

# VALLEY

## Men plead guilty in weapons cases

The Daily Inter Lake

A Kalispell man whose stolen car was recovered in Lincoln County with a pistol and drugs inside has been convicted of federal weapons charges.

During a hearing Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Missoula, Rian Erik Britt, 32, pleaded guilty to possession of a firearm by a user of a controlled substance.

According to court records, Britt reported that a friend had stolen his car in April 2008.

Deputies with the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office found the vehicle and, based on information from the alleged thief, obtained a search warrant. Authorities recovered 8.5 pounds of marijuana and a pound of hashish from the trunk and a .40-caliber pistol from the back seat.

Britt, who is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 15 and is currently released on special conditions, could face up to 10 years in federal prison.

**ALSO ON THURSDAY,** another Kalispell man, Shawn Trent Burress, 47, pleaded guilty to federal charges for being a felon in possession of ammunition.

Burress was under state supervision for failing to register as a sex offender, and thereby prohibited from possessing firearms or ammunition, when Whitefish police stopped him for traffic violations in November 2008.

Officers found a .30-caliber bullet in his pocket and four additional rounds in his vehicle. Investigators later recovered video surveillance footage of Burress purchasing the ammunition from a local sporting goods store and paying with a personal check.

Burress, who also is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 15 and is currently released on special conditions, could face up to 10 years in federal prison.

## Parks budget being trimmed

The Daily Inter Lake

Kalispell's parks and recreation department expects to spend roughly \$300,000 less in fiscal 2010 than in fiscal 2009.

The proposed fiscal 2010 parks and recreation budget calls for \$1.354 million in revenue and \$1.316 million in expenses.

The department briefed the City Council at Thursday's workshop session.

Fiscal 2010 — which begins July 1 — will be the first year that the parks department will be separate from the general fund in mapping out the city's budget. That makes precise apples-to-apples comparisons difficult between fiscal 2009 and 2010.

The idea is to make the parks department dependent on its own income plus an allocated amount of property tax revenue. In return, the department won't be the constant sacrificial lamb when the council adjusts the general fund.

The council is facing a cash reserve fund of roughly \$136,000 — less than one-tenth of what the city should have. Consequently, the council is in a budget-trimming frame of mind.

The proposed parks and recreation budget trims some dance and athletic activities, four park concerts, some scholarships for summer programs, some hockey referees and some maintenance work.

Also, several plans to expand programs, buy equipment and fix up some facilities have been put on hold.

The slowed-down construction economy also hurts the parks department in that developers who don't put parks in their projects must make payments-in-lieu-of-parks payments to the city.

Fiscal 2009 is expected to produce \$133,378 in revenue in this program, while fiscal 2010 is expected to provide only \$52,500.

## Who let the dogs out?

### Whitefish to let canines run free at new Wag Park

The Daily Inter Lake

After four years in the making, Whitefish will open the gate at its new dog park on June 20.

The facility in the Armory Park complex has been named the Hugh Rogers Wag Park after beloved Whitefish veterinarian Hugh Rogers, who recently died in a plane crash.

An open house and hot dog party is planned from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. that day. It's free and open to all dogs in the Flathead Valley and their owners.

A leash-cutting ceremony will take place at noon with Whitefish Parks and Recreation Director Karl Cozad joining Whitefish Animal Group Chairman Steve Lull, in the official opening. Prior to the

leash cutting, a talk on "minding your dog park manners" will be given by Ellie Bell, a local dog trainer.

Myni Ferguson will represent the Flathead County Animal Shelter with a table offering both Flathead County and Whitefish dog licenses.

Owners need to bring proof of current rabies vaccinations to obtain a license, which is a city requirement for dogs to play within the park. Dog owners must bring their dog's rabies tag or a certificate to have a license processed.

Cost of the county license is \$5 for altered dogs or \$10 for unaltered animals. A city of Whitefish license is \$5 altered or \$15 for unaltered females; \$10 for unaltered male dogs. Dogs need only be licensed in one jurisdiction.

Ferguson also will have photos of pets available for adoption and educational handouts including copies of both the city and county dog ordinances.

Other dog-friendly organizations represented at the opening include the Spay & Neuter Task Force, Stolte's Pet Stop, Three Dog Ranch and Tailwaggers. Any interested dog-related business is welcome to participate. Contact Diane Ward at 862-3624.

The dog park encompasses nearly five acres with fully accessible paths, a drinking fountain for both dogs and people, benches and lots of room for running and playing catch.

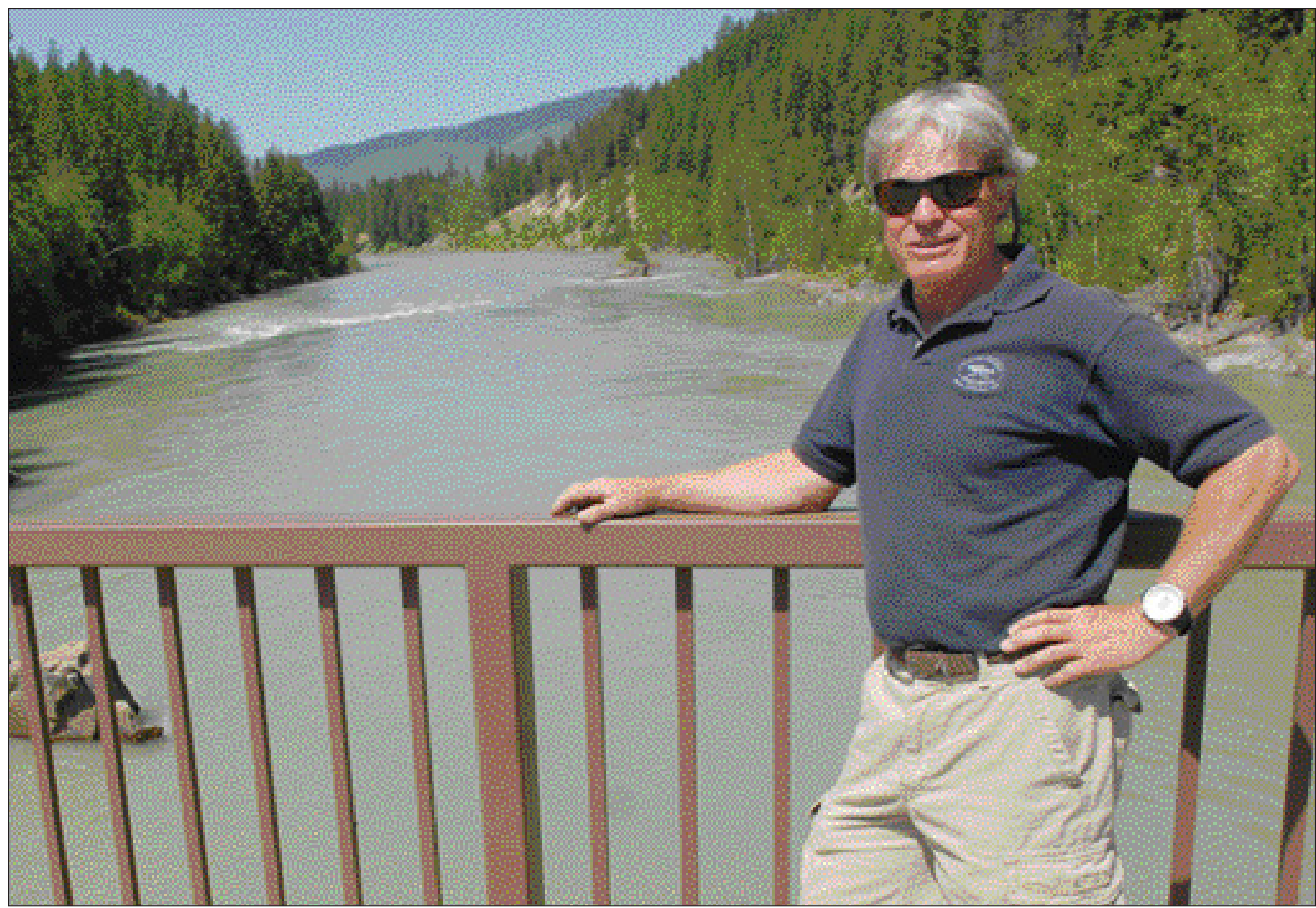
Future park plans include a gazebo structure for shade and shelter, a dedicated area for small or shy dogs and develop-

ment of a pond where dogs can cool off. Additional fundraising will be conducted to expand the facility.

The Whitefish Animal Group board recently incorporated Hugh Rogers' name into the park as a memorial to the popular veterinarian. Rogers was an early supporter of the dog park and gave countless volunteer hours to many community projects ranging from animal support groups to the Red Cross.

In a press release, Lull said the group wanted to honor Rogers, who "creatively, graciously, and steadfastly invested his humanity in profound and lasting ways."

For more information about the Hugh Rogers Wag Park, go to [www.wagparks.org](http://www.wagparks.org) or call Diane Ward at 862-3624.



Becky Malewitz/Daily Inter Lake

DARWON STONEMAN stands on the old West Glacier bridge over the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, where locals jump into the river. "My son can do a double flip off it," he said, adding that he has also jumped in the water many times. Stoneman was one of the founders of Glacier Raft Co. in 1976.

## Satisfying a thirst for adventure

### Glacier Raft Co. founder forged the way for modern-day river-runners

By JIM MANN  
The Daily Inter Lake

Back in the day, Darwon Stoneman figured it out: rivers in the summer, ski slopes in the winter. They would be his workplaces for life.

Stoneman arrived in West Glacier in 1976, forming the Glacier Raft Co. with Onno Wieringa, who's still a partner, and Bill Hoffman. The idea came about after a Grand Canyon kayak trip, at a time when kayaks and river guide operations were rare.

"We decided to get into the rafting business," Stoneman recalls.

The group set up their home and office in a small building near the Glacier Highland Motel, and got to work trying to drum up business on the streets of West Glacier and Apgar.

"**LITERALLY, WE** were looking for business," said Stoneman. "We took whatever we could get because then we could eat that night."

Stoneman recalls that he and his partners sought a special-use permit from the Forest Service, but were initially told that they didn't need one — unthinkable in today's world. Within months, they got one of the first such permits issued for the Flathead River system.

Charging just \$12.50 for a half-day trip on the Middle Fork, some days they would find just a single customer but other days they would fill their boats.

"You would rarely see anybody on the river back then," Stoneman said, who estimates that now more than 60,000 people run the Middle Fork river every summer aboard commercial and private boats.

**THE PARTNERS** rapidly expanded the business, acquiring permits on other rivers in the region. They had operations based in Polson and British Columbia and for a time, even a guiding business in Moab, Utah.

Stoneman said he was the first to get an Idaho guide permit on the Lochsa River, and that to this day, all permits on that river are derived from his.

Stoneman said additional partners were taken on to help with the distant operations, but he still found himself working at a breakneck pace. He recalls running trips on the Lochsa until 6 p.m., then returning to West Glacier and packing to fly into the Schafer Meadows airstrip the next day for trips on the wilderness stretch of the Middle Fork Flathead River.

"I tell my employees about it now and they don't believe me," Stoneman said with a chuckle. "We were all young

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and sleep was for the weak." And that was just his summer work.

**STONEMAN AND** Wieringa met as ski patrollers at Utah's Alta resort. Stoneman, a former Alaska state wrestling champion and business graduate from the University of Alaska, has since had a rich career in skiing.

In addition to patrolling and doing contract avalanche control work, Stoneman has been a heli-skiing guide in the Wasatch Mountain Range of Canada and Alaska since 1978.

Stoneman married his wife, Terri, in 1985 and the Glacier Raft Co. took on longtime employee Sally Thompson as a partner after Hoffman left to pursue another career.

After they started having children, Stoneman said, the partners decided to start selling off their distant rafting operations to concentrate on family and personal adventures.

Stoneman has several first descents on rivers. The most challenging, he says, was a death-defying drop through the

Toby Creek Gorge in Canada.

"That was a pretty good feat back then," Stoneman said, adding that it pales in comparison to what today's top kayakers do.

"We thought things we were doing back then were pretty hot," he said. "But now it's all run-of-the-mill ... We were just kind of paving the way."

**SINCE ITS** start, Glacier Raft Co. has burgeoned into an empire of sorts in the West Glacier area, expanding in recent years with rental cabins and an impressive outdoors retail store.

"In the heat of summer we take on close to 100 employees," said Stoneman, who at 61 is still full of adventure.

He recently did a 16-day, 226-mile float through the Grand Canyon.

Soon after returning to Montana, he led two Glacier Raft Co. raft crews on an unprecedented single-day trip from Schafer Meadows to Sportsmens Bridge just north of Flathead Lake. They did the 123-mile trip in 17 hours and 44 minutes.

And it likely won't be his last adventure.

"It's been a fun run," Stoneman said of his ride so far.

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