

City & State

INSIDE: BULLETIN BOARD 6F

A fabulous life

On the day Helena resident Irene Roberts was born, in a little sod-roofed house on the South Dakota prairie, a severe and unexpected blizzard wiped out most of her family's cattle. That same day, her father also managed to step on a spike that went through his foot.

"That sort of set the tone for my life," says Irene, with a laugh, on her 90th birthday.

A childhood of walks on the prairie and snowball fights and horseback riding was interrupted at age 6 when Irene came down with polio.

"It changed everything," she said.

"It changed the way I saw the world."

It was difficult for Irene to get out of bed at first, and impossible to walk. A woman from a neighboring farm came to visit, and predicted the 6-year-old girl would be a 'cripple for life.'

But Irene's mother massaged her daughter's arm and leg with olive oil. Her brothers and sister took over Irene's chores, and pulled her around in a red wooden wagon. Eventually, Irene's strength came back — everywhere but in her right arm. She could use her right hand, but the arm hung limp. When Irene went to school she started to feel different from the other kids. She couldn't do what they did. She couldn't take part in the school play, or dance. She was terrified when her pencil lead broke, because she would have to go to the front of the class and try to sharpen the pencil with one hand. She was afraid the teacher would send her home.

"That's when I decided the world is made for perfect people," she says, "and I decided that I was certainly not one of the perfect ones! But just as I found a way to sharpen a pencil, I've found solutions to most of the physical challenges I've been confronted with. You compensate. You use your feet, your teeth, anything you can to hang in there."

Irene did more than hang in there. She became a teacher herself, and later raised eight children of her own.

"I had to cradle my kids with one arm," she says. "They learned to cling around my neck like little monkeys."

For the past 15 years, Irene has audited courses at Carroll College.

"I've taken all kinds of classes," she says. "History, English, you name it. There's so much stuff out there. There's something in me that needs to learn. And not just about good things. For example, it's clear there will always be wars. Because that's human nature. There's always going to be good and evil. But I have a strong belief that good will prevail. That's not to say that people don't suffer. We all experience pain. I've had great pain, but even greater joy. I believe good and love is always present in the pain and suffering like a glowing ember in the ashes. And that's what keeps me going. I've had a fabulous life."

Clay Scott is a veteran, well-traveled reporter who lives in Helena.

CLAY SCOTT



Eliza Willey IR Staff Photographer

From left Michael Cozino, 5, Jacob Reis-Ronalli, 7, and Benjamin Reis-Ronalli, 6, enjoy complimentary cake and ice cream Saturday at the Parrot. The Helena business celebrated their 85th anniversary Saturday and the community turned out to celebrate with them.

Sweet treats

The Parrot Confectionery celebrates 85 years of business downtown

By JOHN HARRINGTON
IR Business Editor

Almond butter toffee. Chocolate ginger. Milk chocolate tingalings, dark chocolate orange cream, pecan rolls...

For 85 years, the Parrot Confectionery has soothed the sweet teeth of Helena, serving up close to 100 kinds of homemade candies, along with sodas and sundaes at the old-fashioned fountain.

Throughout the day on Saturday, a stream of customers and well-wishers passed through the door for a piece of birthday cake and some punch as the Parrot celebrated the 85th anniversary of its opening. Originally located where the Park Plaza hotel now sits, the Parrot has occupied its current perch on the Walking Mall since 1938.

Donna Carey, who stopped in with her husband, Rex, said she's been a regular "for about 27 years, at least once a week. I come for the coffee and conver-

sation. It feels good and warm and special."

Such sentiment is sweet music to the ears of the store's owners, brothers Dusty and Dave Duensing and their wives, Pam and Wendy. The Parrot has been in the Duensing family for a half-century.

"It's a big thing in your heart that this happens," Dave Duensing said. "That people like you so much, they like the product, they come from all over to see you and to enjoy it."

Turkish paste, milk chocolate peanut caramels, dark chocolate pecan tops...

Little has changed at the Parrot in the past 50 years. "Everything's the same," Dusty Duensing said. "As long as it's not broke, we don't fix it, and everything seems to be working just fine."

One-pound boxes of the store's signature candies sell well all year long, but 30 percent of the store's sales come around Christmas time, Dave Duensing said. Easter, Mother's Day, and birthdays the year round are all popular occa-

sions for a box of chocolates.

Dave Duensing said the store goes through nine or 10 tons of sugar and a similar amount of chocolate each year. On the soda fountain, he scoops 100 gallons of vanilla ice cream every three weeks on average, more in the summer.

Black walnut caramel, brown sugar fudge, peanut clusters, dark chocolate molasses chips...

The Duensing brothers started working at the store in the early 1970s before becoming owners nearly 20 years ago. Prior to taking over the family business, Dusty worked at a Helena sawmill, and Dave was a chemist for the Anaconda Company in Great Falls.

"Dad got sick, and he said, 'Why don't you come and try it, and if you like it, the store will be yours, and if you don't like it, we'll sell it,'" Dusty Duensing said. "I guess I must have liked it, I've been here 36 years."

Dusty makes most of the candy, and Pam is the dipper, coating each piece in dark or milk chocolate.

Dave mans the fountain, and Wendy is in charge of the front end of the store.

Dusty said a typical batch of a single kind of candy — say, milk chocolate mint supremes — makes around 125 pounds of sweets and lasts anywhere from three to eight weeks.

Peanut caramel, cashew brittle, milk chocolate filberts, haystacks, marzipan, honeycomb...

Gen Morgan of Helena said she's been coming to the Parrot a few times a week since high school — or around 60 years. She'll have a cup of coffee while her husband, Bob, enjoys a pineapple milkshake.

Morgan said she appreciates the continuity the store provides to people who have lived in Helena for many years and seen so many things in their hometown change.

"It's the only place I can think of downtown that's still here," she said. "That's very important."

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Livingston man heats, cools house with energy from ground

SCOTT McMILLION
Bozeman Daily Chronicle

LIVINGSTON (AP) — Eric Schneider lives in a big, airy house with high ceilings. He's got a lot of cubic feet of space to keep warm. He does so by tapping the Earth, pulling heat from the cold ground.

Schneider's house is heated with geothermal energy. He didn't have to cap a geyser or wrestle with intricate subterranean plumbing. He didn't even have to go very deep. "It isn't a big complicated thing," he said. "It's like a refrigerator that runs backwards."

And it's cheap, too. Even in the depths of winter, when the winds howl around his eaves and the mercury drops below zero, his power bills run about \$70 a month.

Only when it gets really cold does he fire up his wood stove, burning a couple cords of pine a year.

In the summer, he flips a switch and reverses the refrigeration. Then the same system keeps his



Bozeman Daily Chronicle photo by Deirdre Elita

Eric Schneider's home east of Livingston uses a geothermal heat pump to keep the hillside home comfortable. He uses a minimal amount of supplemental heat, even with a 22-foot vaulted ceiling. A long underground loop of pipe extracts heat from the ground in the winter to heat this home. A reverse process in the summer acts as an air conditioner.

house cool on the most blistering of days.

Geothermal heaters for homes have been around at least since the 1940s, though they're rare in the West. They work by bury-

ing a few hundred feet of pipe full of water and some environmentally friendly antifreeze, then circulating it with a small electric pump.

The fluids coming into

the house don't have to be very warm: about 40 degrees to 50 degrees is plenty, said Curtiss Moe, of Campbell's Plumbing and

More ENERGY, page 2F

IR daily planner

pick of the day



Queen City Ballet presents 'Cinderella.' Details below.

Today

April 29

Helena Railroad Fair. The Helena Railroad Fair features thousands of railroad items to buy, sell, or swap. There will also be a free slide show at 7 p.m.

- When: 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Where: Helena Civic Center
- Cost: \$2; children under 12 get in free
- Contact: 227-7469

Holy Spirit Conference. The conference will be packed with speakers, celebration of Eucharist on Saturday and Sunday, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. There will be youth activities.

- Where: Carroll College
- Cost: \$25 person/\$50 family
- Contact: 442-5820 ext. 16

'Fiddler on the Roof.' The beloved story of community, family values and changing social mores cuts across barriers of race, class, nationality, religion and time. The musical includes such songs as "Sunrise, Sunset," "If I Were a Rich Man" and "Matchmaker."

- When: 8 p.m., April 26-28, May 3-5, 10-12, 17-19; 2 p.m., April 29, May 6
- Where: Grandstreet Theatre
- Contact: 447-1574

Dog Agility Trials, sponsored by Montana Kennel Club

- When: 8:30 a.m.
- Where: Lewis and Clark Fairgrounds

The Helena Chamber Singers with special guests, the Montana Guitar Ensemble, will present "Portraits of Life and Love."

- When: 7:30 p.m., April 28; 7 p.m., April 29
- Where: St. Paul's United Methodist Church
- Cost: \$5/students; \$8/seniors; \$10/adults; Available at Piccolo's Music, Cornerstone Christian Bookstore and Leslie's Hallmark
- Contact: 443-6185

Queen City Ballet presents 'Cinderella.'

- When: 2 p.m.
- Where: Helena Middle School
- Cost: \$15/adult; \$12/students and seniors. Tickets available at Leslie's Hallmark, Queen City Ballet, online at www.queencityballet.com or at the door.
- Contact: 444-5004

Monday

April 30

Prickly Pear Land Trust Trail Workday. Still work to do on newest trail on Mount Ascension.

- Where: Meet at the Beattie Street Trailhead
- When: 5:30 p.m.

American Red Cross Blood Drive

- When: 1:30-5:30 p.m.
- Where: Cathedral, Brondel Center
- Contact: 495-1293

Government meetings

- Broadwater County Commission; 10 a.m.; commissioners' room of Broadwater County Courthouse in Townsend, 266-9203.

Tuesday

May 1

American Red Cross Blood Drive

- When: 1-5 p.m.
- Where: Red Cross Blood Donor Center
- Contact: 495-1293

Cake & Roses kickoff. A May Day celebration, art opening and potluck will kick off the monthlong Cake & Roses: Witness through Art celebration. The Helena Peace Seekers sponsor this annual series, which includes a film series, con-

More CALENDAR, page 2F