

# Gillette News Record

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## A REAL BONSAI SCHEME

Annual Garden Walk includes unique Wyoming bonsai bonanza, **B1**

**DROUGHT TOLL RISES** Wildlife, air quality at risk for Great Salt Lake, **A2**



News Record File Photo

The Eagle Butte mine just north of the Northeast Wyoming Regional Airport produced 12.3 million tons of coal last year. At an average of about \$12 a ton, the coal was worth about \$147 million when burned to produce power. As a source of carbon for manufacturing, Powder River Basin coal has the potential to be worth many thousands times more per ton.

# Carbon-loading

Effort at all levels to transform PRB into nation's Carbon Valley

By GREG JOHNSON \* NEWS RECORD MANAGING EDITOR  
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Going carb-free may be the diet du jour for people looking to drop a few pounds, but when it comes to re-imagining the Powder River Basin's coal-dependent economy, many believe in carbon-loading.

Even as PRB thermal coal production has declined by more than 50% over the past decade, more research, innovation and development is being pushed to find ways to make coal clean to use and much more valuable.

A push to develop the PRB and its 25 billion tons of available coal to spark a new carbon economy for northeast Wyoming aims to evolve the region into the Carbon Valley. Like what California's Silicon Valley has achieved to become the world's leading hub of computer and technology development, local, state and federal officials are banking on the Carbon Valley to advance new carbon industries that go well beyond just burning coal.

It makes sense that northeast Wyoming could become the nation's Carbon Valley, and the region is well on its way to earning the nickname, said Rusty Bell, a Campbell County commissioner and supporter of the initiative.

"We already are that kind of area, and the reason I say that is we're sitting on the resource already," Bell said. "We're sitting on 25 billion tons of recoverable coal. We want to use it."

"Whether we use it for energy production or something else, we should be looking forward because our miners don't care what they're going to do with that coal."

Treating coal as an ore allows producers and manufacturers to take the base carbon from coal and use it to make much more valuable, useful and climate-neutral products, Bell said.

Things like carbon nanofiber and graphene are two examples of things that can be made from coal ore that potentially could be worth thousands of times more than the \$11-\$12 per ton it's worth to burn to produce electricity.

### 'Too valuable to burn'

One company on the leading edge of creating this new Carbon Valley is Ramaco



Courtesy File Photo/CarbonBuilt

Cinder blocks infused with waste carbon dioxide from the Dry Fork Station power plant north of Gillette are formed while the CarbonBuilt team was at the Integrated Test Center last summer to show how its technology can scale. The UCLA team's project is one of two NRG COSIA XPrize winners announced in April.

Carbon, a private endeavor near Sheridan that has built a combination research/incubator facilities that can take coal and turn it into valuable carbon products.

One facility, called the iCAM research park, provides space for higher education, national laboratories and private companies to research and prove their coal-to-carbon innovations, said Randall Atkins, Ramaco CEO and chairman of the National Coal Council.

"We started really trying to approach alternative uses for coal about six or seven years ago and have pretty much been at the forefront of that," Atkins said.

The company also runs its iPARK manufacturing center, which is next to the Brook coal mine. Like locating a power plant at the mouth of a coal mine, Atkins said a Carbon Valley approach could easily see at least one, if not many, manufacturing facilities at the mouth of a mine in the future.

"There's a real future for using coal in an alternative manner that has been explored going back to the late 1970s and early '80s when the Department of Energy did a lot of funding for research on coal to liquids," Atkins said. "At the time, we thought we were going to run out of oil and that oil was going to be \$300 a barrel."

"Needless to say, that didn't go anywhere. But what we've done now is borrow some of that technology and done a fast-forward 30-40 years with technology and new materials and have incubated the first coal-to-products vertically integrated platform."

The iCAM is expected to come online within the next few weeks, Atkins said, adding that he anticipates it will be a model for other Carbon Valley-motivated efforts.

"What I thought about when I originally coined the concept is finding advanced technology ... for a whole new use of coal," he said.

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## Plea deal is nixed, prison for sex crime

By NEWS RECORD STAFF

A judge has rejected a plea agreement that would have resulted in a suspended sentence in a case where a man repeatedly tried to solicit women for sex.

Instead, District Judge Stuart S. Healy III sentenced Gilberto Zaragoza, 44, to prison for two to three years.

Healy detailed Zaragoza's repeated failures to abide by his probation in past felony convictions — including threatening to shoot a past probation officer in the head — as justification to go against the plea agreement.

"The court believes that based on your conduct over the last four years, you are a danger to the community and you are not an appropriate candidate for probation," Healy said at Zaragoza's sentencing.

In the plea agreement, Campbell County Attorney Mitch Damsky recommended a two- to three-year prison sentence, suspended in favor of a 90-day split sentence in county jail and then three years of supervised probation.

But Damsky noted that it was Zaragoza's fourth known felony.

"He has a deviant dark side and that's got to be addressed," he said. "It's like 'Groundhog Day.' We keep coming back."

If Zaragoza violated his probation

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GILBERTO ZARAGOZA

## Summer music series to highlight downtown Gillette

Outdoor performances will range from rock and roll to country

By GREGORY R.C. HASMAN  
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After a year of few outdoor musical performances, Gillette will host a handful of summer concerts this year.

The events are billed as family friendly, where people can have a good time after being cooped up or getting out and about with not much to do.

"I can't possibly describe to you how happy I am," said Max Temple, CEO of Downtown Events, which is helping put on a couple of the outdoor concerts. "Not everybody realized how important it is to be part of a community event. The last 12 months have driven that home to everybody."

Friday night's Thunder Basin Thunder-Bolt Band's fundraiser performance "Jazz in the Park" at Lasting Legacy Park kicked off the start of a summer of outdoor music.

### Get ready to dance in the street

Gillette Main Street will host weekly downtown Thursday night concerts starting this week.

The downtown Thursday shows, which are free, will happen from 6-9 p.m. each week through Aug. 12 at the Third Street Plaza.

The following acts have been lined up:

\* **Thursday:** My Second Rodeo. The group is based out of the Black Hills and plays a variety of music ranging from classic country to punk. "Our name is a little confusing," bassist Garrett Holtz said. "Sometimes we get mistaken for a country band since we

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**ONE MORE TROPHY:** Former Camel Lauryn Love named state's top female track athlete, **B3**

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