SPORTS

Hobson-Moore boys pick up conference win

A9

OUTDOORS

Annual Perch Derby held at East Fork

A11

COVERING CENTRAL MONTANA LIKE THE STARS

LEWISTOWN NEWS-ARGUS

$2.00

VOLUME 141 NUMBER 103 | LEWISTOWNNEWS.COM | SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024

LARRY MAYER

U.S. Air Force General Colin Connor, the Air Force Global Strike Command's director of the ICBM Modernization Site Activation Task Force, addresses a town hall in Lewistown.

Missile project town hall draws crowd

Air Force responds to questions; timeline for project still uncertain

DEB HILL
Reporter

Over 150 people attended Wednesday's Town Hall meeting in Lewistown to hear updates on the project to replace the aging Minuteman III missiles with the new Sentinel missiles. Speakers from the Air Force and the major contractors working on the program fielded questions ranging from the impact on local roads and bridges to the cost of the program.

The Sentinel missile project will replace the 450 existing Minuteman III missile launch facilities, 52 of which are in Fergus County. Because of changes to communication technology, the project also means replacing communication lines and installing communication towers, as well as updating missile silos, decommissioning the old Minuteman III missiles and replacing them with LGM-35A Sentinel ICBMs.

Wednesday's Town Hall presentation included brief introductions of key Air Force and Northrop Grumman personnel. Colonel Barry Little, Wing Commander at Malmstrom Air Force Base opened the meeting by greeting audience members, calling them partners in America's defense program due to living with and near the missiles.

More **MISSILE** | **A13**

'THE LORD HAD ME PICKED OUT TO DO SOMETHING'

98-year-old Durl Gibbs on his induction into MT Cowboy Hall of Fame, long-term goals

KATHERINE SEARS
Managing Editor

Ninety-eight-year-old Durl Gibbs can hardly wait for the next two years to go by. It might seem like a funny thing to say for a guy who's lived nearly a century. But, simply put, he still has a lot to get done. And if there's one thing people should know about him, it's this: when he sets his mind to something, somehow it's going to happen.

"Things I really wanted and wanted to accomplish, even though there was no way I could see it happening, the impossible happened," Durl told the News-Argus in late 2023. "If you set your mind for a goal, even if you can't see how that can happen, you'll see those things can happen."

That philosophy is what led Gibbs to Montana, and to build a life on what would become the family ranch at Buffalo.

"I quit a good job making good money. I wanted to be a rancher."

COURTESY PHOTO

Durl Gibbs, a rancher from Buffalo, will be inducted in to the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame on Saturday, Feb. 10 in Great Falls.

Durl Gibbs (left) in the Big Apple fight, Okinawa

And ranch he would. On February 10, Durl will officially be inducted into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame as the Living Inductee for District 6.

Durl's grandson nominated him for the honor.

"I laughed," Durl said of the nomination to the MTCHOF. "I was really surprised when word come to me I'd been nominated. I was just amazed."

The nomination and upcoming induction are just two things in his life that have amazed Durl.

More **GIBBS** | **A12**

PHOTO BY KATHERINE SEARS

Reaching Out

Sheriff holds events across county

KATHERINE SEARS
Managing Editor

The Fergus County Sheriff's Office is on a tour of town halls across the county. On Monday, Sheriff Ryan Peterson and Undersheriff Cory Smith were in Grass Range, where about 25 people gathered at the fire hall. Tuesday, the two spoke to about 50 people in Winifred, giving updates on their first year in office and taking questions.

Ryan Peterson

In Grass Range on Monday, Smith and Peterson highlighted several changes over the past year, as well as how they are preparing for a possible population boom in the future.

With the county looking at a new manufacturing company coming to Lewistown, as well as an Air Force missile upgrade project, meeting attendees were particularly interested in how that might affect law enforcement and the county.

"All our towns are going to feel that," said Peterson of a possible increase in population. "You think about 200 more cars on the road, more calls... We should be having that conversation about how to keep up."

The office currently has 11 sworn officers, which includes Peterson and Smith, as well as nine deputies. In July, Peterson said the office transitioned from having deputies on call only from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m., to two deputies on duty around the clock.

He noted this not only helps with response times, but also with the office's presence around the county.

Some meeting attendees seemed concerned with the number of deputies, and thought the county should plan to hire more, especially considering the increase in calls for service.

From 2022 to 2023, the FCSO saw a 28% increase in calls. In 2023, the number of calls was 4,786, compared to 3,805 in 2022.

Peterson said the increase is a reflection of a growing population.

More **SHERIFF** | **A12**

Your ad could be here..

Buy One, Get One FREE Front Page Banner Promotion.

February only! Contact your local ad representative today, you wouldn't want to miss any eyes on your ad. 406-535-3401

USPS 311-120 | EDITOR@LEWISTOWNNEWS.COM | 406-535-3401 | OBITUARIES: C. JENSEN, L. VANEK, R. ROZELL, D. WICKENS

COMMENTARY

Transforming myself into a 'prison bod' — or not

DWIGHT HARRIMAN

Nothing makes the cold winter months like wanting to get in shape. But I'm not quite there yet.

My kids tease me that after I recuperate from my recent knee replacement surgery I will hit the gym and transform my slender frame into a "prison bod" — so named after convicts who, with all their free time, build their bodies into muscled hulks.

Alas, it has not been the case for me. My body is far from a prison bod. Let's just say I'm working on it.

Fitness centers are popular for bulking up and getting in shape. But it's causing me a serious case of "gym 'timidation" as I stand alongside the buff guys.

My 36-year-old son in Chicago found a way to deal with that problem — by working out with the elderly YMCA clientele there. As a relative youngster, he jokes he looks like the fittest person there.

But no YMCA for me as I learn to navigate the local fitness center scene. Here's what I'm learning:

The iconic exerciser. The iconic exercisers are the guys who can lift several times their body weight, while I'm lucky to lift 10 pounds for a couple of reps. The clanging of the weights accentuates how far I have to go and how much requisite loud grunting and groaning I need to meet new weight milestones. Somehow grunting is part of the mystique.

Treadmill phobia. No exercise machine produces more gym 'timidation than the treadmill. Something about trying to walk or run on a moving rubber carpet goes against the natural order of things and, at least for beginners, is sure to whisk you off your feet and cause a faceplant or two.

Personal space. Many fitness equipment machines are, due to space issues, right next to each other. I always get a little nervous invading peoples' personal space. Do you just barge in and start exercising right next to them, or do you give them a little space till they're done? Ah, forget it — you just to have to get over it.

Spray disinfectant. Spray disinfectant is ubiquitous for gym exercise equipment. Do I use the spray for obvious things like sitting in rowing machines or should I also spray dumbbells, too? Does casual contact to equipment constitute contagion-level spray action? This a big deal to figure out. Once the bottle and rag are in sight, you feel you must use it.

Body image crises. Body image crises could be caused by a high-speed runner next to you melting the Nordic Trax belts while you clump along to a 1 or 2 resistance setting; or it could be caused by rippling weight lifters who outclass my embarrassingly my small biceps; or people who can jump from floor level to 4-foot boxes with ease. There is no shortage of comparative performances.

Nevertheless, I'm still grateful that during the cold winter months there's nothing like a local fitness center to work out in. And meanwhile, I'm still working on that prison bod.

Dwight Harriman is a retired Livingston Enterprise editor. Reach him at d.harriman77@gmail.com.

Missile/from A1

Brigadier General Colin Conner, director of Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Modernization for the Air Force, told the 156 people in the audience he hoped to come to Lewistown at least twice a year and was looking forward to engaging with the community. He invited any groups that would like a presentation on the Sentinel missile project to contact him through Malmstrom Air Force Base.

Questions from the audience ranged in topic from land acquisition to job opportunities, and from the impacts of the 2,000-3,000 workers living in Lewistown at a workforce hub to the project schedule.

TIMING OF PROJECT UNCERTAIN

What became clear early in the discussion was the timetable for the start of construction in Montana is up in the air.

Early projections had suggested work might start as early as 2027, following completion of work in the F.E. Warren Air Force Base missile fields in Wyoming, Nebraska, and northern Colorado.

However, the entire Sentinel program has run into major cost overruns, as well as staffing shortfalls, supply chain issues, and delays.

"This is a Herculean effort," said Colonel Charles Clegg, director of the Sentinel Systems Directorate.

Clegg is the program manager for the Sentinel project. He said the Air Force hasn't had a project this large since the first installation of intercontinental ballistic missiles back in the 1960s.

"Right now we are going through a reassessment due to a critical breach for the cost," Clegg said in response to a question about the project being 37% over budget. "We have 120 days to reassess, and we will need to go through a recertification of the program."

That recertification is required by the Nunn-McCurdy Act, which requires the Department of Defense to report to Congress whenever a Major Defense Acquisition Program experiences cost overruns that exceed certain thresholds, known as a Nunn-McCurdy breach. The Air Force notified Congress of the breach of the Sentinel program last week.

Under the Nunn-McCurdy Act, any program in "critical" breach status (meaning the program has exceeded 30% cost overruns), could be terminated unless the Secretary of Defense certifies there is no alternative. That is the recertification Clegg was referring to. Clegg said the Air Force hopes to have a new budget and schedule for Sentinel by this summer, assuming the program is allowed to continue.

As a result of the uncertainty posed by the cost overruns and Nunn-McCurdy Act process, speakers at the Town Hall were unable to answer questions about the schedule of work in Central Montana.

LOCAL IMPACTS ADDRESSED

Several community members, including Judith Basin County Commissioner Cody McDonald and Fergus County Commissioner Carl Seilstad, asked about the impact, whenever construction does start, to roads and bridges. Their concerns were echoed by Jim Stevenson.

"How many cubic yards of concrete are you hauling? How many concrete and gravel trucks will be on the roads? What is the impact to timber bridges that may be ok now, but after five or six loaded trucks go over them, can fail? Most of our secondary roads have only 2 inches of pavement and were not designed for those heavy trucks. I think you have minimized the impacts," Stevenson said.

Russell Bartholomew, a civilian working with the Air Force on the Environmental Impact analysis for the Sentinel project, said there is a section of the EIS just on impacts to roads and bridges.

"We have an entire branch dedicated to roads and bridges," Bartholomew said. "We've already analyzed impacts. We expect to have three trucks a day running. We work from plans and information given to us by the state and local agencies. It all gets pulled together so we understand where the 'spikes' are and can decide how to 'do no harm.'"

Potential negative impacts from project workers were on the minds of some citizens, but Bartholomew said that was also addressed during the EIS assessment.

"This is a workforce of professionals who are a little bit older than what you saw with the oil and gas industry," he said.

Matthew Dillow, ICBM Regional Operations director with Northrop Grumman, said the workers may be confined to the workforce hub to be built in Lewistown to a greater or lesser extent.

"These are very experienced workers, mostly from the Gulf Coast, who travel to do these big projects. They will fly in and be picked up in busses. They will be bussed from the workforce hub to the sites. We'll assess your interest in having them come into town. Right now what we are hearing in Kimball, Neb., [where the first workforce hub will be built] is that the town was concerned about the workers not being in town enough to patronize local businesses," Dillow said.

Dillow said there will be two 10-hour shifts each day at the launch facilities, with multiple sites under construction at one time.

Dillow also said that once the missile project is completed, Northrop Grumman will meet with local stakeholders to see whether they want the workforce hub facility to be removed or left in place.

BUYING LAND

Taylor Walton, Real Estate Acquisition Program manager, said he is working with the Army Corps of Engineers out of Omaha, Neb., to do land acquisition for utility corridors, communication tower sites and the workforce hub.

"We will have agents in the community. We are predominantly buying land associated with the communication corridors. We'll need a 100-foot-wide Right of Way across private land for seven years to allow us to install the corridors. At the end of that time we will restore the properties as they were. We will also need 32 5-acre sites for communication towers. We don't know yet if the tower sites will need to be completely chain-link fenced or whether other activities, such as farming, will be allowed under the towers," Walton said, adding each tower will be 300 feet tall, with guy lines attached to the ground for stability.

Possible tower sites have been chosen, but there is still some ability to move them if someone objects. The towers will not be available for use by commercial communication companies, but may be available for use by emergency service organizations, Bartholomew said.

Walton said they will also need to acquire land next to the launch facilities for seven years during installation of the new missiles.

In response to a few final questions from the audience, Colonel Little said the impact of the Chinese spy balloon on the missile project was "absolutely zero."

"We were watching and tracking the balloon from the minute it entered U.S. air space," Little said. "What most people don't understand about the missile fields is that day-to-day, there's nothing to see."

The same will be true of the Sentinel missiles, he said.

Bartholomew said members of the public have asked about acquiring the decommissioned Minuteman III missiles.

"If you want a missile, there's paperwork for that," he said.

Those interested in working on the Sentinel project were directed to the Northrop Grumman website, northropgrumman.com/jobs/.

Those with additional questions about the project were directed to the Air Force Global Strike Command website, afgsc.af.mil/Sentinel/Project-Information/.

LARRY MAYER

People are seated in the Trade Center at the Fergus County Fairgrounds for the Town Hall hosted by the Air Force about upcoming missile updates.

PHOTO BY DEB HILL

Colonel Barry Little, Wing Commander at Malmstrom Air Force Base, addresses questions about the Sentinel missile project at a meeting Wednesday evening at the Trade Center.