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FLYING UNDER THE RADAR



ROBERT DeBERRY/Frontiersman

George Krumm does some fly fishing on Matanuska Lake at Kepler-Bradley State Park Monday afternoon. Krumm was fishing for rainbow trout and Dolly Varden. He said he will fish up until the lakes begin to freeze and then give the fish a break until ice fishing season begins.

Report probes senior rent hike

BY MICHAEL ROVITO
Frontiersman

WASILLA — Wasilla Area Seniors Inc. is the target of an investigation by the state's Office of Long Term Care Ombudsman involving what some residents call unfair rent increases.

The investigation comes on the heels of a state assistant ombudsman's report regarding how WASI handled the complaint of an elderly couple who sparred with management over a maintenance issue.

According to the most recent report, the state agency found rent increases attributed by WASI to residents as a rise in utility costs were unjustified because no substantial rise in utility costs were found.

Since Oct. 1, 2007, rents at the WASI complex have risen by \$175 a month for each of its 129 units — \$75 on Oct. 1, 2007 and \$100 on Aug. 1.

Lisa Merrill, an assistant ombudsman and author of the report, says in the document that Matanuska Electric Association revealed electric charges for the senior housing campus have actually decreased over the last 12 months. Four of the five senior housing buildings saw an overall monthly decrease of about \$199 while the fifth rose by about \$74 a month.

In regard to natural gas costs, Merrill's report cites ENSTAR quoting a \$550 rise in monthly 2008 charges for the housing campus. In 2007, natural gas costs at the complex rose by \$1,722 a month.

"Many of the senior residents, both low-income and residents on fixed incomes paying the market rates, are understandably upset over these increases," Merrill says in the report.

Merrill's report also faults WASI for failing to file an appeal for two buildings on the campus to receive low-income housing tax credit. That, the

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Mat-Su Valley
and Lorri Cook
of Wasilla.

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A quick jaunt up the Glenn Highway has much to offer in fall.

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Talkeetna robber changes plea

Under deal, Tolen to serve 7 years

BY ANDREW WELLNER
Frontiersman

PALMER — One of four people implicated in the Talkeetna-area robbery of eight trick-or-treaters last Halloween night changed his plea Monday.

Aaron Tolen, 25, pleaded guilty to a consolidated felony count of first-degree burglary, Assistant District Attorney Rachel Gernat said. In exchange, Tolen will serve seven years in prison.

The charge to which Tolen pleaded in state court relates to a cache of stolen vehicles, tools and other items troopers said they turned up while investigating the robbery. Troopers said most of the goods were linked back to several Talkeetna-area burglaries and thefts.

Tolen also faces charges of being a felon in possession of weapons and tampering with evidence. Whether or not any jail time resulting from that federal case is tacked on to those seven years or set to run concurrent with them is up to the feds, Gernat wrote.

Tolen was, along with Michael Scott Wilson, 25, one of the first to be arrested in the case.

According to troopers, the chil-



ROBERT DeBERRY/Frontiersman

Aaron Tolen, 25, pleaded guilty Monday to a consolidated felony count of first-degree burglary. In exchange for the guilty plea, Tolen will serve a seven-year sentence.

dren reported that two masked women jumped from a truck and pointed a gun at them, cranked off a round into the ground and demanded the candy. The women drove off with the treats and an iPhone a parent had sent along in case of emergency and was being held amidst one of the children's candy.

Tolen and Wilson were later spotted at a local restaurant, having pulled up in the same truck the children described.

During interviews, Wilson pointed to Kendra Butts, 19, and Amber Martin, 21 as being the culprits in the robbery, according to troopers. Butts and Martin were Tolen and Wilson's girlfriends.

In the month after the robbery, both Martin and Butts were apprehended.

But not, according to federal prosecutors, before Butts could talk to Wilson about possibly breaking into a police impound lot to remove evidence from the now-impounded truck. Tolen, according to federal prosecutors, also asked a third party to conceal evidence.

According to prosecutors, Tolen potentially faces 20 years in prison and \$250,000 on the federal charges.

In April, a Palmer Grand Jury leveled more than 150 new charges against the four defendants for alleged crimes relating to the cache of stolen goods. In Tolen's case, in addition to state charges of hindering prosecution, felon in possession of weapons and theft leveled after his Halloween-night arrest, he was hit with an additional 59 charges ranging from criminal mischief to first-degree burglary.

Butts and Martin have entered pleas to robbery in state court and will serve between seven and 11 years in prison. Butts has also entered a plea in federal court and has been sentenced to six months in prison for conspiring to obstruct justice.

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Teens' hike turns into long adventure

BY ANDREW WELLNER
Frontiersman

PALMER — What was to be an afternoon's hike ended with a ride on a military helicopter for two Valley teens this weekend.

Steven Green said Monday there wasn't a whole lot to say about his son's time spent lost on Pioneer Ridge.

"They get lost, they get picked up by a helicopter," he said simply.

According to Alaska State Troopers, Gehring's son, David Gehring, 17, Palmer, and a friend, Kelsey Stein, 17, Wasilla, went for a hike up Pioneer Peak on the Pioneer Ridge-Austin Helmers trail Saturday morning.

At about 6 p.m., Gehring said, his son called to say he was lost. Gehring said it's not the first time someone's been lost up there. There's a canyon, he said, up over the ridge that seems to prompt a lot of searches.

"They've responded to four other folks who have gotten lost up there in a canyon," Gehring said.

In response to his son's call for help, Gehring said he called troopers who in turn called the Rescue Coordination Center at Elmdorf Air Force Base in Anchorage.

According to troopers, the RCC launched a helicopter at 11:42 p.m. to go find the hikers.

Both hikers were flown to Mat-Su Regional Medical Center where, at 12:30 a.m. Sunday they were reunited with their parents. Neither reported any injuries.