THE COVID CIRCUIT

A minefield where the Happiest Place on Earth is open

By Page

As of Thursday, the United States stands far and away at the top of the Covid-19 charts.

Not exactly a chart one wants to hit. Certainly not Kasey Kasem’s Top 40!

The total number of Covid-19 cases nationwide sits at approximately 3.4 million, and the virus has caused more than 135,000 deaths.

States are seeing record jumps in case numbers: Florida reported more than 15,000 new cases on Saturday, July 11. California recorded over 11,000 jumps in case numbers: Florida 135,000 deaths.

The total number of Covid-19 cases nationwide sits at approximately 3.4 million, and the virus has caused more than 135,000 deaths.

STUCK IN A MINEFIELD

Town cuts ties with wildlife specialist

By Lunch

Coming off a fairly dry winter, the local bear population was active earlier than usual this spring.

And Mammoth Lakes has been jammed with tourists ever since travel restrictions were lifted a month ago.

These are the typical ingredients which keep Town Wildlife Specialist Steve Searles busy 24/7 during a typical summer.

But this is an atypical year. And Steve is no longer busy this summer.

The Town of Mammoth Lakes and Mr. Searles parted ways last Friday when Mr. Searles objected to proposed changes in his contract.

Searles used the term “blind-sided” to describe his meeting with Town Manager Dan Holler.

The offer

Searles is one of the few contract employees in town. Compensation-wise, he’s a relative bargain. $75,000/year but no benefits.

The employee unions have all rejected Covid-related salary adjustments.

Town Manager Dan Holler offered to take a salary cut this spring but Council refused him.

The Town offered Searles a 50% cut in pay and hours.

Work through December at full salary, and then be forced to take a six-month unpaid furlough.

Searles declined.

Allowing the Town to claim he “voluntarily resigned.”

The Sheet asked Police Chief Al Davis how the MLPD planned to handle wildlife calls moving forward.

“No change in how we deal with bears. The team has been trained by Steve and they all have bear kits that include less than lethal items to scare off bad bears. Just call 911 like most people do, and not call Steve directly as many have done in the past,” he said.

Searles said he’s still receiving several wildlife calls per day since his resignation.

And he said the New York Times interviewed him Thursday morning.

A Dave Titus profile of Mr. Searles begins on page 10.

FURTHER READING

- Viral complications can include MIS-C

- Kids not at increased risk

- California’s 9,000 cases

- The debate surrounding school openings intensified after the President increased pressure to reopen; Florida’s state education board is currently requiring all schools to be open while some local jurisdictions have postponed in-person classes until at least the spring.

On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany told reporters that in regard to the current administration’s push to reopen schools, “The science should not stand in the way of this.”

While children are not generally considered at severe risk when it comes to Covid-19, they do stand the chance of developing multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C), which can inflame parts of the body like the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, brain and eyes.

In addition, U.S Immigration and Customs (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security backed off a policy that would have required foreign college students to depart the country if their respective schools do not hold in-person classes. A lawsuit filed by Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and supported by countless other schools, resulted in the policy walk-back. Total time elapsed in the hearing: approximately five minutes.

The spike in cases across California lead Governor Gavin Newsom to issue new restrictions on Monday, affecting businesses in all counties.

see VIRUS, page 8

Starring in Japan ...

Julyteenth

Will we ski in ‘20-’21?

Cens-less

All service


Steve Searles, in happier times.
SINK NIGHT
Okay. It’s 8:20 p.m. I don’t know how it got to be so late. Forty minutes to deadline (which we never make anyway, but ...). Here’s the kitchen sink.

The Town of Mammoth launched a $300,000 program to help small business. Those with 1-10 employees and less than a $1 million annual revenue. And a storefront presence.

The goal, said Community Development Director Sandra Moberly, is to prevent commercial vacancies.

The Town received 19 applications. Given that the maximum award is $10,000, that means there’s gonna be a second round of awards with at least $110,000 available.

Some of the rules are going to be relaxed or modified. For example, the employee requirement, which eliminated hair salons (most of which operate via independent contractors) will be relaxed. For more details, call Moberly at 760.965.3630.

As most of you know, I generally never make political endorsements. But I’ll make two here. Rhonda Duggan for Mono County District #2 Supervisor. She’s earned it. I go on a “learning” tour with Mark Lacey and Mammoth Lakes Recreation’s Matt McClain and Friends of the Inyo Executive Director Wendy Schneider - she’s on it. I do a story on a “learning” tour with Mark Lacey and Mammoth Lakes Recreation’s Matt McClain and Friends of the Inyo Executive Director Wendy Schneider - she’s on it. I do a story on the Mammoth Lakes Food Bank - she’s one of the unsung heroes running the operation. You ask her a question about any County issue under the sun - she’s informed and thoughtful. I honestly can’t remember who she’s running off against. She deserves the job.

Chris Bubser for Congress. When she began her campaign, I didn’t know what to make of her. Her politics aren’t necessarily my politics. She’s a leftie. Her opponent, Jay Obernolte of Big Bear, is a Trump righty. The centrists have long left the stage.

When you factor in that the admin. asst. receives employee benefits. © 2020 The Sheet, all rights reserved.

For a subscription, contact Lunch at his above e-mail address, or call the office. Issues are mailed out bi-weekly. Cost is $75/year.

And finally, I had a good chuckle over the Mary Trump (Donald’s niece) book that just came out. Most media obsessed about Donald hiring someone to take his SATs (he’s a good delegator!), admiring his niece’s figure (he’s observant!) and regifting Christmas presents (reduce, reuse, recycle!).

As for the Searles debacle ... I can’t believe the Town is letting the guy go over what amounts to $37,500.

“Attlework recalls her family roots and explores the history of California’s arid Eastern Sierras in her ambitious, beautiful debut … Attlework’s remarkable prose renders the ordinary wondrous and firmly puts this overlooked region of California onto the map.”

- Publishers Weekly

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- San Francisco Chronicle

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Marketing ourselves to death

Dear Editor,

Mammoth Lakes has been my home for more than fifty years... And, throughout it all, we have, for the most part, financially sustained ourselves on a TOURIST BASED ECONOMY. But today, that all is changing, and I honestly believe that we need to start conversations around a NEW ECONOMIC PARADIGM brought on by a wild and scary virus, new technology, and an underlying desire to save our precious landscape from the ravages of human overindulgence. Mammoth is truly a very special place that lives in the hearts and minds of many people. I think now is an opportune time to rethink our future together.

I have personally struggled over the years with the constant conflict between the human need to earn money and make a living, and the protection and preservation of our precious environment, which we tend to take for granted that it will be there for us forever. Thirty or forty years ago, Mammoth Lakes’ local economy was justifiably based almost entirely on tourism.

Today, we live in a very different world in which many factors play into our economic welfare. It is not just tourism that drives our economic viability in 2020. Mammoth will survive regardless of our marketing efforts.

I just heard yesterday that over the years workers and visitors to Yosemite would “escape” to the Eastside (Mammoth, et. al.) to get away from the crowds in the Park. Today, mostly due to rearrangements caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, people are escaping the Eastside and going to Yosemite (by reservation) to avoid the crowds here!

We are being tested today. To abide by State and local edicts to fight the virus pandemic, we have cancelled many of our popular summer events, but are seeing enormous crowds showing up anyway. Here we are in summer again and under the shadow of a global pandemic, and are “busier” than ever. I suggest that this is not going to be a tolerable outcome in a post pandemic era as “tourism” may explode.

I suggest that we start to think very differently about the way we do business in the Eastern Sierra. We need to talk about where we have been, and where we are going in order to build a more sustainable and rewarding quality of life out here in the open lands of Mono County before these lands are consumed and damaged beyond reasonable repair.

Too many people in confined locations leads to trouble. That situation is not my vision for Mammoth Lakes. While I have thoroughly enjoyed some of the festivals over the years (like the Jazz Jubilee and biking events), I tend to shy away from the giant invitations we regularly make to the open public. Occasional, well-prepared events are obviously welcome, but there has to be a balance/limit to the number of people we draw here.

Mammoth is surrounded by amazingly beautiful mountain and high desert scenery. It draws its own natural admiration from people who “discover” it. The recreation available in our mountains will naturally draw attention from sports enthusiasts. I suggest that there is no longer a fundamental need to MARKET our town in order to stay economically healthy.

Here is where we seem to be at, for the moment. We have at least five strong economic drivers that look like a solid base to a “new economic paradigm.” These things either did not exist before, or were too weak to carry the economy by themselves.

1. We have accumulated a massive real estate valuation in Mammoth that includes many, many committed second homeowners who care strongly about Mammoth’s real values, who make their livings outside of Mammoth, and who spend money when they are here. Condos to trophy homes... will remain an economic force and a supportive economic constituency for our community.

2. Digital 395 (fiber-optic internet) has brought with it the opportunity to connect and do business from local establishments, making money outside the area, but spending money and living here. We did not have that kind of connectivity back in our pioneer days.

3. Many folks are aspiring to retire here, or are already doing so. Their retirement comes for the most part from outside the community through pensions, annuities, and other investments, but they live here and spend money here, and will continue to do so into the future more than ever. There are limitations to mountain retirement, such as medical needs, family situations, altitude problems, etc., but generally this is a growing block of local residents who actively support our economy.

4. The ski mountain is now owned by major outside interests, and we can probably look to outside investment in our community that has not been available to us until recently. It is a new world in the ski and biking industry, and I think we can count on even greater support. As a business, they will promote it as they see fit, but we do not need to market for them. They have built it, and people will come and spend money here. This is not the era of Dave McCoy, although that historic era was epic and important to our communal character and growth over the years. Alterra Mountain Company is not Mammoth Lakes, but simply an important future.

I just heard yesterday that over the years workers and visitors to Yosemite would “escape” to the Eastside (Mammoth, et. al.) to get away from the crowds in the Park. Today, mostly due to rearrangements caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, people are escaping the Eastside and going to Yosemite (by reservation) to avoid the crowds here!
LETTERS
continued from page 4

is not Mammoth Lakes, but simply an important part of it. We should start to stand on our own and create our own destiny.

5. Today we have a world which, more than ever, and due to over population, is anxious to find recreational and peaceful retreats for an escape from urban insanity. We will continue to see huge numbers of visitors regardless of any expensive marketing efforts. Our tourist tax base should remain relatively stable to fund our local government needs into the future, without much marketing.

Due to these strong drivers, Mammoth’s economic future is almost guaranteed, throughout good times and bad. The money will be there for local businesses that adapt with the right business plans. Individual businesses can advertise their own unique products and services, but there is seemingly no marketing. “I would like to see us slow advertising, given the drivers above and the reversible damage is done to our overall quality of life in the Eastern Sierra. We may be marketing ourselves to death. Also, I would suggest abandoning the absurd government subsidies to support air service to Mammoth. We do not need hoards of people arriving by big jets with unreliable scheduling. For me, one of the real attributes of living and recreating here is the ‘remoteness’ of our village. It is a thrill to discover the quaintness and cultural throwback of a charming mountain hamlet ... without the noise and congestion of modern transportation and over population. The vast amounts of money saved by limiting marketing could be put to better use by funding community development aimed at building a great town that locals and visitors can enjoy together. Build more great infrastructure like Shady Rest Park, Whitmore, skate parks, and pedestrian/biking paths and trails. Save the trees where we can. Bury the wires.

We are definitely facing changing times, and with it we are challenged to change ourselves to better fit in with the new real world, and build a new SUSTAINABLE quality of life that can feed us spiritually, economically, and recreationally into the unpredictable future. We have got to open the conversation before it is too late, and before we allow the further desecration of this special place. Byng Hunt

Mammoth Lakes

Preserve Solitude

Dear Town of Mammoth Lakes

Building an expensive new multi-use trail into the rugged terrain of pristine Solitude Canyon makes no sense when we already have a multitude of trails many of which are in serious need of repair. Moreover, the existing network of trails is accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford expensive trail bikes and not just those who are upper tier athletes, the likes of whom a trail in Solitude Canyon would largely be limited to. Such people already have access to an extensive network of trails on Mammoth Mountain that are well maintained and capable of challenging the strongest hikers and runners and best equipped mountain bikers. At a time when the science is abundantly clear that everyone needs access to trails in nature for walking, hiking, biking or horse riding, building a new and expensive trail limited to a few instead of performing much needed repairs on our existing trails that are appropriate for everyone sends a message to our visitors that we are a community that is more concerned about those who are in exceptional shape and can afford expensive gear than people of all income levels and physical fitness levels. Please put our precious resources where they will benefit the most.

Byng Hunt

Mammoth Lakes

Dear Editor,

Regarding the proposed mountain bike trail up the Solitude Canyon portion of the “Lakes Basin and Sherwins Area Trail Enhancement Project”, is there a project plan the public can review, including a schedule, budget and risk analysis? Having hiked and skied in Solitude Canyon since the 1970s, I am concerned that the cost of construction in such steep, rugged terrain could easily run into the upper hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions. Regardless of whether or not we believe this project should proceed, in these financially challenging times we absolutely need to be assured that if it does move forward, a realistic budget will be presented, as well as a secure, reliable source of funding for the entire project before any work ensues.

Sam Roberts

Mammoth Lakes

USFS policy in the North Mono Basin

Dear Mono Board of Supervisors:

Recently, I [Mammoth District Ranger Gordon Martin] had a chance to view the video of the Board of Supervisor’s June 2, 2020 regularly scheduled meeting and read the letter to the Board from Hillary Hansen Jones regarding North Mono Basin Water and Resource Management, which Ms. Jones commented on during the June 2nd meeting as well. As a result, I felt compelled to write to help the Mono County community better understand the Forest Service’s policies and actions in managing its land and water resources in the North Mono Basin Watershed.

As the Board is aware, the inyo

see LETTERS, page 6
National Forest is a Mill Creek water right holder. The Forest Service water right is associated with the DeChambeau Ranch and associated waterfowl ponds, which the Forest Service acquired in 1991 through a land exchange. The water rights, which were adjudicated in 1914 by the Mono County Superior Court, allow diversion of water from Mill Creek. Diverted water, after use for hydropower generation, is conveyed to areas north and east of Mill Creek through the Wilson system. The Forest Service then manages a distribution system that moves water from the Wilson system at the Cemetery Road crossing to the DeChambeau Ranch and waterfowl ponds. Although the Forest Service has a large water right (12.6 cfs), it is very junior, being 9th in priority behind water rights held by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), Mono County and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The Forest Service right only begins to become available when Mill Creek flow exceeds 43 cfs, which occurred for only about 2 weeks in this dry year. Fortunately, the Forest Service is also able to utilize unused tailwater in the Wilson system to irrigate the DeChambeau Ranch and adjacent meadows for a longer time period, with the excess water creating the arroyo. The arroyo is a deeply incised channel with a narrow strip of willows and a low productivity aquatic environment.

Ms. Jones also expressed concern about the lack of environmental review for how we use the available water resources for our lands. Since acquisition of the property and repair of the ponds in the 1990s the Forest has managed the area with consistent objectives to preserve the historic ranch and provide wildlife benefits at the ponds. In 2001, the Forest Service conducted a North Mono Basin Watershed/Landscape Analysis (Watershed Analysis). This analysis was conducted as part of amending the Forest Land and Resource Management Plans for all Sierra Nevada forests. The Watershed Analysis characterized the watershed, identified key issues and questions, and made recommendations. Other Forest Service documents, including the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Comprehensive Management Plan and the 2000 DeChambeau Ranch and Wetlands Desired Conditions Analysis, also contain environmental review and provide guidance on managing North Mono Basin land and water resources.

As a water right holder, the Forest Service has an interest in planning its water management and anticipating what water resources will be available in a given year. The annual planning process now being conducted by Southern California Edison (SCE) is usefully providing the water right holders with projections of the quantity and timing of water available for the water right priority and forecasted Mill Creek runoff. With these projections of water availability in mind I have used the Watershed Analysis to guide my decisions related to where the Forest Service water is directed in order to manage National Resources. As discussed at a previous Board meeting, even though Wilson Creek down to Cemetery Road has developed into a largely perennial water course, it has never been unusual for the arroyo to run dry at certain times of the year, even when the Wilson system was receiving all or nearly all of the Mill Creek adjudicated water rights. The Watershed Analysis identified that flows are not sufficient to support the riparian vegetation in the arroyo. Recommendations found in the Watershed Analysis also included restoring the bottom third of Mill Creek by restoring a more natural flow regime that would lead to regeneration of a healthier aquatic and riparian ecosystem.

This is a dry year and Mill Creek runoff is projected to be around 50% of average. We have had some challenges in trying to ensure that we are able to irrigate the DeChambeau Ranch and supply water to the waterfowl ponds. Ms. Jones’ letter referenced the drying out of two of the waterfowl ponds. This unfortunately happened and was purely an outcome of maintenance that the Forest Service needed to perform on the inlet and outlet pipes to the ponds. This maintenance has been done and the ponds are once again filled or are being filled and the ranch is being irrigated. Also, in making it a priority to try to get the broken hot water pipe at the ponds repaired, which will help greatly with pond management. I am hoping to do this with help from our partners and the community.
Mono County currently occupies the bottom spot for Census response rate in the state of California.

As of July 16, 19.3% of county residents have responded to the nationwide population survey, conducted once every ten years.

That rate also places Mono close to the bottom of the country in terms of response, behind less populous jurisdictions in states like Texas and Alaska. Even neighboring Alpine County, home to slightly more than 1,000 people, has a better response rate than Mono.

During the last census in 2010, Mono’s overall response rate was 25.2%, second-lowest statewide. Only Alpine’s response rate of 20.2% was lower.

What good does answering do?

A whole lot it, it turns out. The Census measures population size and demographics across the United States. That information is then used by local, state, and federal officials to determine funding for a variety of things like infrastructure/maintenance, schools, public libraries, and healthcare programs.

That funding determination will last for the next ten years. In short, lower response rates mean less money for public services for a decade, regardless of what the population size actually is.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, public resources have been strained by increased demand. School lunches, access to healthcare, and first responder support all rely on public funding to ensure their continuity.

In addition, population determines the number of representatives each state has in Congress as well as district boundaries.

Finally, businesses use Census data to determine where they will open new branches or stores in the coming years. Lower numbers make it less likely that a business will choose to invest in a specific area.

The Census Bureau compiles specific states to assign “Low Response Scores” to areas that may require extra effort to obtain responses. Factors include vacant housing, number of houses without phone lines, percentage of people below the poverty line, and linguistically-isolated households. Areas are then assigned a Low Response Score percentage rating.

Mono County has a Low Response Score rating of 21% as of 2019, which doesn’t indicate that obtaining responses here would be all that difficult. Kings County in the central Valley has an LRS rating of 33.0%, making it one of the higher-priority targets for extra effort.

Kings County currently has a 2020 Census response rate of 60.5%.

Some theories for the low response rate: a higher percentage of second homeowners and immigration-related fears.

As the Census Bureau will you, taking the Census in 2020 is easier than it’s ever been. Individual census packets have been placed at every residence in the County; the only things required are answering the questions accurately and then putting the completed form in the mail.

There’s also an online option, which asks for your census ID (on the physical packet you received) or, if you’ve misplaced the packet, simply providing some additional personal information. The whole process takes about five minutes and the questions are very limited in their scope. Additional household members should be included but do not have to fill out a census for themselves.

For those without internet or easy mail access, the Census also offers reporting by phone at 844-330-2020 with a wide variety of language options.

Come August 11, the Census Bureau will deploy census takers to physically visit homes or residences that have not yet responded to the Census. Local workers will be trained in social distancing/PPE protocols consistent with the county.

If knocking on doors sounds at all appealing, the Census is still hiring workers to help out with the response effort. Visit 2020census.gov to learn more about the Census itself and how to make a little extra money during August.
These include closing indoor operations at restaurants, wineries, movie theaters, bowling alleys, and cardrooms. In addition, bars, breweries, etc. must close all operations unless they provide outdoor, sit-down meals.

Counts on the State Monitoring list for more than three days must shut down gyms, places of worship, hair and nail salons, and malls.

Inyo and Mono Counties are currently not on the State Monitoring list.

By Tuesday, businesses had removed all indoor table seating, restricting access only to those making orders or using the restrooms. Those with little or no capacity to host patrons outdoors will be taken out of delivery exclusive if they choose to remain open.

Both counties have seen recent up-ticks in positive cases: Mono County has averaged one new case per day since July 2, while Inyo has added 2-3 new cases each week.

Mono County Administrative Officer Bob Lawton called the changes “manageable but nonetheless significant” during a presentation to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

Public Health Officer Tom Boo elaborated, telling Supervisors that Mammoth Hospital remains unimpressed by the relative surge and hasn’t seen a Covid-related hospitalization since March. He added that the current percentage of positive tests, 2% as of Thursday, is approximately half the state average, “below thresholds of higher levels of concern.”

Boo referred to the current testing situation, both statewide and in Mono County as “not great”, adding that Mammoth Hospital and Northern Inyo Hospital were experiencing severe shortages of rapid result testing. Both Inyo and Mono counties are relying on tests sent out of the area, pushing turn-around times to nearly a full week.

One exception is the Mono County Free Public testing, which has consistently returned results within 2-3 business days of the test.

Despite the testing issues, “Mono County is doing overall fairly well,” Boo said, “better than other jurisdictions in terms of this individual responsibility mitigation efforts.” He added that complaints to Public Health about mask and social distance compliance haven’t been particularly high.

For a county that’s supposedly done everything right and remains below the thresholds for concern, why is Mono subject to the same limitations as other, more concerning counties, Supervisor John Peters wondered.

“What metrics do we have to meet, exceed, maintain, in order to have an expectation of reopening what was just closed down yesterday?” Peters asked, adding “I think there’s ways to emphasize local control.”

The short answer: petition Mono County’s unique situation to the state. The lack of communication with the state has caused frustration for county officials, with CAO Lawton likening the situation to a minefield.

“We don’t know how to go forward, we don’t know how to go backward, we can only watch people blow up around us,” Lawton said.

Supervisor Fred Stump asked Boo about contact tracing and the legal measures that could be undertaken to ensure that people are compliant with the Public Health department. He referenced subpoenas as a strategy in use in New York State.

Boo responded that while the vast majority of contacts are cooperative and willing to help out, there are a few rare instances where people don’t comply or tell the full truth. In that case, Boo said, “We do feel like we need some legal tools available.”

One possible course of action that was referenced throughout the meeting: follow the example set by Inyo County’s Public Health Department earlier this week.

Public Health Officer James Richardson issued a press release that not only mandated wearing face masks in public, but also mandated that businesses “strictly enforce the face-covering requirements of this order ... and shall refuse admissions and service to any person who fails or refuses to wear a face covering.”

The sticking point came at the end. Inyo law enforcement is tasked with enforcing compliance with the masking mandate and any violation of the new order “constitutes an immediate threat and menace to public health, constitutes a public nuisance, and is punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.”

Mono County Sheriff Ingrid Braun explained that her department currently responds to Covid-19 related complaints as opposed to patrolling for violations.

“Deputies have been asked to kindly remind someone that they should be wearing a mask, provide a mask, and gain compliance,” Braun said, noting that deputies will issue citations for more serious criminal violations like trespassing and disturbing the peace.

At the request of Supervisor Jennifer Kreitz, Boo outlined the process for contact tracing beginning with an individual reporting symptoms. They are presumed positive and asked to quarantine for two weeks; the inability to work, Boo said, is the driving force behind non-cooperative individuals.

After receiving a list of recent contacts, Public Health follows up with each by phone and, if they are unable to be reached, visits them in-person. Boo told the Supervisors that one of the groups they are currently tracing is at about 40 people so far.

The presentation concluded with Peters again advocating for a variance in ordinance for the County, adding “I think we’re going to further frustrate the public by not being able to be flexible to adjust based on something that’s tangible.”

“Why was the hammer dropped with no communication?” Peters asked.

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**July 15, 1-3 pm**

**AGES 8-12**

**WRITING WORKSHOP WITH CHILDREN’S AUTHOR SARAH SCHEERGER**

**July 22, 1-3 pm**

**AGES 8-14**

**LEARN TO READ THE LAND VIRTUAL HIKE WITH MS. MOLLY OF EASTERN SIERRA INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION**

**July 29, 1-4 pm**

**GRADES 9-12**

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THE SHEET Saturday, July 18, 2020
Mammoth Lakes Town Council approved a contract update, worth an estimated $6 million, with Mammoth Lakes Tourism (MLT) on Wednesday, July 15.

Last year, MLT and the Town of Mammoth Lakes (TOML) signed a four year contract spanning July 1, 2019-June 30, 2023. Parts of this contract require an annual update to Town Council.

Council member Tem Lynda Salcido.\footnote{[Image 27x36 to 381x279]} called MLT a “sophisticated, world class tourism brand” with “significant effects on visitor attracting and retaining.”

Exhibit B (of the contract), outlined contract deliverables (if you say it long enough, it becomes a word -Lunch). Council member Kirk Stapp kept his comments short and suggested moving the agenda item forward.

Council member Cleland Hoff had a series of questions for MLT Executive Director John Urdi regarding semantic issues such as the use of the word ‘sustainable’ or ‘sustainability’ in sustainable tourism. Councilmember John Wentworth said it was important to get these kinds of things in place as the world becomes more sustainable.

Finally Wentworth said, “I think the public should make sure to read the sentences that open up item B.” So here it is public: “The COVID-19 Pandemic has fundamentally affected the Tourism Industry in Mammoth Lakes, with ongoing consequences that are both consequential and unpredictable. Desired COVID-19 Specific Goals are called out in addition to the baseline set of goals that may or may not be attainable given the operational realities imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. MLT’s role in providing timely and accurate visitation related data to assist decision makers in the Town, the County, and the Emergency Operations Center will be critical as the Town and its partners respond successfully to the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Councilman Kirk Stapp kept his comments short and suggested moving the agenda item forward.

Councilmember Cleland Hoff had a palpable hesitation to simply turning the page. “Again, I can tell the way the wind is blowing here. Everyone feels very supportive of this. I do not think we could stop people coming here even if we tried. This is the best we can do contract-wise but if we are not going to recognize the fact that we have had to roll back … and it does have to do with our tourism, then I don’t know.”

Hoff, before she even spoke, was outgunned. Her vague comments reflect this.

Mayor Bill Sauser had a couple of questions for MLT Executive Director John Urdi regarding semantic issues such as the use of the word ‘sustainable’ or ‘sustainability’ in sustainable recreation, or even ‘why are labor costs coming out of Measure A rather than TBID?’ Urdi parked these softballs easily over the left field fence.

Council wasn’t only concerned about where the labor costs are coming from. No. Council knew it had to give MLT extra deliverables over FY 2020-21 to justify a $5-6 million slice of the pie. And what are these strings specifically?

Most of the pre-existing deliverables are altered within the confines of COVID. For example, on ‘International Marketing’ the deliverable is ‘achieve 30% of 2019-20 international visits for FY 2020-21.’ Lunch: 30%? That’s insanely optimistic and flat-out dumb. Who thinks of this crap? There’s another one where they state a goal of ‘minimizing reduction in TOT revenue by less than 40% year-over-year in September and October.’ You could do the greatest marketing job in the world and miss that goal, or not do a damn thing and beat it by a mile. Dump the metrics. They’re unfair, unnecessary, bean-counting bull.”

But there are also COVID specific items such as “Communicate decisions and actions by the Mono County Public Health Official, the USFS, the National Park Service, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes that may have significant effects on the visitor experience in coordination with the Public Health Official and the Town.”

Or “Communicate ‘In-Market COVID-19’ specific graphs and messaging to external audiences to facilitate the setting of appropriate expectations for COVID-19 visitor behaviors in the market.

Another unique deliverable read, “Communicate decisions and actions by the Mono County Public Health Official and the TOML that may have significant effects on visitor attracting and retaining.”

All of these specific deliverables start with the word ‘communicate’ and seem to indicate a slight alteration of services provided by the marketing arm of town. MLT is now much more COVID-19 aware and marketing team as marketing organization.

Council approved the budget and deliverables for FY 2020-21 by a vote of 5-0. Before the vote, Wentworth summarized it best, “I want to make sure we have this communication tool in the environment that we are in.”

\footnote{[Image 774x1080]}
Mr. Titus submitted this interview with Steve Searles for publication last year. We had planned to run it in the 2020 Summer Guide (which, for obvious reasons, we skipped). Given the events of this week, we figured we’d run it now.

Steve Searles is the last of a grizzly breed — raised wild and living wild. He’s wandered these mountains nearly all his life and he’s accomplished great things, but he’s responsible for considerable damage. Lethargy, ignorance, and selfishness comes with the human condition, and Steve is not immune. The unique thing about Steve is that he’s admired for recognizing his mistakes and creating change. His respect for wildlife has overwhelming public support and his techniques have gained national notoriety. He’s become an ambassador for the Black Bears of the Eastern Sierra in the small resort town of Mammoth Lakes, even if he has to kill them.

Steve told me himself he’s hunted, killed and put to death more wildlife than you and I would see in a lifetime. He was “a killing machine back in the day,” as he mildly stated, but his unorthodox path transformed him into the foremost expert on the use of non-lethal methods to deter wildlife from falling victim to the wasteful habits of civilization and the scourge of human convenience. It’s also why they call him The Bear Whisperer.

But he doesn’t whisper. You can’t find “No” like he does; a growling shout that’s the hunter never gets ‘em.” He’s holding his phone in his hand and stands up to show me how he does it. The phone turns into a trigger and Steve shouts “POP!” He’s in killing position. “When I fire I hit ‘em point blank, right behind the ear and they drop. That’s it. In all these years of killing bears, I’ve never missed once.”

I see the torment in his eyes and the pain he feels each time he recounts the story of a suffering bear. His angst gains strength as he elaborates. “One came running out of the woods into someone’s backyard last week and was laying in the shrubs next to the creek a few days later.” Steve relives the scene. “He was just laying there, heavy labored breathing, laying on his backside. I could see the blood dripping down the front. It was thick and coagulated in the fur. He was shot in the chest.” Steve’s detailed description turned high-definition in my head. I wanted to help the dying bear, but could only think of calling the vet. It’s such a wash-my-hands thought I was instantly embarrassed. Steve is the vet in this story. He’s the one they call in these particular cases. I pictured him pacing back and forth, a safe distance from the wounded bear, pulling on his beard trying to come to grips with what he had to do. “I loaded up a lethal round and didn’t hesitate,” said Steve.

In the early days, he hunted everything: geese, fox, rabbit, coyote, elk, deer, bear. “Killed ‘em all” he says, like it was normal to do that. When the town hired him to service bear calls he started to see the truth of what was happening to wildlife, especially bears. They were habituated and it caused dangerous situations for multitudes of people encroaching more and more on bear habitat. A much clearer picture of the plight of the bears became his mantra: Mammoth, Don’t Feed Our Bears.

“If people didn’t feed ‘em we’d all have an easier time encouraging bears out of town.” Steve encourages them out, because his goal now is to keep them alive. “People don’t remember what they had for breakfast this morning, but I remember every one of ‘em” he says. People don’t remember what they had to do. “I loaded up a lethal round and didn’t hesitate, said Steve.

Steve is responsible for keeping the bears safe from the public, “not the other way around,” as Steve puts it. He wears his compassion on his sleeve. It’s much more noticeable than the patch sewn above that reads ‘Bear Management.’

Once he decides to take the shot, he never misses. “I’m not a marksman. I’m not even a good shot, but I’m better than some,” says Steve while warming his hands by the pellet stove in his house. “Of all the bears hunted and shot in California this year alone, says Steve, “forty percent will run off wounded and
Frievalt also pointed to what he saw as real opportunity for the business community to lead the charge in educating the public about Covid-19.

**SHEET SURVEY**

With so much uncertainty surrounding Covid ...

The Sheet asked people on the street: Will Mammoth Mountain open up this winter?  

**By Jasper Page**

“With limitations, yes”  - Kayla Neumann, Bay Area

“Yeah, 100%”  - Ryan Tetz, Mammoth Lakes

“With cases in California skyrocketing, I’m guessing no”  - Griffin McComb, San Diego

“Probably not”  - Elizabeth Weinberg, Los Angeles

“Yes, and I’m hoping if enough people think that, it’ll come true”  - Tim Albihider, Southern California

“Maybe if they didn’t sell day passes”  - Miranda Zoscak

“They’d have to limit the number of people, so it seems unlikely”  - Helen Truskouski, Sherman Oaks

“Hard to say, but probably not”  - Zac and Gretchen Smith

“Probably not”  - Elizabeth Weinberg, Los Angeles

“With limitations, yes”  - Kayla Neumann, Bay Area

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Tina tests her fortune with One Dish

Believe it or not, there is one restaurant that is opening in the middle of a pandemic: Dish Bistro. Festival goers in Mono County might recognize the name from the “One Dish Bistro” food truck seen at June Lake Jam or the Mono Arts festival. Same owner and chef. Her name is Tina Fortune.

“I called it one dish because if you should have one dish you make really well,” said Fortune on the difference between the restaurant and the food truck names, “But now it is Dish Bistro because we have more than one.”

Fortune, originally from Smithers, British Columbia, Canada, immigrated to the United States two years ago. Earlier in her life, Fortune had spent a couple of years in Vancouver at vocational school as well as cooking for different restaurants in the area.

Then Fortune started a catering business and moved back home to Smithers. Two years ago she randomly met a man named Richard May in Smithers who, coincidentally, lived in Mammoth Lakes. Fortune gave up everything and emigrated to the United States to be with him.

But Fortune was accustomed to the mountain lifestyle.

“Being an immigrant is really hard. You are very vulnerable,” said Fortune mentioning the lack of support for immigrants in the new country.

Mammoth Lakes is set to open “within a couple of weeks,” said Fortune. Festival-goers in Mono County might recognize the name from the “One Dish Bistro” food truck seen at June Lake Jam or the Mono Arts festival. Same owner and chef. Her name is Tina Fortune.

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## TOWN STUFF

**July 17/**
**Special Bishop City Council Meeting** at 3 p.m. in City Council Chambers. To submit a comment in writing, please email publiccomment@cityofbishop.com and write “Public Comment” in the subject line.

**July 18/**
Kendra Atleework socially distanced book signing of her literary debut “Miracle Country” at Bishop City Park, 6-8 p.m. Hosted by Spellbinder Books.

**Art and Wine Online:** Happy Poppies with Miguel Flores. Time: 5:30-8:30. For information and registration: Monoarts.org

**July 20/**
Mono County Board of Supervisors Special Meeting @ 9 a.m. For agenda and meeting: https://monoounty.ca.gov/meetings

**July 21/**
Mono County Board of Supervisors @ 9 a.m. in Bridgeport. For agenda and meeting: https://monoounty.ca.gov/meetings

**July 22/**
**Art and Wine (in person):** Mosaics with Kristen Schipke. Time: 5:30-8:30. For information and registration: Monoarts.org

**July 22-23/**
The City of Bishop invites you to participate in a two-day virtual workshop to help shape the future of Downtown Bishop! The workshops will be held July 22 and July 23 via zoom, 6-7:30 p.m. Visit www.downtownbishopplan.com for more.

**July 22-26/**
**DSES Virtual Sierra Cycle Challenge.** Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra (DSES) hosts its annual three-day cycling challenge virtually. Riders only need a bike (road, mountain, or stationary will work well) and a method for tracking mileage. For more information, contact Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra at 760-934-0791 or info@disablesportseasternsierra.org

**July 22-26/**
**Wave Rave Summer Skate Camps.** Register at: https://apm.activecommunities.com/mammothrecreation/Activity. Search The Cast Off is open on Tuesday and Saturdays only due to Covid-19 restrictions. No book drop off when closed. We’re overwhelmed with donations at this time.

**Vons** offers two hours of shopping Monday-Friday from 7-9 a.m. for those shoppers who may be virus-vulnerable.

**Mono County Library** locations will offer pre-arranged pick ups for library materials. You only need a library card and an internet connection. Visit monocolisbies.org for a link to a video tutorial using the online catalog.

**Devil’s Creek Distillery in Mammoth Lakes** is offering tastings by appointment only. Call 760-279-3670 to schedule your tasting.

**Summer Reading Program with Mono County Libraries - June 22 - Aug 1.** Register by emailing participants name, age, and local library to cdevine@monocoe.org.

**CS Studios** will be open during the months of July and August. The new hours are: Wednesday - Friday from 3-6 p.m. Saturday from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. and the second Sunday of both months from 9 - 11 a.m.

**How Big Is Big Fishing Derby** during the month of July. Cast your line in the West Walker River for a chance at great prizes during the “How Big Is Big.” All entries must be weighed at the Walker General Store.

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## TOWN STUFF

**Ongoing:**

**4th Annual Crowley Trail Run** is going virtual this year. Participants have from July 15 – August 1 to complete the run. For more information and how to sign up, visit https://crowleylaketrailrun.com. **Beer lovers’ candy store**

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<td><a href="mailto:info@MammothInsurance.com">info@MammothInsurance.com</a></td>
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**THE SHEET | Saturday, July 18, 2020 | www.thesheetnews.com | 13**

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**NOTICE:** These are only a few of the events happening today. For a full list of events, please visit www.thesheetnews.com.
A FINAL WALK WITH RALPH ELLISON

By Hite

Juneteenth

By Ralph Ellison

Random House

368 p. (1999)

“Juneteenth,” Ellison’s second book, published posthumously, is a companion to the first, written over the span of decades that was eventually compiled by Ellison’s literary executor John F. Callahan. Callahan turned 2,000 pages into 368 and put it together, could he have? He had written over 2,000 pages over 40 years. It appears even the author was lost in the weeds for this one.

Juneteenth as a book still works. It is one of those characters rather than the reader. Ellison completes a master class of supplementing his reader with the necessary knowledge before a scene takes place.

Then the scene happens and you are forced to complete the puzzle on your own.

Because of this, Ellison’s grand masterpiece fell short of its goal. The philosophy and ideologies that he attempts to impart on his reader feel grandiose, yet incomplete.

In some ways this is disappointing. In other ways it makes sense.

Ellison’s ability to impart an ethos argument to the reader is impeccable. When you read the book you feel like you are holding your hand, walking you through your perceptions of race, family, reconciliation, and what it means to be a human. But right when it feels like you are about to breakthrough into a new way of thinking, Ellison ends the chapter. He lets go of your hand.

This feels disappointing. But what is Ellison supposed to do? And for that matter, how was Callahan supposed to put this book together?

The lessons in any book can be chosen. If you read the book you feel like you are holding your hand, walking you through your perceptions of race, family, reconciliation, and what it means to be a human. But right when it feels like you are about to breakthrough into a new way of thinking, Ellison ends the chapter. He lets go of your hand.

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down, or one that was hit by a car, or one he found dead, without telling me how he takes the body out to a spot, smudges him off with smoking sage and sings a Paiute prayer before moving on.

Steve is amazingly humble in that regard and has connected closely with the Bishop Paiute Tribe of the Eastern Sierra. They’ve accepted him as friend of the bear and allowed him to participate in their rituals and sacred sites. For me Steve embodies what it truly means to be local. He serves this place to protect man and animal alike. It’s a transcendence of sorts and extremely admirable because Steve walks the walk, unlike many of us.

“I walk around amongst the masses and try to get them to give a crap, about the bears I mean. I’m not an educated man, but I know a lot more than the tourists. I live here and they visit. I try to save the bears from them. Seventeen hundred bears are gonna be killed legally by the end of hunting season. And when the tags run out a whole bunch more will die because they live here in town. They’ve been habituated and they raise the young the same way. Mom’s regard and has connected closely with the Bishop Paiute Tribe of the Eastern Sierra. They’ve accepted him as friend of the bear and allowed him to participate in their rituals and sacred sites. For me Steve embodies what it truly means to be local. He serves this place to protect man and animal alike. It’s a transcendence of sorts and extremely admirable because Steve walks the walk, unlike many of us.

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“Bears know how to get into anything. This little Runt got his head stuck in one of those marble blue mayonnaise jars. It was his first winter and mom was showing him how to get fat. Whatever was at the bottom of the marble got him in trouble. He squeezed his head in and when his ears fluffed out it was too tight to pull off. Someone spotted him with the marble stuck on his head running across town.”

“Three days later I’m on a call at Shady Rest. The officer backing me up was lethal, ready to shoot. I got these welding gloves on so I don’t get my hands ripped off and Lethal spots the sow over in the bushes. I see her with the Runt’s brother and then I see the Runt up a tree. He ran for miles with his family for three days. Somehow he stayed with em’ the whole time, even with all the snot inside the marble and breathin’ his own air.”

“He was sixty feet off the ground. Lethal was behind me. It was worst-case scenario; mom in the bushes protecting the kids and the Runt up a tree. They don’t down come down for nothin’. Once they get up there they only come down when a bear calls. I told Lethal and everyone else to shut up, stay back and keep an eye on the sow. She would tear me to shreds with those four-inch claws.”

“It got quiet so I looked up and did a bear call, ‘OOT, OOT, OOT’. The cub slid down immediately like he was on a greased pole. When he got right in front of me I bear hugged him. He was a strong son-of-a-bitch. He ripped right out of my arms and went straight back up. You only get one chance and I blew it. The Runt would die if I didn’t get the marble off his head. He couldn’t eat or drink and eventually couldn’t breathe and he’d suffer a slow miserable death.”

“So I told everyone to shut up again. It got real quiet. ‘OOT, OOT, OOT’. He came right back down. Pretty crazy but he needed help bad. A second chance, and this time I didn’t let go. One swipe and he’d rip my eyes out, and the sow could charge at any moment. It could have ended up real bad, but I wrestled him to the ground and mom stayed back. I made room and Lethal got the snips under the marble. It took a minute to start the cut. The Runt was screaming and struggling and I barely kept my grip on him.”

“When the marble came off the runt went still and I held him. The sow never moved before I let him go.”

Lethal had a chest cam mounted during the whole rescue and Steve showed me the video. It was a successful call, one of the feel-good stories.

“We forgot how to co-exist with bears,” Steve says. It can’t be overstated. We leave our trash out, our doors open. We build houses on top of bear dens. With-out question we drive too fast. A paved road seems like a raging river to a bear. Once the bear figures out where to cross he throws caution to the wind and runs quickly to the other side, but the road can be unpredictable like a spring river – much quicker than expected.

A week after Steve freed the Runt, the family was still in town, scavenging. Typically mom guides the little guys through traffic and the cubs follow when they get the courage to cross the road, but they don’t understand the speed of rolling metal. Even mom gets it wrong on occasion.

“The Runt was much weaker than mom, especially after no water or food for days stuck in the marble. Steve set him free, but The Runt didn’t have enough strength to evade the rush of anxious skiers speeding to the slopes in brand new rental cars. He was hit and killed instantly.

“The sow cried in the bushes on the side of the road as Steve lifted the young cub into his truck. He drove off wondering if the Runt’s brother would suffer the same fate. ‘Not many of them make it anyway’ he told himself. He knows the statistics all too well. The dead body bounced around the back of the pick-up on the drive down the fire road to wherever; a special place, picked out just for the Runt.”

He muscled the bear from the truck, placed him on the ground and smudged him off, then sang ... and yelled. I can only guess how loud Steve yelled, alone in that moment. As he drove away he pushed the tears aside and set his sights on the mother and brother. ‘A lot of teaching to do’ he told himself, ‘a lot of hard work.’ Not that it’s hard to teach the bears. “The bears are great students,” he says, “they learn quick. The hard work is schooling the people.”

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