



Daily News-Miner

THE VOICE OF INTERIOR ALASKA SINCE 1903

Inside Today

Plane full of students coming back from conference struck by lightning. » A4

GOOD MORNING



The weather.

Mostly cloudy with isolated snow showers throughout the day and night.

High today40
Low tonight20

WEATHER » A9

Aurora forecast.

Auroral activity will be low. Weather permitting, low displays will be visible overhead from Barrow to Fairbanks.

This information is provided by aurora forecasters at the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more information about the aurora, visit <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast>

...



2016 CAMPAIGN

Clinton announces her president run on her website.

**NATION
Page A8**

...

SUICIDE STUDY

Researchers find suicide is twice as likely in rural areas.

**HEALTH
Page B4**

...



MASTERS WINNER

Jordan Spieth takes home green jacket at tournament for first time.

**SPORTS
Page B1**

...

SOURDOUGH JACK:

"Lot left to do; glad I ain't in their shoes down in Juneau."



Skiland's future less uncertain

Tourism company looking to operate popular downhill ski area

By Sam Friedman
SFRIEDMAN@NEWSMINER.COM

The downhill ski season will end with an ellipsis instead of a question mark this spring at Mount Aurora Skiland.

The ski area needs a new operator next year because of the retirement of Brenda Birdsall, who has operated the ski area off the Steese Highway for the last 25 years.

Anchorage-based tour company Alaska Skylar Travel has made a deposit and reached a purchase agreement to buy Skiland Inc., according to the parties. But because Skiland doesn't own much of the land around the ski lift, the prospective buyer wants to work out agreements with area landowners and leaseholders before promising a 2015-2016 ski season.

Skiland Inc. is a company skiers founded as a kind of industrial homestead in 1962. Its shares are owned by numerous skiers who

volunteered at Skiland in the early years.

Shareholders met last year and decided selling the company was the best way to keep Skiland running as a ski area.

Alaska Skylar Travel is a tourism business that caters to visitors from China.

At Skiland, the company wants to expand the lodge for aurora viewing, build a new chairlift and add a bunny slope with a rope tow on a patch of land just below Skiland's lower parking lot, said Operations Manager DJ Larson. Larson lives in Fairbanks and has worked at 11 ski resorts in his career.

"It would be very exciting to be able to take over the operations from the Birdsalls, to work with what they've done with the area and expand on it," he said.

But Skylar first needs to negotiate a lease with the Alaska Mental Health Authority Trust, which



Gabrielle Vance weaves through the gates during the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association J4/J5 Alaska State Championships at Mount Aurora Skiland on April 1, 2000. NEWS-MINER FILE PHOTO

owns land used for Skiland's ski runs, Larson said. The company is also in talks with Freegold Ventures Limited, which has plans to mine gold near Skiland.

"Right now the ski area depends on aurora viewing in the winter. That's the only way it can remain

SKILAND » A3

SPOTLIGHT · WANDA SOLOMON



Wanda Solomon concentrates during weapons training. PHOTO COURTESY WANDA SOLOMON

Military a tradition for Wanda Solomon

By Sam Friedman
SFRIEDMAN@NEWSMINER.COM

In her career in both the Air National Guard and Army National Guard, Staff Sgt. Wanda Solomon has had jobs including writer, photographer, personnel officer and air terminal officer.

Last month, regional Native corporation Doyon Limited honored her with its military service award. The award is named after Richard Frank, of Minto, who served as an aircraft mechanic in World War II.

Solomon didn't join the Air National Guard until she was 27, but the military made an impression on her at a young age. She's from Kaltag, a town of about 200 people on the Yukon River. Her

father, William Solomon Sr., was a Iditarod musher, subsistence hunter and fisherman and a longtime member of the Army National Guard.

"When I first joined, my dad inspired me with his loyalty and his service," she said. "I saw that he wanted to serve people."

When Solomon was growing up, the Alaska National Guard C-130 flew into town each month to take her father and other men in Guard his unit to training missions in Nome.

Solomon joined the Air National Guard after getting a degree in business administration at the University of Alaska Anchorage. In addition to her degree, she already had a private pilot's license, and she picked the Air Guard because she wanted to be

a pilot. But that never worked out because aviation jobs came open infrequently, she said.

She was the oldest in her squadron when reported to basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. She was initially nervous about competing with 18-year-olds in push-ups, running and other physical tests. But her childhood doing cross country running, snowshoe races and spending summers at fish camp prepared her well for the physical training requirements, she said.

Solomon's favorite part of the job in the military was working as a photographer and writer in the public affairs department during a deployment to Afghanistan between 2004 and 2006.

SPOTLIGHT » A3

Trucks begin moving on Dalton

By Dan Joling
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANCHORAGE — Alaska's rugged Dalton Highway reopened Sunday to limited traffic with 30 northbound trucks making the first crossing in a week to resupply North Slope oil fields.

A 6-mile stretch near the northern end of the road just south of Deadhorse had been impassible for a week because of unprecedented overflow from the Sagavanirktok River, commonly referred to as the Sag River, which runs parallel to the highway and the trans-Alaska oil pipeline.

The department reopened the road at 8:30 a.m. with 30 trucks carrying loads most critical to oil field operations.

"My understanding was that it was primarily food," said Meadow Bailey, spokeswoman for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

After an inspection, 30 southbound trucks were allowed to make the trip. The trickle of trucks was a start but hundreds more loads were waiting in Fairbanks about 483 miles to the south to resupply oil field workers.

"They need food, they need fuel, they need general supplies," she said.

The 414-mile Dalton

DALTON » A3

THIS WEEK IN JUNEAU

Legislative business to finish before the end of this year's session

By Becky Bohrer
ASSOCIATED PRESS

JUNEAU — Heading into the legislative session in January, two of the big issues were Gov. Bill Walker's desire to expand Medicaid and the suddenly more urgent need to confront Alaska's budget deficit amid a crash in oil prices.

Here is a roundup of some of the unresolved issues as the Legislature's nears its scheduled adjournment Sunday:

The budget

It's been said repeatedly this session that no one could have predicted the free-fall in oil prices that exacerbated Alaska's deficit, leaving projected multibillion-dollar holes this year and next. Alaska relies heavily on oil to fund state government, and oil prices are roughly half of what they were this time last year.

While it's seen as virtually impossible for the state to cut its way out

of this predicament, the focus in Juneau has been on cutting spending and reducing the size of state government before starting in earnest on discussions about additional revenues. The state plans to use savings to help get by, but legislators and Walker want to stretch those reserves as long as possible.

One of the more contentious issues as House and Senate negotiators work to reach agreement on the state operating budget appears to be education funding.

The House agreed with Walker's proposal to forward-fund education for 2017 at 90 percent, but the Senate did not forward fund for 2017 and proposed cutting \$47.5 million in school funds for the next fiscal year, which starts July 1. The would be on top of proposed cuts to the state education department and the possible elimination of one-time funds approved by lawmakers last session, of \$52 million

JUNEAU » A7

