

20 YEARS AGO today

BY NEL BURKETT

The following stories appeared in this publication 20 years ago this week. All stories have been edited for space.

Wind power blows into the valley

by Melissa Ruch

Two local women are hitting the streets, armed with sign-up sheets and information on an alternative means of energy, wind power. Michael Greene and Karen Janssen are spreading the message that locals can avoid burning coal for energy and harness a new energy in their homes.

In November of last year, the Gunnison County Electric Association offered its customers the ability to purchase "green power" for the first time.

"But it was confusing, I think people didn't really understand the opportunity," said Greene. And after learning that only 80 households had signed up for green power, she decided to do something about it. "I knew we could do better than that," she said. So Greene, alongside Janssen, hope to sign up "everyone we talk to," for at least two 100 kilowatt hour blocks of wind power.

GCEA customers can sign up for as many blocks of wind power as they

want, at \$2.50 extra for each block. Today's rates charge households \$6.67 per 100 kilowatt hours of electricity. According to Mark Daily of GCEA, 215 blocks have been purchased over the last year.

Greene and Janssen are committed to signing up "everyone in the valley if we can," said Janssen, by the new year, when GCEA must put in its energy order from Tri-State in Denver. The majority of the basic electricity from Tri-State is from coal or hydroelectric generation. The wind power comes from a wind farm near the Colorado/Wyoming border. Wind power is renewable and inexhaustible and does not emit any pollutants.

But wind power costs more, according to Daily, because less is being purchased and its equipment is new and expensive to install.

"It's very clean here in Crested Butte," said Janssen. "We don't see the hidden costs of cheap energy. All you need to do is drive to Denver to see the smog. We still have to be aware."

Greene and Janssen recently signed up 30 people after a church service in town. They figured that signing up that group at two blocks of wind power each



The final two pieces of Crested Butte's latest affordable housing project, Poverty Gulch, rolled into town recently. PHOTO BY EDWARD STERN

month will eliminate the need to burn 72,000 pounds of coal.

"For some people, it's not a concern. But those things are real and we can make a difference," said Greene.

Daily said Tri-State is currently branching out to alternative energies. Tri-State has a contract to begin purchasing energy generated from landfills, or bio-mass gases in the future.

Arson attempt strikes Marriott

by Edward Stern

The recent string of random crimes continued last week as vandals attempted to blow up a car in the parking garage of the Marriott hotel last Monday night. Mt. Crested Butte police officer Brett Jaros explains, "At about 10:30 a resort employee pulled up and saw that a car was on fire. We then pulled back out, which was a smart thing to do, grabbed a handful of snow and put the fire out."

According to Jaros, the fire that the employee extinguished was caused by someone stuffing a cotton grocery bag into the gas tank of the vehicle and igniting it. "The bag had come from the inside of the car," he says. "It was a random act, but it was an obvious intent to blow up the car."

In addition to attempting to destroy the vehicle and possibly the hotel itself, several other attempts of seemingly random vandalism were also discovered in the garage that night. When they finished their shift two employees discovered nails placed under the tires of their cars. In addition, ski equipment

was stolen from another vehicle that same evening. Jaros says that while the instances were probably connected, they appear to be random acts of vandalism and not premeditated crimes.

"I don't believe that anyone said, 'I'm going to go in there and blow the car up,'" Jaros explains.

Mt. Crested Butte police chief Hank Smith attributes the acts of random vandalism to the accelerated growth in the upper East River valley. "To me this seems like a sign of increasing population," he says.

Crested Butte Mountain Resort senior vice-president of resort operations Scout Walton believes it is a sign of decreasing precipitation in the upper East River Valley.

"I share the general concern that most would feel about the increase of this activity," Walton says. "It is hard to predict why it's happening, but I think if it would snow the problem would be solved. I think people are going stir crazy right now."

Smith says he recognizes the gravity of this crime and he will take appropriate measures.

"This is serious," he says. "This scene had a grave potential for human life. We have physical evidence from the scene and if we have to we're going to go the hard way with this. We'll go to the wall with this."

Nel Burkett is the curator at the Crested Butte Mountain Heritage Museum and enjoys putting the present in the context of history.



A hand-crafted advertisement posted by the Crested Butte Mountain Theater for their December production of *The Frog Prince*. COURTESY PHOTO

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JOSH: SALES@CRESTEDBUTTENNEWS.COM

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