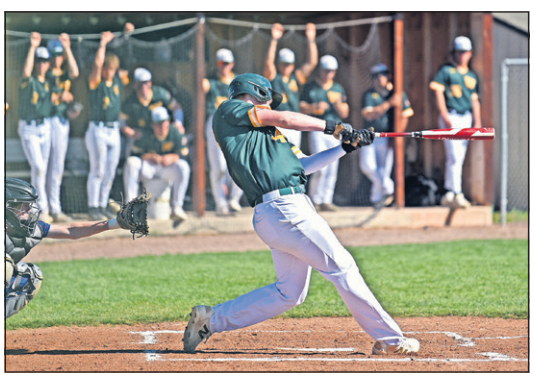
NEXT LEVEL

Sluggers sign: B1



News: Skijoring moves to fairgrounds **B2**

WHITEFISHPILOT.COM

Whitefish Pilot

121st year / issue 45 | Wednesday, November 11, 2026 | $1.50



Whitefish's Stella Hobbs crosses the finish line of the Big Sugar race, part of the Life Time Grand Prix, well ahead of the rest of the riders on Oct. 17, in Arkansas. (Gretchen Powers photo)

Hobbs has dream race to end cycling season

By JULIE ENGLER
Whitefish Pilot

Local cyclist Stella Hobbs crushed the Elite Women's Big Sugar Gravel race in Arkansas on Oct. 17, riding alone in the lead for the last 15 miles and finishing almost 2 minutes ahead of her nearest competitor.

It was the kind of race many athletes dream of.

The Life Time Grand Prix is a multi-discipline race series that attracts riders from around the world. It comprises six races, each with different terrain, equipment and distances. The shortest race is about 40 miles and the longest is around 200. Races are completed with either gravel bikes or mountain bikes.

"The multi-disciplinary series is just such a cool way to diversify the training and diversify the racing," she said. "It puts all the athletes in this kind of really cool humble place of always having to rise to the occasion and it being different most of the time."

Big Sugar is a gravel race of about 101 miles with 6,400 feet of elevation gain. Not only did Hobbs win the race, she did it in a dominating fashion, pulling away from the field with 15 miles to ride. No one reeled her in. No one came close

See CYCLIST, A4

Whitefish area statehouse seats go to Democrats

By KELSEY EVANS
Whitefish Pilot

Democrat Rep. Debo Powers retained her House District 3 seat in the state Legislature in the Tuesday, Nov. 3 election, while the House District 4 seat flipped to Democrat Paula Koch, marking a blue stronghold in deep-red Flathead County.

Koch, a Columbia Falls junior high teacher, earned 55% of the votes in the HD4 race, 460 more than Republican Shaun Pandina. The district covers Columbia Falls and the east side of Whitefish.

Pandina won handily in the Republican primary over incumbent Lyn Bennett, who served one term.

In the 2024 election, Bennett defeated Democrat Lindsey Jordan with 52% of the votes. This year, Koch not only flipped the seat from red to blue but nearly doubled the margin. However, Koch did not win all the precincts that make up the district.

Pandina won Precinct 9, the southern half of Columbia Falls below U.S. 2, with a vote margin of 696-654. He also handily won precinct 11, the rural area between Columbia Falls and Whitefish, with a margin of 446-219.

Koch won precinct 10, the north half of Columbia Falls, 460-407; precinct 12, downtown Whitefish and the avenues neigh-

See ELECTION, A3

Local pet care company expands across Montana

By MAGGIE MERCER
Whitefish Pilot

Happy Tails 406, a locally owned pet-care company, has seen exponential growth since Veronica Clarno started it five years ago.

Clarno started Happy Tails 406 in hopes of offering a personal and trustworthy approach to pet care in the valley.

"I just wanted to do something big for my community and I saw the lack of pet services," Clarno said.

Her main goal in starting the business was to be able to provide trustworthy, reliable services to the community, she said.

Clarno admits the early days of the business were tough. She spent a lot of time finding a way to market that worked specifically for her and the company.

She has since hired five additional staff members to help provide pet care services throughout the Flathead Valley.

Happy Tails 406 offers a variety of at-home services for dogs and cats such as check-ins, administration of medication, walking and feeding. They also offer pet taxis to transport animals, as well as overnight care.

Even though the Happy Tails 406 team has grown, Clarno is proud to continue working daily with the animals.

Clients use a pet portal to easily schedule services and check in on their animals.

"The ability for them to just have their schedule in front of them and be able to manage that

See PET CARE, A6



River Rapp with Layla, Veronica Clarno with Dolly, and Devin Fleck with Poe, all go for a Happy Tails 406 walk on Monday. (Kelsey Evans/Whitefish Pilot)

54	54	52	47	45	45	42
35	33	33	33	33	30	30
Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues

"A big credit for our kids, they never stopped playing hard. They never quit.

— Coach Brett Bollweg

#7

WHS soccer players named All-State



