of a joint meeting for the purpose of informing the public about details related to the Jungo Landfill project. City Attorney Kent Maher is shown in the background.

Local attorney seeks public meeting to discuss landfill

By Jen Anderson
The Humboldt Sun

WINNEMUCCA — Local attorney John Doyle is trying to rally public officials into holding a joint meeting for the purpose of informing the public about details related to the Jungo Landfill project.

He went before members of the Winnemucca City Council during their meeting Aug. 4 to discuss his concerns during the public comment portion of the meeting. Since the subject was not agendized, no action could be taken. Council member Paige Brooks was not at the meeting.

He said he would like officials to help dispel some of the rumors floating around the community, but would also like them to investigate more thoroughly the facts related to the project to find out just how detrimental the project could be for the community if it is allowed to proceed.

"I feel it is an essential func-

tion of the public government to protect the public welfare," he said. "I think that this landfill within a 25-mile distance of Winnemucca is certainly not in the best public interest of our community. My focus is that if the facts warrant it, some action be taken to stop this."

Doyle had attended the Humboldt County Commission meeting the day before and said he spoke out against the landfill in front of project officials.

Mayor Di An Putnam also attended the commission meeting and agreed with Doyle that facts needed to be gathered and the issue investigated more thoroughly by local government officials so they are better able to inform the public on what is going on.

"I do believe that since Winnemucca has the majority of the population in Humboldt County ... it is a concern for all of us," she said. "I think that it is

— See LANDFILL, Page Two —

Local officials discuss property owner fraud alert

California firm luring taxpayers

By Phillip Gomez
The Humboldt Sun

WINNEMUCCA — Two brothers running a business in southern California, Arizona and Nevada called "a property tax reassessment and adjustment service" — unlicensed with any state tax board of appraisal in those states — are using official-looking documents to allegedly fool property owners into thinking they can substantially reduce their property taxes for a \$189 fee.

Nevada Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto last week issued a consumer advisory regarding a mass mailer advertising the company as the "Property Tax Review Board." The board claims in its letter — relying on widespread awareness of news out of Las Vegas and California that hundreds of foreclosures have lowered assessed valuations there — that recipients can save hundreds of dollars on their property taxes. But the information in the letter is based on California law, not Nevada law, which put a



PHILLIP GOMEZ • The Humboldt Sun

Humboldt County Treasurer Gina Rackley (left) and Assessor Jeff Johnson on Friday discuss a letter scam being visited upon Nevada property owners and about which the state attorney general has come out with a warning: The so-called Property Tax Review Board fraudulently claims it can lower homeowners' property taxes for \$189 cash up-front.

cap on property taxes in 2005 using the 2004-05 tax year for its baseline valuations.

"Therefore, the savings the Property Tax Review Board promises are based on faulty data and a Nevada property owner

will probably see no savings," said the attorney general. Furthermore, Cortez Masto said, "If Nevada property owners have questions about the calculation of their property taxes, the local county assessors will provide

assistance free of charge. There is no need to pay a third party a \$189 fee for this information."

On May 12, 2009, California Attorney General Edmond G. Brown Jr. filed suit against the two brothers, Michael and Sean

McConville and their business, which the Nevada secretary of state has on file as a "foreign corporation" with Michael McConville as the only named officer, holding positions as president, treasurer, secretary and director, and with no mention of his brother. Sean McConville, according to the Ventura County district attorney's office, has been charged with 20 felony counts for criminal conduct in connection with the property tax readjustment scheme there.

According to Brown's lawsuit, "the McConville brothers billed tens of thousands of homeowners throughout California nearly \$200 each for property tax reassessment services that were almost never performed and are available free of charge from local tax assessors. Few, if any, of the assessment appeals were completed," the lawsuit alleges.

The reliability report of the Better Business Bureau regarding the Property Tax Review Board gave no rating to the company, because it is not a BBB accredited business, and confirmed that PTRB did not hold proper licensing credentials with the Arizona Board of Appraisal.

As with California and — See SCAM, Page Two —

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Jim's Chevron	Uptown Market
Khoury's Market	Winnemucca Gas I
Maverick (Fairgrounds)	Winnemucca Gas II
Maverick (Boulevard)	Winnemucca RV Park

The Humboldt Sun

Sign up now for Conservation Stewardship Program

Special to the Sun

RENO — Bruce Petersen, state conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Nevada, has announced the sign-up for the new Conservation Stewardship Program began on Aug. 10.

CSP is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones on their operations.

According to Petersen, eligible applicants may include individual landowners, legal entities and Indian tribes.

Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, rangeland and non-industrial private forestland.

The program will be offered to producers through continuous sign-ups, but applications must be submitted by Sept. 30 to be considered for funding in the first ranking period.

Potential participants should

Water authority chief wants vote on pipeline

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority wants a vote on plans to suck some water from the Snake Valley and send it to Las Vegas.

Pat Mulroy said Thursday she wants the vote held later this month to show there is still desire to move forward with the project. "The level of noise has reached the point that we have to begin to push back," Mulroy said. "They're trying to create an erosion of will to build the project. It becomes death by a thousand cuts."

The Snake Valley aquifer stretches across Nevada and

Utah. Plans have called for eventually delivering rural groundwater to the Las Vegas Valley through a pipeline that could stretch more than 300 miles and cost up to \$3.5 billion.

The pipeline could supply enough water for almost 270,000 homes. Authority board members on Aug. 20 will vote on whether the agency should keep seeking federal permits and environmental clearances for the pipelines network. The seven-member board includes three county commissioners and one council member each from Las Vegas, Henderson, North Las Vegas and Boulder City.

Environmentalists have voiced concerns the project could dry up the valley around Great Basin National Park and potentially send dust storms toward Utah's Wasatch Front.

The Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada said it has collected 16,000 signatures in the last month from southern Nevada residents who don't want the pipeline. Lounce Rake, a member of the alliance, said the water authority has changed the rationale for the pipeline, first saying water was needed for growth and now saying it's needed to protect the community from drought.

contact Rod Dahl, programs specialist, at (775) 857-8500, ext. 146, for assistance.

Producers can also use a self-screening checklist to first determine whether the new program is suitable for them or their opera-

tion. It is available on the NRCS Web site at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/new_csp/. More information about CSP, including eligibility requirements, is also available on the Web site.

USDA is finalizing the program's policies and procedures.

The CSP interim final rule, published in the Federal Register, is open for public comment through Sept. 28.

SCAM

(Cont. from Page One)

Nevada, no fee is required to file a property valuation appeal with county treasurer or assessor offices in Arizona. And as with the state of Nevada, Arizona law does not allow changes to be made in property valuations for tax purposes after the posted appeals process has formally ended, according to that state's attorney general — something PTRB does not mention in its letter solicitations.

"The appeals process is way gone (for Nevadans)," said Humboldt County Assessor Jeff Johnson. Jan 15 was the deadline for filing for the ensuing tax year. "They can't appeal 2009-10 values; it's too late," he said.

"They're actually a legitimate business," said Humboldt County Treasurer Gina Rackley, adding that PTRB has been in business for a little over one month. Rackley herself got a customized solicitation letter in the mail, she said, saying she could save \$805.96 in her property taxes. She called the company,

informing the person on the other end who she was and asked questions about the offer. "They're saying the Assessor's Office made mistakes," she said. "I take offense with that. ... We're not seeing the huge reductions that they saw in Las Vegas driven by foreclosures. We have seen some foreclosures, but not anything like Washoe and Clark counties. ... Just because it's raining in Phoenix doesn't mean it's raining in Winnemucca. Gold mining has kept us pretty stable."

Rackley said it had been nine years or so since Humboldt County has had to redraw property value assessments due to mining shutdowns, a decline in gold prices and some home foreclosures.

PTRB says in the letter that takers of the offer will get a refund of the \$189 if the company "is unable to prepare and submit an application to the county for property tax reduction," carefully avoiding saying that a refund would come if no reduction is warranted.

But since the service is based

on market-value assumptions, it's irrelevant to Nevada property owners. "We can't be above market value," Rackley said in reference to a theoretical tax assessment under Nevada law. "If we were, we'd have to recheck it, by law." Only the land is affected by market values, she said.

The "2009 Property Tax Reduction Form" sent out by the company is taken from the Humboldt County Web site, with the Property Tax Review Board listed as a "regional processing center" in smaller letters with a Las Vegas address. It contains a property description and profile of the current assessment for each individual recipient. In Rackley's particular case, the form states in bold letters: "Our records show an Over-Assessed Value of \$76,758. ... If necessary, PTRB will attend a hearing on your behalf to actively advocate your right as a homeowner to pay the correct amount of property tax."

"That's the scary part," said Rackley. "It looks really official." The county's Web site

allows anyone's property to be researched by name, she said. "Everything is available on the Web page, which has been great when you want to use it in a constructive way."

Close to 20 recipients of the letter personally visited Rackley's office last week, she said, including a local real estate agent who was taken in by it.

When she called PTRB back after her initial call for information, Rackley said she asked for the company appraiser's name and identification number. At first she was told that information couldn't be given out, and when she pressed the issue of whether it couldn't, or wouldn't be provided, "They hung up on me," she said. "They have to be a licensed appraiser."

"It's one of the gems of living in a small community (that anyone with a question about their assessment) can probably speak to the person (at the Treasurer's or Assessor's offices) who assessed their (property's) value," she said.

LANDFILL

(Cont. from Page One)

important that as a government body, that we research all aspects of it and be able to answer to our constituents what we find out."

Council member Rich Stone noted that he's heard a lot of false information circulating in the community, including the belief that California as a state and political body is responsible for driving the project.

"It's not the state of California, it's a private company," he said, adding that the fact that it is that particular state seems to turn people off even more. "Is it just

because it is from California or is it because it is a landfill?"

Council member Patty Herzog agreed.

"If it was Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, would we have the same gut reaction?" she asked.

Doyle agreed that he does not agree with the groups that are politicizing the issue by claiming Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., is behind the project.

"I personally take offense at that because this is not a republican or democratic or liberal or conservative issue," Doyle said. "It's a question of whether it's right or wrong. Whether it's garbage from California or Reno or wherever, I'm personally opposed to it."

Herzog agreed with disseminating accurate information to the public, but urged her constituents to research their options prior to a joint meeting so they may take action if possible.

Putnam agreed, noting that it's important for officials to not only

learn the specifics of the project, but to recognize alternatives as well.

"I would hate to see us stop it and they go one mile down the road and put it in Pershing County," she said. "It would have the same effect, and (we) would have no control and none of the income from it. I think we need to look at all matters. For them to just move it a mile down the road does not change anything."

Later, during the council comment period at the end of the meeting, member Joyce Sheen said that she had also attended the commission meeting the day before and was disheartened by the mocking, ridiculing tone of the audience toward the landfill officials.

"If we have a public hearing, I think that we would need to do some real serious research to have answers for some of those things, not that it would make any difference if the mood of the crowd is like it was yesterday,"

she said. "The beef I had about yesterday's meeting was the tone of the people; the mocking, the calling them basically liars. There were a couple of speakers that I had formerly had a little respect for and lost it yesterday because they threw out innuendo without any basis whatsoever."

City Attorney Kent Maher said he continues to be amazed by people who act like the landfill project has been proceeding under a cover of secrecy, as if it has not been on the publicly posted agendas of several different governing bodies. "I don't know how you become informed unless you just pay attention," he said. "(The information) was all out there."

Sheen said she fully supports investigating the project and being cautious, but urged people to let go of the rumors and focus on the facts.

"It is something we need to approach very, very carefully because bad things have happened in the past with dump sites, but at the same time, the difference is that we have the pot-stirrers out there who are throwing out (untrue rumors)," she said. "Landfills are not toxic-dump sites. They are regulated by six different organizations and they will have to meet tons of standards. They're a legitimate company. We can try to help the public see that not all the things they are being told are true."

Herzog said she is becoming weary of the attitude of some people in the community.

"It wasn't a waste generator like I am, then maybe I could sit on some sanctimonious pedestal and look down on everybody and say 'well take care of your own garbage.' We've got garbage — it's an issue," she said. "Those people who address big problems are big beneficiaries. Those that bury their heads in the sand and choose not to look at problems ... they're the ones that are going to miss the boat. We have an opportunity here to look at the issue and be problem solvers."

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