



Mayor Jeff McBirnie



Deputy Mayor Travis Watt

THERE'S A NEW MAYOR IN TOWN

By Katie Thompson

At the January 7, 2025, Town Council meeting, Jeff McBirnie was elected as the 2025 Mayor of West Yellowstone. The Town Council selects the mayor each year from among its members. Travis Watt, who served as mayor for the past three years, will serve as Deputy Mayor in 2025.

McBirnie grew up in West Yellowstone and attended school here before leaving for college, where he met his wife, Karin. The couple pursued careers in Washington, with Jeff working as a band instructor. Eventually, they decided it was time to return to West Yellowstone. Soon after his return, McBirnie purchased Pete's Pizza on Canyon Street, becoming a local business owner.

TOWN COUNCIL REVIEWS 2025 PRIORITIES, EVENT PERMITS AT FEBRUARY 5TH MEETING

The West Yellowstone Town Council met on February 4, 2025, to discuss key priorities for the year and review applications for upcoming events and business licenses.

Among the topics covered, the Council held a public hearing on a conditional use application for Quantum Print & Stitch, LLC, a home-based business. The application was reviewed for compliance with zoning regulations, including potential impacts on noise and traffic. The council approved the resolution.

The Council also approved a request from the organizers of the Wild West Winter Block Party to amend the event's insurance requirements. The proposal included replacing the \$500,000 bond requirement with a cancellation insurance policy covering up to \$100,000 and reducing the general liability coverage from \$5 million to \$3 million.

Continued on page 2



WEST YELLOWSTONE SCHOOL UPDATE: JANUARY WRAP-UP & WHAT'S AHEAD

We survived the month of January, which is usually one of the tougher months for us here at the school due to the short days, cold temperatures, state assessments, the semester change, and the prevalence of illnesses. We have two and a half weeks left for this round of testing, after which most students will have a break until April.

The JH Boys' Basketball team has two weeks left in their season, and the Nordic Ski Team has been busy competing in and out of town, with races at the Rendezvous Trails this weekend. The High School Basketball teams have one more home game on February 13, where we will honor the senior competitors for all winter sports, followed by the alumni game. The District Basketball Tournament will be held from February 20-22, and the Divisional Basketball Tournament will take place the following week, from February 27 to March 1. Please note that there will be no school on any of these dates.

We will soon begin working on next year's school calendar. I will be sending out a survey to gather parent feedback on the days off for the basketball tournaments and the evening Parent-Teacher Conference format, so please keep an eye out for that in the coming weeks.

For the most up-to-date sports schedules and other important information, please check our website at wolverine.life. You can also download our school app by searching for West Yellowstone Wolverines and looking for our Wolverine logo in your app store. As always, feel free to reach out to us with any questions.

Respectfully,
Kevin Flanagan



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THERE'S A NEW MAYOR IN TOWN : FEBRUARY 5TH TOWN COUNCIL MEETING RECAP *continued from page 1*

Council members adopted their top priorities for 2025.

Primary priorities:

- 1. Complete started/ongoing 2024 projects**
 - Budgeted CIP projects
 - 80 acres zoning map updates (late winter 2025)
 - 80 Acres community housing meetings (Jan/Feb 2025)
 - Mammoth Room plan
- 2. Water rights/Water well**
 - Review Water and Sewer Rates/connection fees to ensure they are appropriate for current and future needs.
 - TD&H and Deb Stephenson will be working with Staff on agreements, timeline and budget for water rights and a new water well
- 3. Growth Policy review**
 - Growth Policy last reviewed 2017
 - Planning Board to review in spring 2025 and make a recommendation to the Town Council
- 4. 80 Acres planning**
 - The Town Council should adopt an attainable housing strategy/80 acres development plan
 - Coordination with housing groups and developers to issue Housing RFP
 - Subdivision planning
 - Infrastructure planning
- 5. Cemetery expansion project**
 - MOU to outline process with Stinnett's (spring 2025)
 - Forest Service Access
 - Budget for land purchase and possible land trade
- 6. Parks and Trails Master Plan**
 - Parks and Recreation Board met last fall to begin process of updating a Parks Master Plan.
 - Consider Community input on projects
 - The in-Town trail design for the Shortline Trail was approved by the Town Council last fall.
 - Trail planning process estimated to begin in February/March.
- 7. Parking ordinance review**
 - When the Zoning Code was updated in 2024, only minor changes were proposed to the Parking Ordinance.
 - The Planning Board recommended that section of the code be revisited in 2025

Secondary Priorities include:

- 1. Support the work of the Advisory Boards and community partners on small projects for future consideration.**
- 2. Resort Tax Ordinance review**
- 3. Deputy Clerk/Permit Technician position**
- 4. Improved community communications/information sharing**
- 5. Review Advisory boards**
- 6. Town Policy Manual update/revisions**
- 7. County-wide EMS**
- 8. SFE Calculator Annual Review**

Additionally, the Council approved Resolution No. 815, which establishes a process for allowing cash payments in lieu of required parking spaces. The resolution aims to provide businesses with more flexibility in meeting parking regulations.

The meeting concluded with staff reports and updates on various town projects.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES WANTED

Contribute to the Best of West Digest!

Guidelines:

- Word count: minimum 250- maximum 650
- We prefer an image to go along with the stories.
- Article Due Dates: The 15th of every month
- Email articles to: admin@thebestofwestdigest.com

We retain the right to edit articles, submission does not always guarantee inclusion.



BOYS & GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL TEAMS ADVANCE TO DIVISION TOURNEY

The high school boys and girls basketball teams each took second place and will both advance to the Western C Divisional Tournament February 26 - March 1 in Butte. You can view these games on the NFHS Network app with a required subscription.

More info and race registration at:
WWW.SKIRUNBIKEMT.COM
More info and race registration at:

EVENT PERMITTED BY AND HELD ON CUSTER GALLATIN NATIONAL FOREST

SWIX, MADSHUS, BLIZ, YOKO, and other sponsors are listed at the bottom.



LOCAL COMMUNITY MEMBER DECORATES THE WHITE HOUSE FOR CHRISTMAS

By Katie Thompson

Christmas is the happiest time of year for so many people. This Christmas it was an extremely happy time of year for Gayle Gavagan. After a friend's encouragement, Gayle decided to apply to decorate the White House for Christmas. It is rare to be selected your first year of application, but she was! This comes as no surprise, when you hear of all of Gayle's life adventures being an interior designer and with her recent retirement of being the Regional Visual Merchandise Manager for Yellowstone General Stores. She was able to recognize her passion and her talent at an early age and has put years of hard work towards her creative projects.

Around Thanksgiving, Gayle left West Yellowstone and flew to Washington D.C. to volunteer several days to help decorate the White House for Christmas 2024. "A Season of Peace and Light" was the theme selected by First Lady Jill Biden. Gayle was impressed how nothing goes untouched to make sure it shows pure Christmas Spirit.

When she arrived, she was assigned with her group that focused on certain areas and certain projects within the White House. No phones were allowed until the theme was announced to reduce the possibility of the decorations to be leaked prior to First Lady Jill Biden's announcement. It was surprising to know that they try to reuse and recycle as many Christmas decorations as possible, year after year. Also, another item that was found as surprising was with the White House being a historical building, structures had to be built to hang the decorations since no tool could be used to hang directly from the walls/ceilings itself.

Gayle reports that one of her favorite decorations was this tree that they decorated where children send in ornaments to hang on the tree. She said reading the stories and seeing their faces was sweet and it's always a fun way to view Christmas through the eyes of a child.

It takes an entire team to build something so magnificent. At one point, a decoration what brought out from the back room and Gayle noticed it wasn't very magical, so her brain immediately started to go to work on how to brighten it up, but as soon as they plugged it in, she was blown away. She hadn't realized there was a team that she didn't even see that had been working on decorations a week before she even arrived. There was at least one individual represented from each state of the United States. Gayle truly understands the power of collaboration, so not only was she willing to put in the hard work, the time, and the volunteerism to decorate the White House, she was able to make lifelong friends from the adventure.

After the decorating was complete, Gayle was invited to meet First Lady Jill Biden and attend the ceremony where First Lady Jill Biden released the theme for Christmas 2024. People were then able to come and be the first of millions of visitors to see the hard work of the volunteers.

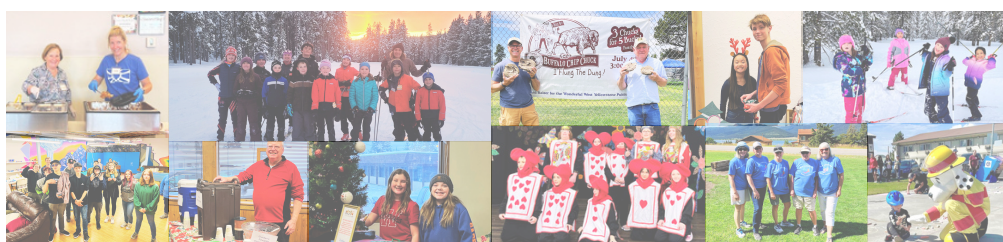
When asked if she would participate in this adventure again for next Christmas season, she couldn't get the word "YES!" out any faster. I wish I had the correct words to share her joy and excitement when she tells of her tales at the White House this past Christmas season so if you see her, I highly recommend listening to some of her favorite memories. Gayle, thank you for sharing your story with us all.



Photo Courtesy: Gayle Gavagan

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VIEW VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES HERE:
WWW.WESTYELLOWSTONEFOUNDATION.ORG/VOLUNTEER



Pictured left to right: Liz Roos, Mike Gavagan, Melisa Darnell and Officer Sosa

Photo courtesy: West Yellowstone Foundation

COMMUNITY RALLIES TO SUPPORT WOLVERINE CARE FUND AT JANUARY BASKETBALL GAMES

By Carrie Coan

On January 10, the West Yellowstone School gym was filled with more than just the sounds of basketballs hitting the court. The Wolverine Care Fund, managed by the West Yellowstone Foundation, hosted its second annual fundraiser during the basketball games between West Yellowstone and Manhattan Christian. The event served as a heartfelt reminder of the community's resilience and commitment to fostering a safer future for its youth.

The Wolverine Care Fund was established at the request of Liz Roos, a dedicated mother to a student in the same graduating class as Alex Hurley. Alex, whose life was tragically cut short, would have been set to graduate high school in 2026. In his honor, the Wolverine Care Fund has taken on the mission of creating a safe and supportive community through education, prevention, and actionable change.

This year's event built upon the success of the inaugural fundraiser held in January 2024. Attendees gathered for an evening of exciting basketball action, connection, and shared purpose. Families, friends, and regional supporters united to contribute to the Fund's ongoing programming while celebrating the spirit of community.

Fundraising Success

Thanks to the generosity of attendees and donors, the 2025 fundraiser raised over \$18,000. This incredible achievement will enable the Wolverine Care Fund to establish an endowment, ensuring long-term support for its abuse prevention efforts. This endowment marks a significant step forward in sustaining the Fund's mission for years to come.

Making a Difference Through Education and Prevention

Funds raised from the event will support the Wolverine Care Fund's impactful programming, which focuses on ending abuse and empowering individuals through knowledge and resources. Highlights of the program include:

- **Abuse Prevention Series:** In December 2024, the Fund organized training sessions to equip the community with tools to recognize and prevent abuse. These included:
 - **Mandatory Reporter Training** for school staff.

- **Bystander Intervention Training** for parents and community members.
- **Teen Bystander Intervention** sessions at the school.
- **Child Abuse: Who is at Risk?** 5:30PM on February 26, 2025, at the Povah Center. This program will provide valuable insights into fostering healthy childhood development and identifying signs of abuse.
- **Future Programming:** The Wolverine Care Fund is planning additional events and initiatives from March to October 2025, with details to be announced.

Honoring Alex's Memory and Building a Safer Future

The fundraiser was a touching tribute to Alex Hurley's legacy. By supporting education and prevention, the Wolverine Care Fund is ensuring that no child in the West Yellowstone community faces the same fate. "This program is about more than just raising funds," said Liz Roos, the Fund's founder. "It's about bringing people together to learn, to act, and to care for one another. Alex's memory fuels our mission to make this community a safer place for all children."

The West Yellowstone Foundation extends its heartfelt gratitude to all who attended, donated, or otherwise supported the event. Together, the community has taken meaningful steps toward ensuring every child's safety and well-being.

As the Wolverine Care Fund continues its vital work, community members are invited to join future events and programs. Let's continue to honor Alex's memory by fostering a culture of care and action—because every child matters.

Their next fundraiser will be held May 1-2, 2025 as they participate in One Valley Community Foundation's Give Big event, which encourages folks to support Gallatin Valley nonprofits through 24 hours of online giving. This year's kick off party will be held on May 1st from 5p-7p at Yellowstone Beer Company and will once again include a Meat Raffle.

For more information about the Wolverine Care Fund and upcoming programming, please visit www.westyellowstonefoundation.org



WEST YELLOWSTONE HOUSING COALITION HOSTS THIRD HOUSING EDUCATION SESSION

On February 11, 2025, community members gathered at the West Yellowstone School Cafeteria for the third installment of the Housing Education Series, hosted by the West Yellowstone Foundation and the local Housing Coalition. The session focused on dedicated funding sources for affordable housing and the potential use of publicly owned land to address the town's housing needs.

Carrie Coan, Executive Director of the West Yellowstone Foundation, opened the meeting with an update on the town's ongoing 80-acre project. She emphasized the critical role the project will play in alleviating the community's housing challenges once the wastewater treatment plant is completed, completion scheduled for Spring 2026. Coan encouraged attendees to participate in upcoming sessions dedicated to the project and to provide input on topics they would like to see addressed. The dates have not been set for these sessions yet.

Nathan Bilyeu, a public finance attorney, presented case studies on funding strategies and the use of publicly owned land for housing development. He highlighted Bozeman's Hidden Creeks Development, which targeted specific income brackets using a shared vision approach, and Fort Benton's model, which facilitated housing development without income-specific restrictions.

Bilyeu detailed several funding mechanisms available for affordable housing, including loan programs from the Montana Board of Housing and the new Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancement (C-PACE) program, which now includes multifamily developments. He also discussed the benefits of a 2% interest rate reduction for large developments through Montana's flexible financing programs, which have no statutory restrictions on their use, allowing communities to customize solutions.

The discussion also covered possible local financing tools, including tax increment financing (TIF) for workforce housing and the use of the 3% resort tax, along with an additional 1% tax for infrastructure. Bilyeu explained how these funds could support essential infrastructure projects, such as water, sewer, and wastewater improvements, to facilitate long-term housing affordability. He further noted the potential for conduit bond issuances, which allow the town to serve as an intermediary for financing affordable housing projects.

Attendees also learned about the Helena Housing Trust Fund, which requires a \$5 match for every \$1 received, with have certain exemptions for shelters and temporary housing. The trust fund follows a sliding scale of affordability, with requirements spanning from 20 to 35 years.

Coan concluded the session by discussing NeighborWorks Montana's Gallatin Housing Impact Fund (GHIF). GHIF was created to preserve and expand housing solutions in Gallatin County. Investments from local financial institutions, businesses, and individuals are pooled into a fund that can provide the low-interest flexible financing that is needed for affordable homes to be preserved and created.

She also announced upcoming educational opportunities, including a home buyer education session and additional town-led discussions on the 80-acre project, dates to be determined.

For more information, community members are encouraged to contact the West Yellowstone Foundation and stay engaged in the town's housing initiatives.



LIBRARY EVENTS: FEBRUARY

Tuesdays 8:00-9:00am: English Class
Tuesdays 3:15-4:15pm: Lego Club
Wednesdays 11:00am-12:00pm: Toddler & Pre-K Storytime
Thursdays 9:00-10:00am: Spanish Class
Thursdays 3:00-4:00pm: Tech Hour
Fridays 8:00-9:00am: English Class
Fridays 3:30-6:00pm: Board Game Meetup

March 1, 11:00-1:00pm: Craft with Cops

Check the library website for March events!
<https://westyellowstonepubliclibrary.org/>

LIBRARY PICK OF THE MONTH

When the Moon Hatched by Sarah A. Parker



When the Moon Hatched by Sarah A. Parker is a dark yet whimsical high fantasy filled with magic, dragons, and romance, following assassin Raeve as she navigates war, tragedy, and a mysterious stranger who may change everything—pick up your copy today!



Photo courtesy: Lindsey Charlton

MARCH SENIOR LUNCH

Anyone can join the senior lunch crew from 11am-12pm on Wednesdays & Fridays at the Povah Community Center for a delicious lunch prepared by Chef Scott Fulton. Salad bar available. On Fridays, fresh vegetables and fruit are available for seniors to take home. Cost: \$5.00 for seniors, \$7.00 for all others

MENU

Mar 5: Sloppy Joes
Mar 7: Fried Steak
Mar 12: Chicken Alfredo
Mar 14: Taco Bar
Mar 19: Spaghetti
Mar 21: Chicken Tendies
Mar 26: Meatloaf
Mar 28: Chicken Fajitas

FRIDAY

MARCH 7



LANCO

SATURDAY

MARCH 8



Corey Kent

WITH JD CLAYTON



WITH DYLAN SCHNEIDER



OPENING TESSY LOU WILLIAMS

OPENING JEFF CROSBY BAND



WILD WEST WINTER BLOCK PARTY

WEST YELLOWSTONE, MONTANA
MARCH 7&8, 2025

SUPPORTED BY WEST YELLOWSTONE BUSINESSES

ALL AGES

4:00pm Gates for VIP
5:00pm General Admission
2 Day VIP Pass: \$225
Single Day VIP Pass: \$125
2 Day GA Pass: \$85
Single Day GA Pass: \$50

SCAN HERE



BUSCH LIGHT Happy Dail Tito's Handmade Vodka SK

WEST YELLOWSTONE FOUNDATION
is the non-profit beneficiary organization of the concerts.
Donate directly at: westyellowstonefoundation.org

Winter Fun

WEST YELLOWSTONE • MT



Winter Events

Nov 16	Ski Swap
Nov 23-30	Yellowstone Ski Festival
Nov 26	Try It Biathlon
Nov 27	Biathlon
Nov 30	5K Fun Ski Race
Dec 13	Moonlight Ski & Snowshoe
Dec 21	Kids N Snow
Dec 21	Spam Cup Classic XC Ski Race & Biathlon
Jan 4	Kids N Snow
Jan 10	Moonlight Ski & Snowshoe
Jan 11	Free Ski Day and Try It Biathlon
Jan 12	Spam Cup and Biathlon
Feb 1	Kids N Snow
Feb 7	Moonlight Ski & Snowshoe
Feb 15	Taste of the Trails
Mar 1	Kids N Snow
Mar 8	Rendezvous Ski Race

2024-2025

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It's Tax Time!

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MEAT RAFFLE

May 1st, 5p-7p
Yellowstone Beer Company

How does a meat raffle work?
There are two rounds. You can buy tickets for each round.

Each round will have 5 meat prizes, 5 drink/treat prizes and cash prize(s).

1 ticket = \$1
7 tickets = \$5
15 tickets = \$10

This event is organized by the West Yellowstone Foundation in collaboration with local nonprofits.

YOU'LL BE ENTERED INTO A PRIZE RAFFLE JUST FOR SHOWING UP! NO PURCHASE OR DONATION REQUIRED!

WWW.GIVEBIGGV.ORG

ALL PROCEEDS WILL BE SPLIT EQUALLY AMONG THE PARTICIPATING WEST YELLOWSTONE NONPROFITS