



SPELLBOUND
San Juan Circus
reaching new heights **1B**

DOWN GO DEMONS
Bayfield volleyball
wins at Durango **6A**

THE Durango HERALD

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PRODUCE to the PEOPLE



New geodesic greenhouse aims to ease food insecurity in Vallecito



ABOVE: Jim McCarroll volunteers his time helping to build a grow dome on Sept. 24 in Vallecito. TOP: Joey Martinez, with Willis Contractor, works on the dome.

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

VALLECITO – Less than three days after construction began, a 26-foot-tall geodesic dome greenhouse appeared on a fall afternoon as part of a community-driven initiative.

The dome is part of a broader effort to address food insecurity in the Pine River Valley. Run by Pine River Shares, a community-led nonprofit focused on enacting social change in the valley, the new year-round grow dome will be maintained by volunteers and the

See **GREENHOUSE, 8A**



From left, Andrew Trujillo, with Pine River Shares; Mike Swift, a volunteer; Joey Martinez, with Willis Contractor; and Austin Willis, owner of Willis Contractor, set up the grow dome Sept. 24 in Vallecito.

LA PLATA COUNTY Services teeter during shutdown

SNAP benefits will
stop Nov. 1; WIC
continues until Dec. 1

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Three weeks into the federal government shutdown with no end in sight, the future of several social service programs is unclear, threatening the health and well-being of the county's most vulnerable residents.

While funding for the Woman, Infants and Children program will continue until Dec. 1, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program faces an immediate halt come Nov. 1 if the shutdown continues.

On Wednesday, staff members from La Plata County Public Health and the Department of Human Services briefed county commissioners on the status of the programs.

Last month in La Plata County, 2,834 households and 4,943 individuals received SNAP benefits, said Martha Johnson, Human Services director. The total benefits amounted to \$962,643, or about \$195 per person.

"When you think about your grocery bill for a month, \$195 per person is not very much, but it adds up to almost a million dollars of economic benefit for our residents and our county every month," Johnson said. "And so at this point, it's almost a million dollars that will not be coming to La Plata County, at least for November, unless the shutdown gets remedied."

The WIC program is in a more stable position.

In October, Colorado's Joint Budget Committee approved a supplemental funding resolution that allocated \$7.5 million to support WIC benefits statewide. Those funds were expected to run out at the end of the month, but a federal emergency funding resolution recently passed will extend the program through November.

"If the government shutdown continues beyond the end of November and funds are not available, grantees like our office will receive a full stop-work order," said Theresa Anselmo,

See **SERVICES, 8A**

Durango City Council approves emergency warming center

Resounding support for project, despite
some reluctance from school district

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Durango City Council on Tuesday approved a resolution to establish an emergency warming center at Sacred Heart Catholic Church Parish Hall in South Durango.

The center will provide overnight shelter for the city's un-

housed population on nights when temperatures drop to 15 degrees or below this winter.

"I believe we face a fundamental moral and public safety issue, and we cannot, in good conscience, risk having people die on the streets of Durango this winter simply because they have no warm place to sleep," Councilor Jessika Buell said be-

fore the vote. "We must give the Sacred Heart partnership and NINA (Neighbors in Need Alliance) the opportunity to save lives."

The shelter will operate from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. Nov. 1 through Feb. 28 and accommodate up to 20 guests per night. It will be managed by the Emergency Warming Center Council in partnership with the Neighbors in Need Alliance, Manna soup kitchen and the American Red Cross. Paid staff and trained volunteers, including a designated fire

watch, will oversee operations to ensure guest safety.

Eleven residents spoke during public comment, offering both support and criticism for the proposed location.

Two speakers – representing Durango School District 9-R and Park Elementary School, located about 0.3 miles from Sacred Heart – opposed the plan, citing safety concerns.

Superintendent Karen Cheser was the first to speak, commending the compassion behind the effort but expressing the dis-

trict's unease about the site.

Parents and staff at Park Elementary have reported people defecating on school property, engaging in sexual activity, destroying student science projects, and sleeping on school steps and entrances, Cheser said. Needles, liquor bottles and other paraphernalia have been found on campus, and the school has been placed on lockdown several times in recent years.

Park Elementary parent Stacy

See **CENTER, 8A**