

FIRST DRAFT

This silent movie star 'Mixed' it up with outlaws in Glenwood Canyon

"Newspapers produce the first rough draft of history."
— Philip Graham

There is a scene in the 1926 film, "The Great K&A Train Robbery," in which silent-movie star Tom Mix surreptitiously listens to outlaws while he dangles from a taut rope angling away from a rocky cliff. When he's discovered, he zooms several hundred feet down the rope and slides neatly onto the back of his horse, Tony. Then he whips the rope loose from the saddlehorn and gallops away.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

I don't know if this is the first use of a zip line in a movie, but it's got to be among the earliest. The fact that it occurred in Glenwood Canyon makes the scene all the more intriguing.

After doing the zip-line slide, Tom and Tony race to rescue a distressed damsel. With her on the saddle in front of Tom, they run down the road and cross Shoshone Dam on a wooden catwalk. They catch up with a train, and Tom deposits the young woman neatly into her father's care.

Mix's movie production crew spent three weeks in Glenwood Springs in the summer of 1926 and produced two films there: "The Great K&A Train Robbery," and "The Canyon of Light."

The filming was big news for The Glenwood Post.

One article told about the arrival of "Mr. and Mrs. Mix" and a company of "fifty-five people and 20 head of horses, including Tony," Hollywood's first equine star. It added, "The company is located at different hotels in the city, Tom Mix being a guest at the Hotel Colorado."

A week later the paper reported on "the excellent conduct" of the film company, "and the freedom from anything coarse or improper, which is in contrast with what is generally expected of movie artists."

The film crew put on a free stage show to thank the residents of Glenwood Springs for their support, with Mix "giving an exhibition of fancy shooting," the paper said.

The show attracted more than 1,800 people.

Additionally, the article said, hundreds of people gathered each day to watch the filming, nearly blocking the canyon highway.

Tom Mix was born in Mix

Run, Pennsylvania, in 1880, according to American National Biography Online. He served in the Army, but was never overseas and was not a member of Teddy Roosevelt's Roughriders, as he later claimed.

He received several commendations and promotions, but went on furlough to marry his second wife and never returned. However, there is no indication he was prosecuted for desertion.

Mix worked on a large ranch in Oklahoma and may have held at least one law-enforcement job before working in his first film in 1909, "The Range Rider," for the Selig Co. In 1918, he switched to William Fox Studios, which produced Mix's films throughout the 1920s.

Mix became one of the top box-office attractions in the country, and "The Great K&A Train Robbery" was among the top-grossing films of 1926.

Plot is not the film's strong point. But the action in "The Great K&A Train Robbery" is some of the best of the era. In one scene, Mix, riding double with a friend, jumps Tony out a second-floor window and into a swimming pool. This was at a time when there was little trick photography, and Mix performed all his own stunts.

A Daily Sentinel article in December of 1926, when the film arrived at the Majestic Theatre here, advised moviegoers to "get a tight grip on your seat ... for the film has more thrills, more hard and fast riding and more good scenery than you'll get in a dozen other Westerns."

The same article said, "Tom Mix seems to get better with every picture, and if he keeps up the good work for say another decade, it will be all right with us."

But he didn't continue another decade because a year after "The Great K&A Train Robbery," the film industry changed. The first "talkie" was released and Mix's film career was doomed. He made a few films into the 1930s, but spent most of his time performing with Tony in Wild West shows and circuses.

Mix died in a car wreck on a lonely stretch of Arizona highway in October 1940, at age 60. Some accounts say Mix had been drinking heavily before the crash. But, the Associated Press story of his death that appeared in The Sentinel did not mention alcohol.

Tony died two years later, at the remarkable equine age of 37.

There is a small rest area and a Tom Mix memorial near the crash site, about 50 miles north of Tucson.



SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

This is an image from the Tom Mix memorial at his fatal crash site in Arizona. He died in October 1940 at age 60.



This article appeared in The Daily Sentinel in December 1926.

It remains well-maintained today, 75 years after Mix's death and nearly 90 years after he made movies in Glenwood Canyon.

Thanks to the Frontier

Historical Society in Glenwood Springs for assistance on this article, to Marie Tipping and to those who allowed the use of their photographs. Email Bob Silbernagel at bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.

Attendance improving for chronically absent in District 51 schools

By EMILY SHOCKLEY
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A four-year state grant that created six new jobs in District 51 geared toward getting chronically absent students back into school will reach the end of its funding cycle next year.

The Expelled and At-Risk Student Services, or EARSS, grant provided \$233,507 in 2012-13 and again in 2013-14 before peeling back to \$175,130 this year.

The grant will provide a final gift of \$116,754 to the district next year.

In addition to paying for a substance abuse counseling program now in its third year at District 51's four largest high schools, the grant supported the creation of six attendance advocate jobs.

The grant is paying for the counseling program and four attendance advocate jobs this year. The district's general fund has absorbed the cost of the other two positions.

District 51 Prevention Coordinator Cathy Haller, who authored the grant application, told District 51 School Board members Tuesday night that she hopes they will fund the attendance advocates once the grant is gone, a proposal board members did not commit to or reject at the meeting.

"We're hoping you guys will see the value in this program and allow it to continue," Haller said.

Attendance advocates meet with families and visit the homes of students who skip school at least 20 percent of the time to try to find out why kids are missing school.

Once they know the root of the problem, advocates try to help families combat that root cause. A student without money to drive to school may get a gas card, for example, while one afraid of bullies could be re-

ferred to counseling.

Attendance advocate Barbara Infanger said she and her colleagues offer students a link back to school.

"Before us, that relationship wasn't there. We're the front lines in a school," Infanger said.

During the first half of the 2014-15 school year, Haller estimates 1,300 students were in contact with an attendance advocate at least once. Among those students, 463 interacted with one of the district's six attendance advocates at least three times.

Among the students with repeat contact with advocates, 54 percent started showing up at school more frequently during the first semester of this school year and 42 percent increased their grades.

That's a boost from last year, when 48 percent of chronically absent students improved their attendance after repeat attendance advocate intervention and 36 percent increased their grade-point average.

Not all students and families agree to meet with attendance advocates, though.

So far in 2014-15, 262 truancy notices have been issued for families who refused or did not respond to requests. Two attendance managers (different from attendance advocates) hand-deliver those notices and try again to work with families and create a truancy management plan.

If there's still no cooperation, a date in truancy court is set, which has been the case for 99 families this year. Those court cases typically end in a court order for the student to comply with an attendance plan. Eleven students have failed to comply with the court order so far this year.

2015 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Now that the House and Senate have completed putting their tweaks on the state's budget, the Joint Budget Committee will take it back to iron out any differences between the two, eventually returning the budget to the two chambers for a final vote.

■ **Today:** The House State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee will hear several gun-related measures, including Republican bills approved in the GOP-controlled Senate to repeal universal background checks and a 15-round magazine limit.

■ **Tuesday:** The Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee will debate SB39, a measure that aims to give the state concurrent jurisdiction over federal land in Colorado.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Finance Committee will hear HB1238, a measure that would allow local governments to impose fees on the sale of cigarettes without jeopardizing the cigarette taxes they receive from the state.

■ **Thursday:** The House Business Affairs & Labor Committee will debate HB1343, a bipartisan measure partly sponsored by Rep. Dan Thurlow, R-Grand Junction, to lessen some of the licensing requirements for managers of homeowners' associations.

■ **Next week:** The Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee will hear a proposed referred measure to the ballot that would require that any citizen-initiated ballot measure that alters the Colorado Constitution to be on the ballot for two consecutive years, something other states do to ensure that voters are educated about a proposed change to their state's Constitution.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Legislature's website at www.leg.state.co.us. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

Alamosa's field of dreams a step closer

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALAMOSA — Alamosa County residents are hoping a new baseball complex will draw thousands of fans hoping to sharpen their skills and keep the season going. They are also counting on the huge project to bring sorely needed economic development to the area.

Co-founder Geoff West said he plans 38 playing fields for

Little League teams, softball teams, and other baseball activities in southern Colorado.

West said he hopes to have the first stage of the project running next year, with completion for youths under 12 and for girls' softball teams. Plans are also in the works for adult teams and training for coaches and players.

West said the baseball complex is modeled after the Co-

perstown theme park in New York, which hosts more than 1,300 teams a year, according to its website.

West plans to run baseball camps from June until August, inviting up to 1,200 teams. He said there are more than enough teams across the country that can't get enough baseball.

"This is a big project," said Alamosa County Commission Chairman Darius Allen, before

plans for the Top of the World Series special use permit got tentative approval. "We want to make sure we do it proper and right."

The proposed ballpark is much more than baseball fields. A western park will offer bunkhouses for 100 umpires, three practice field clusters, a shop and three residential houses. The proposed eastern park is more elaborate with 50 bunkhouses for 1,400 youths.

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Open beer citation given

Buster Ray Hartung, 53, was issued a summons Tuesday in the 200 block of Rood Avenue on suspicion of having an open alcoholic beverage container in public and littering, according to the Grand Junction Police Department.

According to a narrative on the summons, an officer approached Hartung, who was drinking a beer and smoking. Hartung told the officer he was just about to throw away the beer and that he usually puts a beer can in a brown paper bag when he

drinks but did not this time, according to the summons.

Hartung threw a lit cigarette on the ground and a plastic bag blew away from his car while he was talking to the officer, according to the summons, which prompted the littering ticket.

"Buster advised that the judge would find the incident humorous," according to the summons narrative.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

■ A report of sexual assault Thursday in the northwest part of the city is being inves-

tigated.

■ An unknown male is suspected of stealing a vehicle Saturday in the 2400 block of U.S. Highway 6&50.

■ A burglar unlawfully entered offices inside the Horizon Park Plaza, 743 Horizon Court, on Thursday and damaged property valued at less than \$750 and stole property valued at less than \$50.

■ A minor was issued a summons Saturday on suspicion of obstructing an officer, possession of drug paraphernalia and having a defective license plate lamp in the 200 block of Linden Avenue.

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We're wearing
jeans for charity
at The Daily Sentinel
Ask me how you can help!

we've got heart!

The employees of *The Daily Sentinel* have joined together to adopt a local non-profit organization/charity of the month. We want to help raise awareness and badly needed funds for these organizations that are dedicated to helping people in our community.

April JEANS FOR CHARITY ORGANIZATION:

The House

At any given time, nearly 160 teenagers are homeless in Mesa County. They sleep in cars, tents and are at serious risk for many forms of abuse. Karis, Inc., with the support of the Western Slope community, operates **The House**. The only licensed shelter for homeless youth on the western slope, **The House** provides teens with warm meals, safe shelter, medical and mental health support, education, and a host of other services, supplied by caring adults. Please join with us and send your tax deductible contribution to **The House**, P.O. Box 2837, Grand Junction, CO 81502.