

Black powder shoot is a family affair

Organizers prepare to welcome participants new and old

By Traci Street
Of the Tobacco Valley News

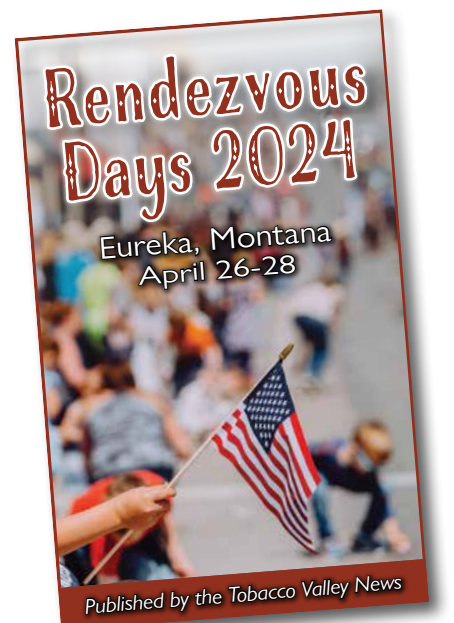
The Tobacco Valley Muzzleloaders will be hosting the David Thompson Black Powder Shoot during Rendezvous again this year, with activities taking place all three days of the event. Long time member Jerome Johnson said

the number of active members locally has dwindled over time. Johnson said he's been involved for a little over 20 years now. "Leigh Erickson introduced me to it and I went and shot with them one day, and it didn't take much to get the bug," he said. There used to be upwards of 30 people in the club, he said, but now there are only about 12 to 15 members.

Despite the lower numbers, Johnson said they usually have an average of about 75 shooters who show up for the events. He said they are often from all over the place, including Kalispell, Libby and Canada.

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INSIDE



EASTER EGG HUNT



Children dash after eggs on the LCHS football field in Eureka at the March 31 Easter Egg hunt. Patrick Broom photo.

Commission votes in cost of living raises for elected officials

By Rebecca Nelson
Of the Tobacco Valley News

On March 6, county commissioners unanimously approved a 1.5 percent cost of living raise to base pay for county elected officials. The raise is effective July 1, 2024.

Positions and their corresponding new salaries included in resolution 2024-11 are clerk and recorder, clerk of court, county attorney, county treasurer, and county superintendent of schools all at \$63,166.43. The county attorney also receives state pay. County commissioners and sheriff will be paid \$65,166.43. The county coroner will earn \$18,949.93 (set at 30 percent of Clerk and Recorder's salary), and the deputy county coroner will earn \$5,684.98 (set at 30 percent of County Coroner's salary).

In the separate resolution 2024-12, commissioners raised the justice of the peace salary to \$65,166.43.

At a Lincoln County compensation committee meeting on Feb. 1, administrative assistant Jennifer Brown distributed Consumer Price Index (CPI) data indicating inflation was up 3.6 percent over the past year.

Eureka man arrested, accused of spate of property crimes

By Traci Street
Of the Tobacco Valley News

Timothy John Lee, 41, of Eureka, was arrested on March 21 following a spree of vehicle thefts and burglaries reported around the valley.

Lee made an initial appearance before Judge Sheffield on March 28, where he was charged with three counts of felony burglary, felony theft, three counts of theft of a light vehicle, felony theft of property exceeding \$5,000, and felony tampering with or fabricating physical evidence.

Lee was also charged with three counts of misdemeanor criminal trespass, two counts of misdemeanor theft, unauthorized control over property, two counts of misdemeanor criminal mischief, and misdemeanor unau-

thorized use of a motor vehicle. Bond was set at \$150,000.

According to documents from Justice Court, charges were pending in District Court. As of press time, Lee had not been arraigned nor entered a plea on any charges.

Lee was arrested on a warrant for probation violation, as he was already on probation out of Flathead County.

Beginning in early March and spanning over a three week period, law enforcement agencies in the area began receiving reports of break-ins and stolen property, according to court documents.

On the morning of March 3, dispatch received a report of a burglary on Pomeroy Trail. The caretaker of the property called authorities after noticing tire tracks lead-

ing into the residence, as well as shoe prints that didn't belong to him or his son who was with him. The responding officer discovered the internet and power to the residence had been cut. During a walk through, the caretaker noted that drawers and doors inside

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Race to represent House District 2 at state legislature draws two candidates

By Rebecca Nelson
Of the Tobacco Valley News

Two candidates have filed to represent the Tobacco Valley in the Montana House of Representatives.

Republican incumbent Neil Duram seeks re-election to his final term under term limit rules. He is challenged by Democrat Dakota Adams for the House District 2 seat.

Dakota Adams says he's running for two reasons: his disappointment with the Republican party - in particular the Montana super majority Republican legislature's last session, and to advocate for "more people to step up and contest races everywhere."

For Adams, the biggest issue is property taxes. "That was, in my opinion, a policy choice, because it's not believable to me that that happened just because they were asleep at the wheel," he says.

Due to the housing crisis, young people, increasingly, cannot afford to live and build a life here, Adams says, which is a "choke point that is completely strangling the potential of the state economy."

Adams says Montana should be spending tax windfalls on a "firm foundation of investment in skills, livelihood, local and especially local small businesses, so that there is lasting benefit that outlives the speculator bubble."

"We're in the situation where our massive budget surplus was squandered on giving enormous tax breaks to the wealthiest tax brackets and corporations to try to lure more elites to move to Montana, as if that were a good investment in the future of the state," Adams says. The legislature took no action to ensure ordinary Montana homeowners were protected from the "enormous speculator-driven spike in housing prices on their property tax valuations." Adams called the rebate "very minor."

The solution, he says, would have been to "put a freeze on the valuation change for single family homes and primary residences for working and middle class people, so that the people who do the work to run the

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EAST GLACIER



Bright blue skies gleam beyond freshly snow-capped peaks between East Glacier and Marias Pass on March 30. Nikki Meyer photo.

FOR THE RECORD

The Tobacco Valley News

Read by: Dale & Linda Baldwin

CANADIAN EXCHANGE

\$1 USD = \$1.36 CAD

Bank of Canada
Tuesday, April 2

LIBBY DAM

Date: Tuesday, April 2
Level: 2,415.89 feet
Last year: 2,402.2 feet

Full pool: 2,459 feet

Inflow: 4,200 cfs

Outflow: 4,000 cfs

River Temp: NA°

INSIDE

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Powder

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Directly after the parade on April 27, around 2 p.m., Johnson said they will hold a “pee wee shoot” to introduce kids to black powder shooting.

Johnson said they usually get anywhere from 12 to 15 kids who show up with their parents to learn about and have a go at the sport of black powder shooting. There will be a target for the kids to shoot at. The group offers ear and eye protection - as well as a chance at a prize. It's all supervised, he said.

Eureka Chief of Police Neil Duram heads up the safety in-

struction and demonstrates the loading procedure, Johnson said, while also controlling the firearm up until it's the kid's turn to shoot. “It's about as safety controlled as you can get,” he said.

Johnson said that since Montana Fish and Wildlife began the muzzleloader heritage hunting season in 2022, he hopes there will be an increased interest in the sport. “Surprisingly, with the new muzzleloader season in the fall, there's been a huge amount of interest for people to want to use it during the hunting season,” he said.

Jerome's son, Samuel Johnson, is 24, and has been shooting with his dad for almost 20 years.

“I'm about one of the last of the younger guys,” he said. Samuel said he always loved the Rendezvous Black Powder shoots as a kid because he was fascinated with the mountain man lifestyle. He said now, as an adult, he just likes to get outdoors, throw his phone down and enjoy seeing all the people that come to compete, sell, or trade things, just like back in the times of the real Rendezvous. Samuel enjoys imagining what it was like during those times. “I like to take a step back and see things from their view,” he said.

When he was a kid, Samuel said, the black powder shoots were much larger than they are

these days. He said he feels like people don't realize the black powder shoot is not only open to the public to come and watch, but also to participate. He encouraged anyone who might be interested to come, and said many of the members would be more than willing to teach people what black powder shooting is about, and even let people try it out. It's his hope that the new heritage hunting season in Montana will help spark more interest.

Samuel said he has seen the club slow down over the years, as many of the members like his father are getting older and have less energy to put on the shoot. He and his brother in law are in-

involved in it, and he hopes to encourage his 3-year-old nephew to try it out when he is old enough.

One of Samuel's favorite memories as a kid was the candy cannon. “We fill up a cannon with candy and launch it 40 to 60 feet into the air,” he said. He also remembers when his dad and other members would “rob the bars” downtown, wearing their buckskins and brandishing their unloaded black powder guns, using only black powder and toilet paper down the barrel. They would then give their spoils to charity. “Me and my father have always had great memories and bonding over it, for sure,” he said.

House

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economy of the state aren't getting run out of the state by property tax increases.”

Going forward, he says the tax breaks, especially for the billionaire tax bracket and out-of-state corporations, need to be reset, and write-offs for things like work trucks need to become easier to help small business owners and self-employed people.

Adams sees effects of the Montana land boom as putting strain on infrastructure. As an example, “Eureka can't pay for its own basic infrastructure,” he says. “Montana land is booming, and according to the raw numbers, the state economy is going great. But what's happening is instead of everyone benefiting from that, ordinary people feel very much that they're being run over and pushed out. They're being drowned by the rising tide, and it's not lifting everybody's boats.”

Adams wants to reverse “the property tax debacle.” An additional solution he's heard floated is a sales tax on luxury goods with an end-of-year refund for people in middle and lower tax brackets. Though not ideal, “that is one possible solution for funding essential services and beginning to get a handle on the housing crisis in general.”

Adams also believes Republicans have been engaged in a culture war, “trying to erode everyone's civil liberties by targeting marginalized people,” he says. “I would like to be in the legislature as an attack dog on behalf of ordinary working people in this state.”

Responding to Montana dropping thousands of Medicaid enrollees after a redetermination period,

Adams says believes in expanding Medicaid. The cap has not adjusted for the cost of living, he says. “I think our state government is ideologically opposed to all of those programs existing at all,” he added. “I can see people who are very paranoid about federal funding coming with strings attached, but we rely on federal funding with strings attached for our entire highway system as it is right now. And that's not a good enough excuse when people's well-being is on the line.”

He believes his unique background may give him an edge in connecting with people. Adams is the son of Stewart Rhodes, who founded the far-right anti government militia group Oath Keepers. Adams says that he witnessed his father “leverage people's fear and uncertainty about the future.” In a way, his upbringing helped Adams see issues such as “the failure of this country to adequately look after its veterans and to correct the mistakes of the past and safeguard everyone's constitutional rights,” he said. “Those are some of the most fundamental problems that have created room for extremists and grifters like Stewart to make headway and gain followings.”

Though he relates to some of the same issues, Adams takes a different approach. While he doesn't feel personal responsibility to fix all the damage Rhodes created, Adams says that he's now more aware of those vulnerabilities and the “deeper problems that need to be fixed.”

Adams is a firefighter for the TFS Volunteer Fire Department and attends FVCC part time, pursuing a political science degree,



DAKOTA ADAMS

while he works full time in construction.

He is interested in being a voice for younger people. “They have almost given up on the idea of being represented by the politicians who are there to represent them. It was almost just a foregone conclusion that everyone in politics is going to be three generations older than them,” he says. “If I want to try to shake more young voters out of apathy, and get them involved, then stepping up and doing everything that I can do personally, is a great way forward on that.”

Republican incumbent Neil Duram is running for a final term as house representative, after which he'll be term-limited out.

Retired from the Montana Highway Patrol and now serving as Eureka's Chief of Police, Duram says he's still learning in his role at the legislature. “Each session, you learn a little bit more,” he says. “And so you're kind of committed, I think, to keep running until you're termed out.”

More than anything, Duram is “hoping to make Montana a good place for our kids and grandkids,” he says.

Duram's emphasis has been public safety. “That



NEIL DURAM

has been kind of my main drive,” he says. “That's really the relevance that I bring to the legislature is just my experience with law enforcement, and helping to find solutions that are effective.”

Duram says he's been satisfied with how the state budget is run. While he's been in the legislature Montana has “underestimated the money that comes in taxes each time,” he says. “And so we end up with a surplus, which is always easier to deal with than a deficit.” Recent tax rebates were “just a way of dealing with the excess money that Montana gathered,” he says.

Duram believes most people want the government to leave them alone, he says. “We really don't care what's going on inside the machine,” he says. “Most of us don't really care about all the details that happened in the middle to make that an end product.”

On the complexity of government, Duram says, “We can find ourselves wrapped around the axle trying to understand everything.” Often, that “manufactured complexity” is designed to keep fewer people in the decision-making process, to keep fewer “cooks in the kitchen,” he says. It's one part of government he's not

too fond of. “That's not my objective,” he says.

Property taxes, he says, are one example where things have become very complex. Duram says he's not sure why there's been such a large tax hike for residential taxpayers.

“The hard part is we have to all acknowledge that the government, in particular a local government, city, and county, is funded primarily through that property tax,” Duram says. “There's a lot of ideas and other ways about doing that. But in the end, I'm confident no matter what system we do, each of us would still carry about the same tax burden.”

If his taxes go up because other categories, such as agriculture, get a break, Duram believes that might be appropriate. “They just don't draw on the services of the county roads, the sheriff, search and rescue, and the schools in the same way that residential property does,” he says. “Given all those other county roads and all that, I have to ask myself, well, who should carry that tax burden if it's not me?” Duram again points to the tax rebates as a way the legislature has attempted to address the issue for residential property owners.

When it comes to health care, Duram believes each person should shoulder their own burden. “I think it's important that everybody has access to medical services. Depending on how it gets paid for, that's where it gets complicated,” he says. “The average working class family chooses not to afford to go to the doctor just because they may do without.” Duram suggests that even if medical care stretches the budget, people should look to make payment plans and

agreements with hospitals.

Duram says hospitals lobby hard for Medicaid expansion because they benefit from the \$7 to \$1 federal match. “That's where the money goes,” he says. “It's the hospitals that absorb those bills.” While Duram says he's “not outright against Medicaid,” it's important to him that “I pay my medical bill or I pay my traffic bill or I pay my property tax and not push that on to other taxpayers.”

When asked to consider his legislative accomplishments, Duram says, “Everything that's done in the legislature is a team project.” Even bills started by an individual come down to the work of committees. That said, he brought a school bus bill that mandated schools to have an extra crossing arm. “That's part of my whole life has been about preventing accidents and mishaps,” he says.

Early in his government career he helped facilitate negotiations between Interbel and Burlington Northern so the co-op could access Burlington's rail lines for easements for wireless communications, Duram said. It started off as a bill that died, but “the negotiations between the two agencies were very effective,” he says.

With a strong dedication to service, Duram plans to continue part time as Chief of Police as long as he's needed. He also is active as an EMT. “We need more people to be EMTs because there's always an emergency,” he says. “Everyone needs to look around and see what they can do in our community.”

Duram explains his overall philosophy on government: “We all want the same thing,” he says. “We want life good for our grandchildren, and our children. And we often have differences on how best to get there.”

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Saturday, April 13 starting at 9 am

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