

# HOW'D WE GET HERE?

Mines lay off more than 400, send local economies, families into flux



Phillip Harnden photos

More than 450 coal miners lost their jobs at North Antelope Rochelle and Black Thunder mines last week.

## Coal layoffs signal dark days ahead

By NICK BALATSOS  
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Days darker than coal likely await Wyoming. That forecast might as well have been carved in stone last Thursday and Friday when Arch Coal and Peabody Energy executives laid off some 15 percent of their workforce in mines in Converse and Campbell counties.

The cuts came in response to proposed stricter environmental regulations, a glut of coal, a strong U.S. dollar and cheap natural gas. It was a perfect storm of events, economists say, that cost some 460 people their jobs.

Many of the miners live in Douglas, Glenrock, Casper, Gillette and Wright.

They worked in the two largest coal mines in America — Black Thunder and North Antelope Rochelle — helping to heat and power homes across the country.

Their jobs and experience-levels varied. They were accountants and mechanics, heavy machine operators and supply guys. Some had toiled in the mines for decades; others, for just a few years.

Whatever their differences, though, they considered themselves family. They worked hard, 14-hour days together.

Covered in soot and grease, they would often return home too tired to eat. They would pass out

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**DARK DAYS,**  
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### PRAYING FOR HOPE



Phillip Harnden photos

The community gathers for a multi-denominational prayer meeting at Assembly of God Church to pray for those out of work after the mine layoffs.

## Cuts to coal cost local railroad jobs

Former UP employee: 'They don't care about you or your family anymore'

By SPIKE JORDAN  
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Mining jobs aren't coal's only casualty. In recent months, two railroad companies have slashed more than 8,000 employees

nation-wide, thousands of which are in Wyoming's Powder River Basin.

Since fall of last year, Union Pacific has pulled the brakes on about 4,100 jobs across its 23 state system and placed as many

as 1,200 of its locomotives in cold storage as part of the company's ongoing effort to align resources with demand. On March 30, Burlington Northern Santa Fe announced it would also be cutting about 4,700 jobs across the country.

"It's kind of hard hearing all these miners cry 'poor me,'" said one former U.P. employee, who asked that we not use his name.

"They all seem to think that because these railroad layoffs have been happening gradually that it's not as bad as what they're going through."

The cuts were based on seniority, and many who found them-

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**RAILROADS,**  
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Phillip Harnden photos

The Hinckley family is in the process of selling their dream home as part of their efforts to downsize in the wake of the recent coal mine layoffs. Katy's husband, T.J. (not pictured), was laid off Thursday with 242 others.

## Counting blessings

Local family does what it has to do to endure layoffs and get by

By JENNIFER KOCHER  
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Last year Katy and T.J. Hinckley moved into their dream home. Today, it's back on the market.

In a weird way, however, the fact that T.J. was among the first miners to lose his job is kind of a blessing.

"The stress is over because we no longer have to wake up each day wondering when it's going to happen," Katy said.

For the past several months, the couple had been bracing for the worst. Months ago when work at the mine started slowing down and overtime was cut, they figured it was just a matter of time before T.J. lost his job.

He was a relative newcomer, and with only 7 years on the job as a heavy equipment operator, he figured he'd be on the short list.

Still,, nobody is ever really ready for that pink slip to come.



Katy and baby Mila Hinckley find little things to keep them smiling in this period of uncertain and stressful times.

It was a blow, Katy admits, when T.J. got the letter telling him to meet at the Holiday Inn last Thursday. At that point, there was no doubt that he was among the 243 miners laid off this week at North Rochelle Antelope Mine.

Katy's mainly upset about the way the company handled the health insurance. Because the

layoffs occurred on the last day of March, their health insurance benefits also expired that night

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**BLESSINGS,**  
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### This week's weather

	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
High	65	63	70	75	57
Low	38	34	38	44	32



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# Blessings

from the front page



**Braxton Hinckley, 3, who suffers from autism, plays with his favorite toy. Finding affordable medical insurance is one more obstacle the family must now face.**

and the COBRA payments would be hard to afford.

Katy sighed as she made a grab to catch 3-year-old Braxton as he pinballed off the cushion into her legs. She missed, as Braxton continued to tornado his way down the micro suede sectional couch curving along one side of the playroom wall.

Braxton, who has high-spectrum autism, is a bundle of energy, Katy explained. He was three months away from receiving his official diagnosis at his June doctor's appointment, but now – like many things – that appointment may have to wait.

Braxton, who is non-verbal and still in diapers at 3, goes to several therapy appointments throughout the week to address his particular needs.

For now, Katy is just trying her best to keep things as normal as possible at home. While 1-year-old Mila sleeps, Braxton and Ava, 8, are taking advantage of playtime before Braxton heads off to pre-school at Head Start.

Ava, who lives with her father in Casper during the week, is happy to return to her mother's on the weekends. Ava, too, has autism, though she's on the higher functioning end.

The front door slams shut upstairs and the footsteps subside. That would be T.J., Katy laughed.

Today, Friday, would have been the start of his days off, but this morning, instead of sleeping in, he's out trying to talk to people and line something up.

"He's not a sit-around-and-wait-kind-of-guy," Katy said. "He needs to do something."

At 27, T.J. has worked at the mine for most of his adult life. Out of high school, he worked for a plumbing company for a while before he got the job at the mine. Mining has been good to T.J. and his family. His dad worked there for years and his older brother, who also works at the mine, missed the first round of layoffs.

"I'm so grateful his brother kept his job," Katy said. "He's got four kids."

She doesn't really blame the company for the downturn in work. They've been pretty good to T.J. She's grateful for the eight-week severance package, which also allows him to file for unemployment.

The lack of health insurance is the largest worry for Katy right now.

"I don't care about myself," Katy said, shaking her head. "I'm just worried about my kids."

Her mother, who works for Blue Cross and Blue Shield, will be visiting her this weekend to try to help.

Otherwise, the family will downsize and regroup. That may include moving back to a trailer on T.J.'s parents' land outside of Douglas – taking a step back to where they lived prior to their big move into their dream home.

Katy has come to grips with the move.

"We wanted a bigger house for our family," Katy said as she assesses the comfortably large playroom with the sectional on one wall and a plastic kitchen and slide on the other, where Braxton and Ava are busily playing. "but it will be nice to live right next to family, and Ava is excited to share a room with her little sister."

Katy's optimistic that T.J. will

find work and that they'll be able to squeeze by until the economy returns.

She's a bit worried because she's never seen it this bad. Mainly, she's angry at President Obama and the regulatory policies that have put the industry in this fix.

Wait until the rolling blackouts start to happen around the country, she added, then maybe the policy makers will realize that they've put themselves in a fix.

She wishes she could help out with finances, too, but with a 1-year-old baby and a special needs child at home, it makes more sense for her to be at home. Plus, Braxton has several therapy sessions throughout the week, and most employers probably wouldn't be okay with her leav-

ing two times in a day to take him back and forth.

Nonetheless, at 27, Katy plans to go to nursing school. One day, when the kids are at school.

In the meantime, they'll do whatever they have to do to get by. It would have been nice if they'd sold the house before T.J. was laid off, of course, she said, but, as she's learned, life is pretty much out of your hands.

In all honesty, though, she's feeling pretty lucky. So many people have it much worse.

"We are pretty blessed," she said, hugging Braxton and Ava as they cuddle next to her on the couch. "We've got options. We've got a place to live. There are so many people out there who don't have a place to go and I'm scared for them."

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# DMS students suspended for bringing prescription drugs to school

Espeland: 'Middle school kids are a real challenge with that type of thing'

By SPIKE JORDAN  
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A handful of Douglas Middle School students have been suspended for bringing over-the-counter and prescription medications to school before handing them out to other students, DMS Principal Eric Pingrey confirmed Monday.

"A few of our students made poor choices and brought medication from their parents medicine cabinets and shared them with other students at the school," Pingrey said. "We were able to move quickly and stop it before it became a big problem."

Pingrey declined to give an exact number involved because the students are juveniles,



**DAN ESPELAND**

but said that the school needed to suspend the students due to the significant consequences and the severity of their actions.

Converse County School District #1 Superintendent Dan Espeland said that Pingrey and the school resource officer had contacted him and made him aware of the situation.

"Middle school kids are a real challenge with that type of thing," Espeland said. "If a high school student takes a pack of cigarettes to school, he will smoke all of them himself. But if a middle school student takes a pack of cigarettes to school, he will smoke one and hand out the other 19 to his friends."

Espeland commended administrators, staff, and law enforcement for investigating and acting quickly. He said that one student was taken to the hospital by his parents, but that the situation was handled appropriately.

Pingrey said that the school is working with law enforcement, pharmacist Gary Shatto and a number of community organizations to better educate the students. He said that flyers will be posted around the school, and that information will be included in the newsletter that will be given to parents.

"You see the PSAs on the national level about keeping kids out of the medicine cabinets, but you don't expect to see it here," Pingrey said.

## Plantar Fasciitis

### Symptoms:

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- \* Pain during and after activity
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