

Commuters like valley van pool

Bitterroot experiment has more demand than available seats

By JANE RIDER
of the Missoulian

MR TMA has the kind of problem most transportation management agencies can only hope for: More people want to van pool to Missoula than there are vehicles available to transport them.

The Missoula-Ravalli Transportation Management Association, a state-funded vehicle reduction program providing shared rides to and from the Bitterroot Valley, has 65 people on a waiting list.

And that number keeps growing.

Another 120 people are part of the budding program's car pooling data base.

"It's amazing how many people want some type of transit system," said Noel Larrivee, the

association's executive director. "I didn't imagine this type of response. It's a pleasant problem to have."

Since it began transporting people in August, the association has had only one 15-seater van available - donated by Mountain Line Bus Service. But that will soon change. St. Patrick Hospital recently donated an

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Managed care

Deal pledges faster care for mentally ill

By GINNY MERRIAM
of the Missoulian

Some of the people who have waited as long as a month for mental-health care under Montana's new managed-care system should now be able to get treatment the day they walk into a clinic.

A new agreement reached Thursday among the state Department of Public Health and Human Services, the Maryland-based CMG/Merit managed-care company and Montana Community Partners, the company's Montana partnership, also promises final rulings on eligibility for treatment within three days.

The agreement concerns people who are not eligible for Medicaid but have incomes that fall at the 200-percent-of-poverty definition. As of August, MCP had enrolled 69,697 Medicaid patients for treatment and 3,200 who are non-Medicaid-eligible but still poor. John Lynn, associate director of the Western Montana Mental Health Center, estimates that non-Medicaid-eligible patients make up about 30 percent of the Center's 3,000 clients.

"This will facilitate our ability to get services to non-Medicaid-eligible people in a more timely fashion," he said. "As such, it's a major step forward in our ongoing process with Montana Community Partners."

CMG, operating as Montana Community Partners with a group of 20 nonprofit mental health care providers, won the \$400 million, five-year contract for Montana's Medicaid mental health patients, the state mental hospital and its five regional mental health centers in November. Since it took over April 1, operation of the system has been fraught with start-up problems and controversy.

Previously, a potential patient had to pick up forms at a clinic, fill them out and get financial approval from MCP in Billings, while the patient's provider had to get clinical approval with a separate set of paperwork.

"We've had applications come in as much as a month later," said Doris Barta, MCP's director of administrative services, in a phone interview from Billings.

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Gunmakers back childproof locks

WASHINGTON (AP) - In an alliance forged under pressure, major gun manufacturers stood with President Clinton and announced Thursday they would provide childproof trigger locks with all their handguns.

"This will affect eight of 10 handguns made in America and it will save many young lives," the president said in a Rose Garden ceremony. He encouraged other gunmakers to follow suit.

Each year, about 1,500 children are rushed to hospital emergency rooms with accidental gun injuries. Nearly 200 children died from those wounds in 1994 alone.

The gunmakers' promise was quietly negotiated

after Clinton threatened last January to press for legislation requiring child locks on handguns. To bolster his demand, the president also signed an executive order in March requiring safety locks on all handguns issued to federal law enforcement officers.

With the gunmakers' voluntary agreement in hand, the administration dropped its call for legislation. Two advocacy groups quickly objected, calling anew for mandatory federal standards.

"The big winners today are America's gun manufacturers, not America's children," said Kristen Rand of the Violence Policy Center.

The White House ceremony marked a rare instance of agreement between gunmakers and

Clinton.

Richard Feldman, executive director of the American Shooting Sports Council, said, consumers should not use trigger locks on guns they keep loaded for protection. "When you have a firearm that you are keeping for self-protection, it is in use," he said. "A firearm locked up for use is of no value to the user."

Two manufacturers, Smith & Wesson Corp. and Sturm, Ruger & Co., announced earlier this year that they would provide childproof locks with handguns. Joining them now are Glock, Beretta, Taurus Firearms, Heckler & Koch, H&R 1871, SigArms and O.F. Mossberg & Sons.

Cue the yaks

They're big

They're bold

They're coming to a theater near you



TIM THOMPSON/Missoulian

To most people, yaks are something they remember seeing in a Dr. Seuss book as a child, but to Lawrence Richards they are a business enterprise. Richards leased some of his yaks to Hollywood for the movie "Seven Years in Tibet," which opens in Missoula today.

Polson-area man turns his exotic livestock into stars

By JOHN STROMNES
of the Missoulian

POLSON - For the first time anywhere, it can now be revealed who cast the yaks in that new \$60 million Brad Pitt extravaganza "Seven Years in Tibet."

It was none other than the Mission Valley's own exotic animal expert Lawrence G. Richards.

He shared with us the secret of his casting-couch success.

"I wanted artistic objects, not breeding stock. I wanted real photogenic yaks," Richards said Thursday in an interview.

Richards, 48, looks a little like Pitt in the movie. He is tall, bearded, slender,

handsome, single and mysteriously urbane.

The yaks were mysterious, if not urbane.

But they were exactly what was needed for a \$60 million flick about an escaped German prisoner of war who finds himself in mysterious Tibet during World War II that was made by a French director and an American movie star in exotic, far off Argentina.

Argentina?

It seems the Chinese would not allow the moviemakers into Tibet - they don't like movies glorifying Tibetan independence - and India, fearing China, refused permission, too. Argentina was a perfect stand-in - high Andes mountains

and grassy sweeps of dry foothills without a telegraph pole in sight and no intractable political questions.

But Argentina had no yaks, not even a specimen at the Buenos Aires Zoo. Llamas or alpacas would not do. A movie producer called a Montreal exotic animal broker, the broker called Richards, and suddenly last summer it was up to Richards to find and deliver 12 star-quality, photogenic yaks to the Argentine Andes.

He selected older yaks, since the animals, a domesticated bovine distantly related to the American bison, develop their bison-like humps and distinctive long-haired "skirts" that hang to the

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Mule deer regulations confusing hunters

License holders have until Wednesday to decipher and change the validation on their tag

By DARYL GADBOW
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State wildlife managers are anxiously waiting to find out the effectiveness of the new southwestern Montana mule-deer "validation" regulation.

comprised of the department's Region 2 and Region 3. That block is divided into eight areas, each of which contain several hunting districts. When hunters buy a deer license they must designate one of those eight areas in which to hunt mule deer exclusively; or by

speculation, but the decrease may come from hunters who come to Regions 2 and 3 from other areas of the state to hunt elk, but will elect to hunt mule deer bucks closer to where they live."

Firebaugh said many hunters seem to be puzzled about the new regulation.

applies to a group of hunting districts," he said. "If they select number 2, that's not Region 2, but a group of hunting districts in the Bitterroot."

Hunters will have the opportunity to change the validation of their deer license through Wednesday, Oct. 15. The general big game hunting season