Trunk or treat in Choteau

Above, Margy Corey with St. Joseph’s Catholic Church hands out treats to Audrey Lohrli during Choteau’s first Halloween “trunk or treat” on Main Avenue North, organized by Katie Adams. Below, two little dinosaurs collect treats; Kris Lancaster, who works at Opportunity Bank, has her trunk decked out with a huge spider; and John and Katie Adams hand out treats.

Fairfield Schools receive electric bus grant

By Yvonne Jacobson

The Fairfield Public School system was one of three Montana schools selected to receive funds through the US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Clean School Bus program.

The funding, which came from a bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), will go toward supplying brand new zero-emissions school electric buses and charging stations for school districts of Fairfield, Bigfork, and Claymore.

The exact dollar amount Fairfield is eligible to receive is in a little unclear. The award letter received by the school district on Oct. 25 states that $2,765,000 has been reserved for use from this program to replace seven new electric buses, which is broken down to $2,525,000 for the buses and $140,000 for eligible charging infrastructure.

However, a release from Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana, and EPA received by the Choteau Acantha says the Fairfield district is slated to receive $395,000 on one bus.

Superintendent Dustin Gordon is still sorting through the paperwork and looking for clarification on the rebate amount. He has been in contact with the director of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality for some guidance and help.

“IT was a surprise, but a great opportunity that the district also received a 40-page question and answer section along with a technical assistance platform to continue their research,” Gordon said. Fairfield Schools had not anticipated even being in the running but took the time to do some research and provide their district data.

Gordon explained he approached the board last summer regarding the program announced by the EPA in May for the availability of $500 million for its Clean School Bus Program.

The administration of the program applied for one or two buses along with the charging stations would be worth the time spent applying for the grant. The application process was a collaboration between Gordon, district school nurse Denise Grant and Paul Wilson, the transportation director. The deadline closed in August.

As the new transportation director, the application process was perfectly timed to give Paul the opportunity to familiarize himself with the school district’s fleet of buses,” Gordon said. The Fairfield school district owns 31 buses.

“The school system operates five rural bus routes ranging in distance of 60 to 100 miles per trip. Fairfield has a fleet of seven yellow school buses, along with all of which is fully depreciated and ready to be replaced. During the application process, the district was required to provide information on its entire fleet of yellow school route buses.

Gordon noted the application process considered the school’s distance from an urban area, along with some of their economic financial information.

Gordon also believes selection was regionalized in the state. Gordon emphasized they provided the necessary information for the application, but it was never their decision to select him as the school district’s transportation director.

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Property tax abatement

Commissioners OK graduated tax break for Power distillery

By Melody Martinsen

The Teton County Commissioners on Oct. 27 unanimously approved an application for a property-tax abatement from Parnell Power Mills at 101 Rainbow Ave in Power.

Commission Chairman Joe Delbeke said the commissioners only received one comment during the two-week comment period. He said the Power Public Schools superintendent lent a letter of support for the abatement, saying that the new business will bring jobs and housing to the community.

Montana state law allows people who are new to a region or expanding existing businesses to request a property tax abatement. Under the abatement, the business would pay no property taxes for the first five years, and then would pay 20% of the total assessed value each year through year six times 10.95 at the end of 10 years, which is paying 100% of the property taxes owed.

Abatement applies to town, county and school.