Locals tell of gas boom for UW project

By Kaitlyn McAvoy

Last fall, over 40 people working and living in Sublette County were interviewed by the University of Wyoming (UW) to create an oral history of the local gas boom. Next month, participants and UW representatives will talk about the project at a public meeting at the Sublette County Library in Pinedale.

The project is called “Wyoming’s Energy Boom, 1995-2011: An Oral History Program,” and was conducted by the American Heritage Center’s (AHC) Alan K. Simpson Institute for Western Politics and Leadership at UW.

Interviews began in late September, with the bulk of them occurring in October and November, said Leslie Waggener, associate archivist at the Simpson Institute who helped conduct the interviews.

Those interviewed included Pinedale Mayor Steve Smith, Big Piney Mayor Phillip Smith, the Sublette County Commissioners including former Commission Chair Bill Cramer, former County Sheriff Wayne “Bardy” Bardin, industry representatives including those from Encana, Ultra and Haliburton, local ranchers Tim Thompson and Albert Sommers, environmental and conservation group representatives Mary Lynn Wolr and Linda Baker and local business owners including Cowboy Shop owner Caroline Bing.

Waggener said the idea for the project was born about three years ago, after AHC associate directors had a discussion about the prevalence of the energy boom and bust cycle in Wyoming. Waggener said the AHC decided it would be a “wonderful idea” to explore the social impacts of energy boom and bust on a Wyoming community. Sublette County seemed like a perfect spot for such a project.

“We have a lot of collections about the industry itself, but what about the effects and impacts of that industry?” Waggener said. “We thought about Sublette County because it had so recently experienced a boom.”

After receiving a grant for the project, AHC began conducting interviews. Local historian Ann Chambers Noble was on the steering committee for the project, and Waggener said she suggested people to interview in Sublette County. Waggener and Noble were part of a team of four people who conducted the interviews. People they interviewed suggested others in the community the team should talk to, Waggener said.

“It built from there as the interviews went on,” she said. This is the first oral history project of this size the AHC at UW has conducted, Waggener added.

The public meeting to discuss the project is scheduled for May 16 from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Panelists will include Ultra Senior Regulatory Coordinator Cally McKee, Worl and Noble, who were all interviewed for the project.

Courtney Carlson, assistant director of the UW Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, and Dr. Mark Northam, director of the UW School of Energy Resources, will also be included in the panel. Dr. David Kathka, former Wyoming State Historian and current vice chair of the AHC Board of Advisors, will moderate the meeting.

Waggener said the meeting will focus on the effects of the recent boom on the county, as discovered through the project.

A meeting on the project will also be held next week on April 4 at UW’s Wyoming Union Family Room in Laramie, and Waggener said that meeting will look at the broader issue of the impacts of the energy boom on a Wyoming community.

Recordings of those interviewed for the project can be heard at the AHC’s website: http://digitalcollections.uwyo.edu:8180/luna/servlet/owydbuwy~37~37. ■

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