

OCTOBER/NEWS

OCT. 1**Inmates may leave early**

TRAVERSE CITY — Dozens of inmates could walk away early from jail within the next few days because of continued overcrowding at the Grand Traverse County Jail.

By Thursday, the jail will have exceeded its 149-inmate capacity for a week, Sheriff Scott Fewins said. Under state law, the county will have to declare a jail overcrowding "emergency" for the first time in almost a decade.

The county forestalled a similar problem 13 months ago by releasing a dozen jail inmates the day before the declaration requirement kicked in.

There were 157 prisoners in the jail Tuesday, with another 29 inmates from Grand Traverse lodged in the Charlevoix County Jail.

Depending on how authorities handle the jail emergency, 15 to 50 inmates could be released early to ease overcrowding.

OCT. 2**County withdraws plans**

TRAVERSE CITY — County road officials are withdrawing plans for the Hartman-Hammond bridge and road corridor to develop a revised proposal they hope will satisfy environmental regulators.

The road commission on Wednesday agreed to withdraw an application for state wetland construction permits that was pending before the state Department of Environmental Quality.

The re-alignment will include moving the route north of the current location from U.S. 31 and Hartman Road to avoid the wetland area around the headwaters of Jack's Creek, officials said.

That location was specifically cited by environmental regulators in their objections to the current proposal.

The county will submit its revised application later this fall in an effort to resolve environmental concerns raised by various state and federal oversight agencies. That likely pushes a DEQ

decision on the project into early 2004.

OCT. 3**One brother found guilty**

GRAND RAPIDS — One of two brothers facing the federal death penalty in the drug-related slaying of a Kalkaska County man was found guilty Thursday.

Michael Ostrander, 25, was convicted on all three counts of the federal indictment: conspiracy with intent to distribute narcotics, murder in connection to drug trafficking and murder in connection to a violent crime, said an official with the clerk's office at U.S. District Court in Grand Rapids.

Ostrander and his brother, 29-year-old Robert Ostrander, were charged in the death of Hansle Andrews. Acting on a tip, FBI agents found the 22-year-old victim's body in July 2001, buried about 6 feet deep in a heavily wooded area of the Manistee National Forest.

Robert Ostrander's trial is scheduled to begin Nov. 17.

OCT. 4**Judge may yet be ousted**

TRAVERSE CITY — Some state legislators are considering invoking a Constitutional provision to oust suspended 86th District Court Judge Thomas Gilbert from office.

State Sen. Michelle McManus, R-Lake Leelanau, was among three legislators who signed a letter to Gilbert on Friday that asked him to answer a series of questions regarding his marijuana use.

If and how Gilbert answers those questions, McManus said, could determine whether she pushes ahead with a removal plan.

She said Gilbert has 30 days to answer the questions or "we will find it necessary to introduce a resolution for removal from your judgeship."

Also signing the letter were state Rep. Ken Bradstreet, R-Gaylord, and state Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.



Record-Eagle file photo/Jim Bovin

Grape growers reveled in warm weather during October.

OCT. 6**Trap ban hits a snare**

TRAVERSE CITY — The city is pulling up stakes on a proposed animal trapping ban that may have baited the state into a legal challenge.

The proposed ban — including a complete ban on the use of kill traps — that was set for city commission approval tonight is being shelved after the state Department of Natural Resources raised legal questions.

The city attorney's office drew up the trapping ban last month at the commission's direction following a citizen complaint about animal trapping at an eastside residence. The ordinance would have prohibited trapping unless an animal was damaging private property, and required the use of only live traps.

DNR officials had no imme-

diately comment on the proposed ordinance when contacted by the Record-Eagle two weeks ago, saying it would be reviewed by state attorneys. That prompted a letter to city attorneys this week from the DNR saying the proposed trapping ban "is unlawful and contrary to state law."

OCT. 7**Fake gun fakes out officer**

TRAVERSE CITY — A handgun that a teenager held to the head of his friend Saturday afternoon looked so realistic the prank almost prompted a deadly response from police.

Todd Heller, a detective with the Grand Traverse Sheriff's Department, was off duty with his wife at the Circuit City parking lot in Garfield Township, said the situation at first appeared to be a life-or-death emergency. Fortunately, it diffused

before Heller could pull his gun and the 19-year-old Traverse City man hopped into a car with his friend and drove away.

Heller followed and called for backup. When the car was pulled over on South Airport Road, police discovered the gun was a toy that shoots plastic pellets and looks almost identical to a Smith & Wesson .40 caliber handgun.

Grand Traverse Sheriff Scott Fewins said the incident was just the latest in a string of problems police have recently encountered with realistic toy guns.

OCT. 8**Warmth good for vintners**

TRAVERSE CITY — A bitter cold snap in March squeezed this year's grape crop, but there's little whine coming from local vintners.

Grape growers are reveling in a stretch of near-70 degree days they say will boost sugar content in the final stages of ripening.

John Crampton, owner of Willow Vineyards near Suttons Bay, said looming 70 degree weather is "superb."

"That's as good as it gets this year," he said.

The outlook is better now than in early March, when temperatures plunged from the high 30s and low 40s to nearly 20 degrees below zero, killing most of the vines above the snow.

The harsh weather hurt crop volume, but the fruit that grew did well, growers say.

OCT. 9**Animal control salvaged**

TRAVERSE CITY — A scaled-back animal control division is back in Grand Traverse County's 2004 operating budget.

County commissioners this week put the finishing touches on next year's proposed \$33.3 million general fund budget after the board had to deal with the largest budget shortfall in the county's history.

Officials cut more than \$3 million in operational costs, which included elimination of

PLEASE SEE PAGE 49