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See Page 3A

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After overturned arson conviction, Bradley Clark recounts 6-year nightmare



JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald

Bradley Clark was convicted of arson in connection with an October 2019 fire at south City Market in Durango. He spent two years in prison before his conviction was overturned on appeal. He is now fighting to clear his name.

DeFlock Durango proposes ordinance

Rule would regulate use of automated license plate readers

BY CHRISTIAN BURNEY
HERALD STAFF WRITER

DeFlock Durango organizers held a news conference at the Durango Community Recreation Center on Friday to present an ordinance that, if adopted by Durango City Council, would regulate Durango Police Department's use of automated license plate reader technology.

DeFlock Durango organizer Ben Peters was joined by Councilor Shirley Gonzales, Enrique Orozco-Perez, co-executive director of Compañeros: Four Corners Immigrant Resource Center, and Anaya Robinson, public policy director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado, who attended virtually.

A little more than a dozen people attended the meeting and had their questions answered after a presentation about the proposed ordinance.

Gonzales endorsed the ordinance and said she would bring it up for future consideration at City Council's next regular meeting on Tuesday.

She said her stance on automated license plate readers – also known as ALPRs – has evolved over the course of conversations with members of DeFlock Durango.

She is concerned about how powerful ALPR data collection and surveillance capabilities are.

"We are all being surveilled in a way that is excessive, and we all know that there's something we can do about it," she said.

She said Flock cameras have been used by DPD for their intended purpose to catch criminals and she wants police to have that tool, but ALPRs have also been used by other law enforcement agencies around the country to identify undocumented immigrants.

"We do want the police to be able to use this service as it's intended," Gonzales said. "What

See DEFLOCK, 12A

'THE SYSTEM FAILED ME'

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

To Bradley Clark, it feels like he has a scarlet letter permanently emblazoned on his chest.

"A," not for adulterer, but arsonist.

"That's a brand that doesn't go away," Clark said. "I mean, besides being branded a rapist or a child molester, I can't think of a worse brand to have. I mean, just the word makes me ill."

In 2019, Clark was arrested on suspicion of setting fire to a bag of chips in an aisle of south City Market in Durango. It was the start of what he describes as a six-year nightmare.

Over that period, he sat through 2½ jury trials. The first ended almost immediately in a mistrial after a juror dropped out, leaving only 11. The second time around, he was convicted of arson.

The conviction was later overturned.

"I've had my life essentially destroyed. I've had roughly six years of my life stolen from me – time with my children that can never be replaced. The impacts are indelible."

– BRADLEY CLARK

In 2023, the Colorado Court of Appeals ruled that evidence had been improperly admitted during the trial – specifically, references to a 2007 arrest in which Clark was suspected of starting a dumpster fire outside his Durango townhouse. He was never charged in that case, but the arrest was presented to jurors multiple times.

Clark believes that earlier incident set the stage for everything that followed.

"That was the initial branding," he said. "It followed me and was used against me, illegally. Thank goodness the courts picked up on that and

said it was unconstitutional. The prosecution cheated to win."

Even after the appellate ruling overturned his conviction two years into a four-year sentence, the case was not over. The 6th Judicial District Attorney's Office sought to retry Clark in 2025. That trial ended in another mistrial after jurors could not reach a unanimous verdict. Prosecutors ultimately dropped the charges, and Clark was released.

"I've had my life essentially destroyed," he said. "I've had roughly six years of my life stolen from me – time with

my children that can never be replaced. The impacts are indelible."

A shaken belief in the system

Clark remembers feeling disbelief when the guilty verdict was first read.

"I was by myself – my family wasn't in court at that moment," he said. "It was announced, my attorneys and I exchanged a few quick words, and then I found myself standing on the sidewalk thinking, 'What do I do now?'"

Clark, who holds a doctorate in American government and once taught political science at Fort Lewis College, said the experience fundamentally changed how he views the justice system he once believed in.

"My experience has shown me there is no balance," he said. "It is skewed in the interests of the state, not the accused."

As a professor, Clark said

See CLARK, 12A

21-year-old Olympian with Durango roots meets fans

Mickel: Discipline key to high level of competition

BY CHRISTIAN BURNEY
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Charlie Mickel, 21-year-old Olympian mogul skier with roots in Durango, met fans young and old at Purgatory Sports Downtown on Saturday to take selfies, share stories and sign autographs.

Mickel had an impressive winter season, claiming the U.S. national title in

men's moguls at the Toyota U.S. Freestyle Championships at Palisades Tahoe on March 29, taking fifth place at the FIS Freestyle Moguls World Cup in Nanto, Toyama, Japan, on Feb. 28, and representing Team USA at the 2026 Winter Olympics, according to Purgatory Resort, a sponsor of Mickel.

Although Mickel moved out of Durango to Park City, Utah, at 16 years old so he could train, he spent his earlier days training on the slope at Chapman Hill Ski Area and Purgatory Resort.

He said becoming an Olympian level athlete has required a lot of sacrifice and dedication, but he is keen on visiting his hometown of Durango more frequently.

"I try to visit as much as I can, but with my training schedule it is a little rare, and more rare than I'd like," he said.

He is trying to incorporate summer trips to Durango into his summer training schedule. The end of May and early June is a timeframe that

See MICKEL, 12A



JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald

Olympian Charlie Mickel autographs a hat for Silas Wenger, 11, as his mom Laura Wenger looks on. Mickel visited Durango, his hometown, on Saturday for a meet and greet at Purgatory Sports Downtown. He competed in the men's moguls during the 2026 Winter Olympics.