

The Tombstone Epitaph.

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134 YEARS IN THE TOWN TOO TOUGH TO DIE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2014

Tourism boom declines



David Weissman / The Tombstone Epitaph

Tourists watch the daily Gunfight at the O.K. Corral on a sunny February afternoon.

Economy affects some business owners

By David Weissman
The Tombstone Epitaph

As the tourist season begins in Tombstone, business owners and shop workers have mixed feelings about the effect of the economy on commerce in the town. “This year is the slowest year I’ve had for snowbirds in our history,” said Sue Sinsley, co-owner of the Stampede RV Park in Tombstone. “I think the economy is what kept them from coming when they could come,” Sinsley said. “I know I’ve talked to three different people that normally come here every year, and they were antsy because of the price of gas and all that kind of

stuff.” Sinsley also said while the RV park was almost entirely booked for the rest of the season, most of the tourists who had booked were from overseas, as opposed to visitors from the East Coast or Midwest. Kyle Bengel, who runs the Silver Strike Winery with his parents, doesn’t believe that his business will be affected. “I think the people that frequent my establishment are not your hat and T-shirt crowd,” Bengel said, “So the ones looking for the free family day walking on the boardwalk, a sour economy may affect them.” “The reality is that wine is a different

market than a lot of other stores in town, and our clientele is pretty consistent year-round,” he added. “I can’t guarantee what it’ll do to the other shops in town.” Bengel said many Silver Strike visitors come to Tombstone and the surrounding areas for wineries, as opposed to families and retirees who come to town for the history and Western atmosphere. “There’s a lot of good wine within 50 miles of here,” he said. “You drive in a 50-mile radius and there’s a ton of wineries,” he said. “I feel that we’re drawing in a lot of our own crowd, not just picking up what the town brings in.”

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Tombstone toys with idea to raise water pipeline

By Courtney Johnson
The Tombstone Epitaph

The latest chapter in Tombstone’s longstanding disagreement over water right-of-ways could be uplifting — literally. Mayor Steven Schmidt said he is considering a plan to lift a 132-year-old pipeline that currently sits 300 feet beneath the San Pedro River to a level above the river. “It (the pipeline) sits there and corrodes under the river,” Schmidt said. Tombstone’s water supply is dependent upon the pipeline that runs from the Huachuca Mountains through the San Pedro River to town. The part of the pipe that runs underneath the San Pedro has been deteriorating over the years,

and is part of the reason the town put together a \$1 million bond issue to pay for repairs. The city can pump water from the San Pedro River as a back up plan, but Schmidt does not want to do that unless it is absolutely necessary. “We’re not trying to upset anybody,” he said. The only years that Tombstone has ever pumped water from the San Pedro River were from 1977 to 1981, after a fire in the Huachuca Mountains. The pipeline has been in need of repairs for years, but the U.S. Forest Service, which now owns the land the pipeline runs through, will not allow the town to make any repairs with mechanical equipment, even though the



Photo courtesy of Robin Silver Photography

The pipeline that runs under the San Pedro River has posed many problems for the city of Tombstone. The City’s latest plan includes raising the pipeline above the river.

town has had the legal right-of-way since 1880. “It’s an issue of right-of-ways,” Schmidt said. “Those rights never expire. This city probably has the strongest water rights in the West.” Back in 1880, the Huachuca

Water Department, a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior, declared Tombstone the owner of the pipeline. The town has only been able to do temporary repairs, like replacing certain areas of the pipe with plastic. However,

the plastic cannot sustain the water pressure and blows up, Schmidt said. The San Pedro is considered the only undammed, free-flowing river in America, said

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Ashley Grove / The Tombstone Epitaph

Tombstone Marshall cars sit parked outside the Marshall’s Office in Tombstone.

County taking over off-hours dispatch services for city

By Maci Hidalgo
The Tombstone Epitaph

As of the first of February, any phone calls to the Marshal’s Office outside of normal business hours are being sent to dispatchers at the Cochise County Sheriff’s Office in Bisbee. The city hopes the move will save money needed to hire another deputy, or possibly two. “It’s expensive to have someone sit in here 24/7,” said Tombstone’s newly installed Marshal Miller Mitchell. Mitchell said county sheriff’s dispatchers now answer Tombstone emergency calls outside of normal business hours and on weekends. However, the move won’t disrupt response times or service to the city. “This community knows everyone here. They can call over here and know them on a first-name basis,” Marshal Mitchell said. “It’s

a little smaller town flavor and that’s what we have to maintain. It’s a luxury they have come to expect and it’s something they won’t be happy about losing.” Before the change, city dispatchers responded to all non-life-threatening calls. Tombstone Mayor Stephen Schmidt said the county had handled the city’s after-hours dispatch calls in the past. If the dispatch change is successful, the city will save enough money to hire a full-time deputy and possibly a part-time deputy to fill out Mitchell’s department. The city now has four deputies, but one is on sick leave. Schmidt said the department should have five deputies to patrol the city. The county’s dispatch center in Bisbee will be moved to Sierra Vista, courtesy of Sheriff Mark Dannels having been awarded over \$1 million in federal grant money for sheriff’s office assistance.

Cuts may threaten Tombstone records

By Alex P. Wainwright
The Tombstone Epitaph

The Tombstone City Council wants to get out of its contract with the Foundation for the Tombstone Archives and move the city’s historic archives back to City Hall. But first, it must have a temperature-controlled storage area that will help the city preserve the documents, many of which are already damaged with mold. The council has been discussing plans to terminate the foundation’s contract since last November. Under the contract, the foundation reimburses the city for the \$32,000 salary paid to a full-time archives manager. Councilman Herbert Linn said the foundation owed

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Swarm of the Yellow Jackets: Boys and girls basketball start state tournament Page 4

Keepin’ it Cowboy: Western music fest returns for the 12th year



Anthony Victor Reyes / The Tombstone Epitaph

Ben T. Traywick looks through his archives at Red Marie’s Bookstore.

Historian concerned with protecting Tombstone’s history

By Anthony Victor Reyes
The Tombstone Epitaph

He created the first launched submarine missiles. He starred in international films. He even served in World War II. But there is one job that made Ben T. Traywick into one of the most important people in recent Tombstone history: He is the keeper of the town’s history. And he has done it for 39 years. “History is Tombstone’s biggest asset,” said the 86-year-old Traywick. “If we don’t protect our history, we are going to be a town full of old people with high utility rates.” Traywick retired as the town historian in 2010, thinking that the job would be carried on. But the person appointed to replace him quickly left office and the town never officially filled the position. Despite this, he’s never lost his passion for preserving the past. “My worry is, and always has been, that we are sitting

on a goldmine, and some of the people refuse to exploit it,” said Traywick. “We need to turn this town to cater to the tourists. The only thing we have to sell is our history.” Meanwhile, the Tombstone Archives has been facing closure after falling into financial conflict with the city. Council Member Herbert Linn of Ward Four said the Tombstone Archives are close to \$10,000 in debt. “If we close the archives completely and move the records we could get one full-time deputy and two part-time deputies, or we could hire two public works employees,” said Linn. “Both of those departments are running short handed. We have to take care of water. We have to take care of police. We have to take care of sewer.” Although the Tombstone City Council may decide to close the archives, they plan to move the documents and have the city clerk handle them. Traywick and the City Council both understand that tourism and history is very important to the city, but Traywick

is worried that the history of Tombstone will no longer be emphasized. “Nancy (Sosa, the current historic records manager) is a very knowledgeable person about Tombstone history. She is very good with dealing with the tourists,” said Traywick. “I don’t know why, but it seems we have people who are trying to do away with that, and we need it. In some measure it replaces what I have been doing, and it gives people a place to ask things about the town.” Since Traywick has opened his bookstore in 1970, he along with his family, the Love family, who owns many of the historical Tombstone buildings, and the Tombstone Wild Bunch, a non-profit historical re-enactment group, has proven that tourism is one of the most important factors for Tombstone’s economy. Basically, they have been putting Tombstone back on the map. “(There was) nothing being done to attract tourists (until) we started the show at O.K. Corral, then a lot more people started coming into town,” said

Traywick. “In just a few years we doubled the amount of people who came into the town.” Traywick said he believes that Tombstone’s history may be more important than just attracting tourists. It is about preserving the truth. Traywick said he has published over 1,700 articles, 38 books and starred in 277 films about Tombstone. “We made the first film for ‘Walt Disney’s (Wonderful World of Color),” said Traywick. “We made three films for them in a row about ‘Deacon, the High Noon Dog’.” They raised over \$200,000 for local Tombstone charities with their films alone. Among the historic distortions: the town’s population has been inflated, with some putting the number beyond 100,000. Traywick said the population never topped 6,000. “We had 245 Chinese here,” said Traywick. “Now some of the people say we had 100,000 people and 30,000 Chinese. Anybody with an IQ over 30 can see there ain’t enough room to hold that many people.”

ARCHIVE

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\$9,000 to the city as of last November; that amount has increased to \$12,000, said Councilman Armando Villa, who also volunteers for the foundation. City Attorney P. Randall Bays says that the city has no legal provision to terminate the contract early because the city never established a payment plan. He recommended that the council keep the contract in place until Nov. 30 and figure out how much the foundation owes before it sends out a past-due bill. Bays said the city should then follow up with a lawsuit 30 days later if the money has not been reimbursed. “The whole purpose (of the contract) was to rebuild City Hall and to maintain the stored documents and I don’t see that happening without being reimbursed for funds,” Mayor Stephen Schmidt said. Melanie Sturgeon, director of the Arizona History and Archives Division, offered to store the Tombstone records in state facilities if the city does not want to bear the financial responsibility. She also said she was worried that if the city improperly stores the docu-

ments, which have grown fragile with age, they could further deteriorate. City Hall could also be an open door for thieves. The records now are in a building that only the archive manager, Nancy Sosa, can access. At City Hall, access is open to the public “so there is a greater chance of someone being able to take a record from the archives,” Sturgeon said. Some original Tombstone documents can sell for \$6,000 to \$10,000 for a single page from a document like Billy Breckenridge’s handwritten account of the shootout at the O.K. Corral, she said. “One thing is unanimous: that these records are vital to the history of the town and that no one wants to see them leave the city,” Sturgeon said, “Tombstone has its own legend. To keep the record in the city helps keep the legends alive.” “You sell Tombstone with the history of the town,” Sosa added. “In a town that has thrived through myth and legend, the history is the truth. It’s where we can look up what actually happened. It’s our connection with the city.” The City Council will meet in executive session to discuss what it will do with the foundation contract and the archives.

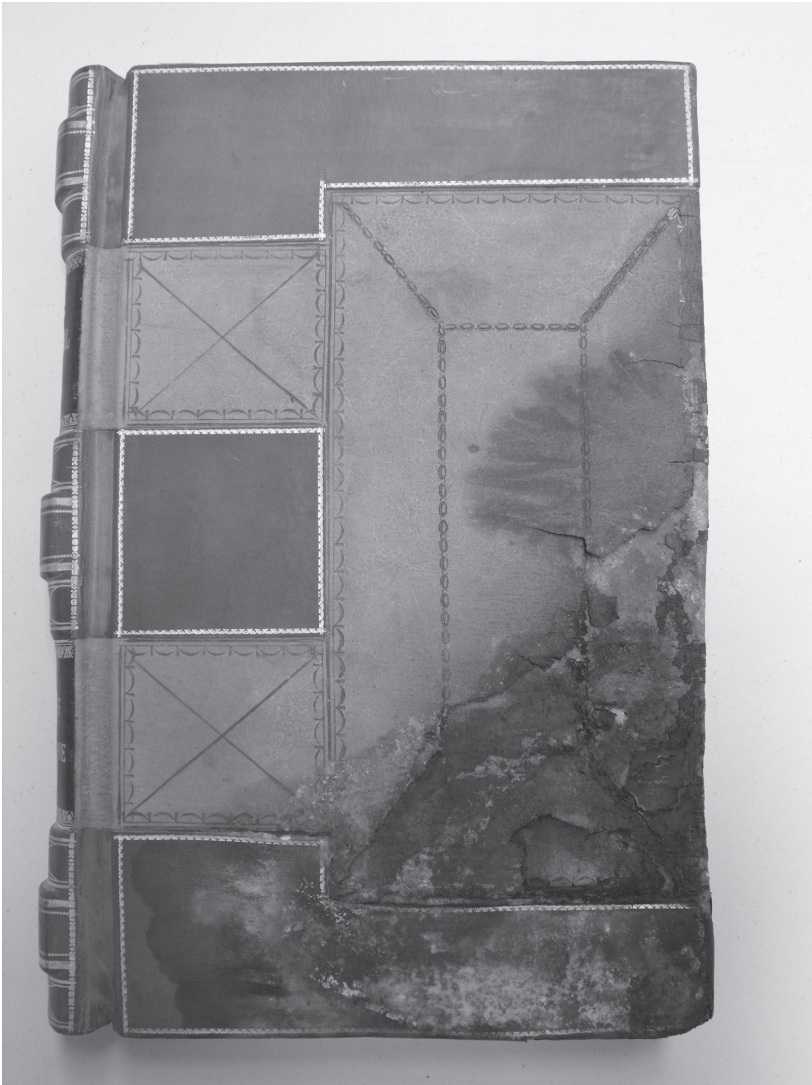


Photo courtesy of Melanie Sturgeon, director of Arizona History and Archives division
Mold spores are embedded throughout this copy of Tombstone’s earliest city ordinance book. The state says many historic documents are at risk of being destroyed.

ECONOMY

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Josh Hawley, who works at the O.K. Corral, said he believes that the economy won’t affect the town in the short term. “I don’t think it’s so much the economy,” Hawley said. “There’s enough people out there in the middle class that can still afford it without a problem. If they’re looking for a cheaper vacation, if the economy was that bad, they wouldn’t be going to Disneyland either. They’d be coming to Tombstone instead of Disneyland.”

Hawley said, however, that the future economic impact of Obamacare could affect potential visitors’ tourism plans. He feels that penalties for not signing up for the program, which are taken out of tax refunds, as well as monthly costs for insurance could prove to be an economic burden. “If you get on Obamacare, or the Affordable Care Act, whatever you want to call it, you are subject to a \$100 to \$200 to \$300 a month,” Hawley said. “That plays a big role in how much money you have to spend, and people don’t think about that. It’s going to be your daily life, and your vacation time.”



Ashley Grove / The Tombstone Epitaph

Silver Strike Winery says that its buisness isn’t dependent on tourism.

WATER

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Schmidt. Part of the river is dammed in Mexico. “Over the years there’s been a lot of deterioration on the pipe in the water. That’s why we’re putting together this bond,” Schmidt said. Voters approved the \$1 million bond issue last November. Schmidt said he is not sure when the city will see proceeds from that bond. The Center for Biological Diversity’s co-founder Robin Silver wants to preserve the river as much as possible. “The river is very fragile.

It’s one of the world’s phenomena,” Silver said. Silver says that if the infrastructure of the pipes weren’t so leaky, then water wouldn’t be wasted. “We need the water in the river,” he said. If Tombstone has to resort to pumping water out of the San Pedro reservoirs, then they would have to pump that water about nine miles uphill, which Schmidt is trying to avoid. As of right now, getting the pipeline suspended over the river is just a possibility that the town is considering as a way to prevent further damage to that part of the pipeline, and no definite plans have been made.

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