

Happy Holidays! from the all-volunteer staff at

Our Community News

Volunteers reporting on community issues in Monument, Palmer Lake, and the surrounding Tri-Lakes area



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Free

Visit OCN.ME on the web. We now have audio posted for many of the recent articles and videos for some events.



Local Events

Readers should assume that event information published in this issue is subject to change and information should be confirmed a day or two before the event by calling the information number or checking the organization's website.

See pages 21-23 for event locations and other details of these and many other local events.

- Downtown Monument Small Town Christmas, Sat., Dec. 2, 10 am-4 pm. See ad on page 2.
- Kiwanis 17th Annual North Pole Craft Show, Sat., Dec. 2, 9 am-4 pm. See ad on page 2.
- Monument Tree Lighting, Sat., Dec. 2, 5 pm. See ad on page 2.
- Tri Lakes Cares Giving Tree, drop off gifts by Wed., Dec. 8. See notices.
- S'more Holiday Fun at Fox Run Park, Sat., Dec. 9, 1-3 pm. See ad on page 5.
- YMCA 5K race series: Jingle jog, Sat., Dec. 9. See ad on page 6.
- Monument Sunday with Santa, Dec. 10, 11 am-4 pm. See ad on page 2.
- Red Cross Community Hero Nominations close, Mon., Dec. 11.
- 2023 Yule Log Community Potluck, Wed., Dec. 13, 6-9 pm.
- St. Peter Catholic Church presents O Come, Emmanuel, Fri., Dec. 15, 7 pm. See ad on page 2.
- The Tri Lakes Music Association presents My Christmas Prayer, Fri.-Sat., Dec. 15-16, 7 pm; Sun., Dec. 17, 2 pm. See ad on page 2.
- A Time to Dance: Believe, dance performance, Mon., Dec. 18, 6 pm. See ad on page 4.
- WMMI Winter Break Steam Camps, Tue., Dec. 19, and Thu., Dec. 21.
- Special Christmas Services, see Benet Hill Monastery ad on page 3, Trinity Lutheran Church ad on page 7, and Tri-Lakes United Methodist Church ad on page 12.
- Palmer Lake Outdoor Classic Youth hockey camp, foundation game event, Sat., Jan. 6, 9-11 am. Adult Tourney, Sun., Jan. 7, 3:30-7 pm
- The Love Shop: Restyle Your Furs, Wed.-Thu., Jan. 10-11. See ad on page 10.
- FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) Qualifier, Sat., Jan 13, 7 am-5 pm

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Tri-Lakes helping those in need



Above: John Howe, in his signature Hawaiian shirt, could not help but smile as he rang the bell while smiling crowds approached Safeway for Thanksgiving groceries. Some commented that it was too early for "Merry Christmas," so John changed to "Happy Thanksgiving" and the response was likewise. As in previous years, the Tri-Lakes community was generous as the Red Kettle was quickly filled each day. The funds raised stay in the community in which they were donated and are used to support local Salvation Army programs for people in need. *Caption by John Howe. Photo by Michael Weinfeld.*

Palmer Lake Board of Trustees, Nov. 9

Proposed 2024 budget proves contentious

By James Howald and Jackie Burhans
The November meeting of the Palmer Lake Board of Trustees (PLBOT) opened with recognition of citizen volunteer Jane Garrabrant. The board held a public hearing on its draft budget for 2024. CORE Electric Cooperative proposed the installation of two electric vehicle (EV) chargers. The board considered a resolution to authorize a rate study in support of a stormwater enterprise fund. It set a date for a public hearing on a petition for annexation and voted on a resolution to authorize fire protection services for a small area of land in unincorporated El Paso County. The board approved road standards.

The board meeting was preceded by an executive session.

Jane Garrabrant honored

Mayor Glant Havenar and Town Administrator Dawn Collins recognized Garrabrant for her volunteer work in support of the town staff, especially her work on accounting issues. Collins said, "Her volunteerism has been invaluable in the last two months."

Garrabrant praised the staff, acknowledging their dedication and expertise.

2024 budget hearing

Havenar preceded the public hearing on the proposed 2024 budget by correcting remarks she made in her mayor's message to the town. She explained that the town was in fact on track to receive more sales, use, and excise taxes in 2023 than it did in 2022, but would receive less total sales tax revenue than was anticipated in the 2023 budget. The town had to return \$80,000 to the state to

correct an overpayment by a business to the state, she said, which reduced sales tax revenue. Havenar said the town would be more conservative in their approach to budgeting and rely less on optimistic revenue projections.

Havenar opened the public hearing to consider three budget alternatives. The first alternative excludes all new hires, provides minimal wage increases, and makes no other changes to departments. This alternative has a deficit just under \$119,000 that would be covered by reserve funds.

The second alternative retains the six full-time and five part-time police officers currently employed, gives them all 3% wage increases and cuts operating expenses to cover the wage increases. This alternative has a \$116,000 deficit.

The third alternative cuts all six of the part-time and one of the full-time police officers, proposes hiring a public works equipment operator and a deputy town clerk, allows for raises between 3% and 5% and moves capital funds to the Public Works Department. This option is a balanced budget with no deficit.

Trustee Dennis Stern suggested a fourth alternative: an across-the-board reduction of 2½% to all departments, which he calculated would cut \$125,000 from the overall budget. After discussing the resolution on the Stormwater Enterprise Fund (see below), the board directed staff to add a part-time code enforcer to all the options.

Collins pointed out that at

El Paso Board of County Commissioners, Nov. 7, 9, and 14

Final budget direction increases funding to roads and parks

By Helen Walklett

During November, the El Paso Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) gave final direction on the 2024 county budget, received an update on the work of Tri-Lakes Cares and Crossfire Ministries, and approved a minor subdivision in Black Forest.

Final focus on 2024 budget

At the Nov. 14 meeting, the commissioners gave their final direction on the 2024 budget, reallocating funds to roads, parks and to challenging unfunded mandates.

The commissioners redistributed \$2.49 million, the majority of which came from funds allocated to a major stormwater project that is now to be financed by federal grants. They earmarked an additional \$2 million to one-time road funds, \$150,000 to stormwater projects, \$140,000 to park projects, and \$200,000 to challenging unfunded mandates that might come from state or federal government.

Chair Cami Bremer described it as "a beautifully balanced budget that aligns with our priorities and allows us to get the things done that we need to get done."

The preliminary budget and all supporting documents can be viewed on the county website at: <https://admin.elpasoco.com/financial-services/budget-finance/county-budget/>. Paper copies are also available for inspection in the commissioners' office at Centennial Hall, 200 S. Cascade Ave., Colorado Springs 80903.

The final budget vote is scheduled to be held at the BOCC meeting on Dec. 5.

Tri-Lakes Cares/Crossfire Ministries update

At the Nov. 14 meeting, Tri-Lakes Cares (TLC) and Crossfire Ministries updated the commissioners on work the two nonprofits are doing with funding from various sources, including the \$20,000 grant money jointly received from the BOCC under the Community Investment Program (CIP). Haley Chapin, TLC executive director, said that between the two organizations, they serve the whole county.

TLC helped 1,595 individuals in 853 households with food distribution, housing assistance, utilities assistance, transportation help, or medical assistance in 2022-23, Chapin said. Renee Beebe, executive director, Crossfire Ministries, said her organization is serving a lot of families that are finding themselves on the verge of not being able to make ends meet. She said the funding had been able to provide a number of families with utility assistance specifically, which is a growing area of need. In the first nine months of the year, Crossfire's no-cost grocery store was accessed over 40,000 times.

Commenting on the increase in need during and since the pandemic, Chapin said, "While the rest of us have gone back to work and finished the remainder of the