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Effort underway to "Raise the Flag" in honor of vet

By Traci Street
Of the Tobacco Valley News

A Eureka man has taken his vision of raising a large American flag on the hill behind the rodeo grounds and is making it a reality.

Nate Duram said he has driven into town for a number of years, and would always

envision a large flag flying over the rodeo grounds. "I just wanted to put a flagpole up because I've been driving by for a decade," he said. He could picture it in his head, he said, waving in the breeze, welcoming visitors and reminding residents young and old why we live in the "greatest country in the world," he said. "I mean, it's just, it's beautiful in my head and I know it's gonna be

more beautiful in reality."

Duram said the potential price tag for the project runs about \$22,000, and through talking to people in the community and securing donations, the project has already raised close to \$17,000. Since the original inception of the idea, costs have gone up, he said. Businesses in town have offered to donate labor to help install the concrete for

the flagpole.

Duram is renewing his fund-raising efforts in honor of Tom Price, a World War II veteran who died in February at the age of 97.

Duram said he used to go pick Price up and take him to see the large flag that was

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SWEET CHEEKS



A close-up view of a Northern flicker shows off the bird's bright red facial markings and the heart shaped spots on its breast. Patrick Broom photo.

Four candidates file for county commission race

By Rebecca Nelson
Of the Tobacco Valley News

Three candidates are challenging incumbent Eureka commissioner Josh Letcher, making the county commissioner spot a four-way race.

Republican Josh Letcher, who is close to the end of his first six-year term as commissioner, wasn't 100 percent sure he'd run again, but after discussing it with his family and praying, came to the conclusion it's the right path for him.

"I wanted to make sure my life aligned with what God wanted me to do," he said. Letcher said his wife and two teenage sons miss out on time with him due to

early mornings and late evenings the job requires. "My family sacrifices a lot for it," he said. "But after talking with them and praying a lot about it, we just concluded as a family, it was probably within our best interest."

Letcher said he doesn't want the county to miss out on the institutional knowledge he's built over six years serving in the commissioner role. Of the three current county commissioners, he's been in the role the longest. "We were continually turning over management," he said. That has put the commission in reactive mode, according to Letcher.

"When you're always on the defense, it's really hard to work on the offense, and

some of that was from not having enough experience or not having enough of that institutional knowledge," he said. "In the last couple years, I've just learned so much of the history of where we've come from, and so it's easier for me to see where we're going. And I'd just hate to walk away and for the county whole to lose the experience that I've gained."

Letcher said he works well with the other commissioners, and has developed good relationships with commissioners in other counties, as well as some representatives at the state and federal level.

The biggest challenge to progress he sees is managing the budget. "As a county,

we were spoiled on timber dollars for a lot of years," he said. "Over the last 25 years, we just can't rely on the steady source of income from the federal lands."

Excluding state lands and conservation easements, "we can only basically make a living on 9 percent of our landmass. That's hard for services," Letcher said.

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Senators urge USPS to drop plan to move aspects of mail processing to Spokane center

By Katie Fairbanks
Montana Free Press

A U.S. Postal Service review of Missoula's mail-processing facility has sparked local concern about the potential move of some work to Spokane.

Opposition to the proposed transfer, including from Sens. Jon Tester and Steve Daines, drew a response from the USPS seeking to "dispel myths" about the review ahead of a public meeting held March 15.

"There are mistruths and false narratives regarding the improvement and investment the Postal Service has proposed at the Missoula facility," wrote Jeffery A. Adams, USPS vice president of corporate communications, in a letter released last week. "The fear that mail service will be adversely affected is wrong. Most local mail travels out of state, and local-to-local mail will stay within the current two-to-three-day delivery standard."

The review is still underway and no final decisions have been made, Kim Frum, USPS strategic communications specialist, said in an email.

In January, the USPS announced it would evaluate Missoula's Processing and Distribution Center as part of its 10-year Delivering for

America plan, which outlines a complete overhaul of the processing network. The review includes considering whether moving some mail processing from Missoula to Spokane would increase efficiency, according to a press release on Jan. 10.

The USPS expects retail service and acceptance of bulk business mailings at the Missoula facility to stay the same, and changes would not lead to the layoffs of career employees, the release said.

Tester and Daines wrote to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy in February, expressing concerns that moving processing out of Montana would lead to job losses and delivery delays.

"I share the concerns that Montanans have voiced in response to this review and oppose any plans that would reduce workforce, capacity or delivery standards for Montanans," Tester wrote. "I urge you to immediately halt any proposal to move Missoula operations to Spokane and refocus efforts on improving delivery standards in rural America."

"While I appreciate the efforts of the USPS to modernize and improve services, I urge you to maintain existing operations at the Mis-

See USPS, Page 9

School board filing will close on March 28

By Rebecca Nelson
Of the Tobacco Valley News

Candidate filing closes March 28 for school boards. Eureka has three openings, Fortine has two, and Trego has two.

In Eureka, trustees Amy Casazza and Jessica Hickman are finishing out three-year terms. Marcy Butts, representing Trego on the Eureka board, is also finishing a three-year term.

As of press time, none of the three had filed to be candidates for re-election.

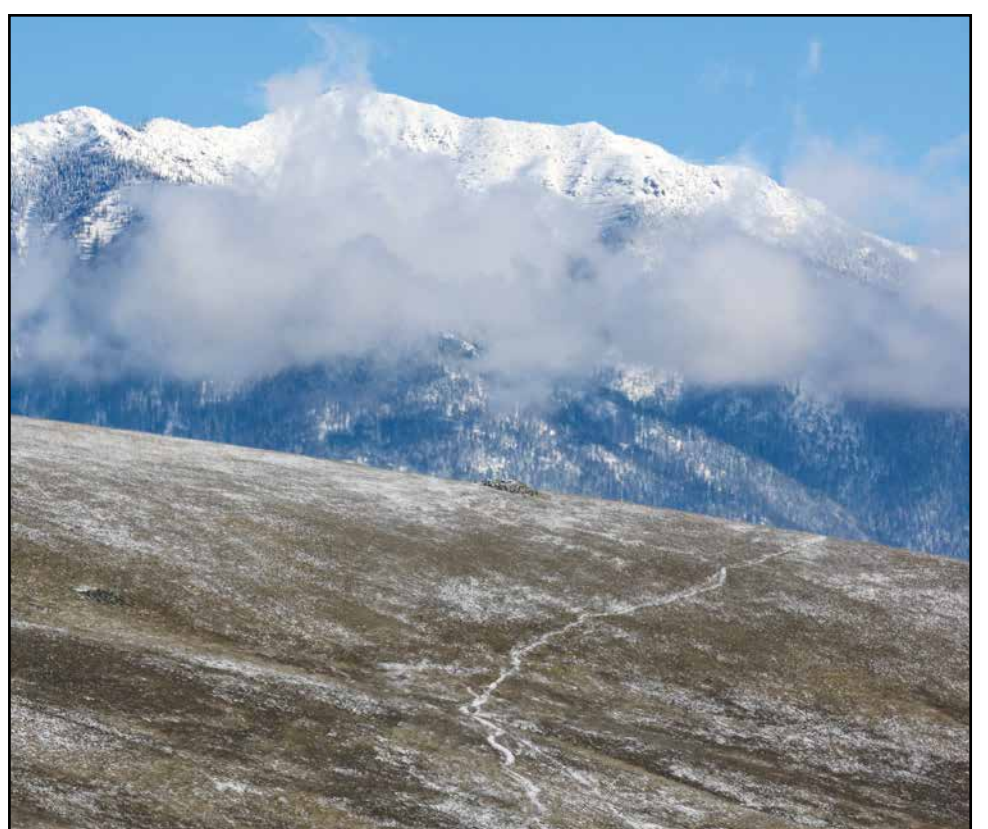
Trego resident Stephanie Vredenberg has filed for the Eureka-Trego seat, and Eureka resident Michael Sage filed for a Eureka seat.

In Fortine, Kevin Talcott, who was appointed in 2023, is finishing out a term, and Alan Erwert is finishing a term. One two-year and one three-year term will open. Neither trustee had filed yet for re-election.

In Trego, one two-year term and one three-year term are open. Trustee Kayla Morris has filed again for the two-year term, and current board president Clara Mae Crawford has filed for the three-year term in Trego.

School election day is May 7, with ballots set to be mailed on April 18, according to a notice from the Lincoln County elections office.

GAME TRAILS



A skiff of snow highlights game trails etched into the glacial hills above Black Lake on a sunny afternoon. Nikki Meyer photo.

FOR THE RECORD

The Tobacco Valley News

Read by:
Peggy Brandon

CANADIAN EXCHANGE

\$1 USD = \$1.35 CAD

Bank of Canada
Monday, March 18

LIBBY DAM

Date: Tuesday, March 19
Level: 2,415.46 feet
Last year: 2,404.7 feet

Full pool: 2,459 feet
Inflow: 3,300 cfs
Outflow: 4,000 cfs
River Temp: NA°

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Candidates

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"Nowadays, we have to find some alternative funding." Just as the creation of a library district will be put to voters, the option of a road district will need to be considered too, he said. Letcher has said that the county needs roads, but it doesn't need libraries. A library district, he said, is "good for the library. But is it really good for all retired citizens?"

Prior to being elected, Letcher ran on his experience on the planning board, the local government review board, and involvement at Forest Service meetings. He was involved with Montanans for Mul-

tipple Use, the Tobacco Valley Rod and Gun Club, and a snowmobile club.

Letcher said lately, along with Senator Mike Cuffe, he's been "highly involved with the Columbia River Basin Treaty."

Letcher emphasized that accomplishments he counts in the last six years were a team effort. He said among other things, he and other elected officials have been able to expand driver services at the Eureka Annex, and Emergency Management has an office there for the first time. Another team effort has been to fix the fairground sewer and water system. "It's been a five year ordeal, but it goes to bid this fall," he said.

Republican Noel Duram said that should he be elected commissioner, he wants to serve the county without a personal agenda. "Lincoln County's been serviced over the last 12 years by commissioners that were good people, but I thought that I could do better," he said. "I think the county deserves better."

Duram said Lincoln County has had commissioners with personal and professional agendas as well as pet projects that might not be good for the county as a whole.



JOSH LETCHER



NOEL DURAM



BRIAN PHILLIPS



DOUG DAVIES

"I don't have an agenda," he said. He considered running 12 years ago, but it didn't fit into his life at the time. Now, the time feels right.

In addition, he offers a different skill set, he said. "I've had a vast array of jobs over my life. I've been in law enforcement, did a lot of conflict resolution where you have to de-escalate situations," he said.

Duram counts relevant experience such as his working within the law for most of his life, experience working in construction and real estate, and an understanding of how subdivisions and budgets work.

Communication skills are important to the job, Duram believes. "I have spent my time trying to resolve things in many ways, and that is a skill set that I bring," he said. In addition to strong in-person communication skills, he processes information well, he said, which he recognizes is a big part of the job - constantly taking in information and educating yourself. "I have a fairly high reading and understanding comprehension skill," he said. "I grasp things very quickly."

Like Letcher, Duram also sees the large public land base as a challenge for the county. "We do have to find a way for that 83 percent of the county to pay for something," he said. Duram said the disappearance of logging mills and the jobs they created has hit Lincoln County's economy hard in the last 15 to 20 years.

Regarding what he'd like to see change in the county, Duram suggests the need to improve services in Eureka. "We have a really great place to live," he said. "I want to keep it going in the right direction. And I think sometimes we've allowed ourselves to fall into complacency." Going from two good clinics down to one good clinic is an example he cites - the retirement community has a growing need for medical attention.

Duram said that he has more time to devote to the job now that he's retired. He's no longer raising kids - his youngest is 26 - and doesn't have grandkids that need his extra time. He believes he has more time to dedicate than other people, and said that for him, it's not about the money.

Duram was raised all over the world in a military family. He moved to Eureka after

high school, moving out of state only for a couple years to attend Washington State University.

"My life has revolved more around community public service than it has around serving myself," he said. It's been a tradition in his family, he said.

Independent candidate Brian Phillips said he would aim to be receptive to the needs of the community in the commissioner role.

He decided to run after a number of people who he respected asked him to consider doing so, he said. He intended to file as non-partisan, but then realized it was required to declare a party affiliation, so chose independent.

A couple years into his retirement from a supervisor position in the Border Patrol, Phillips believes he has acquired transferable skills. "I thought this would be just another way to continue to serve the community and put my problem solving skills to use," he said.

Phillips spent 30 years in law enforcement, as well as some time in the Navy and Navy Reserve. He's also done "tons and tons of leadership training" and all the levels of FEMA emergency management training.

Phillips said, "I don't really have a personal agenda, other than to represent the taxpayers of Lincoln County - North Lincoln County in particular." He spent 10 years as the Border Patrol union president and learned in that role how to listen to diverse interests. "In that 10 years, I spent some time maybe not agreeing with what the membership wanted, but they elected me as their representative, not their dictator," he said. After making his own arguments, he would ultimately go with what the majority of people wanted. "I think we've made a mistake in this country - we call a lot of our elected officials our leaders - and they're not our leaders, they're our representatives."

In the commissioner role, he would try to remain accessible to constituents by setting regular office hours, he said. He's also thought about publishing regular updates, should he be elected, informing the public of goings on of the commission and common public concerns. "Transparency is a word that gets used a lot these days, but I think that it applies here," he said.

Challenges he foresees in

the role include not having a background in local politics, and a knowledge gap when it comes to the needs of other parts of the county, something he'd have to learn, he said.

Phillips grew up in a military family, living all over the world. In 2002 he moved to the Eureka area after northern Border Patrol positions expanded after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Here, he met his wife, whose family has been here since the 1880s, and the two live on Pinkham where they have cows and horses. He enjoys spending time with his grandson.

"The day I drove into town I knew, having lived all over the world, I knew I'd found home and was never leaving," he said.

Phillips's view of politics is that it's "something you do after you've retired from something or you've been successful at something else of your own," he said. "When I first looked into this, I didn't even realize it's a paid position." He added, "I've been done for a couple of years now and just felt that need to continue serving the community."

Democrat Doug Davies believes there's a better path forward for county governance, and he'd like to represent that change.

Born in Missoula, Davies lived in several locations in western Montana, and also lived in Alaska, moving to Eureka, where his sister also lives, at the end of 2017. He's served on the Eureka town council for the past five years.

Davies has not been happy with county leadership. He believes commissioner salaries, which have risen around \$16,000 since 2018 and are now about \$20,000 higher than the county's median income, should be frozen along with other elected officials' pay. Davies recognizes that Montana statute ties sheriff department salaries to commissioner salaries, as Letcher pointed out in a recent meeting, but believes commissioners should be responsible and find a way to take a lesser amount, in light of the current strains on the county budget.

Davies criticizes Letcher for going against the health board recommendation during the pandemic. Letcher went against recommendation because his choice "matched Letcher's philosophy," Davies said. "Denying the science and so forth."

Davies believes the green box issue left residents wanting and should have been handled differently. "A leader leads by building consensus, not by issuing threats," he said. "I'm happy to see that they have approved the repairs or the upgrades to the dumps. And in large part that's based on grants that the health department got."

He believes the county has been fiscally irresponsible. In addition to supporting both a library and a road district, he thinks that pursuing more grants is one of the ways to address the county's budget crisis, and that hiring a grant writer for the county should accompany a general hiring freeze. He does not think raising taxes is a good solution, and would advocate for limiting capital expenditures and freezing elected officials' salaries.

Other things Davies would like to see change in the county include more opportunities for job training for young folks, more attention to affordable housing, and more options for elderly residents seeking retirement communities. He has ideas about creating recreational opportunities using our natural resources to generate income and jobs for the county.

Davies has degrees in accounting and industrial management with an operations emphasis. He retired as a chief engineer. During his last five years, he worked as a staff engineer for the company that oversaw the oil spill response equipment in Prince William Sound in Alaska. "Through that I had very regular contact with regulatory authorities at all levels," he says.

Prior to that, he worked for years as a consultant in the maritime industry, where he contracted with the Navy and private industry. "I've got a really broad base in researching and interpreting regulations," he said.

On why he loves the community, he says, "I've never been so impressed by a group of people as I have been by the people I've met here in Lincoln County. Even where political philosophies differ. If somebody needs a hand, they get it. And that is unique - that doesn't happen very often anywhere in the United States. It's a very special thing."

St. Michael & All Angels Church

Worship at
10:30 on Sundays

All Are Welcome.
No Exceptions.

FREE SOUP CAFÉ

Thursdays
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
at the corner of
First Ave. & Third St.
Eureka, Montana



TFS COMMUNITY HALL ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

FRIDAY MARCH 29 AT 6PM
AT THE COMMUNITY HALL

ELECTION OF THREE BOARD POSITIONS
A SUMMARY OF THE PAST YEARS ACTIONS
AND A DISCUSSION ON PLANS FOR 2024

WWW.THEHALLTFS.COM

PET OF THE WEEK



ANGEL

Angel is a 1-year-old husky mix girl who is good with kids and other dogs. She will make a wonderful new family member!

Tobacco Valley
Animal Shelter
406-889-5457

tobaccovalleyanimalshelter@gmail.com

FILTER SALES EVENT

Save up to 40% on
all NAPA Gold® Filters

MARCH 23rd-30th

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