

Ice rink looks to future

Board presses ahead with plans > NW, Page 1C

PANTHERS TAKE DOWN HAWKS

Carolina holds off furious rally > Sports, 1B

IT'S MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016



45°

Partly cloudy
FORECAST: 6A

Follow us on
the Web at ...



The LEWISTON TRIBUNE

lmtribune.com



FOUR SECTIONS

THE REGION'S INDEPENDENT NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1892

ONE DOLLAR

Northwest

Big Picture

Who owns the throne?

— PAGE 6C

INSIDE:

In the schools:

4C

Obituaries: 5C



THE LEWISTON TRIBUNE

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016



Tribune/Steve Hanks

The Palouse Ice Rink hopes to raise enough money to replace the three-quarter-size rink and temporary structure with a metal pole barn structure that has working plumbing, indoor bathrooms, increased seating, six locker rooms that includes one specifically for girls, and space that can be heated and a full-size rink.

Palouse Ice Rink sees sunny skies ahead

With an embezzlement scandal now history, board members are pressing ahead with plans for a new facility

By ELIZABETH RUDD
OF THE TRIBUNE

MOSCOW — Palouse Ice Rink board members went into “survival mode” this summer, after learning a former employee embezzled nearly \$30,000 from the rink.

There was no money in the bank to pay bills, no manager, no staff, and they had to decide how to handle the discovery. They determined the best and only thing they could do was protect the community by taking the information to the police, despite how it might affect the rink’s reputation.

“We felt like we had to do the right thing, and in the end, we felt like we could bounce back from it,” board member Anna Lim-Mikkelsen said.

They reported the rink’s former bookkeeper, Mary C. Bentley, to Moscow police in early June, alleging she had stolen about \$29,000 from the rink through a series of smaller thefts. Bentley, 30, was arrested and ultimately charged with 41 counts of theft and forgery for allegedly taking the money and forging former rink manager Victor “Chris” Storhok’s signature on several unauthorized checks.

Bentley, who was hired at the rink in May 2014 to manage its accounts and bills, pleaded guilty to the thefts earlier this month as part of a plea agreement with prosecutors that dropped the forgery charges. The Moscow woman will be sentenced in March, and if the judge follows the plea



Anna Lim-Mikkelsen

agreement, she will be required to repay the full \$28,686.18 taken from the rink.

“It hurt on a very personal level,” Lim-Mikkelsen said.

It also hit the rink hard financially, upset its users and news stories about the embezzlement have become some of the first links seen when searching the Internet for the Palouse Ice Rink.

“We knew that was going to happen,” said Tony Mangini, the rink’s vice president. “We knew that was going to be a risk, but we didn’t have a choice.”

Board members pulled together to keep the rink going, volunteering their time as the organization’s summer employees, turning on lights, checking mail and planning for the fall season. Mangini said if there was ever a time to close the rink, it would have been after this summer.

But the board members pushed on, reminding one another of the overall goal to construct a permanent facility to house a regulation-sized sheet of ice to meet the increasing user demand the rink has seen since opening in 2001. Lim-Mikkelsen said the board had to use the rink’s line of credit to pay bills, communicate with vendors to set up payment plans and tighten their account procedures.

The rink has since re-

covered. The board paid off its credit, resolved the payment plans and deferrals, and has operating money in the bank again, President Mark McGuire said. They also hired a new manager in August, after asking Storhok to resign in April because of differing visions for the rink, Mangini said. The embezzlement was discovered after his departure from the rink.

“We got through this,” Lim-Mikkelsen said. “We’re stronger as a result.”

Board members have also been able to build good momentum on the rink expansion project, despite the distractions of Bentley’s case. They have been working for more than two years to raise money for a full-size rink, which is 200 feet long and 85 feet wide, to replace the temporary, tent-covered three-quarter-size rink at 1021 Harold St. in Moscow.

> See **RINK**, page 5C

RINK: Group has support for regulation-size ice

> Continued from PAGE 1A

Their goal is to construct a basic, metal pole barn structure that has working plumbing, indoor bathrooms, increased seating, six locker rooms that includes one specifically for girls, and space that can be heated. McGuire said there is significant user demand — and desire — to support a full-size rink.

Youth hockey participation has increased from 65 children to about 175 in the past eight years, and adult hockey has grown from 25 people to about 150 during that time, he said. That doesn’t include the people using the rink for figure skating, curling, broomball and those coming in just to skate.

In the past year, the board was able to purchase a new scoreboard, hire Stout Fundraising Solutions as a project consultant, as well as an architect. The rink’s overall debt was paid

off and a business plan completed. The board received a cost estimate of \$4.2 million for the project, but are working to find ways to reduce that to \$3.5 million.

Mangini said purchasing the scoreboard was an important accomplishment for the board because it was a promise made to users and donors at last year’s gala fundraiser. Following through with that promise helped with people’s trust in the organization. The board has raised about \$500,000 for the project that includes cash-in-hand, pledges and assets like recently purchased dashboards.

Board Treasurer Brenda Boyko stressed that the money taken from the rink was strictly from its operational funding and none of the fundraising money was touched. The board also vowed not to tap into money reserved for the expansion project to help fill last summer’s

void, she said.

“We just want to reassure people of that,” Lim-Mikkelsen added.

The group is in the midst of planning this year’s gala fundraiser and anticipate a good turnout. The gala begins at 5:30 p.m. Friday at the University Inn Best Western with a silent auction and no-host bar. Tickets cost \$50 per person, or \$450 for a table of 10, and can be purchased at Palouse Ice Rink, or online at <http://palouseicerink.com/>

Boyko said the board members are 100 percent committed to the expansion project, and what happened with Bentley has only made that dedication stronger.

“The little rink has served us well, but the time is now,” she said.

Lim-Mikkelsen added, “It was a small setback.”

Rudd may be contacted at erudd@lntribune.com or (208) 791-8465. Follow her on Twitter @elizabeth_rudd.