



Whitefish Pilot

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Local therapy dog lightens burdens

By KELSEY EVANS
Whitefish Pilot

Every week, Pam Saunders and her dog Rusty knock on doors at the hospital and the veteran’s center to offer a bit of sunshine.

“We announce, ‘It’s Pam and Rusty, would you like a visit?’ and we walk in. Rusty walks up to their bed or chair for pets,” Saunders said.

Rusty, 3/4 golden retriever and 1/4 Irish setter, has a happy but gentle temperament – perfect for being a certified Intermountain Therapy Animal.

Saunders said that both nurses, residents and patients are known to tuck cheerios into their pockets for Rusty in anticipation of his weekly visit.

“They love to pet him because it reminds them of home,” Saunders said. “He just wants to be your friend.”

Even at the dog park, Rusty will look around and find all the people. Only once he’s finished saying hello to people, will he go to the dogs and ask to play.

Rusty was a 90th birthday present for Saunder’s mother, Barbara Saunders, who had always wanted a golden retriever.

“I looked in the paper, the Pilot, and all of sudden there was one,” Pam recalled. “I called thinking, I’ll come pick them up. Turns out, he was in Nebraska.”

Pam said she struck up a deal with the breeder to temporarily home the whole litter of nine puppies from Nebraska. In exchange, Barbara could have her first pick.

Pam and her daughter and granddaughter each collected three puppies in their arms and surprised Barbara at the dog park. Rusty stood out, and Barbara had her wish for a few sweet years. Barbara lived to age 95, dying in 2024 after a year and a half battle with cancer.

Barbara enjoyed being involved and one of her favorite acts of volunteerism was being the “cookie lady” for Logan



Whitefish resident Pam Saunders and Rusty, her Intermountain Therapy Animals certified dog. (Kelsey Evans/Whitefish Pilot)

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Stoltze says Haskill trails were ‘always illegal’

By JULIE ENGLER
Whitefish Pilot

Whitefish City Council last week postponed a decision about recognizing F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company’s new open lands policy following concerns about the future of recreational access in Haskill Basin.

Several public comments were opposed to the policy, which is an update to the multi-resource management plan for the Haskill Basin watershed conservation easement northwest of the city.

The lumber company owns about 3,200 acres in Haskill Basin, the watershed that provides about 90% of Whitefish’s drinking water.

Voters approved a 1% increase in resort tax collections in 2015 to help purchase a conservation easement over Stoltze’s property to protect the water supply, preserve open space, natural habitat and recreational opportunities.

The purchase of the easement by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the city of Whitefish was complete in 2016, and the City Council approved the multi-resource management plan, and the open lands policy.

Two points made in the updated policy are clarifications that no bicycle use is allowed off existing road systems, and off-road trails are not allowed.

Ron Brandt, executive director of Flathead Area Mountain Bikers, learned of the amendments to the policy hours before the Council meeting. He urged

See HASKILL, A4

Logging leaves new look, opens tree runs on Big Mountain

By JULIE ENGLER
Whitefish Pilot

A large logging project, underway throughout the summer on Big Mountain, caused hiking and biking detours and will make for a different skiing experience this winter.

The Flathead National Forest recently completed the Big Mountain Fuels Reduction Project on the national forest within the Whitefish Mountain Resort boundary. The project included just under 200 acres of active management below and directly adjacent to critical infrastructure on the resort to safeguard operations and utilities.

The project aimed to reduce stand density and remove ladder fuels, favoring fire tol-

erant tree species, while using only existing roads for project implementation.

“We are planning to remove accumulated vegetation and dense trees along Chairs 1, 2, and 4 to safeguard resort operations from wildfire,” said Tally Lake District Ranger Bill Mulholland before the project began.

The Big Mountain trail crews are currently cleaning up stumps, felled trees and other debris near Chairs 1, 2 and 4. Chad Sokol, public relations manager for the resort said the crew is making significant headway, but they anticipate some of the work will resume next summer.

“The fuels reduction proj-

