



The Longest Night clothing and supply distribution for Helena's homeless fills Women's Park on Saturday, the day of the Winter Solstice. Men and women gathered at the park to collect donated sleeping bags, backpacks, blankets, boots, socks, gloves and more to help them survive the upcoming winter months.

SOLSTICE SOLACE

Donations of winter gear, supplies abound at Longest Night observance for homeless

Story and photos
by JULIE BAUGHMAN
Independent Record

Despite the cold, cloudy weather, men and women flocked to Women's Park early Saturday morning for the 15th annual Longest Night stand-down for the homeless.

In addition to a box truck full of supplies from the Good Samaritan Thrift Store, folding tables and a truck bed were piled high with clothing, boots, gloves and blankets donated to the event by Helena residents.

Mike Hankins, the lieutenant governor's liaison to homeless veterans, has been involved with the annual event — held each year on the winter solstice in recognition of the fact that cold, dark winter nights present significant threats to the well-being of the less fortunate — since its start in 1998.

He said the event is designed as a way for those who are homeless or less fortunate to stock up on the proper gear and supplies necessary for surviving



Lonnie Tucker, 59, attends the Longest Night distribution Saturday looking to stock up on winter gear. He says he lives on disability and Social Security checks and does not have any extra income to purchase proper clothing for the cold weather.

winter, at no cost to them.

"This is done in memory of those homeless veterans and citizens alike who have died," Hankins said.

This year, because the Veter-

ans Administration in New Jersey which usually provides many surplus supplies to the event was unable to do so, Hankins spent the first weeks of December scrambling to try and collect

goods.

He reached out to the community via local media outlets to advertise the event and ask for donations, and the result, he said, was "unbelievable."

"We have never asked the community like this before, and now we have enough stuff for another two give-aways," Hankins said.

In previous years, Hankins said he had to turn the homeless away after running out of supplies. But this year, even after more than 30 people had passed through the stations of items, the tables were still overflowing with donations.

Community members pulled into the park, sporadically refilling piles of blankets, sleeping bags and jackets with donations from their own homes.

For those who came to shop, the surplus of donations was much appreciated.

"It's like Christmas," said 50-year-old John Turck as he

More HOMELESS, page 8A

Sting aimed at sexual predators results in 7 arrests

Missoula | 6 men, 1 woman answer ad prostituting girl

By KATHRYN HAAKE
Missoulian

MISSOULA — A sting operation targeting sexual predators of children led to the arrest of six men and one woman, all of whom appeared in Missoula County Justice Court on Friday facing felony child sex abuse charges.

The roundup of the seven alleged sexual predators — including one couple — was the result of a two-day sting in which members of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and several law enforcement agencies posted advertisements on the websites Craigslist and Backpage, posing as an adult female willing to prostitute a 12-year-old female relative.

The sting was a pre-emptive measure to target sexual predators in the community and proactively keep children safe, law enforcement officers involved in the operation said Friday afternoon at a news conference.

"I would like to speak to the men who believe it's all right to victimize children," Missoula County Sheriff's Capt. Mike Dominick said. "I would like to promise them three things: We will find you, we will arrest you and we will lock you away for as long as the law will allow."

The officers assured members of the media no children were involved in the operation and they would continue to use such stings in the future.

According to the affidavits filed by Assistant Chief Deputy Missoula County Attorney Jason Marks, all of the defendants were arrested after responding to the advertisements and driving to an address given to them by the undercover detectives posing as the girl's adult relative.

Matthew Steven Keith, 22, appeared in Justice Court on Friday facing a sexual abuse of children charge.

According to the affidavit,

More STING, page 8A

Weinstein to lead 20th Air Force

Malmstrom | New commander vows to restore public trust in ICBM program

By TREVOR BROWN
Wyoming Tribune-Eagle

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (MCT) — The new commander of the nation's land-based nuclear weapons arsenal says he plans to restore public confidence in the embattled missile force.

"One thing you'll see is that 99.99 percent of the time people are doing a really good job," said Maj. Gen. Jack Weinstein. "I think what we need to do is step up, do our job every day, take care of the airmen, and things will just fix itself."

Weinstein officially took charge of the 20th Air Force and Task Force 214 during an assumption of command cere-

More ICBM, page 9A

Butte boy dares to lick wrought-iron fence on frigid morning with predictable results

Neighbor to the rescue | Stunt recalls iconic scene in 'A Christmas Story' film

By RENATA BIRKENBUEL
Montana Standard

BUTTE — Did anyone "triple-dog dare" him to stick his tongue on an icy wrought-iron fence?

No one knows for sure — and no one's talking — but an unnamed little boy who dared to touch his tongue on a fence Thursday may never speak of it again.

The predicament evoked shades of the tongue-stuck-on-a-pole scene from "A Christmas Story," the much-beloved, kick-in-the-pants retro holiday movie (1983) that reminds us of real-life kid shenanigans that remain slapstick funny.

A Kennedy Elementary School boy found



In a famous scene from the 1983 film 'A Christmas Story,' Flick's tongue freezes to a flagpole while Ralphie looks on. A similar incident occurred in Butte Thursday, when a boy froze his tongue to a wrought iron fence. He wasn't hurt.

himself in the same jam Thursday, an adult neighbor rescued him from the tight spot. The boy and two female school chums had been walking to school, heading east down the hill when Wally Butt, who lives at 1223 W. Granite St., was roused from bed by

surprise knocks on the door sometime between 7:30 and 8 a.m.

Expecting instead to catch a few extra winks while his wife was away at work, Butt described how events unfolded:

"I hear our dogs give a couple of barks," he recalled. "I hear a knock on the door. After donning some pants, I venture to our front door and see a couple of young kids walking away from the door."

At first he thought the kids were unexpected drop-offs for his wife's at-home day care business. But the girls said no.

"These two little girls said they needed a glass of warm water 'cause their friend got his tongue stuck to our neighbor's wrought-iron fence," wrote Butt in a first-hand account to The Montana Standard. "I swear, I'm not making this up. I grab a jacket and step into my slippers, grab a glass of warm water and yes, my cell phone so I can

More TONGUE, page 7A

MT expert: Pyroterrorism is real threat, but unlikely cause of Colo. wildfires

By GARRISON WELLS
The (Colorado Springs, Colo.) Gazette

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (MCT) — Experts are putting a damper on rumors — spreading like wildfire on the Internet — that the blazes in Waldo Canyon and Black Forest were set by terrorists.

Still, they say, the threat of pyroterrorism is not something that can be ignored.

"The potential is always there for pyroterrorism," said Dick Mangan, owner of Blackbull Wildlife Services in Missoula, Mont. "It doesn't have to be foreign. It

could be domestic, as well."

Mangan, former president of the International Association of Wildland Fire who retired from the U.S. Forest Service as the Fire and Aviation Program Leader at the Missoula Technology Development Center, downplayed pyroterrorism as the cause behind the recent spate of wildfires in Colorado.

"Just because somebody starts a fire, doesn't mean they are a terrorist," he said. "A terrorist has a political agenda. He is trying to strike fear or cause damage to a

More TERRORISM, page 8A

Did you know?

In 2004, the FBI warned the National Interagency Fire Center of the possibility that Al-Qaeda had plans to start wildland fires in Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado.

Sting

continued from 6A

prior to arriving at the residence the Missoula man confirmed with the undercover detective that he was to have sex with the 12-year-old child.

He was taken into custody Wednesday after allegedly requesting the officer come out of the house to ensure he wasn't being set up.

Keith told law enforcement he had no intention of having sex with the underage girl, but went to the house to identify the people involved before going to police, the affidavit stated. Justice of the Peace Karen Orzech set his bail at \$25,000.

Jenna Elizabeth Davis, 29, and her boyfriend Chad Lee Briggs, 36, also appeared before Orzech on Friday.

Davis is the only woman charged in the investigation and faces a count of conspiracy to commit sexual abuse of children.

According to the affidavit, the Turah woman responded to an advertisement Wednesday, stating Briggs would be interested in "helping the 12-year-old girl ... lose her virginity."

She told an undercover detective that Briggs, who faces a sexual abuse of children charge, had been involved in a prior sexual encounter with an underage girl and enjoyed the experience, the affidavit stated.

Briggs, of Bonner, then allegedly contacted the officer and assured he would be gentle with the girl and would bring condoms.

About 9 p.m., Davis contacted the officer and said they were on their way, the affidavit stated. She also requested she be present in the room to "help Briggs get ready."

The couple was arrested upon their arrival at the residence.

In Justice Court, Marks said Briggs had a prior offense involving a child.

Orzech set bail for both Davis and Briggs at \$25,000.

Christopher Michael Cooper, 30, was visiting family for the holidays from Fort Lewis, Wash., when he responded to the advertisement, Marks said in court Friday.

Marks argued for \$50,000 bail because Cooper led law enforcement officers on a foot pursuit after his arrival at the house about 2:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Public defender Daniel Mandelko argued for a lower bail as Cooper is a member of the U.S. Army and stationed in Washington. The military,

he argued, will hold him accountable and force him to attend court appearances.

"No, for him it's \$50,000," Orzech said. "He lives out of state and I don't know what assurance the U.S. Army can make to the court."

Cooper also faces a sexual abuse of children charge.

Neal Lewis Gray, 54, was taken into custody Wednesday after his alleged response to the advertisements. He was arrested with a variety of items used in sado-masochistic sex acts, the affidavit stated.

"He had a long, detailed and disturbing list of what he wanted to perform on the 12-year-old girl," Marks said in court Friday.

Orzech set his bail at \$75,000 - \$25,000 higher than what the prosecution suggested.

He faces a charge of sexual abuse of children.

Justin Gale Walker, 28, of Hamilton, was arrested after arriving at the residence about 2:45 p.m. Thursday. According to the affidavit, Walker insisted on speaking to the girl and had a phone conversation with an undercover detective posing as the 12-year-old.

He allegedly confessed that he had come to the house to have sex with the girl.

Orzech set his bail at \$25,000. He faces a sexual abuse of children charge.

James Stewart Myers was the seventh suspect to appear in court Friday.

After contacting the undercover detective Wednesday, Myers allegedly was told he had the choice of a 12-year-old girl or a 15-year-old girl. Upon arriving at the house, he met the undercover detective and said he wanted to receive oral sex from the 12-year-old girl and gave the detective a \$100 bill, the affidavit stated.

He was taken into custody and posted \$50,000 bond after his arrest.

All seven defendants' preliminary hearings are set for Thursday, Jan. 2, at 4 p.m.

The investigation was a cooperative operation between the Missoula Police Department, Missoula County Sheriff's Department, Flathead County Sheriff's Department and ICAC.

— Missoulian intern Kendra Cousineau contributed to this report.

Terrorism

continued from 6A

political institution for political reasons."

Nonetheless, pyrotechnics is on the radar for federal agencies.

In 2004, the FBI warned the National Interagency Fire Center of the possibility that Al-Qaeda had plans to start wildfires in Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado.

Robert Baird, deputy national fire director of Fire and Aviation Management for the U.S. Forest Service said at a 2013 conference in San Diego that pyrotechnics "is a real threat. Anything we can do to reduce it is a real accomplishment."

Wildfires are among the most difficult blazes to investigate, experts say.

The most difficult part is finding where they started.

"Even if you think you can figure it out, then you have to prove it," Mangan said.

"It takes a lot of work and there's a very skilled cadre of people that do that who are fire investigators."

Homeless

continued from 6A

perused piles of ski gloves and blankets.

An Army veteran, Tucker said he lives on disability checks and, after the rent for his tiny apartment is paid, he only has about \$200 to live by each month.

"I can't afford anything and I don't have any family," Tucker said. "All this stuff is good for me."

He said he has been coming to the Longest Night event for a few years now to get "blankets and everything to keep me warm."

Last year, Tucker said he was only able to get two blankets, which in his overheated apartment presented a real problem.

"Last year I froze," he said.

Lonnie Tucker was also there to stock up on coveted winter gear.

"I got a sleeping bag and a warm jacket, and several pairs of socks," the 59-year-old retired carpenter said.

Tucker said he volunteers two or three days a week at Good Samaritan and was glad they were at the event helping those in need.

Because his only sources of income are his disability and social security checks, Tucker was grateful to be able to acquire all the cold-weather essentials.

"I think it's great," he said of the event.

"I didn't realize there would be nearly this much stuff."

"When you're on a fixed income, you don't have \$200 or \$300 to throw into

If investigators plan to bring charges against someone or file a civil lawsuit, "you want to be right," he said. "You don't know what the government knows," Mangan said. "They may have inside information that they don't want revealed, or it may compromise a source that they still want to use."

Investigators searching for the cause of a wildfire essentially work backwards, said Bill Gabbert, managing editor of Wildfire Today.

"You have to look for the direction of the spread must determine what way the fire is moving," he said. "So you have to work backwards."

The quicker the response, the easier it is to find the point of origin because it decreases the area investigators must pursue.

Once the point of origin is located, investigators must determine what started the fire, which, depending on the igniter, "can be fairly easy or hard."

If they use a lighter and put it back in their pocket, it's hard," he said.

But arsonists also use devices that are left at the scene, sometimes something as tiny as a match.

buying warm clothes," Tucker said.

In addition to winter clothing, attendees were also able to stock up on disposable hand warmers and enjoy free hot coffee and soup donated by God's Love.

Amidst the distribution, a man sang patriotic tunes and a short prayer was read for those homeless men and women who had perished from exposure over the course of the past year.

The mother of one such man was at the event Saturday to honor her son and spread the word about reaching out to those in need.

Lisa Wamsley's 28-year-old son, Joshua Wamsley, died under a bridge just north of Seattle on Jan. 23 of this year.

She said he spent a brief period of time in Montana, living either at her home or at God's Love. He had a drinking problem, though, she said, and eventually left to travel the West Coast.

Wamsley said that reaching out to the homeless needs to be a two-way street in that shelters and volunteers need to not just provide food and shelter, but an open avenue of communication to build a companionship with those who need it most.

"They need to let us in also," Wamsley said of those who are homeless.

Wamsley has been volunteering at God's Love since March as a tribute to her son and said that, as wonderful as the Longest Night event is, it's important for word to spread about the community's need.

"It's nice that part of the community is rallying to help the homeless," she said. "But we need to get more people involved."

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Independent Record
 helenaTV.com

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