

SHOE

by Jeff MacNelly



Van Horn toots its own horn

United Press International
VAN HORN — With 17 hotels, a good underground water supply and a proposed \$300,000 civic center, residents of this West Texas town of about 2,800 residents, are embarking on a program to advertise their town, about 120 miles east of El Paso, as the home of good fresh air, wide open spaces and an "out-to-lunch lifestyle."

Van Horn's assets also include rail and truck transportation and a steady supply of labor, said Dr. Hank Shaffer, president of the Van Horn Chamber of Commerce.

"But aside from the economic aspects of Van Horn, this town is just a good place to raise children," he said. "We have a school system with 900 children and just about anything here anyone could want, without all the distractions and disadvantages of a big city."

The Van Horn City Council recently gave the green light to construction of a 6,000-square-foot civic center with two meeting rooms, offices for the Chamber of Commerce and a dining facility to accommodate 297 people.

"We've got a great future here," Schaffer said. "I came here from Dallas two years ago because I wanted to live where the air is pure. There's no pollution in Van Horn, and I go for the laid-back, out-to-lunch lifestyle."

Tourism, ranching and mining are the main industries in Van Horn, Schaffer said. The area boasts the largest talc deposits in the world. Limited gas production nearby also adds to the economy, he said.

"We're excited about this civic center," he said. "We know it's not very big, but we figure we can attract meetings from surrounding towns in West Texas. We're on a major east-west highway, Interstate 10, and I can see nothing but growth and progress for our town."

The new center will be financed by the Van Horn City Council's Motel Tax Committee, he said. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 1985.

Editor Larry Simpson of the weekly Van Horn Advocate praised City Council for approving the civic center construction project, noting the building will be paid for with no bonds or tax increases.

"We will have a useful facility that can be used by the entire community and which will attract additional visitors to our community," Simpson wrote in a front page column.

Farmers and ranchers who come into Van Horn from ranches in Culberson County to buy supplies complain of drought conditions for the past several years which has caused some ranchers to sell their herds and move out, Schaffer said.

"We had good rains this spring and the range around here is green again," he said. "We may be over the worst of the drought."

Van Horn ranchers have another reason to be optimistic this year, area promoters said.

The Texas Game and Wildlife Commission is replenishing the wild herds of nearly extinct Big Horn Sheep which once abounded in the nearby mountains.

"A favorite of big game hunters, the elusive sheep may be so plentiful in a few years, the commission may permit a limited hunting season for the animals," officials said.

Hunting is one of the city's winter-time attractions. Deer and antelope are plentiful in the area. Ranchers pick up extra cash by allowing hunters to use their property.

Breakaway utility poles set for tryouts on roads

United Press International
COLLEGE STATION — About 2,000 people die each year from injuries they receive when their vehicles hit utility poles, but preliminary tests show that breakaway poles may save some of those lives, a researcher here said Tuesday.

The experimental wooden poles should get their first highway tests within a year in three states, said Dr. Don Ivey of the Texas Transportation Institute, which is headquartered at Texas A&M.

Ivey said the Federal Highway Administration, which will conduct the tests, has not yet decided which states will take part. The target states should be selected within a few months, he said.

But crash tests conducted at Texas A&M last week already showed that the breakaway pole performed as designed when struck by a vehicle, he said.

When hit, the pole slips free at its base, rotates about the knee or hinge connection to the electric lines and settles to the ground after the automobile passes underneath, leaving the utility lines intact.

Ivey said the breakaway poles should perform safely when hit by cars or trucks going from 20 to 60 mph.

About 100 of the utility poles, designed to prevent deaths and injuries when hit by vehicles, will be demonstrated in the test states, Ivey said.

"We hope the demonstration projects will set a precedent in the field so that utility companies will be aware of a safety treatment for selected poles in critical areas," Ivey said.

Breakaway poles are designed using some of the same concepts TTI researchers used many years ago to develop the popular breakaway signposts for highways and freeways.

The public should not anticipate seeing breakaway wooden utility poles everywhere, Ivey said.

"It wouldn't be economically feasible to do this to every utility pole," he said. "With the use of cost effectiveness and accident frequency techniques, a company can determine which areas should have a safety treatment such as this."

Ivey said there can be a cost savings for the utility company using breakaway poles. The savings would come from the reuse of the pole and the ease of restoring a pole that has been struck.

To reinstall the pole, a company would have to lift it up with a crane and remove the knee brace straps. The transmission lines are still intact, so the pole can simply be set back into place and bolted to the base plate. Then, the upper knee brace straps would be replaced and the pole restored.

Timber, range fires aggravated by winds

United Press International
HELENA, Mont. — Gusting winds pushed range and timber fires out of control in at least 20 locations across Montana Tuesday, destroying 30 homes and threatening hundreds of others in what the governor described as the worst such disaster in 10 years.

No injuries were reported, although at least 107,000 acres had been blackened in 16 separate fires, authorities said.

Hundreds of people were evacuated from their homes and others were told to be prepared for possible relocation.

Montana Gov. Ted Schwinden called it the "worst fire situation in a decade." Conditions deteriorated Tuesday, Schwinden said, adding that Montana urgently needed trained firefighters from other states. The Federal Emergency Management Agency agreed late Monday to direct more firefighters from outside Montana to the state.

About 200 National Guard members were assigned to support duties at various fires, Schwinden said, with up to 90 military vehicles also in use in the firefighting effort.

Winds gusting to 30-40 mph propelled flames across treetops and under-dry grass while preventing, in

many cases, the use of retardant bombers and helicopters.

"It's up again today," said John Gibson of the Interagency Fire Center in Billings, referring to the wind.

The two largest fires became one Tuesday, mushrooming to 50,000 acres in the Bull Mountains between Roundup and Billings, in south-central Montana. It was near Roundup that 30 ranch-type homes, scattered in the rugged hills, were destroyed.

Officials dubbed the Bull Mountain blazes the Goulding Creek and Hawk Creek fires. They had scorched 20,000 and 30,000 acres of timber and grass before they became one.

An 8,000-acre fire 20 miles north of Helena, the state capital, threatened rural residential areas and led to home evacuations Monday.

Officials in northwest Montana evacuated two fire areas, setting up Red Cross evacuation centers in Kalispell and at a rural school in the Swan Valley, not far from Glacier National Park.

About 400 to 500 people were told to leave their homes because of the 12,000-acre Houghton Creek Fire west of Kalispell and the 2,000-acre Red Owl Fire southeast of Kalispell.

U.S. Highway 2, between Kalispell and Libby, was closed because of the Houghton fire.

On the other side of Glacier Park, along its eastern edge, more than 1,000 firefighters worked to control the Napi Peak Fire on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation. That blaze destroyed at least one mountain cabin while blackening 3,500 acres of heavy timber in extremely rugged terrain.

"We can't stand to have any more fire up here," said Bill Bishop of the Bureau of Land Management.

Other major fires getting attention from several state and federal agencies included the Mount Centennial Fire, which had consumed 12,800 acres in north-central Montana; the 11,500-acre Murray Ranch Fire, in the Pine Hills of southeast Montana, and the 3,000-acre Kirby Fire, south of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, also in the southeastern part of the state.

"We're tracking 16 major fires," said spokesman Gibson from the Billings fire center. He said that although crews have lines around two or three fires, "No one is being optimistic" enough to call any of them contained or controlled.

A storm blowing down from Canada was pushing high winds into the state for the third day today and authorities, hampered by equipment and manpower shortages, feared the perilous situation would grow worse.

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