

and for Livingstone unconscious for more than two months. For the next two years and three months, Livingstone endured physical therapy. Today, he spends his time speaking to oil field workers throughout the country on the dangers of taking shortcuts and the importance of safety in the energy industry.

Between 5,000 to 7,000 area workers recently attended one of the series of talks Livingstone gave at the Farmington Civic Center. The message he presented will, we fervently hope, save lives and make workers more aware.

The recently created San Juan Basin Operators Safety Council — spearheaded by Jason Sandel of Aztec Well Servicing and Triple S Trucking, as well as president of the Four Corners Safety Network — brought Livingstone to San Juan County. While the seven presentations literally emptied the oil and gas fields of workers for the day, Sandel said getting Livingstone's message to those employees was worth it.

The efforts of the safety council and its organizer to help educate workers on the dangers of the work they do, which can be easy to forget, is commendable and critical. The energy industry is one of the largest employers in San Juan County, and employees need to be reminded that safety should always come before shortcuts.

It is important to note that employees were paid to attend Livingstone's talks, which speaks loudly about the importance of safety for employers.

If one life is saved, if one employee says "No" to a suggestion that a short cut be taken if that decision violates safety issues, if one more oil field supervisor makes safety as important as productivity, Livingstone's message will have made a difference.

One safety-conscious employee can set an example for others, which can help create a safer environment for those oil and gas workers who are so important to our community, our economy and — most importantly — to their families.

"Nothing is so important about our job that's worth putting a family through what Brad's family went through," Sandel said.

We can't agree more. Work smart and work safe. Your loved ones will thank you for it.

One such request was that for \$578,000 for the San Juan Safe Communities Initiative, which happens to be administered by another city councilman, Dan Darnell.

Would such money be frivolous spending?

Is it fair that such a lofty request ahead of others be linked to a project with special-interest ties to a council member?

Both are good questions and deserve to be answered. Perhaps it is a noble thing. But instead of just looking back, the city leadership should look ahead.

Former City Manager Mike Miller, who submitted the requests before the City Council saw the list, was fired.

Whoever takes that office next must know that on no uncertain terms, the City Council as a whole never should be surprised the way this council seemed constantly to be surprised under the old guard.

Nor should anyone by now remain ignorant of the importance to conduct the public's business in public. No longer should major decisions like this be done "behind closed doors," as Sandel so correctly described it.

Cost overruns on an airport restaurant? Better inform the council; all of the members.

Cost overruns on a park project? Better get the council's direction on what to do next and where to trim.

Prioritizing what to seek from Big Brother in federal funding? Better not let the elected leaders be surprised.

Bottom line: Yet another opportunity exists for the city of Farmington to improve its sloppy management image. And how can it be called anything else given the one surprise after another that has made headlines?

The good news is, most council members seem to indicate they realize things can be done better. Perhaps they also realize the opportunity at hand, and not just in the hiring of a city manager. A bit of mirror examination is needed as well.

Now is the time. No matter who becomes the new city manager, the City Council should be a part of the leadership equation.

We're not suggesting micromanagement. No city staffer wants to hear that. It's the worst thing elected leaders could do.

We're simply suggesting management, period.

That means no surprises.

Finances

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"We can probably weather this thing," Campbell said. "Although there will be repercussions if oil and gas really does go south."

Gross receipts tax revenue accounts for about 85 percent of the city's general budget, Campbell said.

Local legislators have said they expect a state budget shortfall of a couple hundred million dollars after a decline in the price of oil and gas. The oil and gas industry drives the local economy.

Councilman Jason Sandel, who predicted a "bleak Christmas," asked staffers at a council meeting Tuesday night whether the city had prepared for a local economic downturn. Sandel wondered whether councilors would have to make adjust-

ments to the budget.

Sandel, executive vice president of Aztec Well Servicing Co. Inc., said his company has 100 fewer people working Wednesday than last month.

His company, like others in the area, has laid off employees or has not hired people to fill positions of those who have quit, he said.

Sandel blames the weak economy, environmental regulations and low oil and gas prices. He said jobless people from his and other companies who don't spend money during the holidays will result in a significant decrease in revenue to the city.

The city should not hire any new employees, as his and other companies are doing, because the city cannot borrow money in case of a budget shortfall, Sandel said. Sandel would make

exception for police and firefighters.

"Raising taxes is unacceptable," he said.

Farmington Fire Chief Troy Brown said he has held off on filling four open positions for firefighters to be cautious. The fire department still can respond adequately to emergencies.

"All in all it's good," he said. "I think Farmington's fortunate right now."

Campbell said the weak economy has led the city to delay buying some vehicles. The city still is hiring people to fill empty positions and Campbell does not expect a hiring freeze.

"We are looking optimistically ahead, but trying to be realistic," Campbell said.

City Manager Rob Mayes has asked other city officials in various departments to spend less in case of a local

economic downturn, Campbell said. In turn, city officials since July have spent about \$650,000 less than the budget allows.

Mayor Bill Standley said at the meeting city officials have taken "appropriate action."

Stifling environmental regulations adopted by state lawmakers have led companies to move some oil and gas drilling operations to Colorado, Standley said. But the industry and its employees remain in northwest New Mexico.

Last year, councilors approved this year's approximately \$225 million budget, which funds the city's Electric Utility and other services such as water and sewer, Campbell said.

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Ed Roufa gets ready to tee off on the 13th fairway at Piñon Hills Golf Course. Roufa is from Telluride Colo., and says he comes to Farmington about twice a year to golf at Piñon Hills. Photos by Lindsay Pierce/The Daily Times

Mayor: Course looks good

Councilman's comments criticized in meeting

— By Steve Lynn —
The Daily Times

FARMINGTON —The mayor strongly rejected claims by a city councilman that Piñon Hills Golf Course has maintenance problems.

Mayor Bill Standley criticized Councilman Jason Sandel's comments and the Daily Times for publishing them at a City Council meeting Tuesday. Sandel's comments last week led Standley to visit the course Monday to inspect conditions and talk to golfers.

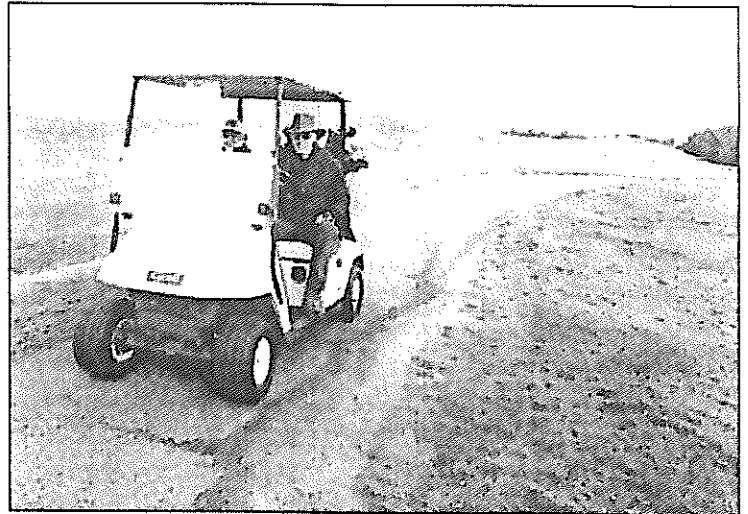
No one complained to Standley about course conditions even when he asked them to do so, he said.

"They say that the golf course is in better condition than they've ever seen it," he said.

The dispute comes as the golf course faces a funding crunch brought on by fewer people paying a daily rate in favor of annual passes that give golfers discounts when they play often.

The approximately \$150,000 shortfall means less money for small improvements or a potential disaster such as an irrigation system failure, said Jeff Bowman, director of the city's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs department.

Even though the course faces less funding, Golfweek recently



Richard Cornellier, left, and Dean Chirigos play a round of golf at Piñon Hills Golf Course last week.

ranked Piñon Hills No. 4 in its "Best Municipal Courses." The magazine rated acclaimed course Torrey Pines in San Diego, Calif., No. 5.

"If you're ahead of Torrey Pines is that an 'unkempt' golf course?" Standley said.

Councilwoman Mary Fischer called Sandel's comments "irresponsible."

Sandel said his comments about crumbling cart paths, deteriorating restaurant furniture and the need for improvements such as an awning for shade on

a patio were based on complaints from golfers and his own observations while playing the course.

Sandel, who did not attend Tuesday's meeting because he was in Houston on business, called the criticism "unfortunate" considering he was not there to defend himself.

"My intent is to be focused on issues and improving our community ... rather than partaking in petty bickering," he said.

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Pinon Hills

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Pinon Hills is in "great shape," but the golf course has "room for improvements," he said.

Bryan Heath, president of Pinon Hills Men's Golf Association, agreed.

The course looks great this time of year compared to how it normally looks in late fall and the "new greenskeeper has done a heck of a job."

But the pro shop and restaurant could use some work, he said.

"The whole pro shop, dining room facility are not up to par with the course," he said. "It's not that they're bad, but I think in the future it's something they should look at."

Standley said the city probably will help the restaurant's operator fund an awning.

He did not see any problems with cart paths during his visit to the course besides natural erosion. The restaurant's furniture also is fine.

"I didn't sit in chairs that

have duct tape on them," he said.

Sandel also said money the city spent on Civitan Golf Course's pro shop should have been spent on Pinon Hills.

Fischer called Civitan "a wonderful facility" for children and beginning golfers.

"Civitan is there for our community," Councilman George Sharpe said.

Standley said "bad publicity" from undue criticism would "negatively affect" Pinon Hills, a major tourist attraction.

"If we're doing some-

thing wrong then we should be criticized," Standley said. "But that's not the case."

Sandel said he was elected to address concerns of constituents, who want Pinon Hills to advance.

"If we just stay where we're at today, we're going to lose our stature," he said.

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or adding more benches, said Jeff Bowman, director of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. If the irrigation system failed or another kind of course emergency occurred, funding would be stretched thinner. And if not enough golfers play this winter, funding for the golf course could decrease further.

“I’m not in the panic mode, but I’m in the ‘we’re really watching our pennies’” situation, he said.

The mayor balked at negative talk and staunchly defended the course and its condition.

We understand that.

We also understand and appreciate those speaking up on behalf of course improvements and making a good thing better.

Piñon Hills is a beautiful and unique course that is world-renowned. People from other parts of the country equate Farmington with Piñon Hills, so it is worth noting that some of the cart paths are in need of a touch-up and the restaurant furniture could be better, as City Councilman Jason Sandel argued.

Sandel pointed out that improvements as simple as an awning shade for the patio are not being considered.

Piñon Hills is supposed to rely mostly on revenue from people who pay individual greens fees to play 18 holes, Bowman said. The price varies depending on where a golfer lives.

Despite the costs of green fees, the city should find a way to pay for upgrades at the golf course. There should be a nice restaurant and the facility should be maintained so it can continue to compete with other quality golf courses across the country.

There is nothing wrong with calling attention to any prize, including the crown jewel.