



# Lack of local childcare gains attention

by Sean Summers  
Herald Staff Writer

When COVID-19 forced Bright Start Learning Center to close its doors last spring, local parents were left with limited options for accessible and affordable childcare.

The Center Early Childhood Programs, operated by Lake County School District, helped meet some of the need. But with nearly 400 children ages five or younger estimated to be living in Lake County, the shortage of available childcare is pressing even with both facilities running — and critical when one shuts down.

Recognizing the urgent need for more accessible early childhood care, county and city partners have started working to address an old issue in a new way, Commissioner Kayla Marcella told the *Herald*.

In early 2021, Lake County



Photo by Sean Summers

Stakeholders are meeting this month to discuss early childhood care in Lake County. Bright Start Learning Center, which previously operated out of the East Fifth Street building pictured above, has faced several closures and relocations, underscoring the need for diversified local childcare options.

teamed up with Diane Muntean, who operates the Muntean Leadership Group out of Steamboat Springs, to develop a sustainable, long-term childcare strategy for Leadville and Lake County.

Last Wednesday, nearly 30 people joined the first of two workshops to be facilitated by Muntean meant to build this strategy.

Representatives from city and county government, employees of the Lake County School District, leaders from local nonprofit organizations and community members weighed in to share their ideas about how to embark on the work needed.

Participants shared their experiences with childcare in Lake County, began constructing short- and long-term goals to address the

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# Skijoring will take place without spectators

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Leadville Ski Joring gained approval to host its 73rd annual races next month, allowing organizers move forward with an altered event in the throes of the ongoing pandemic.

After securing a temporary use permit from the city on February 2, skijoring event organizers got county approval to hold this year's races at a Feb. 9 special meeting of the Board of County Commissioners.

The races will take place during their traditional time in the first weekend of March, but not without significant changes — one of the most notable being the event's location.

What has historically been a downtown mainstay, with organizers trucking snow onto Harrison Avenue and building the track through Leadville's main corridor, will instead take place on McWethy Drive.

The alternate location, west of Lake County

Intermediate School and Cloud City Farm, will serve to restrict public participation, which was an important condition attached to the event's approval.

As stipulated by both the city and county, spectators are not only discouraged from attending but are barred from participation in an attempt to limit crowding that may facilitate the spread of COVID-19.

To prevent crowds from gathering, Counsell said organizers may position people at access points to the course to turn away would-be spectators, and may pause the races if anyone encroaches on the course.

For the same reason, the number of event participants is limited to 75 people, including racers and staff.

Though in-person attendance will not be allowed, organizers are considering broadcasting and streaming the event for remote viewing, organizer Duffy Counsell told the commissioners during last Tuesday's meeting.

During the races, the course



Photo by Sean Summers

John Hyde skis off a jump at last year's skijoring festivities. Leadville's 73rd annual skijoring will take place without spectators on McWethy Drive this year, in an effort to follow public health guidelines.

will obstruct West Sixth Street and County Road 4, 31 and 36, and through-traffic will be blocked accordingly.

Skijoring organizers are

working with the county's public works and emergency services departments to ensure residents and first responder have access to all impacted routes.

Similarly, the segment of the Mineral Belt Trail that runs adjacent to McWethy alongside the course will be used as a return route for horses and riders, and users may expect interruptions along the trail on March 6.

The recycling center at the Community Field will also be closed during the event.

As for the races, instead of a double-wide course, jumps will be aligned in a single row and the event itself will be abbreviated, Counsell said.

This year, there will be no junior, legends or snowmobile classes.

An awards ceremony for racers will take place on the outside patio at the Elks Lodge, weather depending, but indoor events have been scrapped in light of pandemic restrictions.

Though the event has been approved, Counsell assured the commissioners that organizers would stay attuned to public health orders as March draws near, and adjust plans as needed to meet COVID-19 safety measures.

