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BURN BAN IN EFFECT, NO GROUND FIRES
by order of Presidio County

Fire at Terlingua CSD campus claims robotics and band building

By SAM KARAS
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TERLINGUA — Just after midnight last Friday morning, a fire broke out at the Terlingua CSD campus. By the time the sun came up, the tiny school district's band and robotics building was rendered a total loss — as well as the personal belongings and equipment of the students in both programs.

Dispatch was alerted at 1:51 a.m. Terlingua Fire and EMS, the Brewster County Sheriff's Department, and National Park Service fire crews responded quickly and helped prevent the blaze from also claiming the school library.

Former Terlingua CSD teacher Nate Simons called 911, initially assuming that the blaze on the horizon was an out-of-control burn pile. In addition to contacting dispatch, he called the Superintendent Reagan Reed at home to start alerting school leadership.

While waiting for the pros to show up, Simons rushed to the scene as the first first responder. Armed with fire extinguishers from home, he did his best to contain the blaze from the outside — noting that the fire had already started to destabilize the building from below. "It was purely a neighborly thing," he said of his split-second decision to assist.

Simons stayed with the fire crews until around 3 a.m., and Superintendent Reed stayed through sunrise. As students and staff started waking up and getting ready for school, news gradually spread through the community about what had happened overnight.

Junior Gigi Keenan found out about the fire from her dad. She thought he was running late to pick her up from school, so she gave him a call — and he told her the bad news. He'd just received word that school was canceled because of a fire that had broken out at the band and robotics building. "It was devastating," Keenan said.

Some of Keenan's classmates had big ticket items go missing — a guitarist lost a series of amps and the percussionists lost two drum sets and a keyboard. Director Bradley Anthenat — who also serves as the school's robotics coach and IT specialist — lost a trombone he'd had since childhood.

The fire also claimed "Big Girl," a robot that the robotics students would have used for a regional competition in Lubbock. "The robotics parts, playing field and tools will all be replaced, but the

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Staff photo by Maisie Crow

Valentine ISD's recently-finalized audit of 2021-22 school year finances found roughly $165,000 in unauthorized transactions had taken place; further investigations are ongoing.

Valentine ISD audit reveals $165,000 in unauthorized transactions, prompting further investigations

By MARY CANTRELL
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VALENTINE — A recent audit of the Valentine Independent School District found that a lack of oversight over the district's finances resulted in roughly $165,000 in unauthorized transactions, plus instances of falsified documents, prompting an additional forensic audit and a criminal investigation by state and federal authorities.

"There were numerous instances of unauthorized transactions, improper coding of transactions, altered documents, payments to fictitious employees and unauthorized withdrawals of the district's funds," reads the financial report, prepared by accounting firm Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert and Moss, the district's accountants of several years.

These findings are part of a report on "material weakness in controls" within the document, which concludes that "internal controls over financial activities were not properly segregated or monitored," as evidenced by an unnamed, sole individual controlling credit cards, bank reconciliations, payroll, recording of transactions and other financial matters.

The audit, covering the 2021-22 school year finances, was presented to the Valentine ISD Board of Trustees last week at a meeting in the schoolhouse. Trustees voted to approve the report, which has now been made public via the Texas Education Agency. The audit reveals $96,960 in unauthorized expenditures within fiscal year 2022, plus $68,075 from prior periods — the combined amount of $165,035, which the report says may be recoverable through insurance, was reclassified to accounts receivable. These adjustments allowed the district to pass a clean audit report free of material misstatements.

Because Valentine ISD is a public school district, the $165,000 in unauthorized transactions are taxpayer funds, Engle confirmed.

The dollar amounts in unauthorized transactions are preliminary, said auditor Kacey Gast, who presented the findings on behalf of the firm. The results of an additional, more in-depth forensic audit are still pending. That investigation is being conducted by a forensic auditor hired by Underwood Law Firm, the district's legal counsel, said Superintindent Debbie Engle.

In an interview with *The Big Bend Sentinel*, Engle said that pending the results of the forensic audit, she was unable to further specify the nature of the unauthorized transactions or how they were logged.

In the meantime, said Engle, preliminary findings have been turned over to the Texas Rangers and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. As of press time, no criminal charges stemming

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May 6 General Election ballot preview: Candidates and a groundwater district proposition

By MARY CANTRELL
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MARFA — The filing deadline for candidates and ballot propositions for the May 6 General Election, which ended last week, saw a handful of candidates contending for local public office and the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District seeking voter approval to become a taxing entity.

Early voting for the May 6 General Election begins Monday, April 24, and runs until Tuesday, May 2.

Marfa City Council

For Marfa City Council, the role of mayor, currently held by Manny Baeza, will be up for election, with Baeza filing to serve for another term and Marfa resident Stephen Salgado Boelter running against the incumbent. Baeza served on city council beginning in 2008, was first elected mayor in 2019 and ran unopposed for a second term in 2021. He said he decided to run for reelection in order to ensure the city's planned projects — including major street and sewer system repairs as well as the completion of the new water well — come to fruition.

"We have put together a great team over the past few years that is dedicated to the community. I want to continue to support their efforts for improving our community," said Baeza of city staffers.

Boelter said he had no comment at this time and plans to share more regarding his candidacy in the future.

Two full-term council seats, currently held by Raul Lara and Irma Salgado, will be up for election. Incumbent Lara filed to run again, along with Marfa residents Christa Marquez and Travis Acreman. Irma Salgado will not be seeking reelection. Voters will be instructed to choose two out of the three candidates on the ballot.

When reached for comment, Lara provided a list of past city council accomplishments, which included initiatives to repair the city's streets, grants for five new police fleet vehicles and EMS training for city departments. If reelected, it will be Lara's third term on council.

Acreman, who works in event production and stage management with New York-based company MJM Creative, said that after becoming aware that the city was struggling to attract candidates for the second election in a row, he felt compelled to run in the spirit of public service.

"There are real challenges facing us out here in the high desert, and Marfans have the right to reliable, competent leadership," said

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As costly suit against DA Ori White continues, a question emerges: Who pays?

By ALLEGRA HOBBS
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FAR WEST TEXAS — As an ongoing lawsuit against 83rd District Attorney Ori White lingers in appeals court, the question of who foots the bill has been brought to county officials, who recently found themselves faced with requests to help cover the top lawyer's legal expenses.

White was sued in August 2021 by former Assistant District Attorney Jerry Phillips, who alleged that White had fired him in retaliation for attempting to report improper and possibly illegal conduct within the office. In the suit, which White has characterized as "false," Phillips details instances of alleged corruption and cronyism, and claims he was wrongfully terminated for attempted whistleblowing.

Since August 2022, the suit has sat in the Third Court of Appeals in Austin, where it awaits a ruling on White's appeal that Phillips' suit, contrary to the trial court's ruling, was not "timely filed" and that it should therefore be tossed altogether. The Texas Whistleblower Act stipulates that claims under the act must be filed within 90 days of termination; White claims that Phillips missed that deadline, having begun his 90-day count from the day he was removed from payroll and not from the day of his actual termination.

In the meantime, expenses stemming from the case have mounted — White hired a private attorney, Steven C. Kiser of Midland-based law firm Lynch, Chappell & Alsup, to represent him. Though White would not confirm a figure, two county judges whose courts were approached by White characterized the current cost of legal services as nearing $100,000.

According to county officials, White's office has approached the counties that fall within his district — Pecos, Presidio, Jeff Davis and Brewster counties — to ask that they help cover the cost.

White approached Pecos County (the DA's office is headquartered within the county, in Fort Stockton) back in November of 2022 requesting that it pay the full amount — roughly $100,000 — said Pecos County Judge Joe Shuster. But the county had already forked over $40,000 to the cause and couldn't afford to give any more.

Judge Shuster explained that the county had been receiving bills for the legal expenses over a period of time, and was sending payments to

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Marfa ISD now monitored by armed school resource officer

By ALLEGRA HOBBS
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MARFA — Marfa Independent School District's newly-hired school resource officer (SRO) took to his post on campus for the first time on Tuesday — the latest in a series of measures the district has put in place since a deadly mass school shooting in Uvalde spurred statewide calls to enhance school security.

The officer, 21-year-old Ian Martinez, is a Marfa ISD graduate from the Class of 2019, making him an already-familiar presence to many on campus. He was sworn in at a Friday ceremony attended by school staff, city employees and members of the Marfa Police Department. His mother, Lori Valerio, pinned his new badge to his uniform.

Martinez is, in fact, a Marfa PD officer, as his badge indicates, and with that comes the power to enforce the law — but the role of an SRO is distinct. Martinez is also an employee of the school district, said Marfa Police Chief Steve Marquez, who explained the SRO is "commissioned through the police department and assigned to the school." Martinez's salary is funded jointly by the school district and the City of Marfa.

The school district began discussing hiring an armed officer for the campus over the summer, when fears prompted by the shooting at Uvalde's Robb Elementary School — which left 19 students dead — led board members to scrutinize their school's security. Since then, the campus has undergone a security audit focused on the campus' exterior doors, ensuring they lock properly, and has installed 37 security cameras viewable by the Marfa Police Department. The idea of arming teachers was floated by board members.

"I just encourage you all to consider options for us so that we're no longer sitting ducks," MISD Junior High and High School Principal Luane Porter said in a June school board meeting. "In a utopian world, we would be full of law enforcement 24/7. But that's not reality."

Martinez's daily duties include roaming the school "as a presence," and to ensure doors stay locked and that students are not letting in unauthorized visitors.

Because their jurisdiction is within a school campus, disciplinary matters will still fall under the purview of the school itself first, explained Marquez, and school resource officers may only become involved in enforcement if an incident rises to a level that would warrant the filing of criminal charges. A fight on campus, for example, would first be investigated internally by school officials, who would bring in the SRO in the case of serious bodily injury.

"The school is a whole different entity," said Marquez. "There's a lot of incidents the school would have to take care of first under their policies, and if it reaches the point where it becomes a criminal act they have an officer on scene."

Martinez — who is armed with a gun and taser, and equipped with handcuffs — explained he was on-sight as a "presence" — to be called upon if needed. He said that he would break up a fight if he felt the situation was potentially dangerous to students, but ultimately, penalizing such an incident would fall to the school first.

"School-wise, there's some stuff the school has to handle themselves, but I'm here mainly as a presence," he said. "If there's things that need to involve me, I will be involved."

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Valentine ISD audit

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from the audit findings had been filed. The FBI declined to provide further information regarding the status of its investigation because it is ongoing. The Texas Rangers did not respond to requests for comment by press time.

Engle said that law enforcement agencies may probe district financials from previous years, and would likely subpoena the forensic audit findings once complete.

Amidst the auditing process, Valentine ISD's longtime director of finance and taxassessor-collector, Ernie Villarreal — who had been with the district since 2007 and oversaw its finances during the audited period — chose to step down following a brief suspension. Engle said that Villarreal was first placed on administrative leave in October, shortly after discrepancies were found during the routine audit process the previous month. He then resigned on November 15, said Engle, and gave no reason for his resignation.

When asked why Villarreal had been placed on administrative leave, Engle said it had been a stopgap measure pending the outcome of an investigation into the financial discrepancies.

"There were some charges that we could not determine and we did not have supporting documentation for, and we were starting an investigation," explained Engle.

Villarreal did not respond to requests for comment regarding his resignation.

Engle confirmed that the person engaged in the unauthorized transactions referenced in the report is no longer with the district, but would not speak with any greater specificity as the concurrent investigations are pending. (The audit also states that "personnel changes have been made" as a corrective action).

In the financial report, auditors recommend the segregation of financial duties that had previously fallen to one individual and the increased involvement of management "to help strengthen controls in areas which cannot be segregated, including board oversight." As head of the district, Engle is listed as the responsible party in the report.

Engle said the district has, per those recommendations, separated financial duties. The Region 11 Education Service Center has been contracted to assist with payroll and other matters, and an existing district employee has been performing accounts payable duties and tax collections while Villarreal's position remains vacant.

"We're trying to find out exactly what happened and correct it so it doesn't happen again," said Engle.

Due to Valentine ISD's size, Engle said the director of finance and tax assessor-collector roles have traditionally been combined to create a sustainable job for one individual. In other nearby counties, such as Presidio County, the county tax-assessor collector handles school district property tax collections.

"We were trying to have full-time duties and be able to afford to pay somebody a decent salary to perform those duties, [so] they combined them," said Engle.

The Jeff Davis County tax assessor-collector, Sheriff Bill Kitts, and his office temporarily stepped in to assist Valentine ISD this winter after they were left without an in-house tax assessor-collector in the wake of Villarreal's resignation, but were unable to help the district long-term. The district will begin its tax season this summer when appraisal values are received by the district, with tax bills going out to property owners in October, said Engle.

As far as immediate consequences of the unauthorized expenses go, Engle said it was negatively impacting the small district, which currently enrolls 42 students and adopted a deficit budget this year due to facilities acquisition and salary increases.

"It's hurting us. It shortchanges the kids," said Engle. "It impacts the decisions as to what we do, anything extra we do — any new vehicles we might buy, a bus, playground equipment, trips, activities for the kids — it impacts all of that."

This is a developing story, *The Big Bend Sentinel* will continue to provide updates as they become available.

Fire at Terlingua CSD

(Continued from page 1)

students' and [Coach] Anthenat's hundreds of hours on design and coding cannot," the school wrote in a press release.

Though Terlingua CSD students and staff were sad about all the hard work they'd put into their projects, the community quickly sprung into action to try to replace some of the lost equipment.

The senior class helped coordinate plans to receive donations so that their classmates didn't miss a beat. Donations of guitars, drums and other instruments started trickling in right away. "It makes sense because of what a tight-knit community we are — and and especially because we're such a musical community," Keenan said.

The robotics students — officially known as the Purobots — also received a helping hand. With just days on the clock, El Dorado High School in El Paso reached out to donate a robot that didn't qualify for the upcoming regional competition. "It'll be a busy couple of days, but they're rebuilding," said science teacher Marcy Reed.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation and the total cost of repairing and repurchasing equipment has yet to be determined. In the meantime, donations are welcome. Funds can be addressed to Terlingua Common School District (note band, robotics or both) and equipment can also be mailed or dropped off at the school.

Terlingua CSD's mailing address is PO Box 256, Terlingua TX, 79852. The district's physical address is 550 Roadrunner Circle, Terlingua TX, 79852 (first right after the Y intersection in Study Butte, just before Cottonwood General Store).

Ori White

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White's legal representation under the impression that the county's insurer would reimburse them. They were shocked to learn from their insurance company — after paying $40,000 in bills — that was not the case.

"We were already through the gate and got our foot caught in the gate," said Shuster. "So we'd already spent the money. Instead of making things worse, we just said: we're not paying any more toward your expenses, you need to call the other counties."

White's request has appeared on commissioners court agendas in Presidio, Jeff Davis and Brewster county courts over the last month. Most recently, on February 14, the matter was discussed in open session in the Brewster County Court, where County Judge Greg Henington advocated denying the request.

"It's sort of a dilemma, but it's not our dilemma," said Henington. "So my recommendation to the court is we monitor it, but we are not contributing."

The DA's office had made another request, said Henington — that the office be permitted to take funds already contributed by the county for operating costs (in Brewster County's case, $94,890) and use them instead to cover the legal fees. Henington recommended denying that request as well.

"The money we give them is used for the operations of the district attorney's office," said Henington. "It's not to be used for anything else."

Henington said the total cost of the legal expenses accrued by the DA's office neared $100,000 — "and the suit's not finished."

In both Presidio and Jeff Davis counties, the matter was discussed in executive session, out of the public eye. Jeff Davis County Judge Curtis Evans said he had not received an exact figure from the DA's office, and due to a lack of information the court opted to take no action. If the district attorney wishes to revisit the matter, said Evans, it may appear on a future agenda.

Presidio County Judge Joe Portillo said his court had taken the same approach, due to a dearth of information. "I don't think there's going to be any rush to put it back on the agenda until we get some answers — and the same concerns that Brewster County had, and the same concerns that Pecos County has," said Portillo. "Why? How much is it? What are the ramifications? What if another bill comes in? Do we just continue paying this indefinitely? One question begets another."

Other county judges had a few more outstanding questions that left them hesitant to take further action. Henington stated in court that the DA was running up against the problem of accumulated legal fees because he had not been bonded or insured (White declined to address this question).

Judge Shuster said he felt the district attorney, as a state employee, should be represented by the state, not by a private attorney.

On this, White agreed. In response to a detailed request for comment, the DA replied by claiming that Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton was refusing to represent him, and that it is his belief that the AG's office should ultimately foot the bill for his legal fees pertaining to his appeal.

"There is a statute in Texas law that requires the attorney general's office to defend district attorneys in this type of situation. However, for reasons unknown, the attorney general's office has refused to follow the law," wrote White in an email. When asked to clarify the statute, White did not respond. Texas law does state that the attorney general is to defend the district attorney, in certain instances, in federal court (the suit against White is not in a federal court); another statute states that the attorney general "shall prosecute and defend all actions in which the state is interested before the Supreme Court and courts of appeals."

The attorney general's office did not return requests for comment by press time.

There is a recent precedent on the matter in a neighboring district. In September of last year, former El Paso District Attorney Yvonne Rosales — who had retained private legal counsel — appeared before El Paso County Commissioners Court, arguing the county should pay for her legal defense in a petition to remove her from office. Commissioners voted against providing the funds but opted to reconsider if the lawsuit against her failed. Rosales has since resigned.

At the time, El Paso County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal told commissioners that while they were not legally obligated to pay for the fees, their decision should come down to whether doing so would serve a public purpose. Though Rosales requested the matter be discussed in executive session, Assistant County Attorney Erica Rosales Nigaglioni advised commissioners that to do so would violate the Texas Open Meetings Act.

White said he planned to return to the counties, this time requesting them to appeal to the AG's office.

"My lawyers have been very patient, and I'm preparing to ask each commissioners court in the four counties to make a specific request to the attorney general himself that they step in and represent me. In my opinion, the attorney general's office should also reimburse what has already been paid to the attorneys for the appeal."

A prosecutor with the attorney general's office has given sworn testimony in the civil suit, stating that some of White's conduct — specifically regarding attempts to take back a case from the AG's office that the previous DA had relinquished due to a potential conflict of interest — prompted concern within the AG's office. The prosecutor, Geoff Barr, had received permission from his supervisor to issue subpoenas and pursue a hearing on the matter, but White halted his attempts to take back the case before the situation escalated.

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JUDD

~THANK YOU~

Words cannot express my sincere appreciation for the kindness and thoughtfulness shown to me during the loss of my love, Chevito Ramirez. Your telephone calls, cards, food, flowers and visits are greatly appreciated. Thanks to Father Victorino for the beautiful mass and eulogy, Sister Margie for the rosary and words of comfort, and Emily for the beautiful music at the church service. Special thanks to Andi for all her support and for being by our side. Also, thanks to all the wonderful people who helped at the luncheon.

I am very blessed to have family and friends like you.

May God Bless you and your families.

Lupita Ramirez

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Visitor Center, Bookstore, and outdoor viewing: 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.

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For tickets and tour information, visit chinati.org.

May 6 General Election

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Acreman. "It is important for our elected leaders to come prepared to serve a full term, ready to address the very real concerns of its citizens and manage their tax dollars responsibly."

Marquez, a realtor and the wife of City of Marfa Police Chief Steve Marquez, has served in roles on the Marfa ISD School Board, the Marfa PTO, and the Marfa Education Foundation board in the past and said she was motivated to run for city council in order to continue to serve the community and represent Marfa's various citizens.

"Through my experiences in educational and community leadership, I've gained the background needed to understand the deeper issues facing our community," said Marquez.

An unexpired one-year term, left vacant by former Councilmember Jason Ballmann, who resigned this past fall, received one applicant: Mark Morrison, who is running unopposed and will likely be appointed. Morrison is self-employed in the construction business and operates a few long-term rentals in town with his partner, a physician with PCHS Clinic in Presidio and Marfa.

"I decided to run for the remainder of the unexpired term to be of service to my community. I don't have an agenda or a pet cause," said Morrison. "I would like to serve the interests of the town in the necessary areas of budget, infrastructure and the various policy and governance areas that have to be taken care of for a vibrant town."

Marfa School Board

The Marfa School Board will have two trustee positions up for election in May: Place 1 and Place 2. Place 2 is currently held by Lori Flores, who filed for reelection. "I'm in it for the students," Flores said of her desire to continue to serve on the board.

Place 1 has remained vacant since the resignation of previous Board Member Christa Marquez in July, and no one filed to run for the seat. The district will likely need to solicit letters of interest and appoint someone to serve on the board. Since Flores is running unopposed, she will likely be appointed and the district will not hold an election.

Presidio City Council

Presidio City Council will see the position of mayor, currently held by John Ferguson, up for election, as well as two council member seats. Ferguson has served as the mayor of Presidio since 2013 and filed for reelection. He will be running against Angel Miguel Campos.

"Presidio continues to face challenges in the lack of opportunity, aging infrastructure and general quality of life needs. Fortunately there are many in our community who step up to address local concerns, and I count myself as one of them," said Ferguson. "I would be more than happy to continue my work as mayor of our city for another term, if given the opportunity by voters."

Council members Arian Velazquez-Ornelas and Nancy Arevalo, whose terms will be up, have both filed for reelection. Presidio resident and realtor with Livingston Real Estate Todd Beckett has filed to run for city council as well.

Arevalo, a longtime resident of Presidio, said the main reason she was running for reelection was because of her love of the community, adding that she felt it was her civic duty to have an active role in the local legislative process.

"If elected I will be in pursuit of making good sound decisions, which will represent the community as a whole and not to appease a personal or a certain small group's agenda," said Arevalo. "I will value and listen to everyone's different perspectives with respect and dignity."

Beckett, Velazquez-Ornelas and Campos did not respond to requests for comment by press time.

Presidio School Board

Over half of Presidio ISD's school board will be up for election, with the terms of Yvonne Spencer, Ethel Barriga, Hugo Ramos and Fidel Baeza expiring in May. The superintendent's secretary, Elizabeth Melendez, did not respond to repeated requests for comment regarding candidates who filed to run for school board. The City of Presidio will hold a joint election with the Presidio Independent School District in May. Voting will likely take place at the Presidio Activity Center (PAC).

Presidio County

There will be a proposition relating to the county's underground water conservation district on the May 6 General Election ballot, in which voters will decide whether or not to allow the district to become a taxing entity.

Since its creation in 1999, the district has operated from a budget from the county commissioner's, rather than levied their own tax. The move to make the underground water conservation district its own independent taxing entity has been a matter of discussion for some time, after County Attorney Rod Ponton initially suggested the change in the summer of 2021.

In the May election, voters will simply vote on whether to make the district a taxing entity, rather than vote on a specific tax rate. According to state law, the district may levy a property tax not to exceed $0.05 per $100 of assessed property valuation. Trey Gerfers, general manager of the district, said the district will sit down with the Presidio County Tax Assessor-Collector and determine what to make tax rate in order to get the budget they need.

The district's current annual budget is around $51,000 according to Gerfers. It's core expenses are for Gerfer's salary — $1,600 a month — dues, insurance, legal, training and more. The district has successfully received grants in the past, and will continue to pursue grant funding and partnerships, said Gerfers.

This fall, the county entered into a interlocal agreement with the district to offset a potential new tax by lowering their tax rate so that citizens would not be impacted, something Gerfers refers to as a "tax swap" that will not appear in the proposition language, but represents an agreement in place with the county.

"The county commissioners will reduce their tax rate to offset the district's tax rate so that the property taxes won't go up for Presidio County taxpayers," explains Gerfers.

If the proposition passes, the district will begin collecting taxes in 2024 but not have its own tax revenue stream until 2025, so would be covered by the county until then. If the proposition fails to pass this election cycle, Gerfers said they will be able to put it up for a public vote once more, although the district is hoping the proposition will pass the first go around. He said their work to monitor groundwater, understand groundwater resources and permit accordingly to ensure the county does not run out of water is a vital service.

"I'm hopeful that people will see their own self interest in this, and they'll understand that the tax rate swap will offset the tax burden of a new tax and that they will vote for this," said Gerfers. "But groundwater is just too important to allow our groundwater district to just dissolve because we're not able to operate unless we can assess a tax."

In order to get the word out about the proposition and gain voter support, the district is planning a series of educational videos that will cover how groundwater works, Texas groundwater law, the history of Presidio County's groundwater district and more, in part funded by the Dixon Water Foundation.

"It would just be a real shame if we lost this because people don't understand what's at stake," said Gerfers. "Because this is the best shot that we have of ensuring local control of the water and guaranteeing or giving ourselves the best shot at a prosperous future."

School resource officer

(Continued from page 1)

School resource officers are required to undergo an SRO-specific training, which Martinez will do in April. In the meantime, Chief Marquez — who has undergone the SRO training — is acting in a mentor role, and would be called upon if an incident unfolded prior to the training. Martinez himself has undergone active shooter training.

Marfa is hardly alone in its decision to bring an armed officer onto its school campus. The presence of school police departments on Texas campuses has surged since 2017; calls to equip campuses with armed officers were renewed by elected officials in the wake of Uvalde. Both Fort Davis and Alpine school districts have armed officers on campus.

"We have had school marshals since 2014, and we also use all options available for arming staff under the 'Guardian' program," said Fort Davis ISD Superintendent Graydon Hicks. "There are armed staff at both campuses and have been since 2014."

Alpine ISD Superintendent Michelle Rhinehart said it employs three school resource officers provided by the Brewster County Sheriff's Department — one for each of the district's campuses.

The matter of increasing police presence on school grounds is contentious — research indicates the presence of police in schools does not increase safety, but may increase disciplinary actions.

Chief Marqeuz said he believes the presence of an officer on campus — knowing someone is there to assist if needed — makes those attending school and parents at home feel a greater sense of safety.

"We all know of the school shootings and things like that," said Marquez. "It's basically a way of easing the minds of the students and teachers and parents in the community, knowing someone's there."

Five Marfa ISD students who spoke to *The Big Bend Sentinel* felt either neutral or positively about Martinez's presence.

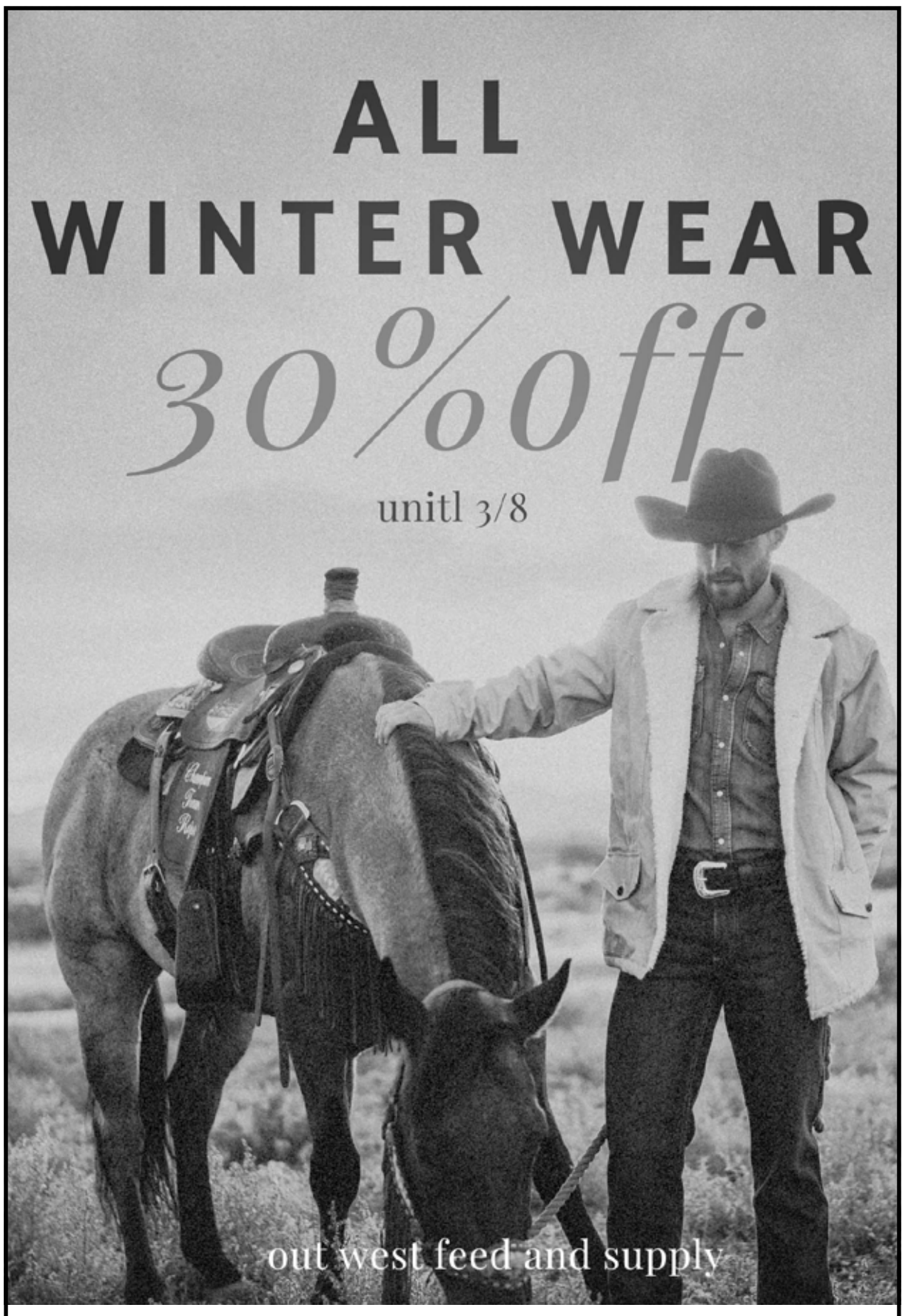
"A lot of people think it's Marfa, nothing could happen here, but it could happen in any school," said senior Ummi Chanez, who said Martinez's presence made her feel safer "in case anything were to happen."

"Having a police officer on campus is definitely going to make parents feel safer, and definitely makes the tight-knit community feel better about having their kids go to school," she continued.



Staff photo by Mary Cantrell

City of Marfa Police Chief Steve Marquez, School Resource Officer Ian Martinez and Marfa ISD Superintendent Oscar Aguero pose for a photo at a swearing in ceremony for Martinez last week.



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Opinion

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Regarding STRs (short-term rentals) I would like to add some comments to Nina Dietzel's well-thought-out letter in last week's Big Bend Sentinel.

One shoe does not fit all! For the city to charge an annual fee of $500, plus HOT (hotel taxes), plus the extra garbage fees, to a small casita that sleeps two and only occasionally rents, the same amount as a three-bedroom house, just does not seem fair. The larger accommodation can of course charge guests more and they should, but our small unit is a modest endeavor.

As for the onerous $78.48 per month garbage charges, our casita does not have a kitchen, just a kitchenette, still we pay the additional charges every month and have never complained even though the amount of garbage generated is very small.

Of course, we pay our quarterly HOT charges, but this added annual fee is very out of proportion to the little income earned and really hurts. I guess if the city is trying to put us out of business they may succeed, although it provides a bit of work for several Marfa-based people and a pleasant experience for some visitors.

I very much hope the city will review their policy to accommodate the smaller STR owner.

Respectfully,

Carolyn Pfeiffer
Marfa resident

• • •

Dear Editor (and MISD),

Two suggestions from an interested observer:

1 - If the school board is committed to a four-day school week, why not make it Tuesday through Friday and avoid all those pesky Monday federal holidays (and three-day school weeks)?

2 - *The Big Bend Sentinel* quotes an educator as saying, "It's not just reading, writing and arithmetic anymore…"

Why?

If students become well-grounded and competent in what we used to call "the three R's," they would have sufficient foundation for any career as well as for a life of alert and responsible citizenship.

Sincerely,

Steve Seegers, M.D.
Marfa

• • •

Editor:

Don't know what the powers that be at Sul Ross State University were thinking (or not thinking) when they fired longtime archaeologist David Keller from the Center for Big Bend Studies. The article that appeared in *Texas Monthly* left me sickened and stunned that a man of David's caliber and reputation was treated in such a deplorable manner. I would think that the disgraceful and disrespectful actions taken by the SR administration will have an extremely negative impact on the future of the center. I, for one, will not be renewing my membership in the Center for Big Bend Studies, nor will I be attending any future center conferences.

Dawn Shannon
Marfa

• • •

To the Editor:

Sterry Butcher, this message is in regards to the article you wrote about Judy Magers, the burro lady, published on March 23, 2007.

I recently looked up the article after talking with Gilbert Wood, her former husband, and her sons and daughters. I asked about Judy and they told me the story, which was a shock to me. They directed me to your article.

Thank you for providing so much detail about her life, as you knew it.

I knew her when I was a young teenager in Newell, South Dakota, circa 1963-65. She was married to my stepfather's business partner, Gilbert Wood. I would frequently babysit for Clay, Judy's son from a previous marriage.

It was a treat when Judy would take me to the Newell Rodeo grounds for a riding lesson and to practice barrel racing.

She was a beautiful woman and very kind.

The last time I saw her was at the Butte County Fair in Nisland, South Dakota, in the summer of 1965. She was stunning. I will always carry that picture in my head: she had on blue jeans and a sparkling shirt. She was wearing a baseball cap over her long, thick, black braid which hung down to her waist. She had spurs on her boots and a bridle in her hand. She was entered in the barrel race later that day and was walking to her pickup and trailer, where her horse was tied.

I always wanted to be like Judy, without any ability to do so. She was a natural horsewoman and so very talented.

My stepfather died and we moved away from Newell. I heard that she'd left her family and moved away without leaving much of a trail. That made me sad. I always wondered what happened to beautiful Judy Wood. Thank you for so eloquently giving me the answer, even years after Judy's death.

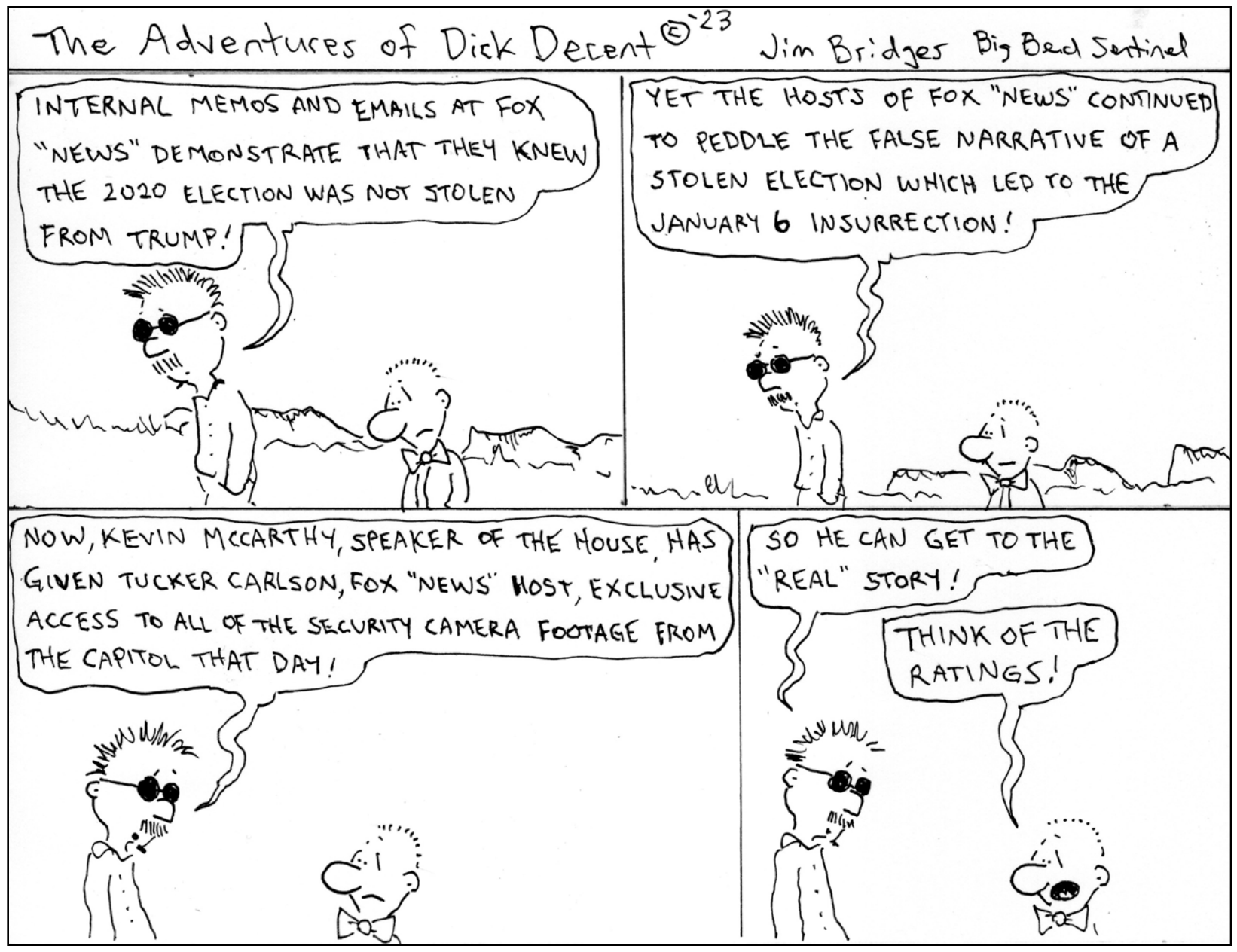
Micky Wienk
Custer, South Dakota

We want to hear from YOU!

- Letters to the editor should be sent to editor@bigbendsentinel.com, and must provide the writer's full name, city of residence and an email or phone number, so that we may follow up and verify information as needed.
- Your letters may be edited for clarity and brevity. While opinions of all kinds are welcome, when it comes to claims of fact, we strive to only publish what is verifiable.
- We have limited staff capacity to fact check unsubstantiated claims, so letters that include those may be held or remain unpublished if information is not easily verifiable.
- We may reach out to ask questions and verify the identity of the sender. We do not run letters anonymously unless the sender is privately identified and has a reasonable claim to anonymity.
- We reserve the right to hold or refrain from publishing a letter for any reason and we thank you for always sharing your letters with us.

- ***The Big Bend Sentinel Editorial Staff***


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OUR WATER MATTERS

Drought in the western U.S.

By TREY GERFERS
tgerfers@pcuwcd.org

2023 started off with a bang for the drought-stricken West. The region was in the throes of what scientists are calling the driest period in 1,200 years when a series of major storms blew in off the Pacific starting just after Christmas. The storms, also known as a "Pineapple Express," formed so-called atmospheric rivers over much of California and neighboring states, causing widespread flooding, refilling reservoirs, and killing at least 20 people.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, atmospheric rivers are "relatively long, narrow regions in the atmosphere … that transport … an amount of water vapor roughly equivalent to the average flow of water at the mouth of the Mississippi River." When these "rivers in the sky" make landfall, they often "release this water vapor in the form of rain or snow." While atmospheric rivers are a relatively common phenomenon, the bomb cyclone that hit the West Coast dropped an average of 11 inches or 32 trillion gallons across the region over a period of three weeks.

While a single season of heavy rainfall may be enough to refill California's biggest reservoirs, the news website CalMatters warns that "the same cannot be said of the Colorado River's huge reservoirs." Seven states and about 40 million people rely on water from two reservoirs, Lake Mead and Lake Powell, both of which have been in decline for decades. The two impounded lakes hold 50 million acre-feet combined and "even several wet winters in a row will not come close to refilling them."

Part of the problem is that atmospheric rivers often fall too fast over a short period. This makes it difficult to store that much water. The issue has several facets: 1) A lot of the rain falls downstream from the reservoirs and is not captured, and 2) Capturing such a large volume of rain early in the year poses a risk of flooding later on. Despite severe and ongoing drought conditions, many reservoirs in the West actually opened their outflow gates during the recent winter storms to prevent overflow.

Another challenge involves the built environment, which is designed to direct rainfall into storm drains and out to sea before it can be captured to augment water supplies. According to CalMatters, "The recent storms have highlighted the need to design and build stormwater systems capable of capturing runoff … Even sinking urban runoff into the ground via rain gardens and bioswales is a better option than letting it escape to sea."

One of the bright spots of the recent winter storms has been their incredible boost to the mountain snowpack that supplies a significant amount of California's water. The current snowpack is outpacing the state's wettest season on record, according to state water officials. And there are still a couple of months to go before the winter snow season is over.

Much like children on a long road trip, a lot of people throughout the western U.S. are asking, "Is the drought over yet?" The answer is maddeningly nebulous because it's so difficult to determine when a drought begins and ends. In the case of California's drought, the reports are mixed. While some experts refer to the Drought of 2013-2016, as though it had a clear beginning and end, others think that the drought of the past few years never really stopped. Based on the data since the last major rainy season of 2006, only three of the past 16 years (2011, 2017 and 2019) have been notably wet in California. Many climate experts believe the predominant weather pattern in the western United States will involve ongoing drought conditions interrupted periodically by very wet interludes. According to Jeffrey Mount, senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, "This might well be just another case of a wet year followed by a string of dry ones."

The lesson for groundwater-dependent regions like the Big Bend is clear. We need to restore and enhance our existing watersheds, design our built environments to capture runoff, and create targeted natural infrastructure to hold the water where it falls and augment aquifer recharge as much as possible. The technologies already exist and funding from the State Revolving Funds could soon be on the way.

Trey Gerfers is a San Antonio native and serves as general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. He is also chairman of the Presidio County Water Infrastructure Steering Committee and president of the Marfa Parks and Recreation Board. Trey has lived in Marfa since 2013.

Community

DISPATCHES FROM MISD JOURNALISM CLASS

Breaking News:
Board approves 4-day week for 2023-2024 school year!
Teachers get new phones in classrooms!
Ms. Powers kills 2nd period yearbook class from negligence
MHS students headed to state science fair
MISD HIRES IAN AS SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

Best teacher poll — results!

By CHRISTOPHER and TARYN

In Marfa ISD, we all have our opinions about the teachers that we love the most and think of as our favorites. So, for this newsletter, I decided to figure out which teachers students love the most. Even though all the teachers at Marfa ISD are amazing in their own subjects and ways, there is one that clearly won the poll when we sent it out to MISD students: Ms. Lara.

Ms. Lara is the teacher for English one, English two, health (eighth grade), theater and career (eighth grade). Ms. Lara also helps with problems you might have, like a counselor would do for you: she listens to all the school drama and gives students much-needed advice. She's a wonderful and trustworthy adult that students love.

In the poll my partner and I made, Ms. Lara got 25 votes as either a favorite or a second-favorite teacher at MISD out of the 43 students that voted. Thirteen, or about 30%, voted her the favorite, and 12 voted for her as second favorite. Ms. Foster got 10 votes and thus 23% of the favorite teacher vote; and Mrs. Donaldson, Ms. Powers and Mr. Klockman all got four votes each for best teacher, about 9% each of those polled.

The second favorite teacher vote, again, had the amazing Ms. Lara on top, but Mr. Martinez was next in line with 20%, or nine votes. Overall, 11 of the 13 high school and middle school teachers were voted someone's favorite or second favorite teacher, which just goes to show how much our teachers here are loved by different students. As one respondent said in the poll, "I chose these people because I enjoy their general vibes and how kind they are to the students. Every teacher I've had has been great, and I've never had a problem so it was difficult choosing my favorite."

Another student echoed how hard it is to choose among our many great teachers, writing, "They all help you and want you to do good. So it's so hard to pick from the options."

We decided to interview the clear winner, Ms. Lara, and ask her what she thinks about being everybody's favorite teacher and ask if she was surprised that she received the poll's honor of being the favorite teacher.

I asked, "How do you feel about winning both first and second favorite teachers?"

Ms. Lara was silent, thinking, and Ana Gallegos, a junior at Marfa ISD, decided to respond for her when Ms. Lara did not immediately answer, interjecting, "She feels amazing and honored."

After Ana butted in, Ms. Lara found her voice, saying, "It's very humbling, I'm shocked I even got it. I thought someone else would get it instead of me."

When she was almost finished saying that, Luis Solis, also a junior, decided to jump into the conversation and say with a sassy but happy tone, "It's a given."

We all laughed a little at Luis' antics and went on to interview more teachers to see their faces when they were informed of their high statuses.

Next on our list was the favorite administrator — that was Mrs. Murphy. Mrs. Murphy is new to her job as the MISD schools counselor, although she's previously worked as a teacher in the elementary school. When my partner and I went to go interview her, she was quite shocked! We told her about the poll and started the interview off with, "How do you feel about being everybody's favorite administrator?" (Mrs. Murphy received 21 out of 43 votes.)

She responded with, "I feel so honored, and I'm just in shock honestly."

I pressed her, "So you're surprised?"

With her happy-go-lucky smile, she responded, "Yes! I am so surprised. I didn't even expect it with being pretty new to the high school. I feel as if Ms. White, Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Gomez do way more than I could ever do, so I feel more like they would win this." Mrs. Murphy was so happy with this news, and her smile was contagious to us! We walked off with a spring in our step and with the sense of making somebody's day way better.

Last but not least, we interviewed the person that has, according to our poll, educated all the students at Marfa the most, and that woman is Ms. Foster, the English teacher for sixth through eighth grades. She had 10 votes, with 23% of the vote for "Teacher you Learned the Most From," followed by Lara and Donaldson with seven votes each, and Ojeda, Aguero, Loya and Klockman tied with four votes each.

When we interviewed Ms. Foster, she spoke about how, ever since she started at MHS, she's felt as if she's been playing catch-up and that she struggles with feeling as if her students aren't learning enough from her, but this changed her whole view on everything.

When me and my partner went to her sixth period, she was so skeptical but really happy and curious to learn about the results of the poll.

When we asked her, "How do you feel about being MISD's most learned-from teacher?" her face lit up in shock, as she was disbelieving that she ended up winning this category!

Soon, she said "I'm in shock, I feel like I'm not doing enough but hearing THAT, I'm speechless, thank you so much. I am so happy to hear this; it means the world to me. I'm always in doubt about if I'm teaching at all already, but now that I know the results, it puts it into a new light. For once I AM speechless." She added, "Write that down: for once, Ms. Foster is speechless."

Even though some teachers did not get picked for the overall favorite, students still were able to write what they liked most about the teacher. Some of my favorite things that people said are included here, like this comment: "I chose Mrs. Aguero because she has been there since first grade, and she will teach you in any style you need if you don't understand. I chose Mr. Klockman because he is kind and understanding."

Another comment said that the teachers they chose "are genuine and are honest. They truly care about the students, and the environment."

Another student said their favorite teacher has "taught me a lot that'll benefit my future and the career I want to choose."

Other nice examples of comments include one student who wrote, "I picked my choice due to their freedom of expression and ability to apply teaching techniques in ways to benefit different kinds of students and how they learn best."

A final sample of the comments included the statement that the student values their favorite teacher's "ability to make things simple, and they use experiences to help you learn the material faster. We learn the material more quickly, because she also makes it enjoyable."

Finally, the funniest comment was, "Mr. Klockman has genuinely interesting and fun classes. He is chill and wise AF."

Early graduation at MHS

By SAMANTHA

Many of us at MHS will have noticed that it seems more students here are finishing high school in less than the four years that most diplomas take. Recently, it feels like students graduate with fewer credits and are fast-tracked out of MHS if they choose. These students may not thrive in a traditional school setting, and so their teachers and administrators try to ensure that they get a degree, rather than not finishing high school. Although early graduation has always been an option for students who seek it, a lot of the time it's for super-ambitious students looking to shake the dust of Marfa off their feet. Although I interviewed one such student, I also interviewed two different kinds of early graduates: students who were offered the opportunity to graduate with the minimum number of credits, mostly gotten online. One of those students graduated in December, and basically just never came back after break. Another is graduating in May, a whole year early. Are they being pushed out just due to the fact that they are struggling too much or "causing too much trouble"? Because, to us students, that's what we think is happening. I decided to investigate.

I began by interviewing a junior who plans to graduate a year early. He is working through online courses quickly right now to try to finish his high school classes. I began by asking him, "Why are you graduating early?"

"Because I'm trying hard to get out of the school, it feels like I've been here for a while," the student responded with a slight laugh.

"Was this a decision you made or the school?" I asked.

"It was a decision I made," he said.

"What do you plan to do now that you're going to be out of school a whole year earlier than you planned?" I asked.

"So, umm, I hope that I find a job in Odessa, probably like cleaning cars or helping people out and to learning new things."

"Are you sad that you're not going to be graduating with your class?" I asked

"Yeah I'm gonna be pretty sad because of all my friends and memories that we had together and here."

So here I found out this was this student's decision and not a school decision, although I still feel like the school must have suggested it. This student is a big part of our class, he's been with us since fifth grade. We will be missing him a lot next year. And I'm not sure cleaning cars in Odessa is better than senior year at MHS.

Next up is Zaley. Zaley has been taking classes in the summer to try and graduate early. First, she was trying to graduate in December of 2022, but now she will be graduating with the 2023 senior class. Zaley's situation is different compared to the others. She's eager to graduate and go to college a year early, whereas my other two interviewees are entering the workforce. I began by getting basic background information.

"So you actually had to do college courses and stuff to be able to graduate early right?"

"Ummm, yeah, online college classes replaced my senior year required classes so I could still take my junior classes."

"Why didn't they just put you on Edmentum like they did with the others?"

"I took Edmentum over the summer, I actually only had to take one class," replied Zaley.

"How does that make you feel, you're basically busting your butt off for this, while people who are the biggest strugglers are getting a push from MHS to graduation this year?"

"To be honest I'm still happy for myself, I'm still happy because it has been my dream for the longest time, I've wanted to leave this town as soon as possible. And I'm graduating with a lot of credits that will get me into college," said Zaley

"Anything else you'd like to add?"

"There is actually. There are a lot of people who think I'm graduating early to go with Jared but that is not true. We are going to be 12 hours away from each other because I want to start my own life. He will stay in El Paso while I go away to college in Nacogdoches. We are staying together, but we aren't moving in together for at least maybe a year."

Next up was an interview with Mrs. Murphy, the MHS counselor. I began with, "Students in my class have been talking about and acting upon plans to graduate from MISD early. Some of those students are high academic achievers, and others are just getting the minimum requirements finished because they struggle in academic settings. So what's happening here? Who gets to graduate early?"

Mrs. Murphy said, "So, obviously Mrs. Porter has more experience with graduation requirements and what's best with students — knowing our students and their strengths and weaknesses, we were able to look for a plan and figure out what was best for each student. The kids that were at risk for not graduating are the kids we wanted to create a plan for, to create a plan for them to graduate with their diploma instead of dropping out, which is worse."

"Is this better for them?"

"For high achieving students, I think they need to stay in school the whole entire four years. For students who are at risk I would say this becomes a better option than not completing school."

"Is anyone allowed to attempt to graduate early?"

"Each situation is evaluated; we assess each individual case."

"What does it mean to be 'at risk'?"

"There's a lot of different indicators that can put students at risk — if you're an EL, if you've failed a STAAR test, or if you've failed a grade level. There are many things that identify if a student's at risk."

Another student graduated in December, finishing high school a semester early. He basically only attended senior year for one semester, and him graduating was a big rush and surprise. I decided to interview his girlfriend due to the fact that this student has gone off the grid ever since he left school.

"So, what were your opinions on your boyfriend graduating early?"

"Umm, happy but sad at the same time. Happy because he didn't know if he was going to graduate at all, sad because he's not with the class anymore."

"What does he do now?"

"He works with his dad."

"Does he like working?"

"He said it's better than going to school."

"Do you think this was better for him?"

"Yes, because he didn't like school."

"Does he miss school?"

"No, definitely not."

"Do you think he's happier?"

"Yes."

"What is he planning to do now that he's graduated?"

"He's going to Houston for school to become an electrician."

Austin trip next week with cool kids!

By TORI

As everyone knows, Aubrie Aguilar is a very talented young woman here at Marfa ISD. She's well known for her excellent drawing skills and positive attitude. Last year, she participated in the UIL Film Festival by creating and entering an animation. She advanced to the semifinals and earned a trip to Austin! I tagged along with her, Ms. Powers and Ms. Donaldson in February of last year and it was a bunch of fun.

Good news, Aubrie participated again this year, and she made it to the state finals! Her animation this year was great and included good music and voice acting by Nathan and Lesly. We're all so happy for you, Aubrie!

Since we plan on doing different stuff on this trip, I asked Ms. Powers and Aubrie what they wanted to do differently this year.

Aubrie explained that she wanted to make good memories with her friends and create inside jokes and whatnot. She's also looking forward to spending time with friends and getting away from town as a vacation. One thing she wants to do differently in Austin is to go shopping at the mall!

Ms. Powers is expecting to have fun times with awesome students (the students attending all helped Aubrie with her movie: Lesly, Nathan, Samuel, Dimetrey, myself and, of course, Aubrie), and her bestie, Mrs. Donaldson!

"I love being on the UT campus and showing it to students because that's where my best memories were as a college kid," she explained to me, tossing around a pencil. "It's also beautiful. Oh, and I'm excited to go and eat out every night because it's such a rare thing for me to do," she finished with a chuckle.

I asked her what she was looking forward to, and she started screaming about Aubrie winning the prize and watching her movie on the big screen! "And sleeping in a hotel bed," she added. My last question for her is what she wants to do differently in Austin. She stared up at the ceiling for what seemed like an eternity before answering. She suggested going to the bowling alley on the UT campus. Hopefully they have other games other than bowling, because I'm not good at it!

To pull all of this together, Aubrie's talent has brought us both satisfaction and a trip to Austin! She deserves this so much because she worked so hard to qualify for State. Her dream finally came true! Again, we're all so proud of you, Aubrie. You're always doing great no matter what!!

Ferret: Is now the time?! A personal essay

By PIPER

I've been begging for a ferret for almost a year now. It's been eventful, I will say. Thus far? What have my efforts come to? What do I need after this year of begging? All I need is a green light from my dad.

I want a ferret because, well, look at one and tell me that it's not cute!?

Ferrets are outstanding creatures, they're smart, agile and energetic.

My father argues that they steal, but who wants spoons anyways? They're just into dishes, and nobody likes washing dishes.

Ferrets are affectionate and friendly, bonding with owners quickly, but they don't like small chil-dren, just like me! (Little kids are sticky, okay?) They can be playful and energetic and entertain-ing. A group of ferrets is called a business. A bunch of business noodles!

Did you know that ferrets are geniuses? They rank above both cats and dogs and a couple of primates. If a ferret wants something bad enough it'll find a way to do it! Ferrets can recognize their names and learn tricks, they respond to verbal and visual commands, and can be litter box trained.

Lets face it, ferrets are amazing, super-genius, carpet snakes, and I want one immensely. In my current escapades in convincing my father, I decided to set up a cage and a living space for a ferret, whether he likes it or not.

I did something similar with an elf on the shelf when I was 11 — lo and behold I now have an ar-my of elves (my current number is seven — what's the name for a group of elves?) I've gotten a new one almost every year. I'm hoping this similar technique will result in a ferret, unless it doesn't…

So, in my conclusion, I want a ferret very badly, and eventually I will get one. Whether it's today or the day I move out, I will get a ferret.

These are some of the February installments from Marfa ISD's journalism class - more to come.


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Chad Serhal, WRONG Marfa's latest artist in residence, to display collage work at closing reception this weekend

By MARY CANTRELL
mkcantrell@bigbendsentinel.com

MARFA — Chad Serhal, WRONG Marfa's latest artist in residence, will host a closing reception this Saturday, February 25, from 4 to 7 p.m at Do Right Hall.

The artist, who also works as an adjunct professor at Southeastern Louisiana University, was in town for the month of February working on his collage, video and musical practices. A native of Indiana, Serhal was recently studying sculpture in graduate school at the University of Florida.

He is an early career artist and the time devoted to making new work at WRONG marks the first of his major residencies. Serhal said he'd always been interested in traveling to Marfa, in part because he and the town shared a James Dean connection. (Serhal grew up on the same street as Dean, who was considered a hometown hero.)

"Because of that, Marfa has always been on the map for me as the location for *Giant*. I'm a big film guy. All the movies that were made here, it just seemed like some sort of mecca that I needed to visit," said Serhal.

True to form, Serhal has been uploading a film a day on Youtube, documenting his residency in a series he's calling his "scüzz vlog." The artist's primary medium is collage — his temporary studio space at Do Right Hall is filled with collaging supplies such as collections of paper, glue and scissors — and said some of his main influences are the styles of artists Kurt Schwitters and Ray Johnson.

"I'm very into collage and when I went to grad school, I thought that I would be moving on from that, but I doubled down and I got really into it," said Serhal. "I'm interested in distressed materials and collecting. Collecting cards, matchbooks and things like that."

Serhaul has been scouring flea markets and book stores for years, building up a collection of items from which he sources to create collages. "You never know what you are going to use," he said. His collections and supplies are thoughtfully organized by category — paper and cards, wood and canvas and paints, brushes and markers — in around 30 clear 64-Liter plastic tubs.

The artist's taste for others' discarded stuff tends to verge on the inexpensive, yet is idiosyncratic, he explains.

"If I go to a comic book store, I'm not looking for new comic books, I'm looking for throw-away $1.50 cent, 25 cent comic books because the quality is what I'm looking for, like '84 and earlier, they're not glossy," said Serhal. "I can't really explain exactly what appeals to me, but when I see it, I know."



Staff photo by Mary Cantrell

Chad Serhal, WRONG Marfa's February artist in residence, will display new collage works and be available to meet local residents at a closing reception this weekend, Saturday, February 25, from 4 to 7 p.m. at Do Right Hall.

Utilizing printed materials such as comic books and magazines, Serhal often finds himself balancing the power of widely-distributed, known images with the desire to make an interesting collage that people can draw their own conclusions from.

"There's one way to look at collage where each piece has a whole world, a whole meaning to it, and you can use that power in the collage, or you can do the opposite," said Serhal.

The same goes for the artists' utilization of words in his work. A small antique wooden box with many shallow drawers — a flea market find — holds tons of cut outs of tiny little letters, words and full book pages. Page 519 from *Moby Dick*, for example, was littered with precise rectangular cut outs where words used to be. Serhal said he takes his cue from filmmaker Harmony Korine's one-word poem concept, and the artist often employs the use of words to add a bit of humor or irony to a collage.

"I need to keep words very vague, so that people don't immediately know what this collage is about and they can interpret how they want. I love to use puns and just dumb down the statement," said Serhal.

The artist works in a "semi-committal," fashion, gluing as he goes along, rather than rearranging meticulously for the perfect composition then gluing materials down. A small glass jar at the main work station in his studio, lit by mismatched lamps, holds his custom mix of universal wallpaper paste and Elmer's. "I'm pretty anarchist when it comes to composing. I'll just go with the instincts, and then there's no erasing. I can always collage over something," he said.

Lately, Serhal has found working small-scale more satisfying, as the materials he uses often dictate scale. His smaller works may be rather minimal, including just a handful of elements thoughtfully placed together. A discarded university collection of glass slides Serhal saved has been useful for giving certain characters the spotlight, he explains.

"If I cut out a little person that's like, five centimeters tall, and I put them on a 6 x 4 canvas it's just going to disappear. This little person wants impact so I put it on a 2 x 2 slide. And it's the main character," said Serhal.

Larger works by the artist on medium-sized panels, which act as palimpsests, have been repeatedly painted and sanded down for a tattered billboard effect. Serhal's tools are often those of destruction as well as creation. Inspired by his major influences — artists Schwitters and Johnson, who developed made up, specific words with which to refer to their art — Serhal came up with the word "scüzz" to refer to his works, describing how a collection of small cards were placed in a tub with paint to get mixed around and "scüzzed up."

"That kind of describes the distressed style," he said.

A student of the history of collage focusing on the past 100 years, Serhal has a theory that collage, despite its reputation as an impermanent medium, could have acted as the precursor to many modern art movements, including surrealism, Cubism and Dadaism.

"People were painting a certain way and then someone glued paper down, and it just broke the mold of how to do things," said Serhal. "I think it was a very important medium for creativity in all of those different genres. But it gets left behind as incomplete or unprofessional or not fine art, because it doesn't last, it's kind of ephemeral."

Terlingua cemetery research featured at Jeff Davis County Library on March 4

FORT DAVIS — After a career spanning 31 years with the National Park Service at Big Bend National Park, archeologist Tom Alex has taken his encyclopedic knowledge of the region to compile important research of the cemetery and ancestors of Terlingua. A free program offered at the Jeff Davis County Library in Fort Davis will highlight his work on Saturday, March 4, at 11 a.m.

Tom has recorded 2,887 archeological and historic sites, plus has documented 57 sites containing rock art. He will soon conclude a 10-year sampling survey of cultural sites coordinated with Sul Ross State University. His work in Terlingua examines little known history.

Tom Alex's newest book, *The Dead Still Speak: Terlingua Cemetery Inventory* (2022) is a compilation of his archeological surveys, photographs, and inventories of this unique cemetery. The author's two previous books, the noteworthy *Big Bend National Park and Vicinity* and *Around Terlingua* published by Arcadia's Images of America, will also be available for purchase and signing.

This program is the second in the library's "Step Back In Time" series. For details, phone (432) 426 3802.

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Sudoku Puzzle

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

			1	5			9	
		5			9			
8				6		3	7	
	3			2		9		
4				1				2
		7		9			8	
	1	8		4				7
			7			4		
	6			8	2			

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution from last week's puzzle:

SOLUTION:

7	5	8	4	3	6	1	9	2
4	9	1	8	7	2	5	6	3
3	2	6	1	9	5	7	8	4
2	3	7	5	8	1	6	4	9
9	6	4	3	2	7	8	5	1
1	8	5	6	4	9	2	3	7
5	7	9	2	6	3	4	1	8
6	4	3	7	1	8	9	2	5
8	1	2	9	5	4	3	7	6

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Universal Crossword

Edited by David Steinberg February 20, 2023

ACROSS
1 Small dishes of Spain
6 Cleans up a spill
10 Dealership sticker amt.
14 Coral island
15 Cry of frustration
16 Dayton's state
17 Executive's free ride
19 Totally absorbed
20 ___ of a kind
21 Fictional bear in a red shirt
22 Make, as income
24 Busy place in December
26 Lamp on a rail
30 So the room can hear
32 Packed house initials
33 Colorless
34 Relay segment
36 Student's home
38 Near the back, at sea
39 With 42-Across, "I don't want that" ... or a hint to the starts of 17-, 26-, 56- and 66-Across
42 See 39-Across
44 Soft slip-on, for short
45 Each
47 Grp. that regulates sweets but not meats
48 Legendary Spanish warlord
50 Carry-on, e.g.
52 Point of view
56 Disco descendant
59 Something fake
60 "Que ___?"
61 Unlikely to droop
63 Planet's form
64 Health-drink berry
66 First Black man to win a Grammy
69 "Jane the Virgin" star Rodriguez
70 Wounded
71 Groom's waiting area
72 President-elect's recitation
73 Metallic rocks
74 Takes a breather

DOWN
1 City south of Seattle
2 Without a musical key
3 Grapefruit cousin
4 European hiker's conquest
5 ___ with a fine
6 City leaders
7 Apple developer's workplace?
8 Sports org. hidden in "championship game"
9 Green ogre of film
10 Original "SNL" cast member Garrett
11 China's most populous city
12 Jeans tear
13 Cauldron or kettle
18 "It's ___ rocket science!"
23 Bay Area city whose name is Spanish for "tree-lined path"
25 Something remarkable
27 Roast or toast
28 Weightiness
29 Explosive that sniffer dogs can detect
31 Ten-year periods
35 Break in continuity
37 Soccer official
39 "Just go for it," in a text
40 Dweller
41 Chef Matsuhisa's restaurant chain
43 Skillets
44 Apathetic response
46 Meadow
49 Book before Jeremiah
51 San Francisco team
53 They say "boo" but not "yay"
54 Rodeo rope
55 Fire remains
57 Proudly masculine
58 "Stop the cameras!"
62 Ski lift
64 A long time ___
65 Undercover org.
67 Your and my
68 Taproom order

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

T	R	A	N	S	■	G	N	A	S	H	■	A	A	H
M	A	C	A	O	■	R	A	I	T	A	■	N	B	A
I	M	I	M	P	R	E	S	S	E	D	■	D	O	T
■	I	D	A	H	O	■	A	L	E	■	W	I	D	E
■	■	■	S	I	M	P	L	E	R	T	I	M	E	S
D	E	L	T	A	C	O	■	■	S	O	L	E	■	■
E	P	E	E	■	O	P	T	S	■	E	D	A	M	■
W	I	G	■	I	M	P	A	I	R	S	■	N	A	P
■	C	A	L	M	■	A	N	T	E	■	O	I	L	S
■	■	L	E	A	F	■	■	A	D	E	P	T	L	Y
O	P	T	I	M	U	S	P	R	I	M	E	■	■	■
M	O	E	S	■	T	A	U	■	N	A	N	O	S	■
E	P	A	■	J	I	M	M	Y	K	I	M	M	E	L
G	E	M	■	E	L	O	P	E	■	L	I	N	G	O
A	S	S	■	B	E	A	S	T	■	S	C	I	O	N

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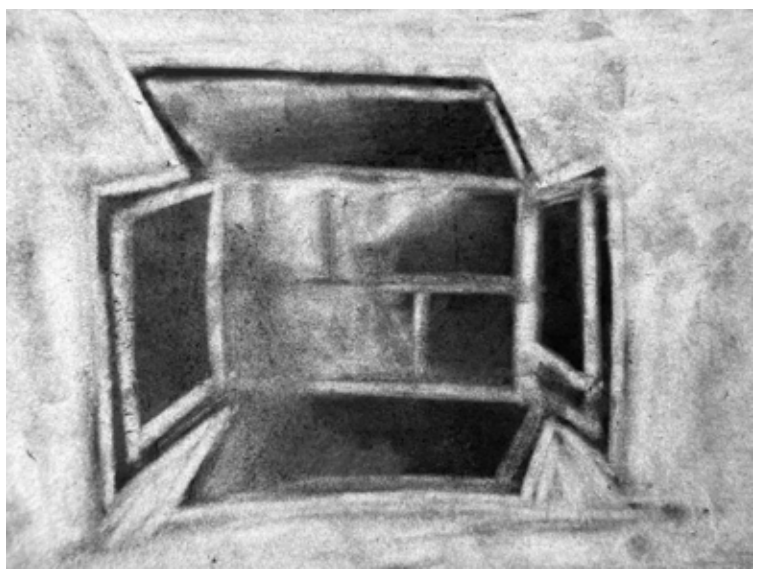


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I will help you,
I will uphold you with my
victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

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DRAWING OF THE WEEK



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FEB/MAR	Thu, Feb 23	Fri, Feb 24	Mon, Feb 27	Tue, Feb 28	Wed, Mar 1
BREAKFAST	STUFFED BAGEL, CHEESE CUBES	DONUT, SAUSAGE	BREAKFAST SANDWICH	FRENCH TOAST, SAUSAGE	POWER BREAKFAST
LUNCH	CHEESY BREADSTICKS, FRESH BROCCOLI FLORETS, MARINARA SAUCE, CINNAMON APPLESAUCE	CHICKEN PARMESAN, ROLL, SAVORY GREEN BEANS, CORN, PEACHES	BREADED DRUMSTICK, ROLL, MASHED POTATOES, TINY TOM	QUESADILLA, SALSA, BEANS, CUCUMBER CUP, APRICOTS	CRISPY CHICKEN SANDWICH, FRESH VEGGIE CUP, GARDEN SALAD, FRUITY GELATIN

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Possession ***by Gary Cee***

2/20

1	2	3	4	5	■	6	7	8	9	■	10	11	12	13
14					■	15				■	16			
17					18					■	19			
20			■	21				■	22	23			■	■
24			25	■	26			27					28	29
30				31	■	32			■	33				
■	■	■	34		35	■	36		37		■	38		
■	39	40				41	■	42			43			■
44			■	45			46	■	47			■	■	■
48			49		■	50		51	■	52		53	54	55
56					57				58	■	59			
■	■	60				■	61			62	■	63		
64	65			■	66	67					68			
69				■	70				■	71				
72				■	73				■	74				

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MARFA SHORTHORNS SPORTS CALENDAR

THU, FEB 23: Boys Powerlifting at Pecos, 5:00pm
FRI, FEB 24: High School Softball vs Presidio at Marfa, 5:00pm
SAT, FEB 25: High School Track at Fort Stckton
WED, FEB 28: High School Softball vs Wink at Wink



Staff photo by Mary Cantrell

Coach Edgar Ramirez addresses the Marfa High School boys basketball team during a timeout at a close district playoff game against Fort Davis High School last week.



Staff photo by Mary Cantrell

The Marfa and Fort Davis boys basketball teams competed in a nail-biting district tiebreaker game last week in Marfa in which Fort Davis won despite a close game.

Sports updates from MISD athletic director

By LINDA OJEDA

MARFA — The Marfa Shorthorns basketball seasons ended last week with the boys falling to the Fort Davis Indians in a playoff-tiebreaker game and the Lady Horns dropping their bi-district basketball game to the Buena Vista Lady Longhorns.

Softball and track is up and running with the Lady Horns going 2-3 at the Pecos Tournament, and track heads to Fort Stockton Saturday for the Comanche relays.



Staff photo by Mary Cantrell

The Marfa High School boys basketball team comes together for a huddle during a district playoff game against Fort Davis High School last week.

OBITUARY



Surratt

Tana Harper Surratt of Marfa, Texas, passed away at her ranch surrounded by loved ones on February 19, 2023. Tana was well known, respected, and feared in the rodeo arena and always had a fighting spirit when it came to rodeo, and this fighting spirit is how Tana will be remembered in her final days. Tana was a World Champion Optional Racer in 1960, AJRA All Around Cowgirl in 1961 and Champion Optional Roper in 1962.

Tana and her sister Amy were their mother and daddy's main source of help and inspiration for having fine horses. Many times her daddy, Ted Harper, would say he couldn't have raised any tougher cowboys than his girls. Tana loved the ranching way of life and she and her husband Johnny spent their lives raising cattle and horses as well as their three daughters at their ranch in Marfa. There was no place she would rather be than enjoying friends and a West Texas sunset on the patio at her home.

Tana remained very close to many of her childhood friends who were lovingly known as the Marfa Chicks. Traditionally getting together for a class reunion at least once a year, she cherished these friendships and gathered strength from these unbreakable bonds.

Tana is preceded in death by her husband, Johnny; her parents, Ted and Frances Harper; her sister, Amy Harper Stephens; and her son-in-law, Robert Weyerts. Tana is survived by her daughters, Amy Surratt Weyerts, Mya Surratt Craven and her husband Kelly, and Tana Surratt Dumas and her husband Mike. Tana had four grandchildren that she cherished, Ryon and Colby Holt and Keith and Shannon Weyerts.

Pallbearers will be Ryon Holt, Colby Holt, Keith Weyerts, Kelly Craven, Mike Dumas and Mem Hall. Honorary pallbearers will be Cleat Stephens, Sam Stephens and Sandy Stephens. Funeral services will be held on Saturday, February 25, 2023, at 1 p.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Marfa with graveside services following at Surratt Ranch.

• • •



Wheelis

Mark Allyn Wheelis of Victoria, Texas, passed away at the age of 72 on February 20, 2023, in Edna, Texas, after a long illness.

Mark was born October 24, 1950, in Corpus Christi, Texas, to L.W. Wheelis and Ruth Lewis Pascoe Wheelis. The family relocated to Marfa, Texas, to run a ranching operation. Mark graduated from Marfa High School in 1969 and attended Sul Ross State University in Alpine, graduating with his bachelor's degree in 1973. After graduation, he returned to help run the ranch and eventually care for his ailing parents.

In 1984, he opened the feed store, Rancher's Store & More, in Marfa. He enjoyed providing Marfa and surrounding areas with necessities for agricultural life and the latest western fashions for over 10 years. After the store was sold, Mark continued to run the ranch for D.H. Braman Jr. and to take on additional responsibilities at other ranch properties. Mark became interested in the issues facing the agriculture industry and became a member of the Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. He served on several committees and eventually was appointed to the board of directors for both these organizations. He also became involved in lobbying legislative bodies on agricultural issues. After relocating to Victoria in 2004, Mark was appointed to the Texas Animal Health Commission by Governor Rick Perry and served as equine commissioner from 2007-2013 — notably establishing regulations and emergency management for livestock, especially in the event of hurricanes. He was also involved with the Calf Scramble Donors Committee of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. In later years he became a licensed realtor, lending his agriculture experience to buyers and sellers of ranch properties.

Many vacations were spent with a horse trailer in tow, from Pecos, Texas, to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and many other locales, as Mark enjoyed steer roping and team roping. He was very proud to be a PRCA Gold Card member. As an avid outdoorsman, he also enjoyed hunting and fishing. He always had a camera on him, as he enjoyed photography — particularly beautiful landscapes. These photos helped tell his stories, and boy did he love to tell a good story!

Mark is preceded in death by his parents; brother Richard "Dick" Wheelis; brother L.W. "Buddy" Wheelis; and sister-in-law, Jan Wheelis. He is survived by his son, Jake Wheelis (Kinsey); daughter, Laura Wheelis (Kent); four grandchildren, many nieces, nephews and loved ones.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to Alzheimer's research, The HEARTest Yard Fund, an agricultural scholarship fund (such as Houston Stock Show) or the charity of your choice.

Services will be held at 10 a.m. on Thursday February 23, 2023, at Evergreen Cemetery in Skidmore, Texas.

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Thu Feb 23

Double Author Evening at Front Street Books
6:00pm - 8:00pm at 121 E Holland Ave in Alpine
Featuring two award-winning authors for the release of their short story collections: Kirk Wilson's "Out of Season" (winner of the 2021 Elixir Press Fiction Award) and Chaitali Sen's "A New Race of Men From Heaven" (winner of the Mary McCarthy Prize for Short Fiction.

Emilie Clepper at French Co Grocer
6:00pm at 206 Avenue D in Marathon
Come enjoy some fun country/Americana/folk tunes. Backyard will be open. Beer and wine will be served.

Fri Feb 24

Alpine Public Library Travel Talk
7:00pm at AEP Foundation Multipurpose Room at APL
Matt Walter will share highlights of his travels to Cornwall, London, and Windsor. For more information, contact the library at 432-837-2621.

Ross Fleming at Old Gringo
8:00pm at 101 W. Avenue E in Alpine
Alpine recording artist Ross Fleming is live!

Dave Martinez at Lost Horse Saloon
9:30pm at 306 E San Antonio St in Marfa
Americana, Folk, lyrics. From Lubbock to you!

Sat Feb 25

Alpine Police Dept. Bicycle Rodeo
9:00am - 12:00pm at Kokernot Park in Alpine
Officers will be giving out free bicycle helmets and inspecting bicycles! Texas Department of Health Services will also be inspecting Child Car Seats. If you have any questions please call the station. 432-837-3486. Snacks & beverages provided. This event is free!

LITTLE JUICE: Cold-Pressed Juice Pop-Up
1:00pm - 4:00pm at 303 E El Paso Street (Marfa Wine Co. property) in Marfa
More information at LittleJuice.Co / @LittleJuiceHere

Sentinel Saturdays
7:00pm - Late at The Sentinel in Marfa
Specialty seasonal cocktails. Pozole & Enchiladas. See you there!

David Adam Byrnes at Ole Crystal Bar
11:00pm at 412 E Holland Ave in Alpine
Come hear some Country music!

Wed Mar 1

GALVEZTON at Lost Horse Saloon
8:00pm at 306 E San Antonio St in Marfa
GALVEZTON, is the latest project by eclectic songwriter, Robert Kuhn. "Honest and Independent Surf Rocknroll Music from Somewhere Near Texas"

Plan Ahead/ Upcoming Events

Big Bend Reproductive Coalition Online Workshop Series: Knowledge Share: Reproductive Autonomy
March 6 - April 17
Multilingual closed captioning available. Security protocols will be in place, including optional anonymity. Free for all residents of the Big Bend. For more information or to register, visit www.bigbendrc.org

Ongoing Weekly Events & Classes

Free Meditation Classes for Local Law Enforcemtn, City, County, and Healthcare Workers
Thursday at 5:30pm at Marfa Public Library

Mira Marfa
Monday: Yin Yoga at 6:00pm
Tuesday: Flexibility Flow at 9:30am; Dance Family at 6:00pm
Wednesday: Astanga Inspired Yoga at 5:30pm
Thursday: Asana Clinic at 6:00pm
Sunday: Primary Series at 10:00am; Dance Family at 6:00pm
105 W Texas St, $15 drop-in fee; no one will be turned away for lack of funds

Big Sky Yoga
Monday: All levels at 6:00pm
Tuesday: Beginner at 10:00am
Wednesdays: All levels at 6:00pm
Thursday: Yin at 6:00pm
Friday: Core at 12:00pm
Saturday: All levels at 10:00am
New location: 105 E Oak #4 (in the ally behind the Wrong Store)

Step it Up (Step Aerobics)
Tuesday at 6:00pm, Thursday at 9:00am & Saturday at 9:00am @ Big Sky Yoga
All fitness levels welcome. New location: 105 E Oak #4 (in the ally behind the Wrong Store)

Free Zumba Classes
Monday & Wednesday at 6:00pm at Marfa Public Library

Free Meditation Classes
Tuesday at 6:00pm at Marfa Public Library

Life Drawing with Model
Tuesday from 7:00pm - 9:00pm at Talent Studios in Alpine
Join this vibrant artist community, make new friends and hone your drawing skills. Reserve your easel by texting 206.619.4699

Baby & Toddler Storytime
Wednesday at 11:00am at Marfa Public Library

The Magic Around Us Youth Drum Circle
Friday at 4:30am at Marfa Public Library

AA (online & sometimes in-person)
Saturday at 12:00pm at https://tinyurl.com/y686nnw2 & in-person at Marfa Public Library

The Alpine Farmers Market
Saturday at 9:00am on historic Murphy Street in Alpine

Note: Schedules are subject to change. Please call or visit business websites to confirm that event is happening.

Have an upcoming or weekly event?
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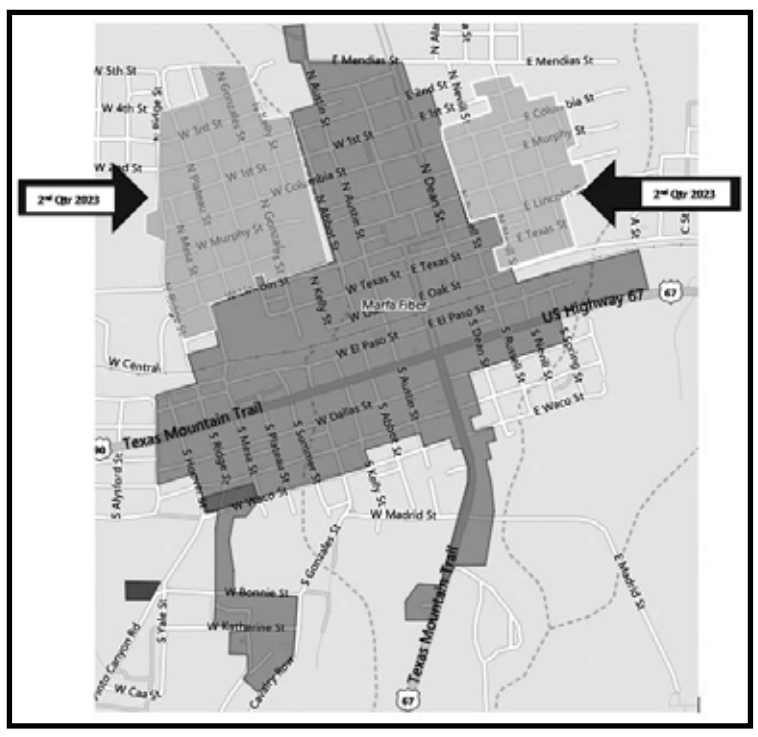
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PUBLIC NOTICES

The Marfa Parks and Recreation Board meets every third Thursday of the month at 6:00pm in the Casner Room at City Hall. The public is invited to attend.

The City of Marfa Board of Adjustment has scheduled a Special Meeting for March 13, 2023, at 6:00 p. m. in the Casner Room, City Hall, 113 S. Highland Street, Marfa, Texas. This meeting is open to the public. The Board members will discuss and render a decision regarding:

- A Variance Request No. 23-01, requested by William McDonald and Janet Williams from the requirements of Marfa's Zoning Ordinance, regarding front yard setback at 610 W. Katherine Street, also known as 06500 Ft Russell, Lot 50x180' of Lot 2.
- A Special Use Permit No. 23-01, requested by Ida Dominguez to place a mobile home, which will be used as a residence, at 1005 N. Gonzales Street, also known as Block 5, N 17.5' of Lot 4 and all of Lot 5, Mahon Addition.

Additional information concerning the above Variance Requests is available by calling Ann Dunlap, Board of Adjustment Secretary at (432)729-4315.

Amanda T. Roane, City Manager

STORYCORPS IN MARFA

StoryCorps, the national nonprofit organization dedicated to recording, preserving, and sharing the stories of people from all backgrounds and beliefs, is coming to Marfa from **Feb. 16 to March 10** to record interviews, in-person and virtually, as part of its Mobile Tour.

To sign up to record a conversation with a loved one, either in-person at the Marfa Public Library, or virtually, call StoryCorps' 24-hour toll-free reservation line at 1-800-850-4406 or visit storycorps.org.

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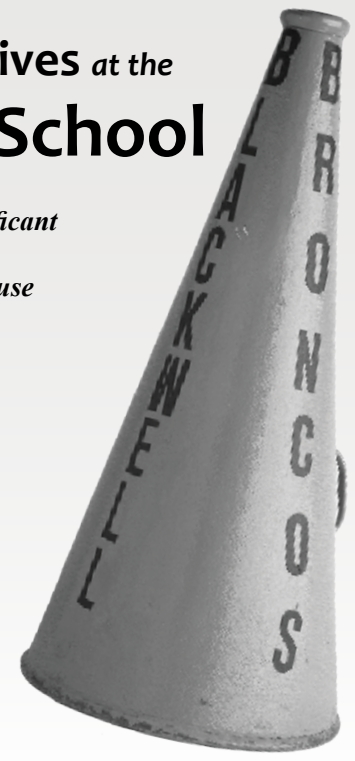
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Notice:

Dr. Katie Rays last day of seeing patients at Preventative Care Health Services (dba) Presidio County Health Services, Inc. is February 28, 2023

"It has been my great pleasure getting to know you and be a small part of your life for these last 10 years. Wishing you the best, Dr. Katie Ray"

Her patients may:
• Remain as a patient at PCHS and be referred to another practicing provider at this clinic. Make an appointment with Dr. Edith Simmons, Dr. Patrick Daly, Dr. Mark Dwinell, Dr. Emily Sliz and William Mason-FNP today.
• Obtain your medical records from this office.
•Request a medical records transfer release to another health care provider.

AVISO:
El último día de la Dr. Katie Rays de ver a los pacientes en Preventative Care Health Services (dba) Presidio County Health Services, Inc. es 28 de febrero de 2023

Sus pacientes pueden:
• Permanecer como paciente en PCHS y ser cita con otro proveedor practicante en esta clínica. Haga una cita con la Dr. Edith Simmons, el Dr. Patrick Daly, el Dr. Mark Dwinell, la Dr. Emily Sliz o William Mason-FNP hoy.
• Obtenga sus registros médicos de esta oficina.
• Solicitar una liberación de transferencia de registros médicos a otro proveedor de atención médica.

"Ha sido un gran placer conocerte y ser una pequeña parte de tu vida durante estos últimos 10 años. Deseándole lo mejor, Dr. Katie Ray"

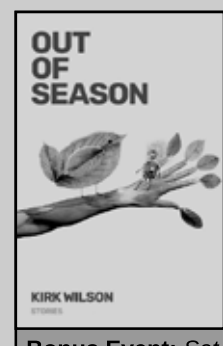
February 23 @ 6 pm

Dual Author Event!

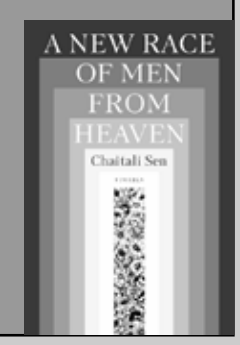
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Bonus Event: *Sat, 2/25 @ 10 am - 12 pm*
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FEDERAL:
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U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz:
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