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SPORTS, B1

Saturday, April 4, 2026

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MISSOULA COUNTY JUSTICE COURT

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY FOUND NOT GUILTY



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Michael Baker answers questions from his attorney Lance Jasper during a trial to determine whether or not Baker is liable for a speeding ticket following a collision with another vehicle in 2024.

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A jury found a Missoula County Sheriff's Office deputy not guilty on Friday of a misdemeanor speeding charge stemming from a 2024 crash that killed a man, siding with the defense who said the officer was within the bounds of duty.

The six-person jury unanimously sided with deputy Michael Baker following a two-day trial brought by the Missoula County Attorney's Office, who argued the deputy should be held accountable to the traffic violation because he did not use emergency lights or sirens while speeding.

The case could be one of the only Montana jury trials related to a speeding ticket, according to defense attorney Lance Jasper, who told the jury the 1955 law used in the case is outdated and charging law enforcement for speeding would cast doubt on law

enforcement's discretion.

"The lunacy, frankly, of the idea that by imposing this on officers makes a better public safety is crazy," Jasper told the jury during closing statements. "Because we know that in this day and age, we have mass gunmen, school shootings, things that were just unheard of in 1955."

The case, heard in Missoula County Justice Court, stems from a May 2024 law enforcement operation where Baker and other officers were traveling on Highway 93 to execute a search warrant on the property of a suspected child predator, according to court documents.

Baker was the lead vehicle in the convoy. While driving at 84 mph, Baker hit a vehicle driven by 81-year-old man Gaylord Angst, who was not supposed to be driving and did

Please see **TRIAL**, Page A2

Finalist for UM president named

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The University of Montana and the Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education announced current interim President of Boise State University Jeremiah Shinn as a finalist in the search to replace former President Seth Bodnar on Friday.

Shinn will visit campus on Monday and Tuesday, participating in an open forum and community reception where members of the public are encouraged to ask questions, according to a UM press release. He'll also meet with UM leadership, faculty and the Associated Students of UM, as well as others at the Missoula flagship.

Bodnar announced he would be stepping down as president of UM in January amid rumors he was planning to run for U.S. Senate, later filing as an independent in the race in March.

If Shinn gets the job, he would be overseeing a nearly \$165 million budget and a staff of more than 1,200 employees at UM.

According to Shinn's resume posted to the presidential search website,

Please see **PRESIDENT**, Page A4

BONNER DATA CENTER

Application provides new details

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A company's initial county application to build a data center at the Bonner Mill Industrial Park said the project would "not require regular staffing" and would use "minimal" water, but indicated it could use enough electricity to power 29,000 small homes.

The application, obtained by the Missoulian through a public records request, is under review by planning staff at Missoula County, who could require changes to the plan before it can move forward to a public meeting.

Krambu, a data center company based in Idaho, submitted the initial application on March 25 through Dolber Engineering, less than one week

Please see **APPLICATION**, Page A4

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