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THE Durango HERALD

Weekend Edition

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What is being done to address food insecurity in Southwest Colorado?



Chris Rasmussen, farm manager at Pine River Shares Community Food Farm, works on the hydroponic system that will grow lettuce year-round in one of the greenhouses.

JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald

'We're building an ecosystem'

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Food insecurity remains a deeply felt issue among Southwest Colorado's residents, which is why emerging initiatives like the Pine River Shares Community Food Farm are so important.

Pine River Shares, a non-profit that works to bring necessary resources including food access to the Bayfield area, is a source of survival for many of the area's residents, Director Pam Wilhoite said.

The food farm, which was bought last year by the organization, consists of roughly 33,000 square feet of covered grow space. The site, which previously housed the Native Roots Garden Center and

Thousands of La Plata County residents struggle to consistently access enough nutritious food. This series examines the impacts of the growing affordability crisis and looming cuts to many New Deal-era nutrition and social service programs on the county's fragile food safety net, the widespread impact on the community and the local efforts working to build a more resilient food system. In this series:

► June 17: A broad range of people experience food insecurity in a variety of ways.

Bayfield Gardens, will make it possible for Pine River Shares to grow produce year-round; keep food, money and labor in the community; increase local food security; and reduce

In this series

► July 24: A look at how the conditions and circumstances unique to the moment contribute to food insecurity and how communities are bracing for looming challenges.

► **Today:** There are more ways than one to keep people fed and healthy. We examine some of the solutions communities are undertaking, and some areas that still need improvement. Also, learn how Pine River Shares is executing a grassroots approach to address the root of the problem by producing food locally – and keeping it local.

dependence on trucked-in produce, she said.

What else is being done?

Pine River Shares has also put together a Food Equity

Leadership Council made up of people from the region who get their food from the non-profit, Wilhoite said. Part of building an equitable regional food system is ensuring the people most affected by food insecurity have influence over how their region feeds itself, she said.

"They tell us pretty much how we need to go and where we need to go," she said.

She said she asked council members who among them solely get their food from Pine River Shares – about 80% of the people in the room raised their hands.

"We are a source of their survival for 80% of the people that we're feeding," she said.

Every year, the organization around 30,000 people

See **ECOSYSTEM, 7A**

NARROW GAUGE MOBILE HOME PARK

Residents regroup after park fire

14-year-old saves his siblings from burning trailer

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

The cause of the fire at the Narrow Gauge mobile home park that destroyed three homes and left several families displaced remains under investigation, according to an Upper Pine Fire Protection District news release issued Wednesday evening.

No deaths resulted from Tuesday's fire, and the several residents inside the homes at the fire's outbreak escaped without injury, according to first-hand accounts.

The three units that caught fire were left uninhabitable.

"It's been a complete nightmare," said Wendy Dougan, the grandmother of three children ages 14, 6 and 4, who were in one of the homes when it caught fire and shortly afterward burned to the ground.

Karson Dougan, 14, was in his bedroom when he heard the explosion of the propane tank, and rushed to grab his two younger siblings who were in the back of the trailer. By the time he reached them, the blaze had aggressively intensified and boxed them in, she said.

Karson smashed through several windows in the back of the house to create an exit for him and his siblings.

Dougan, who lives three homes down from her grandchildren, said she was sitting on her porch when she heard a huge boom that sounded, "just like a shotgun in the barrel."

There is nothing left of the home or the belongings inside it,

See **FIRE, 8A**

DURANGO

School district PIO knows when to feed cats – 'er reporters

Spokespeople have begun to see themselves as storytellers. Does that affect access?

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Durango School District spokeswoman Karla Sluis says journalists are like cats.

Chatty journalists who pepper her with follow-up questions are siamese cats. Aggressive reporters who show up unannounced looking for controversy are alley cats. New reporters fresh out of school are kittens – skittish but teachable, she says.

"I like kittens, they're trainable," Sluis said.

She presented her anthropomorphic classifications at a Colorado School Public Relations Association conference held in June in Breckenridge.



Sluis

Sluis, the CO-SPRA board's western director and former journalist, was teaching other school district spokespeople from across the state how to deal with local media.

Her presentation, titled "Care & Feeding of Local Reporters: Building Trust Without Getting Scratched," covered strategies for building trust with local reporters to better help "tell the district's story."

The Durango Herald obtained a slideshow and secret recording of Sluis' presentation from a participant who



A slide from Durango School District spokesperson Karla Sluis' presentation at a Colorado School Public Relations Association conference held in June. The presentation, titled "Care & Feeding of Local Reporters: Building Trust Without Getting Scratched," covered strategies for building trust with local media reporters and telling the "story of schools."

read the session description and thought it sounded insulting toward journalists. The participant declined to comment for this story, saying their re-

spective school district did not authorize speaking publicly on the subject.

The presentation provides an unusually candid view into

how public agency spokespeople approach their role, a role that shapes much of the information the public receives from local governments, public school districts, and state and federal agencies.

Sluis' suggestions and the ensuing discussions among attendees illustrated how communications professionals sometimes attempt to frame issues, maneuver reporters and influence the angle of stories that might paint their respective institutions poorly, or catapult them into the center of a controversial community discussion.

At a time when people are inundated with misinformation and competing sources of information, greater transparency about how reporting is

See **CATS, 8A**

