

SIERRA COUNTY SENTINEL

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Remote Learning Concerns Voiced

By Jim Shiley
SENTINEL

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The district's school board met in regular session Monday, September 14 with the virtual reopening of schools inspiring a large turnout, most attending remotely, via Zoom Meetings. With over nine community members electing to make public comments, that portion of the agenda was pushed to the front of the meeting, before comments from the superintendent or board members. This allowed for both board and superintendent to address those comments during their own remarks. Public comments were made both in person

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KEEPING THE SYSTEMS WORKING, Chris Soiles, technology specialist with the district's schools gets the Zoom meeting set up and working, insuring that the meeting can be attended by the public. Soiles has been central to helping staff learn to use and navigate the Schoology system being used.

Williamsburg Planning For Future Disasters

By Cheryl Ray
For The SENTINEL

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The Village of Williamsburg will formalize details for receiving assistance from the Sierra County Emergency Services in the event of future disasters like the recent flood.

At their Sept. 10 meeting, Williamsburg Mayor Deb Stubblefield explained to trustees that Emergency Services had provided assistance to the village as a courtesy during the flood, but there would have to be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOA) formalizing assistance in the future.

Stubblefield said Sierra County Emergency Services only has authority within the unincorporated areas of the county, which does not include the Village of Williamsburg, Truth or Consequences or Elephant Butte.

"Would this enable them to clean up the channels?" asked trustee Lee Wedgwood.

"No," replied the mayor. "This does not enable any equipment. This is to give Emergency Services Administrator, Paul Tooley, the authority to act on the village's behalf."

The mayor said Tooley might have delivered the village's disaster declaration directly to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on Williamsburg's behalf during the flood. (The EOC is a command and control facility responsible for carrying out emergency preparedness and management). She said he also has access to more resources for such things as cleaning up properties and information about

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EB To Look At Red Lot Ordinance

By Chuck Wentworth
SENTINEL

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Among several items addressed during the Elephant Butte City Council's September 16 regular meeting, were wording and potential liability concerns with municipality's current Red Lot ordinance (No.157). As they moved to this item on the agenda, councilor Travis Atwell said he felt the ordinance needed to be rescinded, and went on to point out several areas where

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Candidate Files Ethics Complaint During Rule's Blackout Window

By Etta Pettijohn
For The SENTINEL

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Before state lawmakers created an ethics commission two years ago, they spent a great deal of time discussing their fears that frivolous complaints could be filed as a political weapon to damage a public official's reputation.

Those fears materialized this week, as the democrat opponent of Rep. Rebecca Dow, (R-38) filed an ethics complaint against her just weeks before the Nov. 3 general election, claiming Dow violated state conflict-of-interest and financial disclosure laws when seeking state grants for the non-profit Apple-Tree Educational Center.

The timing of the complaint means it will be long after the election before the New Mexico Ethics Commission determines if the allegations have any validity. A 60-day (before the election) blackout period was established in the law creating the entity,

where the Commission is required to keep cases confidential, unless it finds evidence of wrongdoing, although the law allows the accuser to publicly disclose a case.

The Commission was established by constitutional amendment in 2018, and signed into law by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham in 2019.

This week, the Karen Whitlock for District 38 Representative campaign also fired off news releases to most media outlets in the state, outlining their accusations.

Whitlock is running against Dow and Libertarian William Kinney for the House District 38 seat. Dow defeated her in two previous runs for that seat.

"I filed after getting all the relevant documents. In no way did the blackout period play into the timing of this, just the timing that documentation was received," Whitlock stated. "I would have very much liked to have had the documents earlier so that the complaint could have been filed earlier."

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Remembering The Fallen Of 9-11



(SENTINEL Photo/Chuck Wentworth)

Not wanting the coronavirus health emergency to overshadow honor due, members of the Elephant Butte Volunteer Fire Department and community volunteers organized a small, yet truly moving memorial Friday evening, September 11. In honor of the firefighters who selflessly gave their lives responding to the tragic events on September 11, 2001, event organizers assembled 343 floating (and environmentally friendly) lanterns to remember each of the individual firefighter lost during those terrible days. In special memory, designated red lanterns carried the names of individual firefighters. As dusk enveloped Elephant Butte Lake's Dam Site Marina Friday evening, volunteers quietly placed the candlelit rafts upon the water, where they floated by clusters into the darkening night. Although large gatherings are still not possible, the small group of volunteers joining for the evening's ceremony expressed pleasure in appropriately honoring the memory of those who despite fear, courageously answered the call.

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QUIET MOMENTS

Dear Lord, we find ourselves unable to cope with life sometimes. Instead of feeling grateful, we feel bogged down by the responsibilities of all that You've given us. We want to live out Your love, but we find ourselves consumed with frustration, jealousy and worry. We want to grow closer to You, but in practice, we're too tired or bored or busy. Circumstances will rarely be ideal; we know that. But we also know that the only thing that makes life worthwhile is living it with You. Show us how to pray when things aren't perfect. Show us how to put aside all of the weights and sins and emotions that tangle us up. Demonstrate to us, daily, the reality that if we spend time with You, things will be better. We, each will be better. In your sweet name we pray, Amen



County Approves Incentive Plans

By Chuck Wentworth
SENTINEL

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After several weeks of discussion surrounding an employee pay incentive plan proposed by Sierra County Sheriff Glenn Hamilton, Sierra County Commissioners rendered a majority decision approving a revised initiative for the sheriff's department, as well as similar salary increases for several other departments. (This issue and the separate department requests were detailed in a report of the commission's special meeting of September 8, which appeared in the September 11 issue of the Sierra County Sentinel)

An essential aspect of all the incentive requests was the use only of budgeted funds within each department, which board members were assured would pose no demand upon the county's limited general fund revenues.

In discussion, commissioner Frances Luna said she was concerned that the pay increase suggested by the sheriff would not be sufficient to bring staff salaries in competition with the Truth or Consequences Police Department



CENSUS CHECK - During his report to the commission September 15, county manager Bruce Swingle outlined a potential miscount in online census responses. He said a complaint had been filed with state officials. While Sierra County's response percentage is above past counts, Swingle said with local efforts expended this year, he suspected the true number was significantly higher.

(TCPD) or other neighboring law enforcement agencies. This was a cited goal for the sheriff's department's incentive plan. While acknowledging the proposal would leave his department's salaries "still looking at the TCPD's tailights," Sheriff Hamilton said the county's larger share of insurance costs and other incentives would make his department's positions competitive.

Luna noted how the commission called upon all departments to cut back to assure the present fiscal year's operational budget. She further questioned the merit of allowing a handful of departments to effect employee raises, while other deserving department staff are being asked to do more with less. Stressing a desire to see all of the county's employees equally rewarded, as well as affirming her support for staff members standing to gain from the proposed measures, Luna nonetheless said she would not be able to support the pay incentive requests.

While acknowledging Luna's reservations, vice chair Travis Day indicated that recent revisions by the sheriff and the fact that all

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ANSWER THE CALL...

DEADLINE 9/30

The US Census Bureau has delivered census packets to all residences in Sierra County. You can respond by mail or by phone at 844 330-2020 and in Spanish 844 468-2020. If you have not received your census questionnaire, call the Census Bureau at the same number. **We need you now more than ever, step up and be counted.**

COMPLETE YOUR CENSUS TODAY AT 2020CENSUS.GOV



BE COUNTED

