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Estes Park

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Packing more heat

■ Police beefing up arsenal in response to heightened awareness of threats to public safety in wake of 9-11
By JAY GENTILE

The Estes Park Police Department (EPPD) is beefing up its arsenal of firearms in response to a heightened awareness of threats to public safety that followed the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Currently, each officer carries a handgun and each patrol car is equipped with a shotgun. At the Feb. 7 Public Safety Committee meeting, trustees authorized the EPPD to purchase seven patrol rifles — one per patrol car — at a total cost of \$7,415.

The Town of Estes Park will only pay \$674, or 10 percent, of that cost. The other \$6,741 will come from a grant that officer Ray Leaycraft secured from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Additional firearms training has also been arranged through the Fort Collins Police Department. Officers will undergo the training every three months, said Police Chief Lowell Richardson.

"We do not have the proper equipment for a patrol officer to effectively manage an armed or violent situation when needed," Richardson wrote in a Feb. 5 memo to Town Administrator Rich Widmer. He wrote that research following Sept. 11 "revealed the necessity to upgrade current armament and provide contemporary training for the patrol officer(s)."

"It's to deal with a serious, serious situation should it arise," Richardson told the *Trail-Gazette*. "We need to be prepared. It's just a prudent thing to do. Every community deserves confidence in their police force to be able to handle a situation like that."

He said with the current times, communities Estes Park's size are "more often than not" armed to this extent. He said the trend in additional armament has been going on since the massacres at Columbine High School in 1999.

He said handguns and shotguns are short-range weapons, while rifles give police "greater long-distance accuracy" and an enhanced ability to control "seri-

ous and critical incidents" from a distance.

Community policing

Also at the Feb. 7 meeting, the EPPD adopted a policy which formalizes its commitment to the philosophy of community policing.

"The primary focus of the Estes Park Police Department must remain the delivery of services to our community, emphasizing quality customer service and the reduction of crime and disorder issues," Richardson wrote in a Feb. 6 memo. "The most effective approach to accomplish these stated goals is the complete implementation of Community Based Policing."

"The bottom line is crime and disorder issues are not just a police issue, it's a community problem," Richardson said. Community policing "is a collaborative partnership between the community and police department to increase the quality of life in Estes Park."

He said in community policing, these partners "apply problem-solving strategies to situations versus just enforcing laws." Community policing works best for resolving "nuisance issues" like illegally parked cars, trash and pet waste.

Richardson said police "can be overloaded and inundated" with trying to resolve these nuisance issues, which can cause police to fail in their efforts to fight harder crime. Community policing spreads out the workload so that the community can work on issues that can be resolved without police action, reserving the police department's full attention for more serious incidents.

"They help us, and we help them," said Richardson. He said a "classic example" of community policing is the EPPD's current actions to resolve the Riverside Plaza nuisance issues, in which police hired mediators from Colorado State University to facilitate a meeting between the community and police in the hopes that the groups can work out a deal among themselves.

"I'm real pleased that we're going in this direction," said trustee Lori Jeffrey-Clark. She said "sharing the responsibility" and "being proactive" is essential, especially with the threats posed by terrorism today.

Breaking the stereotypical profile

■ EPHS students educate "30-year-old senior"

By BRIAN F. JOHNSON

Before I walked into Estes Park High School, I had the same impression that many people in this community and throughout this country have about high school students — that most are nothing but a bunch of slack-jawed stoners who can hardly figure out two plus three even with the help of a calculator. They're lazy. They're rude and ill-suited, if not downright incapable of holding down any type of meaningful employment, now or in the future.

But, as with all stereotypes, the truth and reality of the situation are far from that common train of thought.

I learned this first-hand last week as I

matriculated into Estes Park High School as a senior for a day. And, just a few minutes into my first-period class, I knew that those who had developed and crafted that negative stereotype over the years had never seen the inside of a classroom in Bobcat country.

My learning curve started the moment I walked into EPHS.

As was par for the course with all of my high school days, I showed up just a few minutes late to Mr. Christopher's calculus class that started the school day at 8 a.m.

Characters that looked Greek to me were jotted all over the board. When the teacher, or the students for that matter, began to talk about a problem I knew I

See Student: Page A 2



Photo by Walt Hester

A sunshine paws

Cora Taylor of Estes Park and her companion, Mary, enjoy sunshine and smiles along Elkhorn Avenue last week. Expect more sunshine this week.



Photo by Brian F. Johnson

Students in Mr. Ufer's technology class learn to apply high-tech methods to everyday uses.

Taxidermist faces investigation

By JAY GENTILE

Around 5 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 4, Vincent Brown heard a knock on his door. When he opened it, a team of federal and state law enforcement officials pushed him aside while serving a search warrant.

Five hours later, the officers were gone — along with over half of the items kept at Brown's business, Rocky Mountain Wildlife. Items were seized from both the Acacia Drive shop and from Brown's residence on Middle Broadview Road.

Eric Harper, assistant chief of law enforcement at the Colorado Division of Wildlife, said 10 to 12 animals or animal parts were seized, along with two firearms, hunting videos, Brown's computer, documents and records — enough material to fill up two pickup trucks.

The wildlife seized include two black bear cubs, a bighorn sheep head, raven, hawk, owl and two Canada geese, as well as a few trophy deer and elk.

The search also uncovered evidence incriminating Brown in a two-year-old unsolved felony theft case, said Estes Park Police Chief Lowell Richardson.

No charges have yet been filed against Brown. Richardson said the Larimer County District Attorney's office is reviewing the theft case and will decide on charges. It is alleged that Brown stole over \$500 from a previous employer two years ago.

The search also uncovered information linking an Estes Park police officer, who worked part-time at Brown's shop, with misdemeanor hunting violations.

Richardson said the Estes Park Police Department is conducting an internal investigation as to whether or not "that's proper and appropriate behavior" for an officer. "I take the allegation very seriously," he said.

The Division of Wildlife is investigating the alleged hunting violations against the officer. Harper said the officer has been interviewed and "there may or may not

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Photo By Brian F. Johnson

We do — again

Over 100 couples gathered in the Concert Hall at the Stanley Hotel on Sunday, Feb. 10, to stand in front of Chaplain Bill Huth of the YMCA/Estes Park Center and renew their wedding vows. Some had been married for close to 50 years, and others just months. But the one thing they all had in common was the desire to renew their commitments as couples. For a complete story, see "Couples renew vows" on page A 4.

Investigation: No charges have been filed

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be state wildlife charges" filed against him.

Those charges are in no way related to the allegations against Brown, who investigators believe is part of a multi-state ring of illegal wildlife selling and commercial trafficking of trophy heads and antlers. It is believed that many of the animals seized in the Feb. 4 search were killed illegally.

Brown, in an interview

Speak out

Trail-Gazette photographer Walt Hester asked residents, "What Olympic sports would you like to do?"



Jamey Young, 16, Estes Park
Oh? Hockey - that's an easy question.



Antonie Rose, 17, Estes Park
Bobsledding.



Alicia Rosenthal, 17, Estes Park
My dreams were crushed because the Olympics refuse to recognize any form of climbing.



Kris Barr, Estes Park.
I like hockey, and bobsledding too.



Chase Van Horn, 15, Estes Park.
Snowboarding.



Russell Rector, 18, Estes Park
Hockey.

Monday from his shop, said he's merely a small-time taxidermist "just trying to run my business." He has hired a lawyer.

He said the only charge that will stick is the illegal possession of a bear cub, which are illegal to kill in Colorado. He said he bought the cub from a New Mexico man who claimed that the cub was legally killed on Indian-owned land in New Mexico, where the man said cub killing is legal with Indian consent.

The man who sold Brown the cub turned out to be an undercover agent with the Division of Wildlife. The undercover agent had been visiting Brown's shop since December of 2000, selling him elk antlers. "After dealing with him for an extended period of time," Brown said, "I believed him."

Brown said the owl and hawk belonged to the Division of Wildlife (DOW), and the raven belonged to the Boy Scouts of America. He was mounting the animals for these groups for free, and said local DOW manager Rick Spowart said he didn't need a license for them.

"That's not true," said Spowart, adding that two different permits are required for mounting the birds. He said while the person getting the mount (the DOW) was exempt from the usual permit in this case, the taxidermist still needs a permit for this work. Spowart said he believes Brown had such permits but allowed them to lapse.

"We find no evidence of any of those permits," said Harper. He also said "there's no documentation at this point" that any of the items, besides one of the two bear cubs seized, belong to the DOW. Brown said most of the items seized belonged to the DOW.

Brown also complained that the team of officers that searched his home and store Feb. 4, a team which he said totaled 33 officers, took his John Wayne video. Harper said the team, which he said was more like 18 officers, did take videos that may depict illegal hunting actions - and said that factory-labeled videos are not always as they appear from the label.

Brown said investigators were really after his list of customers in an effort to locate others involved in the illicit animal trade. Harper said investigators seized a list of 20 to 50 names of people that they will try to track down for more information.

"At this point, Rocky Mountain Wildlife is one of many stores involved in trade of antlers and wildlife parts," Harper said. He said one additional suspect has been identified and another has been interviewed since the search.

A computer specialist with the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office is currently analyzing the data on Brown's computer. "He told us that a lot of his business records are kept on a computer," Harper said.

Along with the officers from the Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, federal agents with the office of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) also participated in the search. Brown said they took three hunting rifles.

Harper said two firearms were seized and one was purchased over the course of the undercover investigation. He said ATF agents were involved "to make sure (the firearms) were lawfully acquired. It's unknown whether there will be firearms charges."

Brown said the search warrant only allowed investigators to take the serial numbers and descriptions of the firearms. Harper said one of the firearms did not have a serial number.

Dal Schaefer, a criminal investigator for the DOW, said the case grew from a rash of trophy killings and poachings, primarily of elk and deer along the Colorado-New Mexico border. Through anonymous tips from residents, the wildlife agencies for both states amassed enough information to begin covert operations.

Harper said an undercover agent in New Mexico heard about Rocky Mountain Wildlife once inside the network. In addition, Harper said the DOW received separate complaints from citizens reporting illegal activity at Rocky Mountain Wildlife.

Search warrants against individuals in Las Vegas, New Mexico, were executed as part of the Feb. 4 multi-state searches. Those individuals are alleged to be involved in illegal wildlife trafficking as well as illegal outfitting and license violations. Arrests have been made in New Mexico.

Rocky Mountain Wildlife was the only store searched in Colorado. Harper said investigators are currently sifting through the "large volume of records" to determine which of the seized items were obtained legally and which were obtained illegally.

"There are probably some in both categories," he said. He said state and federal charges may be filed,

most likely along the lines of illegal sale and illegal possession of wildlife, some of which could be felonies.

He said besides the bear cub from New Mexico, the DOW is most sure of its case for the illegal possession of the bighorn sheep head. The head did not have an aluminum plug in its horn, which certifies that it was killed legally. He said the requirement for this plug is "a well-known fact among taxidermists."

Brown said the sheep "was a pickup for a customer." He said he is not required to have the hunting license of a person who brings in an animal - just their name, address and phone number.

Brown said investigators will be returning most of his items in the next few days. "That's not humanly possible," said Harper, adding that it will be weeks before investigators are finished sifting through the evidence. An announcement of what charges will be pursued is not expected before that time.

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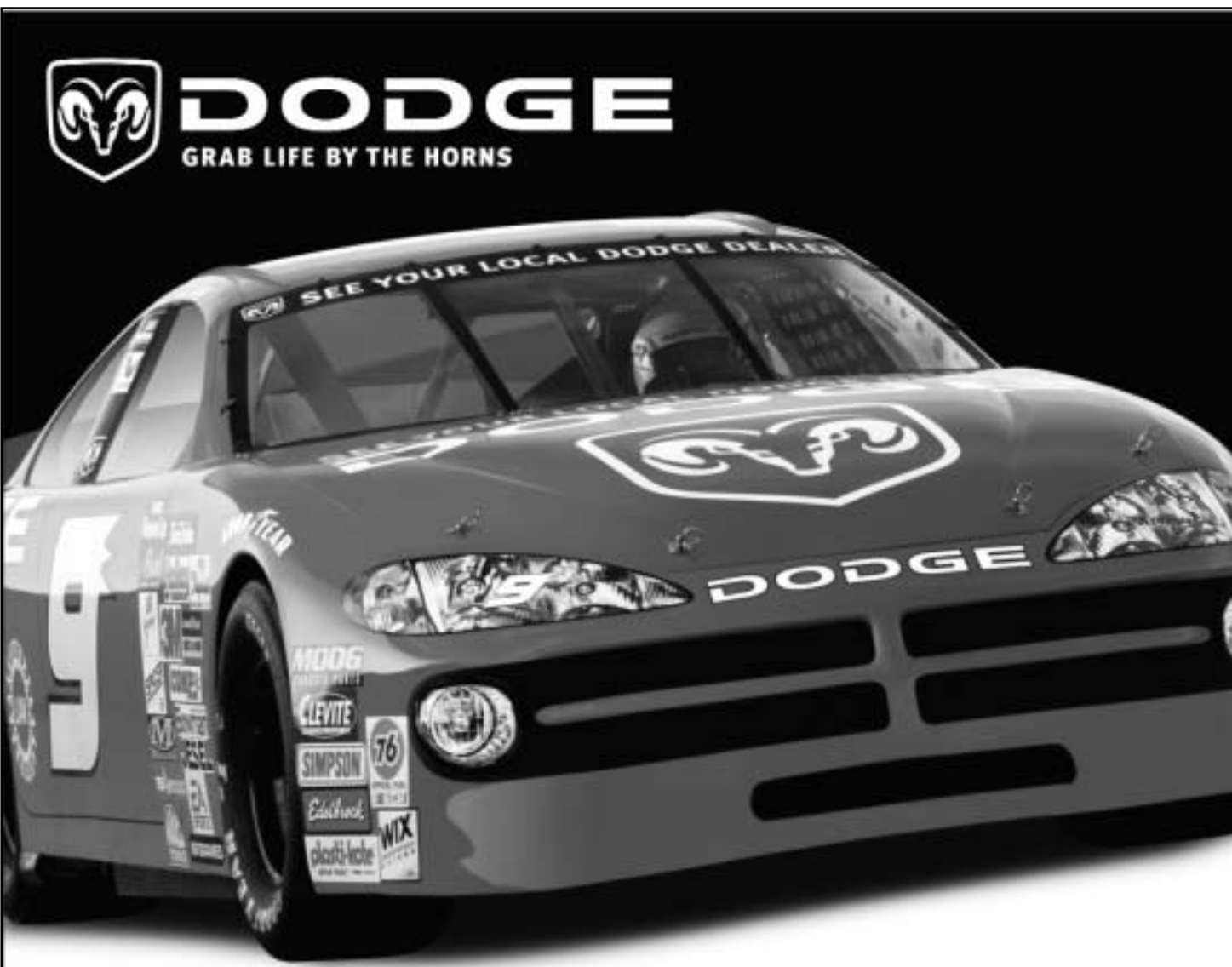
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