

# The North Fork Merchant Herald

The Digital Version of the  
Newspaper From the Valley That  
Wants to Vote on Stuff Whether it  
Matters or Not

**Digital Edition**  
**Volume 25 - Number 2.5-E**  
**February 15, 2022**

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## Paonia Will Have Weird (but historic) Non-Contested Election Hotchkiss Candidate Forum Set For March 2

By Thomas Wills

Paonia Town Council  
February 8, 2022

*"I concur with Corinne's assessment. This is not an emergency situation."* Delta County Health Department – Environmental Health Director Greg Rajinowski, posting a comment on YouTube during the meeting. He was referring to the need for repairs at the water and sewer plants.

*"We will take no more comments from the public on this item (water and sewer issue)."* Mayor Mary Bachran, two and a half hours into a four hour meeting, who then allowed Michelle Pattison to comment further on not taking comments.

The first Paonia Council meeting in February had all of the usual stuff: excessive length (over 4 hours), grandstanding antics, attacks on Town administration and the mayor, and good information (on the water system), along with some routine business being conducted midst the storm. "Frustration" seemed to be a word and feeling being shared frequently by all parties concerned.

As usual, Administrator Corinne Ferguson maintained a professional demeanor throughout despite the barrage of slings and arrows aimed her way from public and a couple trustees.

**Water News in a Nutshell:** While former Public Works Director Travis Loberg left the Town's water and sewer plants in something of a mess, both plants are functioning and the Town's water is clean and safe and meeting government standards. But, lots of repairs and procedural fixes need to be done relating to the plants and that is proceeding quickly with the help of multiple entities. (See related story.)

Bringing the lower water plant and tank back on-line is in the works as is planning for the relining of the 2-million gallon Lamborn Mesa plant tank and PRV (pressure reducing) valve work.

Restaffing of the various departments is proceeding with

several hiccups and backsteps and understaffing remains a major issue.

Another major issue is the question of what it will take to remove the current water tap/service expansion moratorium as the need for additional, affordable housing steadily increases? The pending JDS Hydro second report, due any day, is supposed to address that question.

### Town Will Have Non-Contested Election

And the Town will have an election even though there will be only four candidates for four seats since a motion to cancel the election and save the Town over \$2,000 plus staff time failed. Arguments for holding the election despite having only four candidate for four seats included the fact that there will be four years terms and two year terms and vote numbers will determine which candidat gets which.

### Water Update/Discussion:

Brianna Greer of Solid Solutions Geosciences (SSG) of Montrose and Brandyn Bair of SGM Engineering, based in Glenwood Springs, gave an overview of the work they have been doing on the Town's water system. Greer's company has been acting as operator (in) responsible charge (ORC) for the Town water and sewer plants making sure paperwork and testing is done and identifying issues. SGM has been working as the Town's engineers for several years and are looking at the relining of the 2 million gallon tank.

At the end of the presentations and discussion Paige Smith made a motion to schedule a special meeting to focus exclusively on the water system issues and how the Town wants to move forward. There was a second as discussion of timing ensued. The Administrator will contact SGM who is finishing up a report that the council felt was pertinent to moving forward and deterring their availability, toss out some possible dates to the Board. This would be after the Water Advisory Committee meeting scheduled for February 17<sup>th</sup>.

### Grants for 2-Million Tank and PRV Valves

Continued on Page 7

## Paonia To Have Historic Non- Contested Election Hotchkiss Will Have Election Crawford Election Cancelled

By Thomas Wills

*"I can f\*\*\*ing say what I want."* Paonia Trustee candidate Thomas Markle said at a 2021 Paonia Town Council meeting.

*Correction: We got Paonia candidate John Valentine's name wrong in the Feb. 1 e-edition. Our mistake, and our apologies are offered.*

In the North Fork only the Town of Hotchkiss, which had one more Trustee candidate than open seat, will be having a *contested* municipal election. But...

**Paonia Style.** Surprisingly, with only four candidates turning in petitions to fill the four available seats, the April 5 Paonia Municipal election will happen if only to determine who is the most popular and who will receive a two-year term vs a four-year term. The decision to not cancel the election as was always done in past in similar circumstances, was made after public pressure at the February 8 Council meeting to the surprise of many including Delta County election officials who had released a sample ballot without Paonia on it. The ballot was revised and rereleased a couple days later.

The new council members include strident critics of the town administration and staff.

According to Ferguson, the candidates are: Paige Smith, John Valentine, Richard Stelter, and Local Nomad co-owner- Thomas Markle. With the exception of Valentine (a retired teacher), all are fairly well known in Town Hall circles. Smith, a persistent critic/attendee of Council meetings, was recently appointed to fill one of two vacancies on the board, Stelter is former Trustee and Planning Commission member and chair, and Markle is the spouse of former trustee Michelle Pattison, who was elected in 2020 (after being appointed to fill a vacancy earlier) but abruptly resigned in

Continued on Page 7

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# Paonia's Town Administrator Faces Steady Stream of Challenges

Report/Analysis by Thomas Wills

*"Kudos (to) all staff who are working double and triple time to keep us moving forward positively in all departments."* Town Administrator Corinne Ferguson in her Feb.8 pre-meeting packet report.

Paonia Town Administrator/ Clerk, Corinne Ferguson, reported in the February 8, 2022 meeting packet that she has been extra-busy as the Town is dealing with multiple issues related to short staffing including vacant Chief of Police and Public Works Director (PWD) posts, making Ferguson, who also serves as Town Clerk, the lone remaining department head as well as the person who supervises department heads. This means that Ferguson's job now includes portions of the other two, departed, department head's supervisory jobs. But as work piles on, she is not being cut any slack by some.

As she tries to do her job(s), Ferguson faces increased heat from critics who were recently handed new evidence by water/sewer consultants SSG at a February 3 Council meeting that the previous PWD had not been able to keep up with basic maintenance at the water and sewer plants, bringing the supervisory oversight buck back to Ferguson's desk.

Adding to Ferguson's challenges is the recent addition of critic Paige Smith as an appointed member of the Council, someone who had previously demanded her firing and the fact that the new council to be installed in April will include Smith and Thomas Markle, who has been equally adamant in his negative assessments of Ferguson's performance and qualifications. So as Ferguson tries to restaff the Town departments and work with a host of consultants and entities on water system issues, a possible majority of the Council will soon be made up of those who have little or no confidence in her abilities.

And a cadre of very engaged critics including: former Trustees Suzanne Watson, Bill Brunner, and Markle, along with out-of-town interested parties Christina Patterson and Chris Kendell, have presented a steady stream of analysis on many issues including what they see as Ferguson's shortcomings. Brunner was the author of the 2019 water tap moratorium as well as an upcoming records accessibility initiative. Patterson was the person who filed the complaint against former Town

Administrator, Ken Knight, which resulted in his forced removal and the appointment of Ferguson as an interim and finally long-term successor. Watson, an indefatigable researcher, has had some success in influencing Council direction on several issues.

The goal of the core critics is apparently to remove Ferguson as Administrator and have the Town hire a new, more qualified/experienced person from the outside to run the Town; something that has not had much sustained

themselves as a department head.

On Ferguson's and the Town's formidable to-do list: restaff Town departments including Police Chief and PWD/ORC (licensed water/sewer plant operator to take over from SSG consultants) and transition to a new attorney- Jeff Conklin, move ahead on securing funding (\$1.5 million) for relining the Town's 2 million gallon (upper) treated water tank and the critical replacement of pressure-reducing valves (PRV), receive and react to a second report from water consultant



**Water Plant Supplies Include Beer?** According to former trustee Suzanne Watson a visit to a Town water treatment plant by one of the current trustees and others last September found the plant unlocked and an otherwise unsecured with no cautionary signage. A refrigerator there was observed to contain liquid alcoholic refreshments. (Photo shared by Watson taken by the trustee.)

success since the 2006 exit of long-term Town Administrator/PWD, John Norris. Besides having problems with some individuals, funding the separate position at a total package cost of about \$100,000 annually had been a strain on the budget. Combining the Town Clerk/Administrator positions under one salary was seen as solution. The Colorado State Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) has discouraged the idea of a Town Administrator also being a department head due to the obvious conflict of the Town Clerk overseeing

JDS Hydro that is supposed to address issues related to the water tap moratorium, moving ahead as financing allows on improvements/repairs to the water system listed in the JDS Hydro initial report, move forward on bringing the lower Clock water treatment plant back on line, move forward on completing the long in-progress new Paonia Comprehensive Plan, and more.

## Sheriff's Office Investigating Double Homicide at Home Outside of Paonia

(Press Release from Sheriff Mark Taylor - February 7, 2022)

On Friday, February 4, 2022 at approximately 11:41 am, the Delta County Emergency Communication Center received a call for a concern for welfare on a male subject who appeared to be deceased at an address on Black Bridge Road, near Paonia.

Delta County Deputies and Investigators responded to the address and during their investigation, located a male and female deceased inside a residence near the Black Bridge east of Paonia. Due to the nature of the investigation, Sheriff's Office Investigators requested agents and forensic specialists from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) respond to assist in the investigation.

Investigators determined both deceased individuals sustained multiple gunshot wounds and their deaths are being investigated as homicides (murder). Investigators believe the murder of these individuals to be an isolated, deliberate and targeted act and do not believe the general public is in any danger.

Delta County Sheriff Mark Taylor would like to encourage anyone who may have information relevant to this investigation, to please come forward and contact Detective Sergeant Becker at 970-874-2005, or share your tips via Delta County Crime Stoppers at 970-874-8810.

The Delta County Coroner's Office has identified the victims as: Michael Arnold, age 69, and Donna Gallegos, age 65; both of whom were residents at the home on Black Bridge Road at the time of their deaths. The Sheriff's Office and Coroner's Office wish to extend our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Arnold and Ms. Gallegos during this difficult time. (End of PR)

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# FEBRUARY JOURNAL

Over the past few weeks, I have been thinking about how fortunate we are to live where we live in the light of dramatically bad weather events, pandemic impacts, and politics in other parts of the country and world. We do seem to be a buffered island of calmness on many fronts. I can see why other people would want to move here.

Yes, we have challenges: long term water trends and other issues stemming from climate change, affordable housing/rural gentrification, cliquishness and political division, a limited (and transitioning) local economy, and so on. But that list is shared by many places in the West and elsewhere. We also have many blessings: a mild climate where one can grow long-season gardens and fruits, access to millions of acres of gorgeous public lands, low population density, an eclectic population (from cowboys to neo-hippies), greater live-and-let-live liberty, and a slower pace of life.

**January 27** - I attended an early morning meeting of the Hotchkiss Community Chamber of Commerce. The meeting was held at the Hotchkiss Crawford Museum where Chamber President Kim Shay (Gambles-Ace) is now vice-president of the HCHS. She is also a hard-working member of the Delta County Fair Board and a leader on the board of One Delta County – the umbrella economic development organization. Whew!

Besides Chamber related discussion news was shared that the Hotchkiss VFW chapter that had occupied part of the museum building has lost its charter and disbanded due to a lack of active members.

A very light snow, like flour on a kneading board, fell in Hotchkiss in the morning. Like flour, it was easily swept away.

**January 28** - Cold and mostly clear.

**January 29** – The charming Joanie Hunt from Paonia stopped by the bookstore/Herald office to say she had enjoyed the February Herald and to share her take on Paonia town news. Moments before I had read a new e-mail from Bill Brunner, laying out what he sees as problems with the Paonia Town administration. Adding details and differing shades of opinion. I appreciate everyone who has shared their unique perspectives on Paonia. Ingredients for baking more balanced narratives.

Sunny, bright, and a little warmer

## Another Month in the Valley

By Thomas Wills  
Publisher - Editor



as the NW U.S. is getting slammed with an historic winter storm.

**January 30** – Sunday. A nice, warmer day across the Valley. I spent some time working on garden planter boxes in my cottage backyard. I started prepping yogurt containers for starting seeds.

Directions: Punch drain holes in the bottom of one quart plastic container and then place it inside another to catch drain water. Fill with starter mix and wet down and plant. Snap lid in place to keep moist and put in a warm spot. About five seeds a container. Check and mist daily after a few days and remove lid move to a sunny spot when sprouts appear. Dampen with spray bottle as needed and/or water with any nutrient-rich drain water collected in the outer container.

Re-pot/transplant as needed until there is only one plant per quart container.

Green peppers starts seem to

grow much slower than tomatoes so I start them in early February. By mid-May they are just getting large for the quart containers. Frost hardy plants can be started in February as well. Cole crops. Stuff like kale that can be transplanted as soon as the soil is workable. (I've had old kale tops that stayed green all winter.) Grow lots of extras just in case you guess wrong as to a transplanting date.

Tomatoes first of March or so.

**January 31** – Colder and overcast but warming and clearing as the day went on. The Hotchkiss Town Clerk reported that there were five confirmed candidates for four Trustee seats and one for mayor, Jim Wingfield. Trustee candidates: Me, Patricia Medina, Sven Edstrom, Tricia McFarland and

Custer McLeod. According to the Clerk, former Hotchkiss police officer, Julia Thompson's, completed and submitted petition was not accepted due to a problem with her voter registration address. Too bad. I was looking forward to having a twenty-something young woman on the board adding her perspective to the mix.

**February 1** – The month started off feeling very winterish; very cold and overcast all day. I stopped by the Hotchkiss Library picked up a few movies and my personal quota of 5 nice KN95 masks, which are medical-grade 3M made.

I e-mailed out the expanded/updated e-edition of the February Herald to our free subscriber list of people, local and all across the country. To get on the list just e-mail me at [Hotchkiss@aol.com](mailto:Hotchkiss@aol.com) and ask to be added. It works best with a G-mail account.

**February 2** - Snow fell overnight across the valley. It came to about a half inch in Hotchkiss, enough to get the cats excited when they dashed out of the cottage at 5 a.m.

I attended the Hotchkiss Business meeting at the Coal Train early this morning. A very good turnout despite the snow (and COVID). Very interesting and productive conversations on a lot of stuff.

**February 3** – I was interviewed by Tracy Ihnot and LaDonna Gunn of the Library District as a “community leader” as part of a library needs assessment process. They let me lecture them at length about the past and future of the Valley and Hotchkiss.

Then, before opening the bookstore, I delivered a new very large 60” by 40” painting “Things We Love” to the Creamery for their February reopening show. Also restocked my handpainted BookCard selection there.

Sunny, but very cold day, in the Valley.

A Zoom (on-line) meeting of the Paonia Council was held in the evening to approve a change order (request for additional funds) from the consulting company that is acting as operators of the Town water (two plants – one in operation) and sewer plant. The status presentation of the plants and why the money was needed turned out to be a bit of a bombshell.

**February 4** – The Paonia water issue blew up on line (Paonia Message Board on Facebook) today after longtime out-of-town critic, Christina Patterson, posted a transcript of consultant SSG representative Brianna Greer's grim

assessment of problems at the water and sewer plants. Critics smelled blood and there was much social media wailing and gnashing of teeth. And finger pointing. Some justified, along with others leaping to conclusions. From a distance, it does look bad for the embattled Town Administrator. Apparently ex-Public Works Director, Travis Loberg, had been

Continued on page 15

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# Hotchkiss Hires New Police Officer (from Paonia PD) New Fencing Regulation Proposal Leaves Out Important Elements

Hotchkiss Town Council  
February 10, 2022

Present: Mayor Larry Wilkening, mayor pro-tem-Mary Hockenbery, John Marta, Jim Wingfield, Patrick Webb, Sven Edstrom, and Patricia Medina. Staff present: Police Chief – Scott Green, Town Clerk - Ginger Redden, Deputy Clerk – Karen Laing, Town Engineer Joanne Fagan (via Zoom), and Town Attorney Bo Nerlin (Via Zoom)

### Candidate Forum Set for March 2 at Town Hall

A candidate forum facilitated by the Hotchkiss Chamber will be held on Wednesday March 2 at 5:30 p.m. at Town Hall with a Zoom option available. The forum will present the lone mayoral choice – Jim Wingfield, and the five trustee candidates for four available seats: Patricia Medina, Sven Edstrom, Tom Wills, Tricia McFarland and Custer McLeod.

### New Police Officer Hired— From Paonia PD

Hotchkiss Police Chief Scott Green reported that he had hired a new officer, Kaden Heiniger, to replace Julia Thompson, who left the department in late January. Heiniger who recently graduated the Delta Police Academy, who grew up in Hotchkiss and lives close to town, has been in training with the Paonia Police Department since December. Heiniger was the unanimously preferred candidate of two young academy graduates who were interviewed by a five-member panel the previous Monday.

“I feel really lucky,” Green said after the meeting. “He (Heiniger) is really excited to be here.”

The Town of Paonia may not be quite so excited to lose yet another officer to Hotchkiss. Hotchkiss officers Neil Ferguson and Brian Berger, along with Police Clerk – Joanne Katzer all came via a mass exit from the Paonia P.D. coming not long after Hotchkiss hired Green to replace longtime Marshal Dan Miller. The department had also suffered a controversy that resulted in the exit of two other Hotchkiss officers. Ferguson, while the Chief at Paonia, arranged for Heiniger to attend the academy with funding and a contract with that town.

A senior Paonia police officer was also reported to have been fired last week. Officer Neil Ferguson’s wife, Corinne Ferguson, is the Town Administrator of Paonia.

### Fencing Ordinance Discussion

Trustees Jim Wingfield and John Marta reported on their work regarding a proposed fencing regulation. Rather than a revision of the previous proposed ordinance, the two presented the fencing code taken from the Town of Cedaredge as a new template to work from.

The Cedaredge code allows fences of a maximum four feet high in the front yard and of a maximum six feet high for side and rear yards to be constructed without permits or expensive inspections as long as they are constructed from materials manufactured specifically for fencing. Fences made of other materials or proposed at a different height would require a special permit. Trustee Pat Medina note that a neighbor had constructed a barrier fence composed of rubbish such as old mattresses. (Note: That sort of thing could be dealt with under the Town’s nuisance code.)

But, while Marta and Wingfield argued the portion of the copied Cedaredge code seemed to make sense for Hotchkiss, an examination by the Herald of the entire Cedaredge text revealed that a number of items important to the integrity of the code had been left out including: addressing the maximum height of side and rear yard fences (without permit), referencing the building code as it relates to fences, noting that the Town or utilities can remove fences that encroach if needed for maintenance addressing Town liability issues, and a caveat that all fences “shall be kept in good repair”.

Mayor pro-tem Mary Hockenbery objected to the prohibited materials list that included shipping pallets. Hockenbery has a very attractive front fence at her Church of Art home that is built from pallets. Wingfield noted that if other, more creative, materials were used, the builder could ask for a special permit.

At the previous meeting it was pointed out by this reporter that the previous ordinance language went well beyond addressing Trustee Wingfield’s “safety” concern that fences on corner lots taller than four feet constituted a traffic hazard by blocking driver’s views. The ordinance, as previously presented, would have required permits and fees for all new fences in town, limited all front fences to four feet maximum back 25 feet from the sidewalk property line regardless of home placement on the lot, and allowed the building official to grant variances at will without input from neighbors. But, despite the somewhat comprehensiveness of the ordinance, it did not address side and rear maximum fence heights at all.

### Overland Water Shares Lease Discussion

The general consensus seemed to be to lease the Town’s Overland Reservoir and Ditch water shares in 2022 but to also discuss the matter of future use of the water by the Town with Overland representatives. Overland bylaw changes preclude domestic use but State water law may override this particularly in regard to municipal use, something that would require a court ruling.

The Town of Hotchkiss for many years has annually leased shares of irrigation water it does not use in the Overland Reservoir and Ditch and the Fire Mountain Canal. The water was purchased many years ago to supplement the Town’s primary Leroux Creek domestic water. In 2021 the Town declined to lease the Overland shares to Overland R.&D.C. president and Redlands Mesa rancher, David Kuntz (the Overland board president), since Kuntz was the only bidder and offered only the per-share assessment. The Town was also concerned about the drought and that it might need to add the water to the system to bolster the summer supply.

Later it was determined, according to a water assessment done by the Town Engineer, that while the Fire Mountain shares have a domestic water decree, the Overland shares do not. The Overland water may be somewhat cleaner and thus cheaper to treat than the Fire Mountain water which comes from the North Fork of the Gunnison River.

### Miner’s Trail Support Letter

It was agreed to supply a letter

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# Hotchkiss Council

Continued from page 5

of support to Delta County grant writers who are seeking funding for constructing a foot and bike trail from the river bridge near the Fairgrounds to the North Fork High School area that includes the Crossroads recreation complex.

District 3 County Commissioner, Wendell Koontz, has taken the lead on pushing through the project. There is still some debate about placement for a foot bridge across the river and how the first part of the trail should be routed. Businesswoman Kim Shay said she thought the foot bridge should be down river from the bridge and none of the trail should run next to the highway.

Although the trail had been included in Hotchkiss planning for nearly two decades the route would be mostly outside of Town boundaries.

### Town Hall Offices to be Reconfigured

The council discussed a proposal to reconfigure the Town Hall Offices, moving the Town Clerks and Public Works Director's office in to the space currently occupied by the Police Department and visa versa. With the PD now having five members including four officers and a police clerk their quarter are a bit snug.

The switch is estimated to roughly cost about \$55,000, which may be funded by Back the Badge tax revenues.

### Old Public Works Building Update

Mayor Wilkening reported that the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) under federal "Brownfields" funding was doing air sampling at the old public works building to determine VOC contamination if any. Erica Hellar of Community Builders, a non-profit that has been consulting with the town on economic development issues, said (via Zoom) that her organization was willing to continue to aid the Town in developing the request for proposals (RFP) regarding the sale of the building once an environmental assessment is completed.

It is hoped that the building can be sold to a developer that would create a use that would generate sales tax revenue and create new jobs. The building at Oak and West Bridge takes up about 150 feet of prime highway frontage.

### Other Actions and Discussion

A street closure for Duckworks/Carquest Auto Part was approved for their 28th Annual Customer Appreciation BBQ on March 11 from 10-2.


The council approved a proposed separation

agreement with former police officer Julia Thompson. The Town paid Thompson's tuition at the Delta Police Academy in return for her signing a contract committing to serve on the Hotchkiss department for several years. She resigned from the force in January and the Town was determining what she needed to do to exit her contract which included reimbursing the Town. She began work in the summer of 2020.

The Trustees approved a resolution that will allow the Town to publish only the title portion of ordinances in the newspaper of record (DCI). This would save considerable money in publishing fees.

Kim Shay, President to the Hotchkiss Community Chamber of Commerce, reported that she was a member of the Fair Board and would like to see Fair improvements including more affordable options for families with kids and "long and loud" parade this year.

For the record: Only four people in the room wore masks: Mary Hockenbery, Sven Edstrom, and Patrick Webb and this reporter. The ongoing COVID issue was not officially mentioned during the meeting, which offered a Zoom option. No citizens took advantage of the option.



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## Municipal Elections

Continued from Page One

2021. Markle has also been a constant, and sometimes overly emotional critic on Town issues and specifically of the Town Administrator. He serves on the Town's Advisory Water Committee.

The four new trustees, who represent a majority turnover of the council members, will join Mayor Mary Bachran, and Trustees Tamie Meck and Dave Knutson on the board. Leaving will be Jeff Thompson (appointed recently), Mick Johnson (after two-year term) and Karen Budinger (after one full term and an appointed term).

Hotchkiss will have an election with five candidates for four trustee seats if one counts that of Jim Wingfield who will be moving up to be mayor. A candidates' forum hosted by the Hotchkiss Community Chamber of Commerce will be held on Wednesday March 2 and 5:30 p.m. at Hotchkiss Town Hall. A Zoom option address will be available from the Town Clerk's office before the event.

The candidate petitions were fully confirmed as of January 31. Names include: (Herald editor) Tom Wills, incumbent Trustee Patricia Medina, Tricia McFarland, Sven Edstrom (appointed trustee), and Custer McLeod and Jim Wingfield for mayor.

Wingfield has served for two years as Hotchkiss Trustee and previously served two terms as a Trustee in Paonia. He is a home builder and construction trades person.

Medina, who was appointed as trustee before being elected in 2018 and serving her first term, owns Pat's Bar and Grill in downtown Hotchkiss.

McFarland, a retired Delta Correctional Facility officer, previously served as a Trustee in the 2000s.

Edstrom, who was appointed to replace Kris Hillman (also appointed) in March of 2021 is a home builder and trails construction expert. He serves on the North Fork Pool Park and Recreation Board of Directors.

McLeod (41), is a former rancher and a Western Colorado native. He graduated from Hotchkiss High in 1999. He is a real estate agent with Needlerock Mountain Realty and Land.

Wills previously served as Hotchkiss trustee from 2000-2010 and 2014-2018 and also spent 13 years as a member, and sometimes chair, of the Hotchkiss Planning Commission. He has also served on the boards of the Leroux Creek Planning Advisory Committee, North Fork Mosquito Abatement District, Hotchkiss Chamber of Commerce, Memorial Hall and the Hotchkiss Crawford Historical Society. He is the co-founder/publisher/editor of the North Fork Merchant Herald and has operated Wills Gallery and Used Books in Hotchkiss since 1990. He is also an artist.

The four successful Trustee candidates will join new Mayor Wingfield and Trustees John Marta and Patrick Webb on the Council. Exiting the board are: Mayor Larry Wilkening (one term) and mayor pro-tem Mary Hockenbery (term limited).

The petition submitted by former police officer Julia Thompson was rejected due to Thompson's failure to change to her registered voter address from Paonia to Hotchkiss, according to the Town Clerk's office.

**Crawford.** In Crawford, Town Clerk, Cally Gallegos, reports that "the Town has 3 open seats, the Town of Crawford received 3 completed petitions, signatures were verified by the Clerk. The Town of Crawford has canceled the April 5, 2022 election by resolution. The seats will be filled by - Jessica Hart, Chris Johnson, and Tim Pobirk." Johnson is an incumbent.

Longtime Mayor pro-tem Mike Tiedeman and Trustee Ralph Clark are stepping down. The newly elected Trustees will join Mayor Wanda Gofforth, and trustees John Paton, Jeff Peed and Gill Saunders.

Crawford is the only municipality in the North Fork that has not retained term-limits.



## February 8th Paonia Council Meeting

### Continued from Page One

DOLA Energy Impact Assistance grant since a lead mitigation grant that could provide the matching fund would be available in about two month or more. The Town would then apply for the lead mitigation grant and then follow that with a application for the DOLA Energy Impact Assistance grant during the August grant cycle and the two grants could be better coordinated and, if both are successful, would cover the cost of the planned projects; 2-million gallon tank relining and PRV valve work. The total would be \$1.5 million.

During her explanation Thomas Markle interrupted repeatedly from the back of the room and Bachran informed him he was out of order and he could “either be quiet or leave” the room. Markle managed to restrain himself.

In an associated motion by Smith the trustees rejected signing an MOU with Elaine Brett to help with grant writing. Instead, Smith and Mayor Bachran will take the lead on the grant writing. Brett, a close friend of Bachran and a community booster in many areas, had previously helped the Town with grants on a volunteer basis. Markle and Brunner were adamant about the Town not signing the MOU.

**Brunner Citizen’s Initiative** – After discussion it was moved to table the discussion on the proposed citizen’s initiative ordinance until the February 22 meeting to give the new attorney and Mr. Brunner time to engage one another further. The motion failed and it was decided on a motion by Paige Smith to hold a special Council Zoom meeting before February 22 to discuss the initiative.

The Council has the choice of either adopting the ordinance, which expands the public’s right to access public records, reduces cost and legal risk to citizens seeking those records, and allows conflicts to be resolved via the Municipal Court without needing an attorney, or setting a date for a special election on the matter.

Trustee Karen Budinger expressed frustration at what the intent of the initiative is, if it is legal, and why it is being done at all give the massive amounts of information the Town now provides via the website (and ClearGov).

Mr. Brunner, several years ago, was named by the Town as an affected party in a declaratory judgement court action filed by the Town to determine if it could or could not release certain information in response to a CORA request by Brunner. In order to defend his interests, Brunner hired an attorney and eventually prevailed with the Town having to pay his considerable attorney’s fees. Brunner would like others to not have to face that effort or expense.

#### In input from the public:

Prior to the meeting Former Trustee Bill Brunner sent a series of e-mails to the Council members asking that they declare the water issue an emergency.

Prior to the meeting Former Trustee Bill Brunner sent e-mails to the Council members saying that, in his view, allowing the development of 9 apartments to proceed in the

**At the meeting a citizen asked why a Paonia Police officer had been fired the previous week. Mayor Bachran noted that the Town does not discuss personnel matters during open meetings.**

Hays Drug and Mason’s buildings downtown would result in a violation of the current water tap/service expansion moratorium since the apartments would result in additional demand on the system. The item was not allowed on the meeting agenda since Brunner had not first discussed the issue with the Town Administrator.

At the meeting a citizen asked why a Paonia Police officer had been fired the previous week. Mayor Bachran noted that the Town does not discuss personnel matters during open meetings. (*Note: incurring legal liability is one big reason.*) Town Administrator Corinne Ferguson is directly supervising the PD until a new Police Chief can be hired.

In the antics category, future Trustee Thomas Markle, after once again stating that he thought the Town Administrator was unqualified and Mayor could run the meetings better, lectured the Council for 12 minutes (allowed by two separate Council motions) on Roberts Rules of Order, claiming that the mayor as chair could not participate in discussion unless she relinquishes the chair temporarily to the mayor pro-tem and addresses the board as a citizen. This all was apparently an oblique criticism of Mayor Bachran.

Former Trustee, Bill Brunner, then noted that Robert’s Rules has a<sup>1</sup> exception for legislative bodies, which need open discussion among all elected officials *prior* to and after motions being made. (*Note: while most municipalities say in code that meetings are conducted according to Robert’s Rules of Order, in actuality that is not the case in practice where some RRO items may conflict with proper, open discussion, thus the legislative exceptions.*)

A few minutes later Markle’s spouse, former trustee, Michelle Pattison, also verbally attacked Ferguson’s performance in suggesting that in light of the “mismanagement” on the part of the former PWD, and apparent lack of oversight of said PWD, that Ferguson be stripped of her power to hire his replacement.

Former Trustee Suzanne Watson piled on during public discussion of the dispersements and the administrator’s report. At one point she refused to yeild to allow Ferguson to respond to her concerns and comments and was admonished by the mayor.

#### Other Discussion and Actions:

It was reported that, due to a software error, the Town’s February utility billings had not gone out.

The scheduled executive session to receive legal advice of the Eric Pace vs Paonia suit was tabled until the February 22 meeting.

A proposal to terminate the Town’s Facebook page and archiving it was tabled.

A proposal to spend up to \$1,500 to make the sound system in the Council chambers more friendly to the hearing impaired and hopefully better for the YouTube viewers passed on a close vote with Mayor Bachran breaking a tie. Markle and Pattison opposed it from the public; another whack at the Town Administrator.

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# LOCAL HISTORY

## Early Valley Builders: Dwight Bennett

By Thomas Wills

Dwight Bennett, who was to become a prominent Delta County pioneer architect/ builder, arrived in the Hotchkiss Area in 1893 and bought some land on Rogers Mesa. Almost the first thing that he did was to build himself a house. A stone house. Over the next two decades he designed and built no fewer than two dozen brick or stone building in the area, working with other local masons and bricklayers.

Dwight was born in Illinois in 1866 (which makes him all of

Delta resident Helen Morgan, during the period from 1893 till about 1910 or so Dwight was incredibly prolific as a builder. She sets the number of major structures as about fifty and includes: The Poulos Theater (now The Paradise), Paonia Methodist Church, the old Paonia High School, in Paonia. Also, he is credited with most of the original brick buildings in Bowie, including the old Power House which is still standing, albeit; empty and unused for many years.

He also is listed as working in partnership with the Sherman Brothers in the brick business as well as in the

Hotchkiss Hotel - under construction 1898  
Sherman Brothers builders - Nephews of E. Hotchkiss  
top center Al Sherman - top of ladder in doorway -  
Carl Sherman



**The Hotchkiss Hotel block building under construction in 1898 by the Sherman Brothers and Dwight Bennett and company Hotchkiss Crawford Museum collection photo**

27 when he came to Hotchkiss) but his family had later moved to the Eastern Slope of Colorado just a few years after it had become a state. He apparently studied architecture in the Denver area and had tried mining for a while but gave that up after a serious accident and a subsequent bout with scarlet fever.

According to the 1979 book Looking Back on Delta County by

construction in 1897 of the Hotchkiss Hotel building. The

Shermans were also stonemasons as well as brick manufacturers and layers.

If one were to claim a masterwork for Dwight Bennett it would have to be the recently restored (after a 1994 fire) Delta Methodist Church, which is an absolutely classic

**Continued on Page 9**

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**Dwight Bennett**  
Continued From Page 8

version of a gothic church, complete with parapets. And that was just his first career.

Dwight Bennett, with the aid of his second wife, school teacher Edna (nee Wilmot), and their ten kids, went on to become a successful sheep grower until he retired about 1930. During his later years he and his wife lived in Paonia but since the most productive years as a builder were spent while living on the Rogers Mesa farm, Hotchkiss can safely claim Dwight as one of the truly great early residents of the Hotchkiss area.

He died in 1949 at the age of seventy-three.

His wife Edna, who had first moved to Hotchkiss from Illinois for her health (her doctors thought she might be developing tuberculosis), lived until she was ninety-six.

**Newspaper History Bits**

Hotchkiss once had two weekly newspapers including the very first newspaper in the North Fork Valley, *The North Fork Times*. The Times premiered on May 21, 1897 and was edited and owned at that time by Ralph Lossius. In 1905 the paper was taken over by Thomas Lewis Blackwell who became something of an iconic figure in Hotchkiss having a unique writing style and also served as the Town's municipal court judge (magistrate) for many years.

Blackwell died on February 2, 1939.

The original *Hotchkiss Herald* began in December of 1905 and continued uninterrupted until the 1970's. The first owners were Arthur and Faye Perry.

*The North Fork Times* was closed in 1930, a victim of hard times, but the name was resurrected a half century later as a Paonia based newspaper by Ed and Betsy Marston. The resurrected paper was eventually sold to Leader Publishing (Norman and Gladys Sunderland) by the Marstons who eventually became publisher and editor of the non-profit High Country News. The Sunderlands subsequently purchased the Delta County Independent and incorporated the Times as a section in that paper.

This left the Valley without a local-local paper until the monthly *Hotchkiss Merchant Herald*, later renamed the *North Fork Merchant Herald*, began publication under the auspices of the Hotchkiss Community Chamber of Commerce in 1996. Co founders were Chamber Officers Thomas Wills and Nathan Sponseller.

Leader Publishing sold the DCI a few years ago to a company that also publishes the Montrose Daily Press and several other papers.

**Museum Open Expanded Hours**

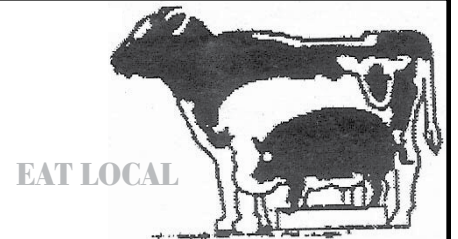
The Hotchkiss Crawford Historical Museum is now open on Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-2 as well as on Saturdays 1-4 p.m. (See article on page 11)

**Yoga Tree Seeks New Owner or Manager**

Yoga Tree owner Nancy Stechert (pictured below) gives the Herald an update on her efforts to transition from being a more active owner/manager to part-time teacher and slow life down a bit. As is the case in many businesses turning a corner, the first try at finding a good fit for a new management team, as reported in our December issue, did not work out and Nancy is once again offering a dream job/business to someone in the community. Are you the One?

Yoga Tree is seeking a new owner or manager to operate the beautiful, well established yoga studio in Hotchkiss. Started in 2006, Yoga Studio has been a successful business: holding classes,

workshops with international teachers, meditation classes, dance classes, music events and more. The Studio is about 3000 sq feet with 2 bathrooms and a massage room. It is fully equipped with yoga props including sticky mats, blankets, blocks, belts, wall ropes and mirrors. Please email [yoga@hotchkissyogatree.com](mailto:yoga@hotchkissyogatree.com) for more information.



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**Got Your Shot(s)?**

The best way to support the local economy right now is to get your COVID vaccine (or booster) to help avoid Omicron challenges this winter. Thank You!

**Recycle Your Greeting Cards!**

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# Marla's Valley: Love Among the Icy Pathways of Life, Hair Issues, and a Stuck Vehicle

All by Marla Bear Bishop - Crawford County and beyond correspondent

The month of LOVE is upon us once again and none too soon! The climate has been testy between politics, COVID and items missing from the shelves at City Market in Hotchkiss and I think we could all use a heart-shaped love muffin, a ton of chocolates dipped in nuts, and a candlelight dinner crammed full of whatever dreams are made of.

February of course is the last full month of winter, but not the end of cold weather. There will hopefully be many more inches of snow in the high country and the continued wearing of layered garments and sitting by the wood stove. Already it's staying light longer but mornings remain dark. It will soon be time to complain about Daylight Savings Time.

It's quite icy underneath the aging crunchy snow up here on Fruitland Mesa. This happens every year at this time and, just like every previous year, I've taken a couple of epic spills. The ice is hard to see until it's too late. The glass-like surface is made hard as rock by the daily parade of 40 plus turkeys, browsing deer, dogs, donkeys etc... that travel my same route. One of those falls was carrying a bucket of water and the other one was carrying an armload of wood. No bruising occurred due to added winter weight and also the snowsuit that should never be seen, the one that protects me from winter life on Earth and the cruel elements of early and late feeding times. I say a little prayer sometimes that no neighbor comes to visit when I'm out and about in this outfit. It's taken me a while to stand up again after meeting the ground because not only am I getting more unbendable, this suit is most unforgiving.

A few folks have casually mentioned that my hair is out of control and what the hell is going on with my bangs? I have two years and counting of cutting them with my pocketknife sans mirror, and après bale string release. Honestly, I've done this for years but always had professional help getting the bangs back to a somewhat presentable appearance every couple of months. So, I shouldn't have been surprised when a kind young



**Marla and her equine friend, Hank, on a cold day.**

Fruitland Mesa photo submitted by Marla Bishop

woman in line with me at City Market got as close as one can get during COVID and said, as she extended her hand out to me and presented a business card for my taking, "Let me offer my services, I can be of help." She explained that she was a hair stylist in Gunnison and had overheard my conversation with someone earlier about how long my hair had gotten during this time of Covid. I laughed, maybe louder than necessary and thanked

her but declined her help unless she'd set up out in the parking lot and

chop away. This young woman allowed a little giggle but backed away a bit when she saw that I was serious. Someday soon

I will get some local hair help.

As I'm writing these words it occurs to me that my car is not home. Last night, against my better judgment on a slick road, I went to a small gathering at Little Lynn's up towards the Canyon to say goodbye and safe travels to sweet hard-working Virginia, she who has done a lot for our small town. Upon leaving I hit something and it sounded like I'd hit a cement block. I got out and was astonished that there was nothing visible blocking me. I couldn't move forward or backwards. I went back in and asked Lynn what was it that I ran over. Shrubs. I ran over low shrubs covered with snow. This is yet another thing to deal with soon, in the daylight. Will AAA pull my small car over and out of the shrubs? I know Lynn and I can't do it. If it's not one thing it's another. Thanks to Annette and her pups for taking me home. I suppose if worse came to worse my car could be a yard ornament at Lynn's or maybe a dog-hair-infused car-shaped animal carrier. It's a good thing none of my animals were along for the ride this time.

Ok, it's time to go enjoy a month of Valentine's Day cookies and other treats from **Blue Sky Bakery at Farm Runners** in Hotchkiss. Time to go support our new businesses in Crawford! Enjoy this last loving month of winter. Stay warm, healthy and keep that chin up to wards the Western Colorado North Fork Valley sunshine!

*(Update: Marla reported later that the unseen thing that her car was stuck on was not some winter-toughened shrubs but a more substantial frozen pile of sand.)*

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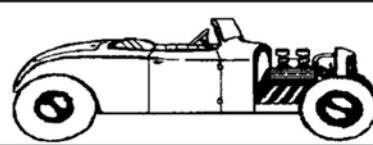
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# Hotchkiss Crawford Historical Society's Annual Meeting Features Archologist Studying Ute Structures

(Press Release)

The Hotchkiss Crawford Historical Society, which operates the Hotchkiss Crawford Historical Museum in Hotchkiss will hold their annual meeting and presentation on Sunday, February 27 at 2 pm. at Memorial Hall (First and Main) in Hotchkiss. Besides some discussion of the activities of the Society and Museum over the past year the event will feature a presentation by Grand Junction -based archeologist Curtis Martin.

Martin is a research archaeologist for Grand River Institute and Dominguez Archaeological Research Group of Grand Junction, is the Principal Investigator for the Colorado Wikiup Project, which won the 2014 Governor's Award. His book *Ephemeral Bounty*, available for sale and signing at the meeting, gathers the knowledge gained from the multiyear Wikiup Project, documenting all manner of wooden structures built by the Utes spanning the pre-contact period through the early 20th Century.

Martin's talk and slide show is entitled: **The Archaeology of the Ute Indians and Their Final Years in Western Colorado.**

According to HCHS information from Martin: "Wondrous new things were coming into the lives of Native Americans

with the arrival of European trade goods and horses. A golden era had come to the land and life was good...or so it seemed. Regrettably, it all came with the high price of freedom. Local archaeologist Martin will present his talk on the Ute Indians, many of whom remained on their traditional homelands in western Colorado long after their "final removal" to reservations in Utah in 1881.

Martin will be showing slides of some of the few remaining wooden structures that the Utes constructed and left behind in the mountains, canyons, and plateaus of the state. Not only have several hundred brush wickiup shelters survived, but also tipi frames, tree platforms, horse corrals, and even caches of firewood. Along with these ephemeral features, the sites contain a wealth of Euroamerican-made trade goods such as metal arrowheads, tinklers, buttons, guns and ammunition, horse tack, and colorful glass beads. His 2021 investigations at a local trade goods site will be discussed.

The presentation will include readings from Curtis' book *Ephemeral Bounty: Wickiups, Trade Goods, and the Final Years of the Autonomous Ute* and there will be copies of the book for sale that Martin will be happy to sign."

## The Hotchkiss Bookman

By Thomas Wills - Wills Gallery and Used Book -229 West Bridge Street - Hotchkiss Open 10-5 Tues. -Sat.

The used book store... That term to some people echoes "the video rental store," or "the record shop" or even "the livery stables" or "the TV repair shop." By coincidence the site of the old 1929 bungalow that has housed my bookstore/studio gallery since 1990, was once part of a livery stable operated in 1910's maybe into the 1920's when the property was bought by the Tuttle Family. They established the first auto dealership in Hotchkiss where the Coyote Drive-in (under a series on previous names was beginning in 1962.

The bookstore building was also once an antiques and collectibles shop in the 1980's called Cobb's Web.

The Tuttle Ford dealership is gone as is the drive-in, which is currently being converted into Blue Harrow, a local meats and foods business. Time is like a river they say.

In 1990 there was also a TV repair shop in town (Jake's). Gone now. A 1990 downtown art gallery/frame shop, previously a men's clothing store, is now a business that deals in hemp. Time... The old bank has been sold three times since 1990 and just had a name change. Another bank was built and the old Hotchkiss Credit Union became part of the Delta County Federal Credit Union and they built a big new building as well. Progress...

The point is that although people tend to think of small rural towns as unchanging, they change constantly. Except the bookstore over the last 32 years.

I am doing today roughly the same things I did 32 years ago. Collecting books, sorting out the

best ones for the store, creating and selling art, and doing some writing and painting.

The book store does now have a lot more books, about 17,000 plus, and I do a heck of a lot more writing and a lot less painting. And we don't sell cassette music tapes anymore but we do still sell records. And I'm an older guy instead of an early thirty-something.

And it seems that some people still get a kick out of an old, dusty, crammed to the ceiling used bookstore like once was common many decades ago.

Thanks for stopping in and clinging to old technology. Like books.



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**Back row** (Left to Right) Tristen Todd (970)589-3344, Tim Gonzales (970)361-4597, Eli Sawatzky (970)589-2112, Brady Todd (970)361-5154, Liz Heidrick (970)234-5344, Custer McLeod (970)209-0696 **Front Row** (Left to Right) Bree Pearce (970)201-5705, Randia Rule (970)366-0033, Marsha Brezonick (970)361-6305, Betsy Fernandez (970)201-8714, Karri McLeod (970)640-8022 (Not pictured) Paula Olsen (970) 424-2124





## Blue Sage Center for the Arts: Amazing Music and Free Cultural Arts Programs Coming Up

(Submitted by Debra Muskar - Executive Director - Blue Sage Center)

For those of you who love music we have a great opportunity to enjoy music throughout 2022. The Blue Sage 2022 concert series pass. The season includes 9 concerts for \$120. With one concert free, that makes the cost \$15 a concert. At this writing we have 20 season passes left. These special passes are on sale until Feb 14 or until we sell out. The Series includes Folk, Classical and Jazz. Make a New Year's Resolution to expand your horizons and expose yourself to various music genres and appreciate everything that each has to offer.

Our first concert of the season is Friday, Feb 18 with Emily Scott Robinson. Emily taught herself to play in the early 2000s by printing guitar tabs from the internet and singing to CDs by Indigo Girls and James Taylor. But she didn't pursue songwriting until after seeing Nanci Griffith perform in Greensboro in 2007. In 2013, she found kindred spirits at Planet Bluegrass' The Song School, a songwriting retreat in Lyons, Colorado. Robinson received significant acclaim for her 2019 album, *Traveling Mercies*. And her long-held dream came true later that year when she sang on the Telluride Bluegrass Festival stage as the winner of the Telluride Troubadour Contest. And the rest is history, now nationally acclaimed, and we are excited to be hosting her here at the Blue Sage.

The 2022 Engage Series starts off in February. This program, made possible with a grant from the NextFifty Foundation offers free cultural events.

Todd Weber (pictured) portraying his Chautauqua character in the presentation Lewis and Clark is a 4-day series Feb 22 through Feb 25 at 2 pm in Blue Sage Curtis Hall. Each presentation is approximately an hour and will cover the following topics: Day 1 -TOOLS, ARMS AND ACCOUTREMENTS OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION. Todd describes the fascinating equipment used by the Corps of Discovery on their historic expedition from 1804 to 1806. Day 2- THE WAY WEST. Join Todd to hear of the perils and adventures of the Corps of Discovery as they make their way up the Missouri River and across the Rockies to the Pacific. Day 3 THE JOURNEY HOME. Todd continues the story of how the expedition made their way home from the Pacific Coast back to St. Louis. Day 4 - THE FATE OF THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY. In Todd's final presentation learn what became of several of the key members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the years following their return.

At a young age Todd Weber became enthralled with stories of the Native Americans, the explorers and the fur traders of the American West. Making his first pair of moccasins as a young teenager, he continued building his collection of clothing and accouterments until he had either made or acquired all that was necessary to re-create life on the frontier. Todd, with his wife Nadine, wrote and ran educational tours throughout the American West for 14 years. Todd retired to Paonia in 2021. His period clothing and colorful collection add to his presentations, making them very visual and memorable.

Other Engage Events to watch for includes mid-April Paul Taylor exploring Australian Aboriginal history in "Wonders Down Under". June brings down to earth comedy with comedians Nancy Norton and John Novasad. Also in June, we are working to bring Glenwood Springs Vaudeville.

The Engage Series has added a special additional series highlighting Native American Culture. This series is evolving but currently

we have planned events to include Native American Storytelling with Roland McCook. Roland is an Uncompahgre Ute. The Uncompahgre Utes were the band of Utes who made their home in the Uncompahgre Valley with its sacred hot springs. McCook is not just any Ute, but the great-great-grandson of Chipeta and Chief Ouray. Sorry, we do not have the date for this at the time of this writing but will have soon.

More upcoming events include a film screening, Earl Bliss, the Spirit who walks among His People on April 16; Carey Morin and Ghost Dog, a nationally known musician, will perform at Sage Alley, the outdoor space at the Blue Sage in a free event on Saturday, July 23. Stay tuned to our website for all the details.

North Fork Community Choir starts their Spring Season. This season's theme is River Songs. Practices start Wednesday, Jan 19<sup>th</sup>. Rehearsals will be from 6:30 to 8:15 at the West Elk Family Church in Paonia. This article will be out after the choir starts rehearsals but you can still join before Feb 9<sup>th</sup>. Two Concerts will happen, one on Saturday, April 31 at 6:30 at Paonia River Park and one on Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at 3 pm at Confluence Park in Delta. For more information please go to [www.bluesage.org](http://www.bluesage.org) or give a call 970-527-7243.

As always, the Blue Sage thanks everyone who supports our efforts to bring our community together through art and culture.



## Creamery Has Reopened for a New Season With a Love is in the Air Members' Art Show

By Thomas Wills

year.

2021 was a great year at the Creamery Arts Center in Hotchkiss, and the board and staff would like to send out a rousing thank you to everyone who supported the facility in some way over the past twelve months. Time for a new season!

The Creamery reopened after a winter break on Friday, February 11 with the *Love is in the Air* member's show.

The February displays also include a one-woman mini-show by promising young artist, and Hotchkiss native, Hillary Stein, in the Peach Gallery.

And don't forget the ongoing classes in a wide range of artistry from painting, pottery, basket weaving, and more.

If you are an artist/artisan who also teaches contact Rich at the Creamery (Rich@creameryartscenter.org) to talk about raising some money for the Creamery as well as yourself. The facility has a terrific, large upstairs classroom.

The Creamery is also in need of volunteers to help out in the gift shop and gallery during open sales hours. If this sounds like fun contact volunteer coordinator Nan Romane at nanromane@gmail.com or 970-872-



Artist Hillary Stein (second from left) visits with admirers of her work on display at the Peach Gallery at the Creamery Arts Center. Tom Wills photo

Featured in March will be the annual *Art Educators Show* featuring local art teachers.

The main gallery show in April will present a *Spring Theme* and May will once again be the return of the much anticipated *Student Show* where we can all be amazed at what our local younger creatives have been up to over the past

2308.

And of course the Creamery would LOVE to receive cash donations of any size to help us continue our arts education work as well as providing a vibrant cultural center for the Hotchkiss area and the North Fork. Checks to Creamery Arts Center P.O. Box 218, Hotchkiss, CO 81419

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# COVID Updates: Omicron Peaks and Begins to Recede in Delta County

## COVID Cases and Positivity Rate Declining Slowly - Two More Deaths in Past Week

Delta, Colorado (February 14, 2022): Delta County COVID-19 Informational Update from Darnell Place-Wise - Delta County Information Officer

Delta County's COVID-19 positive cases are holding steady; from Tuesday, February 8 through today, Delta County has seen 139 new cases for a total of 5765. Delta County's positivity rate is at 12.5%. Delta Health has five (5) individuals hospitalized with COVID-19; 4 are unvaccinated and 1 is vaccinated. We are saddened to report that there have been two additional deaths, a female 35-44 and a male 85+; this brings Delta County's total COVID-19 deaths to 128. Our deepest condolences to the family; we ask for their privacy during this difficult time.

As things continue to move in the direction of COVID-19 becoming classified as an endemic versus a pandemic, Delta County will no longer provide weekly COVID-19 updates unless and until something critical changes. The word 'endemic' is used to describe a disease that settles into a population at a stable case rate and - while it doesn't go away - can become more manageable and more a part of everyday life. The Delta County Health Department's COVID-19 dashboard will continue to be updated Monday - Friday with the most up to date information on COVID-19, in Delta County.

The State of Colorado Vaccine Bus Clinic is offering 1st & 2nd doses, as well as boosters and pediatric doses of the COVID-19 vaccine; click here to make an appointment at one of the mobile vaccine clinics listed below. (Walk-ups are welcome as well):

- Sunday, February 19, 2022 - Lions Pavilion parking lot near Bill Heddles Rec Center, in Delta - 10a - 4p
- Tuesday, February 22, 2022 - Walmart in Delta - 9a - 4p
- Sunday, March 6, 2022 - Walmart in Delta - 9a - 4p

It's Valentine's Day, what better day to start taking care of your heart, than today! According to the American Heart Association the best things to do for your heart are to quit smoking, eat healthy, exercise daily and aim for 150 minutes of movement per week, manage your stress, get enough sleep, and cultivate your personal relationships for your mental well-being.

If you are not feeling well, stay home and get tested! We strongly encourage all Delta County residents to wear a mask in indoor settings, wash your hands vigorously and often, and avoid large crowds. There are several testing opportunities throughout the week, in Delta County, please note that North Fork EMS is no longer doing COVID-19 testing. Where can you get a COVID-19 test? (See list at the end of the second earlier release)

### Declining Case Numbers - One More Death

Delta, Colorado (February 7, 2022):

Delta County COVID-19 Informational

Update from Darnell Place-Wise - Delta County Information Officer

Delta County's COVID-19 positive cases are beginning to see a downward trend; from Tuesday, February 1 through today, Delta County has seen 139 new cases for a total of 5626. Delta County's positivity rate, while higher than we'd like to see, is down to 14 %. Delta Health has six (6) individuals hospitalized with COVID-19; all are unvaccinated. We are saddened to report that there has been an additional death, a female 55-64; this brings Delta County's total COVID-19 deaths to 126. Our deepest condolences to the family; we ask for their privacy during this difficult time.

The State of Colorado will have their vaccine bus in Delta County, on the following days and times, offering 1st, 2nd, and 3rd doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, along with the seasonal flu shot:

- Saturday, February 19, 2022 - Lions Pavilion in Delta - 10a - 4p A great way to stay healthy this winter is to incorporate an outside walking routine. According to the Cleveland Clinic, people who walk regularly experience health and psychological benefits from a daily walk; here are five reasons why they are right:
    - Walking reduces stress, increases self-esteem and cheers you up.
    - Walking is one of the best ways to lose weight, and can be realized in as little as 30 minutes per day.
    - Regular walking lowers blood pressure, improves sleep, and increases energy.
    - Snack cravings tend to lessen during and after a 15 minute walk.
    - Tracking one's steps is the key to success, and often leads to more daily steps as it encourages one to keep going, to maintain a certain level, etc.
- If you are not feeling well, stay home and get tested! We strongly encourage all Delta County residents to wear a mask in indoor settings, wash your hands vigorously and often, and avoid large crowds. There are several testing opportunities throughout the week, in Delta County:
- Tru Vu Drive-In Theatre, 1001 Hwy 92, Delta
    - o Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
    - o 9:00a - 4:00p
  - Delta County Health Department, 255 W. 5th St., Delta
    - o Every Tuesday by appointment - 970-874-2165
  - North Fork EMS, 110 E. Hotchkiss Ave., Hotchkiss
    - o Every Wednesday - Drive up ONLY
    - o 10a - 1p
  - Delta Health Internal Medicine - 970-874-7668
  - Delta Health Family Medicine - 970-874-5777
  - Delta Health West Elk Clinic - 970-872-1400
  - River Valley Family Health Center or Convenient Care - 970-874-8981

Delta County Health Department and all Delta Health Clinics are offering pediatric COVID-19 vaccines to everyone 5+, as well as the COVID-19 Booster to anyone 12 and older if they are fully vaccinated. If you have not been vaccinated, or are in need of a vaccine booster, please schedule your appointment now; click here for a full list of COVID-19 providers in Delta County.

For additional information regarding COVID-19 visit [deltacounty.com](http://deltacounty.com).



## Winter Speaker Series

Thursdays, 6:00-7:15pm

February 3rd, Online: Bat Conservation in Colorado  
 February 24th, Online: Climate and Water in the Rocky Mountains  
 March 24th, Paonia Library: The State of the Cuckoo

Visit [westernslopeconservation.org/speakerseries](http://westernslopeconservation.org/speakerseries) to RSVP

## Mask Up in Public Spaces

Omicron will be peaking in our area in February. The CDC and State and local health departments recommend that you wear a good mask (N95 or KN95 ARE BEST) in indoor public spaces. Masks work dramatically in slowing the spread of COVID, but are most effective when most or all the people in spaces are wearing them.

Thanks for shopping locally and patronizing local farmers, artisans and artists. A dollar spent locally can recirculate up to seven times - if we try real hard.



## NORTH FORK SENIOR CONNECTIONS:

### Senior Connections Can Steer you to the Right Handyman/Tradesman

By Laura Lee Yates for North Fork Senior Connections

For many folks, owning a home is an important part of the American Dream. But nobody warns us about all the upkeep, and how it gets harder as we grow older.

Twice annually, North Fork Senior Connections holds “Service Saturday,” when teams of able-bodied volunteers tackle seasonal chores for

favorite projects, he told me, “Mostly I like working with the people. I enjoy the variety and meeting lots of different folks.”

Master gardener John Valentine is in the process of transforming a stark corner lot in Paonia into a horticultural paradise. When he needed someone to install a custom garden window, John reached out to North Fork Home Improvement, Inc—aka Jay Simon—when no one else was ready or able.

“Jay is versatile,” John reports, “skilled at any job, a very interesting guy to talk to, and reasonably priced. Thumbs way up!”

The Paonia Senior Center is currently undergoing renovation and asked



Jay Simon at work with helper Kalia (submitted photo)

senior homeowners. Throughout the year our members also request help with individual tasks beyond their fitness level and/or expertise. Sometimes a volunteer is available to solve the problem—but what happens if the job is too big or too skilled?

When local senior Bobbie Selk needed someone to chink and stain the logs of her rural home, she hired Crawford handyman Jay Simon. “He’s fantastic—very reliable and quiet,” Bobbie enthuses. “He went above and beyond.”

In 1983 Jay relocated from Tacoma, Washington, to Telluride, where he “made snow” before going into business as a handyman. Though he purchased a home in the North Fork Valley Jay ended up in Boulder for fifteen years, raising three children and utilizing his skills in drafting and surveying. But in 2018 he settled on Fruitland Mesa, where he enjoys hiking and skiing—and getting the job done for those of us who can’t do it ourselves.

When I asked Jay about his

for an estimate from North Fork Home Improvement. Jay offers a discount to seniors on a limited income. He’s on North Fork’s Senior Connections’ list of preferred providers. If you’ve found a reliable person with useful expertise—whether for household maintenance, construction, in-home healthcare, landscaping, technology assistance, cleaning help, or any other skill that helps seniors age in place—please let us know, or have them contact us.

North Fork Senior Connections is a 501(c)3 non-profit that recruits, vets and trains volunteers willing to help with errands, light housework and yard work, provide friendly visits and telephone check-ins as well as transportation to appointments, snow shoveling and occasional pet care. For more information call us at (970) 527-3482, or visit our website: <https://nfseniorconnections.helpfulvillage.com/>

## Paonia Water Consultants Report Lack of Maintenance at Paonia Water and Sewer Plants

By Thomas Wills

Critics of the Town of Paonia’s Public Works Director and Town Administrator were handed a box of fresh ammunition at a Zoom meeting of the Town Council on February 3. The meeting had been called to consider a \$7,200 change order to Solid Solutions Geosciences (SSG) to pay for them providing supervision of repair work needed at the Town’s water and sewer plants. That was eventually approved after SSGs Brianna Greer gave an explosive overview of the problems that her and partner, Josh Moore, who is acting as Paonia’s official operator of responsible charge (ORC) of the water and sewer facilities, have found.

Greer recited a long list of shortcomings that SSG discovered when they were called in after the relatively quick exit of PWD Travis Loberg. She described a mess that included: “...plants that were VERY dirty, mouse droppings, clutter; things not related to water plants being stored in there.” “The usual instrumentation for readings that are required once to three times a week is not present.” “There is no standard operating procedure (SOP) written down for any activity, which means it can’t be delegated.” The latter also meant that SSG’s first job was to figure out the procedures for operating the Town’s water and sewer plants and writing such a manual. SSG’s role was as an emergency stopgap operator of the plants while the Town seeks to hire a new Public Works Director.

As to justifying the \$7,200 for “out of scope” repairs that SSG called for and supervised these included: the fact that all of the alarms at the water plant had been turned off apparently because there were so many minor problems that they rang all the time. Since the alarms have to be active in case of genuine major issues, repair work had to be done.

Then, there were a plethora of needed repairs on a variety of water-related things including water line breaks. Suddenly SSG was being asked to do way more than they had contracted for.

“There wasn’t supposed to be a lot of repairs, (but) he (Josh Moore) was getting a lot of calls for him to participate in (repair supervision), from the Town of Paonia, Public Works Department, Corinne and others,” Greer told the Council.

Greer noted that the Town of

Paonia had come to her attention last spring when she noted that the Town was apparently having trouble filing their required paperwork with the State on time.

“I do a lot of discharge monitoring reports and you guys had a lot of LATE one,” Greer said. “We thought oh, maybe there’s an opportunity to help you out.”

She said she contacted the Town and talked with Ferguson and trustee Dave Knutson but didn’t hear anything back until the recent exit of PWD Travis Loberg and the Town suddenly needed a licensed operator to run their water and sewer plants and provide a status audit. The list of items Greer and Moore found is extensive and was immediately pointed to by town administration critics as evidence that former PWD Loberg was not doing an acceptable job and Ferguson’s supervision of his work had jumped the tracks a while back.

As to the change order:

“SSG will make recommendations for needed repairs to the Lamborn Water Treatment Plant and the Paonia Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) and coordinate with the Town of Paonia and the Town’s selected contractor or employee to schedule repairs.

Current known needed, urgent, repairs include:

- Lamborn compressor heater and redundant compressor motor
- Lamborn broken piping to the chemical backwash system from floating pipes
- Leak in Lamborn Skid 2
- Valve in Lamborn Skid 2
- Water pump replacement, Lamborn
- Non-functioning dataloggers at the WWTP
- Broken aerators at the WWTP

The list of needed repairs is not exhaustive, focusing on those known issues most likely to result in loss of water treatment or Permit violations. The task does not include bringing the Clock Water Treatment Plant back online. Breaks within the distribution system have been common in the past two weeks. While no leak is currently known, one could occur at any time. If any additional oversight is needed for distribution line breaks it will be added to this task at a rate of \$120 per hour and will likely cause an exceedance of the cost estimate.”



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# Another Month in the Valley

Continued from page 4

overwhelmed due to a lack of staffing, wasn't giving the Administrator accurate information regarding the water plants, and the Administrator had not managed to keep fully abreast of the true situation.

Thanks to Kathy Edwards of Paonia for stopping by the bookstore/Herald office to share her concerns on the Paonia water issues.

A cold, but sunny, day. The low overnight in Hotchkiss was six degrees.

**February 5** – Clear, dry weather continued. Snow reports from Snowmass and Aspen noted no real snowfall for a while. Meanwhile the Northeast U.S. was getting buried and suffering major power outages.

I'm still trying to figure out the big picture narrative for the Paonia water system in light of new revelations. Way too many pieces. *Needs work* about sums it up.

**February 6** – Sunday. Warmer.

Whether or not the health experts have declared the COVID-19 pandemic a manageable fact-of-life endemic disease, locals have apparently already moved on. That was my observation today at City Market in Hotchkiss. Staff was masked (but not upgraded as per CDC recommendations) but patrons were about 25% masked, if that. I did see one man with a real (secured behind the head) N95 mask.

**February 7** – I sat in as part of an interview board for applicants to fill the police officer vacancy in Hotchkiss.

The Delta County Sheriff's Department reported that a double homicide was reported/discovered at a home on Black Bridge Road on Friday, February 4. The victims were Michael Arnold (69) and Donna Gallegos (65). Both had been shot several times. The CBI is assisting in the investigation. Anyone with information on this crime is asked to contact Detective Sgt. Becker at 970-874-2005, or share information via Delta County Crime Stoppers at 970-874-8810

**February 8** – Another Paonia Town Council entertainment. Drama, conflict, and quirky characters. Will Corinne, the plucky Town Administrator, continue to remain cool in the face of a steady barrage verbal rotten tomatoes or will she finally burst at the seams and take a taser to somebody? What creative curse words will be mumbled into "hot" mics? Stay tuned.

Well, the TA did persevere with admirable grace under pressure, insults, drama, conflict, and quirky characters were allowed mostly full rein by the mayor and council. The Paonia reality show went on.

**Good fact of night:** Paonia water is high quality, clean and safe despite all the kerfuffle.

**Weird decision of night:** to hold a municipal election, despite having only four candidates for four seats, at a cost of several thousand dollars. Huh?

**February 9** – Sunny and a little warmer.

**February 10** – The monthly Hotchkiss Town Council meeting was held this evening.

**February 11** – The Creamery Arts Center reopened from a winter break with a reception for a new "Love" themed show. A modest turnout enjoyed cookies along with live music. The highlight was the opening within an opening by promising young artist Hillary Stein presenting her near-abstract impressionist floral paintings.

**February 12-13** – The warming trend continued in the Valley through the weekend. On Sunday I even took some newly sprouted green pepper plants outside to do initial transplanting and let

them get some sun, bringing everything back inside at sundown.

Reading a book in a sunny corner of the yard I had to shed a layer of clothing to avoid overheating. Temperatures nearing 50 but some snow remains in the north-shaded shadows in Hotchkiss. .

## Business News and Other Rumours

**Free Masks at Libraries: Federal government provided, medical grade 3M manufactured, KN-95 masks** are available at all local libraries with a limit of five masks per patron per month. The CDC has recommended that in the light of more infectious strains of COVID that people upgrade to the now easily available K-N95 or N95 snug-fitting masks that are much more efficient at trapping droplets/virus than cloth.

N-95 masks are also now being given away at grocery stores, including **Hotchkiss City Market**, and other large retailers. This just as local general masking in public spaces, never very impressive, appears to be on a downward trend. COVID hospitalizations and deaths have continued to occur in Delta County and the infection rate from test remains in double digits after peaking at mid-month and appearing to be on a downward trend.

Hotchkiss will have a new coffee shop as of early April. **246 Coffee** will be located in the picturesque small building at 246 East Bridge Street (just east of the parking lot at Third Bowl Ice Cream/Hotchkiss Flowers). Owners are Rick and Jean Dean with local, Tracy (Chinn) Sternburg, acting as manager. Sternburg previously managed P.J.s Pub and The Living Farm Café. Hours at the new shop will be from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and there will be a nice European-style outdoor patio area in front of the building. Interior construction preparations are moving along nicely.

**The S&B Quilters present the 2022 Cabin Fever Quilt Show** at Heritage Hall at the Delta County Fairgrounds on Friday thru Sunday March 18-20. Friday and Saturday 9-6 and Sunday 11-4. An amazing display of work-of-art quilts. A quilt raffle, demonstrations, and baked goodies for purchase will be available. The quilt event of the year in the Valley.

## Hotchkiss Construction Concerns Merchants.

Downtown merchants in Hotchkiss are discussing how to mitigate the impacts of nearly three months of Bridge Street street reconstruction when patrons will be unable to park in front of businesses or even turn onto or off of Bridge Street between Cedar and Fourth Streets.

The old Town Hall/Bank of the North Fork building on the northeast corner of East Bridge and Second Street in Hotchkiss had been rented by **glass artist Lark Abel**. Abel creates a range of etched glass including architectural glass for doors etc. as well as smaller art gift items. She also creates custom memorial gravestones.

Preparatory work for a new planned **Western Slope SUP (Stand-Up Paddleboard) building** is proceeding on the southeast corner of West Bridge and Oak (in front of the Delta County Annex). The Town installed water service in February and owner Daniel Roman was preparing for excavating the site.



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Jocelyn Wiggins



**PROPERTY GENTLY SLOPED** w/ large reservoir. Younger orchard- mostly honey crisp, some fuji and gala. Vacant field ready for the crop of your choice. Barn - remodeled worker housing. Sophisticated irrigation system. Abundant irrigation water. 1.96 ac. building site under a second deed with one Rogers Mesa Domestic Water Tap #789132 \$410,000 Bob Pennetta 234-2232



**LARGE AND SPACIOUS BUILDING** near Downtown Delta. Most recently used as a chapel. With a little bit of updates and TLC this building could be brought to life to accommodate your needs. Convenient corner lot, with great exposure. #789538 \$145,000 Jocelyn Wiggins 765-5096



**GREAT ACREAGE** with rolling terrain and absolutely spectacular mountain and valley views. Very private and in a quiet location that is surrounded mostly by large cattle ranches. Choose your building site. Water will be piped to the property and is from a shared, developed spring. There will also be a small amount of irrigation water. #789375 \$299,000 Myles Roberts 234-3391



**TIDY HOME IN THE COUNTRY** with irrigated pasture and fenced paddock. Comfortable and well-maintained 3 bed/2 bath home, 1 car garage/shop with woodstove, storage shed and sprinkler system. Mature trees border the front lawn. Plenty of room for an RV and toys! #788501 \$298,900 Mike Jackson 234-4427

**THE ULTIMATE COLORADO LEGACY PROPERTY! 71+ ACRES** along the Anthracite Creek. 3+ acre lake provides fishing, boating and swimming. CR 12 (Kebler Pass) stretch from HWY 133 to property is kept open year round. Approximately 10 acres of irrig. pasture. Electricity on the property. #756117 \$1,250,000 Dave Mitchell 234-4046

**VERY UNIQUE IRRIGATED PROPERTY** and Water, Water, Water. A water company & loads of springs & water rights are included too with good potential income in place. Excellent grazing land on 43.17 total acres with about 30 irrigated. Corrals, lots of trees, tons of wildlife, superb mountain and valley views, 4 reservoirs/ponds and numerous decreed and developed springs. #788921 \$594,000 Myles Roberts 234-3391



# Happy Valentine's Day North Fork Valley

Every \$ Spent Locally Keeps  
Our Beloved Community Strong

Buy Local  
Eat Local  
Drink Local





2022

# PAONIA'S BLUE SAGE CONCERT SERIES

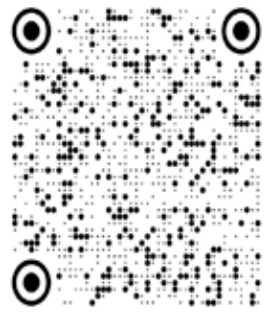
WINTER/SPRING

SEASON TICKETS  
LIMITED QUANTITY  
BUY BY FEB. 14TH!!

\$120 ~ \$15/concert

INDIVIDUAL

\$20/ \$25 day of



MEXICAN FOLK/ LATIN ROCK

**JARABE MEXICANO**  
**MARCH 11**



FOLK FOLK

**EMILY SCOTT ROBINSON**  
**FEB 18**



CLASSICAL

**BRIAN KRINKE & BILL AIKENS**  
**MARCH 18**



SPANISH GUITAR

**JAVIER DE LOS SANTOS**  
**APRIL 23**

### 2022 Concerts Fall/Winter:

6/25 NELSON RANGELL Jazz

7/23 CARY MORIN & GHOST DOG folk

10/15 EMILY ONDRACEK-PETERSON & ANNA ARZUMANYAN classical

11/12 KA-WAI YU classical

12/10 SCOTT COULTER classical/jazz



970-527-7243  
226 Grand Ave  
Paonia, CO

for more info: [bluesage.org](http://bluesage.org)



# The North Fork Merchant Herald

Raven Rumors Press, LLC P.O. Box 386 - Hotchkiss, CO 81419

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The Herald also sends out a **free PDF e-mail edition** to a growing e-subscriber base of local folks and Valley lovers across the country, that contains the whole paper as printed, including your ad.

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TERMS: All advertising charges are due upon publication. Charges are deemed delinquent 20 days after publication and will accrue late charges of \$5 a month.

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