



Paul Kuecks photo

Alleged arsonist heading to trial

By Sandra Mudd
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Douglas resident Kirby Cross, 38, was bound over to Eighth District Court at his preliminary hearing April 18. He was originally arrested a few weeks ago for intentionally setting a fire which gutted a home at 501 N. 4th April 10.

Cross is charged with felony property destruction and third degree arson. He could spend up to a maximum of 15 years in prison and pay up to \$15,000 in fines, if he is convicted on both charges.

Douglas Police Officer Thomas Jones testified at the preliminary hearing about the events surrounding the fire, while Cross sat somberly in his orange jail suit. Jones recounted that the fire was reported in the early morning hours of April 10. Not long after, Douglas fire fighters were dispatched to battle the blaze.

Cross was a renter in the home and allegedly admitted to setting the fire after police found him on 3rd Street, according to the police affidavit filed with the court. Michael



KIRBY CROSS

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BOUND OVER,
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Creepy signs of spring

By Jen Kocher
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Turkey vultures roost in Douglas trees each April

These men slugging down coffee at Whistle-Stop Books & Mercantile have earned lifetimes of wisdom about the Wild West, and they will tell you the return of the turkey vultures is a sure sign spring has finally bloomed in Wyoming, where ferocious, snow-drenched winds whipsaw into April.

Like conscientious tourists following strict timetables, the vultures typically land in mid-April and stay through the fall. Each spring, they stake their claim in Douglas where they come to seek out their breeding grounds along the craggy cliffs and rocky terrain.

This year, they are roosting in the thorny twigs and upper branches of trees along 4th Street. It's definitely not a lyrical sign of spring like Washington state apple orchard blossoms or the swallows returning to Capistrano. This Wyoming breath of spring definitely borders on Gothic.

That this year the vultures showed up in mid-March, a good two weeks ahead of schedule, does little to ingratiate the vultures being welcomed to Douglas – although their arrival almost coincided with the calendar's official start of spring on March 21.

Unlike the melodies of the songbirds and sparrows, the turkey vultures greet the day in a menacing shroud of black. Huddled en masse,

the vultures cower among the stiff branches like witches in stiffly collared capes, warily eyeing passing pedestrians and joggers with tail feathers twitching.

It's hard not to view their annual arrival as a personal affront, the men agree, as they grumble amongst themselves about ruined lawns and rooftops and other damages caused by copious quantities of feces.

"Don't get even get me started on the smell," Dick Pexton says while sipping on his coffee, reflexively flaring his nostrils as if to begin an odor-driven exorcism.

"They seem to like the tower," Don Wagoner notes, as their heads turn to look through the window at the clusters of black birds clinging to the rungs of a cell phone tower. It was a popular roost last year, too, they note, though the birds tend to move around from year to year.

The cemetery used to be popular grounds for the migratory birds, but has since inexplicably fallen out of favor.

Luckily, their own houses have not been singled out for a roost, but Earl Shatto wonders aloud if some of the unlucky ones might have done some bad deeds to earn the vultures' company.

"It can't be good," Shatto says with a sly grin. "and they must wonder about a few things when they wake up in the morning one day to find those birds sitting up in their tree."

Others at the Whistle-Stop table point out that it might be accidental and more of a tree-thing and less to do with the unfortunate residents. Shatto shrugs. He has his theories, they have their's.

The vultures can smell death, too, he notes, recounting an old tale about a man who died in his trailer home and remained there for three days until someone found him. Were it not for the vultures circling over the top of his trailer, who knows how long his corpse might have sat there undiscovered?

There's a bit of disagreement among the guys about the likelihood of the circling vultures over the house of a dead man, but Shatto holds his ground. And he's right about the vultures keen sense of smell. In fact, according to the Turkey

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Outside groups ask for less \$ from city, more from county

By Sandra Mudd
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Submissions for this year's aid to others have rolled into the city and county with a variety of funding requests totaling \$509,000 from the city (down \$107,000 from last year at \$616,000) and \$554,000 from the county (up \$23,000 from last year at \$531,000).

Before the start of every fiscal year on July 1, the city and county allow outside groups – from the senior centers to youth programs to economic development and mental health – to ask for funding under service contracts. The deadline for requests this year was April 7.

Once the requests are received, Converse County Clerk Lucile Taylor and City Clerk Karen Rimmer compile the requests into a single chart so commissioners and council members can easily see who asked for how much from each. Then, in a day-long work session, the city, county and the applicants meet, and each group has 15 minutes to present its case for funding. The county holds off on the decision to grant, deny, or amend the request at this point as they still have to hear requests from Glenrock entities, according to Taylor.

Budget work sessions for the county will be June 8, 9 and 12, when the commissioners will hear from the county departments, including the airport, library and hospital, as well as the Wyoming State Fair, groups from Glenrock which were not involved in the Douglas work session and others, Taylor explained.

Once the county has a more firm grip on revenues, the commissioners meet again to compare the requests and make any necessary adjustments, Taylor said. The budget hearing will be held July 17, with adoption on July 18.

"I did ask that they keep in mind that our revenues are down,"

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AID TO OTHERS,
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Simulation Thursday to teach perils of drunk driving

It only takes one bad choice to ruin your life or that of others when it comes to taking a drink or partaking in another risk-related behavior and getting behind the wheel.

That's what PARTY Jackalope (Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth) organizers hope to get across in their third-annual crash simulation this Thursday.

The event will be hosted in the back parking lot at Douglas High School on Thursday morning, beginning at 9 a.m. Along with the simulation, a crash survivor will also be sharing his story.

The demonstration is free and open to the public, and organizers encourage parents of teens to attend.

Pool will be open more this year

By Sandra Mudd
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Budget file photo

The city swimming pool will be under new management this year as the city takes on that duty itself.

Patrons at the Douglas Municipal Water Park will see a slightly higher cost of hosting private parties which use the big slide under the city's re-assumed day-to-day management of the pool.

Other than that, swimmers can expect the hours of operation and admissions costs to remain the same as last year, even though the pool season may be a tad longer this summer.

The outdoor pool and slides at Washington Park will be open seven days a week beginning the Friday before Memorial Day each year and will stay open through most of August. The exact date of closing – which had been at the start of Wyoming State Fair Week in previous years – will be determined later but will likely be after fair and just before the start of school.

The pool will open this year on Friday, May 26. Scheduled hours of operation for daily use will be noon to 5 p.m. for the entire season, with July hosting

extended evening hours from 6-8 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The pool will be open for private pool parties on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 6-8 p.m. for the entire season.

Additionally, the pool will be open for lap swimming every weekday from 6-7:30 a.m. for the cost of daily admission rates.

Scheduling for any extra activities or programs will be up to the discretion of the Parks and Recreation supervisor, according to the resolution approved by the Douglas City Council Monday.

Operational hours will potentially be modified during Wyoming State Fair week and will be subject to staff availability if the pool has enough business to stay open during this week. The August closing date will be determined by the Parks and Recreation supervisor.

The city first proposed to take over the control of the water park in February after years of

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WATER PARK,
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This week's weather

| | Wed. | Thur. | Fri. | Sat. | Sun. |
|------|------|-------|------|------|------|
| High | 54 | 47 | 41 | 43 | 52 |
| Low | 34 | 30 | 25 | 23 | 33 |

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Harbingers of spring

from the front page

How do you get rid of turkey vultures?

Turkey vultures are protected in the USA by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and may not be harmed by law, so you must use humane methods to deter or remove them. Some suggestions for deterring them from roosting in your trees or overhangs according to neverpestcom include:

- Hang shiny reflecting objects in tree branches to spook the birds away
- Install a motion sensor sprinkler system in your lawn, gardens and crop areas
- Make tons of loud noises by banging, yelling and blowing horns
- Install motion sensor lights into your yard that turn on and spook the birds when they try to land
- Ask Fish & Game to safely remove a nest
- Eliminate dead trees and bushes from your yard
- Use a bird zap shock tracking system or bird spikes to prevent roosting

Vulture Society's webpage, these birds have one of the best senses of smell of any in the animal kingdom.

That said, according to the same website, it's unlikely for vultures to circle dead carcasses as they are more like pouncers who arrive directly on scene to devour their share of a carcass.

As gross as this might sound, vultures tend to get a bad rap when it comes to what they'll eat.

Contrary to rumor, they won't eat just anything and prefer fresh kills, though they will eat a slightly putrid carcass if they are hungry enough. They typically feed on herbivorous animals and, unlike hawks and eagles and other carrion-eating birds, they do not kill their prey because they lack the sharp claws and beaks. The image of a vulture snacking on a freshly squashed squirrel, though, does little to warm many to the particular merits of these otherwise disgusting birds.

But as retired science teacher Paul Kuecks points out, they're wild birds well worth watching.

"No, they are far from my favorite bird out in the wild," he says, "but they do have some quirky qualities that set them apart from the rest."

Unfortunately, some of those quirks are related to their repulsive personal habits. For the most part, they're gross slobbs, though resourceful in the various ways they appropriate their regurgitated fluids as a means of survival. For example, when they're hot, they'll barf on their legs to cool down because they don't have sweat glands. And if you try to kidnap one or harm it in any way, they'll pee and poop on you (they only have one orifice for both bodily functions) to scare you away.

According to Kuecks, who likes them enough to take their photos at close range and study them, they also are charmingly klutzy and majestic with a 6-foot wing span, which makes them ungainly fliers in the sky, yet keenly resourceful. To get around their flying deficit, they circle on the thermals of hot air to boost themselves up in a process called kittling, named so after its resemblance to bubbles rising in a pot of boiling water, which is something only a science teacher would treasure.

And despite their slovenliness, turkey vultures are not as disgusting as they might seem, according to Kuecks, who points out that their bile is an effective form of sanitizer that kills bacteria and viruses in the decaying corpses.

They are also pretty easy to get along with when it comes to human interaction, assuming you can get past their appearance and demeanor.

"You would have to go pretty far to offend a turkey vulture," Kuecks laughs, adding that he wishes more people would take an interest in them and just give them a chance. He talks excitedly about the day last summer when he and his wife happened upon a vulture nest while they were floating the North Platte River. Vultures build their nests in caves and in crevices on the ground, and, true to a lot of bird couples, both share parenting responsibilities equally, taking turns to scavenge for food while the other parent remains behind with the nest.

Contrary to the belief that they are building nests as they roost, that couldn't be farther from the truth, according to Kuecks. The roosts are more or less recreational, a single's club for unmated pairs as it were, where vultures convene socially before ultimately pairing off.

How vultures choose their mates, like human couples, remains a mystery. But for Kuecks, it's not a hard stretch to see the attraction.

"They're actually pretty lovable birds," he muses, "and they'll even follow you around like a dog."

That said, there is an international treaty that prohibits people from taking home a turkey vulture to raise, should anyone feel the temptation to steal one out of a nest while the parents aren't looking.

Yet, despite their resourceful quirks, it's hard to glamorize a bird that poops on you and vomits to cool off his legs. Maybe instead of ominous witches hovering in trees, a turkey vulture is more like that charming, socially awkward uncle at Thanksgiving.

Regardless, the birds will summer in Douglas until they go south in the fall. And though they might not be the cherry blossoms or swallows or other harbingers of spring found in other parts of the country, they are nothing if not loyal to Douglas.

Bound over

from the front page

Crawford, Cross' roommate, told police Cross woke him up to tell him the home was on fire and he noticed the flames were coming from Cross' room as he rushed out of the house. In court, Jones testified that Crawford and Cross exited through the back door of the home. Jones testified the damage from the fire was severe and the home appeared to be completely destroyed as the flames had engulfed the entire house.

"I set the fire on my bed because people were coming through it," court documents quote Cross as telling police.

During the initial investigation into the cause of the fire, the K9 on scene alerted to the bed, allowing officials to determine that "some sort of accelerant was used to set the bed on fire," Jones said. The type of accelerant has not yet been determined.

Police also claim Cross was "exhibiting signs of stimulant use requiring medical attention" when they first made contact and that his comment about starting the fire was unsolicited. Jones testified Cross' signs of stimulant use included exaggerated reflexes, rigid muscle tone and increased heart rate, and Cross also allegedly admitted to having used methamphetamine.

The only time Cross spoke during the hearing was to plead his case for a bond reduction, during which he stated he had friends he could stay with and he thought his time would be better spent working. Cross' lawyer said his client has agreed to attend a residential inpatient treatment program and asked for a bond reduction of 20 percent of the \$5,000 requested.

Circuit Court Judge Vincent Case denied the request, saying that even though he respected Cross' desire to work, it didn't change the fact that Cross had obviously hallucinated to a point where he felt he had to set a bed on fire.

Case also clarified that the bond amount is already set lower than what the state originally asked for and that in his opinion it is a fair and reasonable amount.

No trial date had been set as of press time.

The family of
BETTY SCHELLINGER

wish to thank everybody for their thoughts and prayers. We especially wish to thank everyone who helped with her funeral. God Bless!

Trina Schellinger and Family

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Wednesday
6:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
1:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Friday
6:30 a.m. - 12 Noon

THE PUBLIC IS INVITED TO JOIN THE COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATED FEDERAL GRANT COMMITTEE on Monday, May 8, 2017 at 3:30 p.m. GIMS Conference Room

The purpose of the meeting is to help coordinate the goals, objectives and activities for each of the Federal Grant Programs and focus them toward common goals to improve our schools. Coordinating programs will also help to maximize the utilization of funds.

The Federal Grants Converse #2 participates in are:

- Title I Reading and Math Programs
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- Perkins Vocational and Technical Education
- IDEA VI-B Flowthrough and 619 Preschool-Special Education

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Parents and family of DHS students are also welcome to attend this presentation!

P.A.R.T.Y. Jackalope sincerely wishes to thank all the local agencies who gave their support for this program.