

FIRST DRAFT

Charlie Steen was face of 1950s uranium boom

In March of 1952, things looked bleak for Charlie Steen's dream of finding a rich uranium deposit in the Utah desert. He was essentially broke. He and his family were living in a tarpaper shack in Cisco, Utah, and his wife, M.L., was suffering from pneumonia. Steen owned 12 mining claims in Utah, in the Big Indian District near Moab. And he'd spent the better part of two years begging money for grubstakes, purchasing a small truck-mounted drilling rig to search for uranium deposits. He searched deeper and in different geologic formations than virtually everyone else — whether government geologist or independent prospector. And he was ridiculed for his theories on where uranium could be found.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Four Corners region was crawling with independent prospectors, Geiger counters in hand, searching for uranium deposits.

Beginning in 1948, the recently formed Atomic Energy Commission guaranteed uranium prices and offered other incentives to prospectors as it sought a viable source of domestic uranium for nuclear weapons.

The prospectors sought uranium near the surface, primarily in the Morrison geologic formation.

Steen was convinced that large deposits of uranium lay deeper, at the bottom of anticlines in the Chinle formation. After two years of hauling M.L. and their four sons around southeastern Utah, often living off little more than rabbit or venison, Steen had temporarily tried something different. The family had moved to Tucson, Arizona, and Steen, a college-educated geologist from Texas, earned a living as a carpenter.

But, as spring approached in 1952, M.L. encouraged Charlie to give uranium one more shot. They sold their trailer in Arizona and headed back to Utah, camping along the way. It was near Mexican Hat, Utah, that M.L. caught a cold, which turned into pneumonia, and led to her hospitalization in Grand Junction.

Charlie spent almost all his remaining funds on her medical bills and wondered how he



ANDREW K. STEEN/Creative Commons

Charlie Steen and his Jeep are shown on the day after his discovery of uranium at his Mi Vida claim near Moab, Utah.

would continue.

A friend named Bill McCormick helped him acquire another rig that could drill deeper than Steen's small rig. He also provided money to bulldoze a road to his claims.

Steen's mother, Rosalie Shumaker, sold her possessions in Houston and moved to Cisco to help care for the family and provide financial support.

The family struggled on while Charlie continued to drill, hauling up core samples, looking for the elusive yellow carnotite that signaled uranium. Instead, all he found was dark gray material.

One day in early July, Steen stopped his Jeep at the only gas station at Cisco before heading to Grand Junction. Owner Buddy Cowger was also a uranium prospector, and he happened to have a Geiger counter.

On a whim, Steen told Buddy to aim the Geiger counter at the dark gray core samples in his Jeep.

Buddy did so, and the device chattered like it had found the core of an atom bomb.

Surprised, Steen realized he had recovered a different type

of uranium material — uraninite, or pitchblende — which had not previously been found in the Four Corners.

Additionally, he had proved that his theory on where to find uranium was correct.

The claim where the material was found he had named Mi Vida, Spanish for My Life.

Over the next 30 years, more than \$500 million worth of uranium ore was mined from the Big Indian district by people following Steen's lead.

The Steens went from barely surviving to being fabulously rich. Charlie rejected offers to buy his claims for \$5 million. In a few years, he earned much more than that.

In October of 1952, Steen formed the Utx Exploration Co. with several people he had once worked for in Texas. The company raised funds to mine Mi Vida and nearby claims.

The following year, he and McCormick bought neighboring claims and created a separate company, Standard Uranium Co., with assistance from several New York financiers. Steen also formed a drilling

company with his brother-in-law. Another company was created to build a uranium mill in Moab, the first mill in the region constructed without government financial support.

Charlie, an avid pilot, began to fly around the West, often on little more than a whim — to Salt Lake City, Grand Junction and elsewhere.

He and M.L. built a spectacular home on top of a hill overlooking Moab, which they also called Mi Vida.

They held lavish parties at the house, which attracted state and local politicians. Even movie stars, such as Henry Fonda, occasionally stopped by when they were filming a picture nearby.

Charlie dipped his toe in politics, serving a term as a Utah state senator from 1959 to 1969.

But problems developed. There were disputes with Steen's original partners in Utx, and it cost Steen several million dollars to buy them out.

And despite his personal reluctance, the Moab mill was eventually sold to Atlas Minerals Corp.

By 1962, the Steens had sold their interest in the Mi Vida mine and other claims, as well as the mill. They left Moab and moved to Reno, Nevada.

A seven-year battle with the IRS, ending in 1975, left them broke once more. The Steens lost their Reno mansion and most other property.

The post-war uranium boom began to decline in 1960. The Atomic Energy Commission found it had more than enough uranium on hand.

By the 1970s, there was a developing uranium market for nuclear electric plants, which would ebb and flow over the next 40 years.

Charlie Steen died in 2006. The Steens' house in Moab is now home to the Sunset Grill restaurant.

The mill has been closed, and its tailings are being moved. Recreation long ago replaced uranium as the economic driver in Moab.

Information for this column came from the Museum of Moab's Canyon Legacy magazine, Winter 2016 edition, which includes articles by his son, Mark Steen, and others. Also, from "Charlie Steen's Mi Vida," by Maxine Newell. And the National Mining Hall of Fame's page on Charlie Steen, mininghalloffame.org/inductee/steen.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.

2017 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — The Joint Budget Committee has completed its work on the budget bill for the 2017-18 fiscal year, which begins July 1. That begins a two-week journey through the rest of the Colorado Legislature that starts in the GOP-controlled Senate, where senators are hoping to start debating it on the floor by Tuesday, though Wednesday is more likely.

During that time, they will try to amend it to their individual liking, but ultimately all of that will be undone when it gets sent to the Democratic-controlled House by week's end.

■ **Today:** The House Finance Committee is to take on HB1242, the bill that would send to the voters a proposed sales tax hike to pay for transportation projects.

■ **Tuesday:** The House Health, Insurance & Environment Committee is to hear HB1080, a measure designed to protect in-state medical suppliers of durable medical equipment from out-of-state suppliers of such products.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Education Committee is to debate HB1258 that would rename the Delta-Montrose Technical College to Technical College of the Rockies.

■ **Thursday:** The House Judiciary Committee is to hear SB115 that would

expand the state's exemption on who is allowed to have sexually exploitative material beyond peace officers in the performance of an investigation.

The bill adds prosecutors, defense attorneys and others who work with them in the performance of a case.

■ **Friday:** This day is reserved for floor debate on bills that reach that stage in the House and Senate.

■ **Next week:** By now, the Senate should be done with the budget. From here, it will head to the House, which will try to put its own stamp on the so-called Long Bill, called that because of its length.

Ultimately, those changes, too, will be stripped out by the Senate at week's end, sending the bill to a conference committee of the same six legislators who drafted the spending plan to start with, the Joint Budget Committee.

Scheduled committee hearings are subject to change.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Legislature's website, leg.colorado.gov.

Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.
Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60.
Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend Delivery includes the following date in 2016: Nov. 24.
Single Copy: \$1.00 daily and \$2.00 Sunday.
Mail (USPS): \$30.00 per week, \$1,560 per year. *POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Daily Sentinel, 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.*

Brown's Shoe Fit Co.
"Better Shoes Since 1911"
YES, We Have...
BROOKS
Free Gait Analysis
Your locally owned store and remember parking in the back.
425 Main St. • 242-7690
Mon. - Fri. 9:00 - 6:00
Sat. 9:00 - 5:30
Sun. 11:00 - 3:00

Curious About the Value of Your Home?
I am happy to provide a FREE market valuation of your property, & then tell you my plan to get it SOLD!
I've been helping buyers & sellers in Mesa County since 1994
Tina Harbin
970-234-3808
www.realestatwestonline.com
tinaharbinhomes@gmail.com
Real Estate West

COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY
See More
Play More
Do More
Learn More
Find Yourself
at Colorado Mesa University
Check out the back cover of Out & About on Friday and find yourself at CMU!

Teens wearing leggings barred from United flight

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Two teenage girls were barred by a gate agent from boarding a United Airlines flight from Denver to Minneapolis on Sunday because they were wearing leggings, according to an airline spokesman.

The girls, were not allowed onto the morning flight because they were traveling under an employee travel pass that includes a dress code.

The dress code bars pass travelers from wearing spandex or Lycra pants such as leggings. The teens agreed to change their

clothing and take a later flight, but the airline's actions sparked a quick Twitter backlash.

Activist Shannon Watts of Denver tweeted that she witnessed Sunday's events and questioned United's decision to police women's clothing. Watts said the girl's father

was allowed to board while wearing shorts and called the airline's policy sexist.

Regularly ticketed passengers are not subject to the same dress code and can wear leggings. But the airline was standing by its policy for pass travelers, the spokesman said.

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Strangulation alleged

Keenan Trout Bradshaw, 22, of Dinosaur, was arrested on a warrant for domestic violence and second-degree assault by strangulation after he allegedly beat up and strangled his ex-girlfriend at a hotel.

According to the warrant for Bradshaw's arrest, several tenants at the WoodSpring Suites, 659 Market St., had reported noises of a man and woman fighting in a room about 1 a.m. March 15.

The hotel manager reported to police that when he knocked on the door of the room he heard a loud "thud, like someone's head was hitting the floor," and also heard a woman scream and yell, "Please, help me!"

After Bradshaw answered the door, the woman ran out of the hotel, the manager said.

Police later found the woman in the parking lot of a nearby car dealership, and she told them she had recently moved to Grand Junction to get away from Bradshaw, but knew he was in town for a few weeks and decided to get together with him.

She said they had been drinking most of the day and she passed out in the hotel room, and woke up to him grabbing her by the head and dragging her to the floor.

She also told police that Bradshaw grabbed her throat with both hands and choked her and hit her head on the floor.

A judge set a \$5,000 cash-only bond for Bradshaw on Friday.

Fire at vacant restaurant

The Grand Junction Fire Department responded to a fire about 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Xian Wei, 1530 North Ave. (the old Far East restaurant).

Employees at a nearby business reported the fire, which burned the northwest corner of the business.

According to the Fire Department, the blaze was quickly extinguished and crews found the building unoccupied. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

The Grand Junction Police Department and the Mesa County Sheriff's Office did not release crime reports on Sunday.

All contents copyright © 2017 The Daily Sentinel. All republication rights are reserved. Material in this publication may not be published, broadcast, rewritten for broadcast or publication or redistributed directly or indirectly in any medium.

Pick 3 Midday Sunday: 5-2-5 Evening Sunday: 3-3-2
Cash 5 Sunday: 1-12-16-17-18
For information, go to www.coloradolottery.com.

CIRCULATION
Subscription and delivery questions:
242-1919 or (800) 332-5833

ADVERTISING
Retail advertising..... 256-4289
Classified advertising..... 242-1313

NEWSROOM
Managing editor..... 256-4252
City desk..... 256-4213

Features and entertainment..... 256-4224
Sports..... 256-4203
Commentary..... 256-4236

coloradopress ASSOCIATION



2011 • 2012 • 2013
2014 • 2015

THE DAILY SENTINEL
734 South 7th Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501
Advertising 256-4289 • Classified 242-1313
Circulation 242-1919
GJSentinel.com