

RATON ~ NEW MEXICO NEWS

Raton High School mock trial team finishes 7th in state

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team's performance. "We were up against 4A and 5A schools: they're all thrown in together. Some big schools field three teams. Our kids went toe to toe. They were not intimidated, and they were very competitive."

Walton has volunteered his time throughout the school year to help coach the mock trial team. Raton attorney Steven McConnell has done the same. He, too, praised the students' performances. "We really did good getting ourselves to state where we compete against large Albuquerque schools that have long-established programs in mock trial. We played rounds against the state's top team, Sandia Prep, and we held our own. We were very competitive."

Walton pointed out the challenges of mock trial, especially

against such formidable opponents. "It's not rote memory," he said, "it's application. They have to demonstrate what they've learned and apply it in competition." Walton said Raton's students spent time with students from the state's top programs, learning that they devote their entire year to nothing but mock trial. Those students were impressed to discover that Raton's students all participate in various school activities and interscholastic teams throughout the year.

Walton praised the parents of team members for raising kids who can stand up to the pressures of mock trial competition, saying the students dressed and spoke appropriately for the legal competition, and adapted well to challenging competitive situations.

Team sponsor Robin Smith points out that, after reading a

recent Chronicle-News story on the team, several area attorneys offered unsolicited donations which helped defray the cost of the team's stay in Albuquerque.

Along with Walton and McConnell, Smith is already looking ahead to next year's mock trial team. Though he's losing seven of his nine team members to graduation, sign-ups for next year's team have already exceeded two dozen students so he'll be able to field two separate teams - just like the top Albuquerque schools.

"What these seniors have done this year," Smith says, "they've set the bar high. Without their success, we wouldn't be looking ahead to state-level competition next year." He adds, "I'll be satisfied when we go down there year in and year out, get in that final round and compete to win it."

Stolarczyk, a junior, and

sophomore Arthur Armijo will return from this year's successful team. Smith plans to have Stolarczyk prepare for two positions - one for prosecution, one for defense - a strategy he saw the top schools use for their best talents. As for Armijo, he'll move up to an attorney position next year. "He'll be good," says Smith.

The graduating seniors on this year's team were Amber Encinias, Kyle Allen, Jessica Vertovec, Erin Gansz, Aaron Stevens, Michael Neurauter, and Claudio Saenz.

They leave a hard act to follow, but Smith sees a sunny future: Raton Middle School is creating its own mock trial program, giving Smith and Raton's mock trial team their own AAA farm club.

EU hails New Mexico's repeal of death penalty

By **DEBORAH BAKER**
Associated Press Writer

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) - The European Union has commended New Mexico for banning executions, calling it "an immense step forward in the worldwide movement to abolish the use of capital punishment."

Gov. Bill Richardson got a letter this week expressing the EU's "heartfelt thanks" to the Legislature for passing a repeal of the death penalty law and to Richardson for signing it.

"This is an act of great humanity on your part and we applaud your vision, your enlightened decision, and your courageous action," read the March 23 letter to the governor signed by the ambassadors of the Czech Republic and Sweden, and the ambassador for the Delegation of the European Commission.

New Mexico repealed the little-used death penalty and replaced it with a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole for crimes committed as of July 1.

An execution in 2001 was the first in the state in 49 years.

There are two men on death row; Richardson said he will

not commute their sentences.

The European Union last year issued a declaration against capital punishment and demanded a global moratorium and an eventual ban on the practice. EU nations have made Oct. 10 an annual day to protest the death penalty.

The 27-nation bloc has pushed hard at the United Nations to get U.N. member states to back a universal ban on the practice.

Richardson, a Democrat in his second term as governor, is a former congressman, energy secretary and U.N. ambassador in the administration of President Bill Clinton.

He said last week when he signed the repeal that among his considerations was the foreign policy perspective, and that the death penalty "did not seem to me to be good moral leadership and good foreign policy."

"We wholly agree with your evaluation of effectiveness of the death penalty," the EU letter said. "We consider this punishment cruel and inhuman. It does not act as a deterrent and any miscarriage of justice - which is inevitable in any legal system - would be irreversible."

County Commissioners address concerns about software request for Assessor's Office

By **LAURA L. BREWER**
The Chronicle-News

Adeline Shell, Colfax County Assessor, presented the county commissioners with a request to purchase new software that would allow the assessor's office to archive several years' data and provide three avenues of account; cost, marketing, and income. According to the data that Shell has compiled on three different systems, Tyler Technologies would meet the criteria for the assessor's office. However, Commissioner Whitney Hite expressed his concern that when the county went through a change in software a few years ago in the assessor's office, the new system, Appologix, was not compatible with the county treasurer's office, and the outcome was a disaster.

The treasurer's office has

used Triadic accounting system, which is an owner-based system, for more than twenty-five years. The Appologix system that the assessor's office switched to in April 2006 is parcel based. The problems arose because numbers assigned to parcels were not always the same as owners' numbers. As names or owners changed, parcel numbers and owner numbers between the two offices do not remain constant, thereby causing incorrect information from one office to the other.

According to Shell, the Appologix Company has not responded to any correspondence from the assessor's office for the past nine months. And, in advance of the December tax deadline, she believes that the assessor's office must install a new system.

County Treasurer, Lydia

Garcia, contends that the Triadic accounting software that the treasurer's office is using is able to archive ten years ownership, as needed by the assessor's office, and that whatever new software is purchased by the county, it should be compatible between the assessor's office and the county manager's office.

"I was elected by the public and I can't gamble with the taxpayer's money. I need to know that the software will work. I'm not going to spend money for new software for the treasurer's office. The assessor's software should work with what we have."

According to Garcia, in the past three years the treasurer's office has had to spend countless hours attempting to balance their records with the

assessor's office because of the software conflict between the two offices.

Although Shell wanted the commission to approve the purchase of Tyler software at Tuesday's meeting, Commissioner Bill Conley stated that by law the county must send out a request for proposal. And that the three county offices should work together to build the RFP so that it would contain all of the requirements needed to ensure that the software is compatible with all three offices. Commissioner Hite suggested that the software be tested concurrently with existing software to ensure that the requirements are met before purchasing the software. County Manager Don Day will begin constructing the RFP for the new software for the assessor's office.



Photo by Laura L. Brewer

These daffodils announce Spring's arrival in Raton. Flower and fruit trees are blooming in the warm weather.

Tri-State to build solar plant in northeast NM

By **SUE MAJOR HOLMES**
Associated Press Writer

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - A 500,000-panel solar photovoltaic power plant that will stretch for nearly a mile is being planned on the high plains of northeastern New Mexico between Springer and Cimarron.

Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association of Westminster, Colo., announced Tuesday it has entered into an agreement with Tempe, Ariz.-based First Solar Inc. to develop the plant. It will produce 30 megawatts - enough electricity for the needs of about 9,000 homes.

"This is a major, major undertaking. As you stand there, literally as far as your eye can see will be rows of solar panels," Tri-State spokesman Jim Van Someren

said. "It's going to be quite a facility."

The Cimarron I Solar Project will be the largest photovoltaic project by an electric cooperative and one of the largest in the world, Tri-State said.

Construction at the 250-acre site is slated to begin in April 2010. Each 2- by 4-foot panel in the solar field will be constructed with a thin film semiconductor technology patented by First Solar, which was formed in 1999 and launched commercial products in 2002.

The first part of the system is expected to be producing energy by August 2010. The plant, which will be owned and operated by First Solar, is to be fully operational by the end of next year.

Tri-State has contracted to purchase the electricity from

the facility for 25 years. The companies said, however, financial and operational terms of their agreement are confidential.

The land was leased from a private owner from New Mexico, but First Solar would not release the name or terms of the lease.

It will be Tri-State's first-ever solar venture, although the generation and transmission company already has some renewable energy. It gets about 13 percent of its power from hydroelectric facilities operated by the federal government and buys a small amount of power from a wind farm in Wyoming, Van Someren said.

New Mexico will require cooperatives to receive 10 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. That mandate does not affect

Tri-State directly, since it sells on the wholesale market, but it has an obligation to help member cooperatives meet that renewable portfolio standard, Van Someren said.

Gov. Bill Richardson, New Mexico U.S. Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, whose district includes the area, praised the project as a way to promote both clean energy and jobs.

Some 120 to 140 construction jobs are expected to be created while the plant is being built, but First Solar said only one or two permanent jobs will be created once the field goes into operation.

The agreement culminates a request for proposals Tri-State sent out in December 2007. Tri-State's board last year selected First Solar's proposal best fitting the utility's needs, then negotiated the agreement over several

months, Van Someren said.

John Carrington, First Solar's executive vice president of marketing and business development, said the plant is "another important demonstration of our ability to provide affordable, utility-scale solar solutions."

The project will be built in the service territory of Springer Electric Cooperative, one of Tri-State's 12 New Mexico member cooperatives.

"It's a great place for sun

power," Van Someren said.

Tri-State general manager and executive vice president Ken Anderson said the plant will diversify Tri-State's energy generation mix, help it address carbon emissions and help meet members' renewable energy requirements.

Tri-State generates and sends electricity to 44 electric cooperatives serving more than 1.4 million customers in a 250,000-square-mile territory across Colorado, New Mexico, Nebraska and Wyoming.

Biden hears from Albuquerque mayor

By **SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN**
Associated Press Writer

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez and a handful of local leaders from across the nation gave Vice President Joe Biden an update Tuesday as the federal government continued to roll out billions of dollars in stimulus money.

Biden, tasked by President Barack Obama to oversee the stimulus implementation, held two conference calls with mayors, county executives and governors to discuss implementation of the stimulus program.

"His interests were what obstacles we were seeing, are the governors treating us well and also there was a sharing of best practices, things that are working well and could be modeled in other communities," Chavez said after the call.

The mayor said things are going well in Albuquerque, which has 10 teams dedicated to researching how the city can access stimulus money. The teams were announced even before Obama signed the stimulus package into law Feb. 17.

Chavez said he is pleased that federal officials are keeping in touch with local leaders to ensure that the recovery act is progressing. The mayor said he plans to continue giving Biden, the rest of the administration and New Mexico's congressional delegation his suggestions for making the act work.

Asked whether Biden warned the local officials on the call about using the money wisely, Chavez said the vice president didn't dwell long on that issue.

"I think a lot of the mayors are getting tired of being lectured by the federal government," Chavez said. "This recession is a product of the federal government. We see ourselves as part of the solution."

A concern of Chavez and the other officials on the call was bureaucracy, but the mayor said city and county leaders recognize that "this has never been done before" and that federal officials are "extraordinarily cautious in terms of transparency and accountability."

"The public, I think, rightfully expects accountability," Chavez said.

Chavez said the city stands to get \$6 million in energy grants, millions of dollars for weatherization of public housing and \$20 million for Title I programs in the Albuquerque public school district.

As for highway funds, he called them "slender," saying the city will get only a fraction of the \$250 million headed to New Mexico.

On the Net:
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: www.recovery.gov

New Mexico Office of Recovery and Reinvestment: <http://www.recovery.state.nm.us/>

COLFAX COUNTY CALENDAR

MARCH
March 26

Health Council Meeting - Noon at International Room of International Bank.

March 27

Substance Abuse Prevention

Meeting - 10:00 a.m. at YES office.

March 28

Schwann's truckload sale to benefit the Christian Motorcycle Association's "Run for the Son" (888)413-0003.