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Animal talk



Crystal O'Bryan photo

Young Scot O'Bryan poses with his mentor, Indiana Bones, and Boobar, one of the characters that helped Scot learn to talk.

7-year-old Scot O'Bryan learns to communicate, interact with people thanks to Indiana Bones' stories and puppets

By Jen Kocher
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For the first few years of his life, 7-year-old Scot O'Bryan showed little interest in human interaction. While the other children, including his 5-year-old older sister Cymmie, clustered together in groups around a pile of Legos or listened raptly during the weekly story time at the Wright Public Library, Scot hid in a cubby hole. In more daring moments, he slid behind a stack of books or disappeared into a cabinet.

The librarians' detective work helped mom Crystal find Scot's hiding spot.

Scot, who had been in speech therapy at age 2 1/2 and later diagnosed at age 5 on the autism spectrum with high-functioning Asperger's, had yet to say a word. Aside from using a complicated language of sounds - "zooms" for cars, "oinks" for pigs - and pointing and hand gestures, he showed little interest in communicating. He also hated to be touched or hugged. He was soothed by hiding underneath weighty clothing or blankets.

Sitting still in a crowd with other children was another form of torture for the young boy. When pressured, he was prone to embarrassing melt downs, complete with ear-drum busting screaming and fist-banging temper tantrums. Crystal had her hands full.

Needless to say, public outings and activities were not pleasant experiences for the O'Bryan family. His sister enjoyed going to weekly story time, so Crystal and Scot braved the inevitable. When Crystal learned that storyteller Indiana

Bones would be speaking at the library that week 4 years ago, she braced herself for the worst. She and Scot took their usual spot in the back row, as Cymmie blissfully headed to the front of the room to snuggle on the floor with the other children.

As Indiana Jones' booming voice, along with his monkey puppet, Boobar, shared stories about his various adventures and histories and facts about animals, something shocking happened. To

her surprise, Crystal watched her son staring back at Indiana Jones with rapt attention as he giggled with the other children in response to his funny stories. Crystal was flabbergasted.

Afterwards, Scot walked to the front of the room and began pointing at various objects. For the first time in his life, Scot was not just engaging in eye contact but he was actually attempting to communicate with another person. Even more amazing, Scot grabbed his mother's camera and indicated he wanted his photo taken with the storyteller. Crystal nearly fell over backwards when she saw her son hug Indiana Bones and pose for the photo.

Crystal thought, "Is that really my son?" In that moment, Scot was transformed.

LEARNING TO SPEAK

Because Indiana Bones would be back the following year, Scot wanted to be ready. He wasn't happy about the fact that when they'd talked after the reading, Scot had been unable to ask him all the questions he had wanted to with his limited vocabulary of sounds and hand gestures.

It was time he learned to speak, Scot conveyed to his mother, so they began working on it together. She hung the letters of the alphabet on the wall in his room. At night, she could hear him attempting to sound out letters and piece together words.

His first letter was "B" along with the number 8.



Pookey Wookey the reindeer is one of Scot's favorite animals.

LEARNING, Page A-2

New liquor license rules start immediately

By Ethan Brogan
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Bars can now keep regular hours all week and package liquor is available for purchase 24-hours a day.

The last reading for the ordinance to change Wright liquor licenses was approved June 27. Town Councilman Nelson Litaba made a motion to approve the third and final reading of the liquor ordinance with the addition to change packaged liquor sale hours to be sold 24 hours /7 days a week. The motion was

seconded by Councilman Danny Preston and passed with a 4-1 vote. The ordinance changes are in accordance with the recent amendments to Wyoming state liquor laws. The state allowed cities to be more self-governing with liquor laws and this change will usher in a new set of rules for alcohol distribution.



NELSON LITABA

Patrons under 21 years old will not be allowed to enter a building with the primary function of serving and consuming alcohol. Also, hours of operation for entities, which the primary service is alcohol consumption, can stay open 6 a.m. to 2 a.m., seven days a week. Finally, the newly adopted amendment, stated above, will allow for 24/7 sale of packaged liquor.

Hank Pridgeon, owner of Hank's Roadside Bar and Grille was an advocate for the ordinance and spoke at the town council meeting.

"This will increase revenue and allow my employees to pick up extra shifts," Pridgeon said.

Wright's liquor law changes are consistent with Wyoming's changes earlier this year. The ordinance went into effect immediately as of June 27.

Engineering firm opens doors in Gillette

Structural Dynamics LLC has recently opened as a regional structural engineering firm in Gillette and Rapid City. SD's main services are in mining and heavy industrial projects, but they also work with the design of bridges, cranes for government, institutional and commercial buildings. SD currently has operations in Montana, South Dakota and northern Colorado and is expanding its presence in Wyoming.

SD is the product of the structural engineering sector of Consolidated Engineers Inc., purchased by previous CE employees Brian D. Shippy and Phillip P. Hohn. Both companies will work together as partner firms on collaborative projects, but with each firm acting independently.

"Our clients can be assured that there will be continuity in the level of service and relationships that have been developed over many years with our staff," Hohn said.

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had interesting and funny stories to tell.”
 Ones that, literally and metaphorically, opened Scot’s eyes.

COPING SKILLS

On Indiana Bones’ most recent visit last month, he challenged the children to pick a super power for their hero identity. Scot was Slappy, whose hero has uncanny slapping power and a red cape.

He also made up another hero, he explains with his characteristic clicking of his tongue, a flying centaur with a mermaid for a girlfriend, who he pushes around in a special wheelchair when on land because she can’t walk.

His eyes widen as he continues his tale, his imagination fully activated. These stories continue playing out in his mind for most of the day, he says with a toothy smile.

“That’s just the crazy way my head works,” he laughs.

Sometimes he tells his stories to his mom; other times, he shares them with the shrubs in the backyard. Typically, he avoids playing with his sister and neighborhood children parading through the O’Byran house.

The kids are great with Scot, Crystal explains, and they understand that when he walks away, he’s done playing.

They also know not to try to hug him without first asking. Scot hates this, he says, shaking his head vehemently, and admitting that his cousins are the worst offenders. Being hugged makes him feel angry.

“It feels like crowdedness,” he says with a frown.

The O’Bryans also do not leave the house without Scot’s sensory backpack. He pulls out a few small cellophane bags of BBs that weigh about a pound a piece, which go into the pockets of a vest that his grandmother made for him. He has two such vests – one with dinosaur patches and another black dress vest – that help him weather sensory overload. He likes to be ensconced in heavy objects, either his vests or beneath heavy blankets.

These heavy objects feel like a hug.



One of Scot’s favorite activities is jumping on the trampoline in his backyard where he is learning to master his front flips.

He also likes to hide under a sheet tent, and because he tends to wander off, he wears a dog tag with his name and phone number and the medical indicator “limited speech,” Crystal points out. The community is great about helping to keep Scot safe, Crystal adds. “It’s a real blessing.”

For Scot’s part, he’s busy learning his future trade and is devoting himself to increasing his knowledge as he rattles off newly learned facts about the Egyptian pyramids, courtesy his recent visit with Indiana Bones.

Scot’s mind is always racing full of stories and interesting facts about animals, two of his favorite past times.

By the time Indiana Bones’ next appearance rolled around a year later, Scot had more words in his arsenal, and the two began to exchange emails with Scot creating his own stories with pictures in crayon that Crystal scanned and sent to his hero. In the ensuing 4 years since first attending Indiana Bones’ programs, Scot’s language has grown.

Today at age 7, Scot shows off his latest photo with Indiana Bones (taken during his last visit to Wright) that Crystal keeps in an album with all the others. Speaking with precise articulation with crisp consonants and vowels, Scot talks in encyclopaedic detail about the pangolin, a rare scale-covered mammal found predominantly in Asia that looks a lot like a walking pinecone, which he just learned about from a PBS animal program.

Making eye contact as he details the habit and lifestyle of this rare modern-day dinosaur, Scot has come a long way from the inarticulate, formerly mute,

3 year old who showed no interest in engaging, let alone communicating with strangers.

This is in part to a lot of work on behalf of his parents, Crystal and Matt. Matt also was diagnosed with Aspergers around the same time as Scot. Like Scot, as a child Matt was also prone to hiding and had a general distaste for crowds. Matt grew up in a tiny town in South Dakota. His meltdowns were harbored in seclusion out on the open prairie. Scot was in a much-bigger classroom, where it was much harder to hide.

Finding Indiana Bones was a god-send in more ways than one and opened Scot’s eyes to a world formerly hidden, namely one filled with animals. Now, he talks about his dream of becoming a zoologist, traveling the world in search of new discoveries. Like his hero, Scot expresses a desire to tell great stories.

When asked why Indiana Bones was the one person who made Scot want to learn to talk, Scot answers simply, “He

FIRE LOG

The Campbell County Fire Department responded to the following incidents:

June 27

At 11:36 a.m. to the Legacy Living Center for a medical emergency.

At 12:52 p.m. to Cottonwood Lane for a medical emergency. Fire personnel provided manpower for lifting assistance.

At 1:24 p.m. to College Park Cir for an automatic fire alarm. Fire units were cancelled before arriving on scene.

At 1:59 p.m. to Fox Hill Avenue for a report of smoke from a house. The resident advised he was using a smoker in his back yard.

At 2:03 p.m. to the Black and Yellow Road for a grass fire on the Christenson Ranch. Fire crews arrived on scene and found local ranchers already on scene fighting the fire. Fire crews helped extinguish the fire with water and foam. Total acreage for this incident was 15 acres. The cause was a lightning strike from a storm in the area.

At 4:17 p.m. to Swanson Road for a grass fire started by a torch cutting metal. Crews contained the fire at fewer than 1 acre.

June 28

At 1:48 p.m. to Rodeo Street for an emergency medical response. Fire department personnel provided patient care and drove the ambulance to the hospital.

At 2:03 p.m. to Kilkenny Circle for an emergency medical response. Fire department personnel provided patient care and drove the ambulance to the hospital.

At 2:35 p.m. to 4003 Hannum Rd. for a report of a grass fire. Fire was out upon arrival.

At 3:38 p.m. to 114 Weischedel Rd. for the report of a hay bale on fire. The fire was caused by a lightning strike.

At 4:29 p.m. to the 800 block of North Gurley Ave. for an EMS assist.

At 6:29 p.m. to the 1800 block of South Douglas Highway for an EMS assist.

At 8:21 p.m. to College Park Circle for an emergency medical response. Fire department personnel provided patient care.

June 30

At 7:10 a.m. to S. Garner Lake for an emergency medical response. Fire department personnel provided patient care.

At 8:57 a.m. to Cliff Davis

Drive for an emergency medical response. Fire department personnel were requested for lifting assistance.

At 12:23 p.m. to N. Highway 59 for the report of a timber fire. The fire was 1.5 acres and the cause was determined to be lightning.

At 9:36 p.m. to Bay Horse Road for the report of a timber fire. The fire was .5 acres and the case was determined to be lightning.

July 3

At 11:27 a.m. to Gunpowder Street for an emergency medical response, firefighters provided lift assistance.

At 12:46 p.m. to T-7 Road for a reported fire. The fire was approximately 1.6 acres in grass and timber. The fire was contained and was caused by lightning.

At 4:00 p.m. to Edwards Street for an emergency medical response, firefighters provided patient care.

At 5:12 p.m. to East 9th Street for an emergency medical response, firefighters provided patient care.

At 8:11 p.m. to Boxelder Road for an emergency medical response, firefighters provided patient care.

Hailing from Australia

By Ethan Brogan
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In mid-June, a tornado warning stretched across Wyoming. Hail the size of baseballs went through Douglas and Glenrock, leaving vehicles dented and in disarray. As the ice balls thunked roofs in its wake, two men from Sydney, Australia, were on their way to Douglas.

Brad Heywood and Ben Gates work for Automotive Hail Repairs. They travel the world following a hail-tracking weather app to places afflicted by hail damage and set up shop to offer repairs. In two weeks Heywood

and Gates have worked on more than 35 cars. The process involves using light to illuminate the smallest of imperfections and noting every single dent from a vicious hail storm. After the preliminary check, Heywood and Gates get to work. They can look at a car anywhere from 6 hours to 3 days, depending on how extensive the damage.

“There is no set way to do it,” Gates said, “each technician has their own method.” There are several tools Heywood and Gates use to depending on where the dent is on the car and the depth of the blemish. “Paint they use on newer cars is so flexible we don’t

have to worry about pulling any out.” Heywood said. After they finish a vehicle, they invite the customer to look at the car again under their light tunnel.

So far, they have been in Douglas for 2 weeks and cars have kept pouring in. Previously Heywood and Gates spent 9 months in Brisbane Australia after a large hail storm.

“You get to visit places you would never have to the chance to otherwise,” Gates said. Heywood came out of retirement to run Hail’s first traveling vehicle based in Oregon. Hail plans on adding three more cars to their roster to cover the U.S.

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