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CLOSING IN
Postseason approaching for DHS wrestling **6A**

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LA PLATA COUNTY

Deputy clear of criminal charges

Officers shot, tased and killed suspect on 550

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

A La Plata County Sheriff's Office deputy who shot and killed a suspect in November on U.S. Highway 550 north of Durango will not face criminal charges, according to a decision letter released Wednesday by District Attorney Sean Murray.

After reviewing the evidence – including body camera footage, witness statements and law enforcement reports – the District Attorney's Office found the deputy's use of deadly force “does not present a reasonable likelihood of conviction.”

The deputy shot the suspect five times, and a Durango Police Department officer tased him three times, according to the letter.

In cases of officer-involved violence or deadly force, it is the role of the district attorney to determine whether a criminal offense was committed.

Ernest Marlin Pino III, 31, of New Mexico, was shot five times in the chest by Deputy Dillon Irwin at 2:52 p.m. Nov. 4 in the 28600 block of Highway 550, according to reports by law enforcement and the decision letter.

According to an autopsy report from the La Plata County Coroner's Office, Pino suffered injuries to his heart, left lung, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, right iliopsoas, ribs and vertebrae. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

At the time of his death, Pino had a blood-alcohol level of 0.229 – nearly three times the legal driving limit – and tested “presumptively positive” on blood and urine cannabis tests, according to the report.

He was reportedly on probation for an assault case in New Mexico at the time of the shooting, and had previously been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and manic depression, according to his fiancée of six years. He did not take medication for

See **DEPUTY, 8A**

Compounding pharmacy provides patients with tailored medications



JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald photos
Jordyn Daily, a certified pharmacy technician at Rivergate Pharmacy and Compounding Center in Durango, mixes a Polyox bandage that contains a pain killer and an antibiotic as Tammy Tucker, right, a certified compounding technician, mixes Progesterone capsules on Thursday.

FILLING A NICHE ROLE

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

When a medication doesn't exist in the right dose, form or formulation, patients are left with few options – a challenge in rural areas like La Plata County.

That gap is filled by compounding pharmacies such as Rivergate Pharmacy and Compounding Center in Durango.

“Commercial products are made for the masses,” said Lori Kearney, pharmacist and owner of Rivergate. “But not everybody can take them. What we do is individualized.”

Located in the Animas Surgical Hospital complex, Rivergate has a small compounding lab behind the pharmacy counter.

There, stainless steel scales sit beneath a protective hood that pulls stray powder into HEPA filters. A planetary mixer spins creams until they reach a smooth, uniform texture, while an ointment mill presses medication through rollers so finished products don't feel gritty on the skin.

This is the world of pharmaceutical compounding – the practice of combining, mixing or altering medica-



Pharmaceutical compounding – the practice of combining, mixing or altering medications to meet the specific needs of a single patient or animal – is a critical part of the complex health care web.

tions to meet the specific needs of a single patient or animal.

Unlike mass-produced drugs, compounded medications are prepared one prescription at a time. That can mean removing dyes or pre-

servatives for someone with allergies, adjusting a dose that doesn't exist commercially, or turning a pill into a flavored liquid for a cat that refuses tablets, Kearney said.

“It's basically because everybody's an individual,” she

said. “I'm making drugs for that individual.”

For many La Plata County residents, that individualized care can be life-changing, and in some cases, the difference between being able to remain in a rural community.

April Stewart, a Bayfield resident of 25 years, said Rivergate's services have been an integral part of her family's life for more than a decade.

Stewart is the mother of seven adopted children. One of her sons is medically fragile and relies on a feeding tube, meaning he cannot take medication orally and requires compounded prescriptions every month.

“Rivergate has been compounding meds for him for over 10 years,” Stewart said. “Without a compounding pharmacy, it would be a lot more difficult for us to get him his medication.”

She said having a local compounding pharmacy makes it possible for families like her's to live in Southwest Colorado.

“It offers high-needs kids access to a rural community,” she said. “If they weren't here, I don't know that we would truly be able to live here.”

Beyond the medications themselves, Stewart said the

See **COMPOUNDING, 8A**

Science fair explores chickens, AI and cybertrucks

‘We’re inspiring these young minds to get involved in early problem-solving’

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

The 68th annual San Juan Basin Regional Science Fair brought together more than 80 students from over a dozen schools Wednesday at Fort Lewis College. Students shared their findings from a range of unique, thought-provoking science projects developed over several weeks.

Projects encompassed a wide variety of topics, including the environment, aerodynamics and artificial intelligence. Others dived into niche topics like which music a chicken responds to most favorably, how much sugar

is in different types of cereal and whether the “five-second rule” really applies to dropped food. (The five-second rule refers to food dropped on the floor being safe to eat if picked up within five seconds.)

Awards for first- through third-place were given across 20 categories, along with a few honorable mention ribbons, and the top-scoring projects became eligible for the state science fair.

The fair is typically open only

to students in sixth through 12th grade – but one errant third grader made history this year by being the youngest entrant organizers can remember.

Park Elementary student Jackson Hayden, 9, set out to create a mini Tesla Cybertruck and had a drivable model to show for it by the time the fair arrived.

He said the hardest part of the project was learning “the electrical stuff.”

Jackson is still working on the

mini car – which boasts a 3,000 rpm motor and a 48-volt battery – with the goal of eventually getting it up to a top speed of 38 mph.

“It doesn't go very fast now, but once you get it going, it's like, ‘ZOOM,’” he said.

Jackson found the competition online, and his mom called organizers to ask if he could join, said San Juan BOCES staff

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