



New residents cost \$1,000

Around Your Region

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August 13, 2008

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Eagle County – Each person who moves to Eagle County costs \$1,242 in services such as public transportation, roads and law enforcement, according to a government study.

Eagle County did the study to get a handle on how it can keep up with future development. The county next will study how much the services it doesn't yet offer — such as assisted living — will cost.

Colorado has the seventh-oldest state population in the country, and demographers predict it will exceed Florida in percentage of senior population by 2020, Eagle County Financial Director John Lewis said.

The county also believes it will have to expand health care and child care programs.

Every additional 1,000 square feet built in the county results in one additional person who doesn't have health insurance, said public health manager Jill Hunsaker.

Every 1,616 square feet built results in another child without child care, she said.

Worker woes

Some long-time ski instructors may not return to Vail next ski season because of a nationwide shortage of the visa many foreigners use to work in the United States.

Only 66,000 people per year are allowed in on what's called an "H-2B" visa. Because the visas are for seasonal work, the government has two application periods per year. During the most recent period, the limit was hit two weeks ago.

Mark Gasta, senior vice president and chief human resources officer for Vail Resorts, said company was not even able to apply for H-2B visas for its seasonal workers this year before the cap was reached.

Congress let part of the law lapse in which workers who got H-2B visas in previous years could return without counting against the cap.

The scarcity of H-2B visas will affect not only Colorado ski areas, but those across the East and West, said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association. "Particularly when it comes to certain skilled positions, specifically ski and board instructors that have developed a long-term relationship with people, instructors who work the opposite sea–son in Australia and New Zealand and Chile," Berry said.

Several other local businesses, from carpet cleaning services to town bus services, say they will have to find other ways to fill winter jobs.

Tax refunds would strain several agencies

A court decision that ruled Gov. Bill Ritter's property tax freeze for school districts unlawful could also cost other local taxing districts millions in revenue, officials said.

If taxing entities, including the county, towns and special districts, are not exempt from the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR), they would have to issue tax refunds and would have to prepare for slashed budgets in coming years.

TABOR limits the amount of property tax governments and other agencies in Colorado can collect, but many districts and municipalities have been "de-Bruced" by public votes, meaning they are exempt from the limiting laws.

A Denver District Court judge recently ruled that Ritter's waiving of revenue limitations for school districts was invalid

because it did not comply with TABOR laws. The case is being appealed, and several counties, including Eagle County, have filed "friend of the court" briefs defending their de-Brucing processes.

If the Eagle County still has to follow TABOR's rules, it would have to go back several years and refund any taxes over what TABOR would have allowed, said Eagle County Finance Director John Lewis.

Since Eagle County's share of property taxes only increased an average of three percent over the last five years, Lewis said the refunds would not be significant.

The biggest refunds would be from the last year, when taxes jumped 38 percent due to increased property values. The county would have to refund about \$2.5 million, which comes out to about \$50 per person, he said.

The real trouble would come in the next few years when the county would collect less money, Lewis said.

"We would have to see what services we could cut because we'd be losing revenues," he said. "It's hard to say what it would be. It could be roads plowed less frequently or maybe a decrease in Health and Human Services."

Detoxing the dump

Wolcott – Your typical garage is home to a toxic mish–mash of near-empty cans of paint thinner, propane, insecticides, brake fluid and old car batteries.

Eagle County has just opened a new hazardous-waste facility, which will give residents a safe place to drop off all those flammable and poisonous chemicals. The new facility will also have a program to help local businesses dispose of their hazardous waste.

The facility will accept any type of common household hazardous waste, including: household cleaning products, latex and oil–based paint, paint thinners, varnishes, fertilizers, insecticides, automotive fluids, batteries, cell phones, thermostats, medicine, aerosols, lab chemicals, swimming-pool chemicals, needles, ammunition up to .50 caliber and Class C fireworks.

The facility, by the landfill north of Wolcott, will be open Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays and is free to residents. You won't need an appointment.

Small businesses are required to schedule an appointment. Hours of the facility for small businesses will be 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Fridays only.

Around the world on zero emissions

Louis Palmer has driven thousands of miles through Europe, the Middle East, India, China, Australia, New Zealand and, now, Minturn. He hasn't spent a dime on gasoline.

His car is the "Solar Taxi." It's a sleek, blue machine that sits low to the road, doesn't make a sound while running and pulls a trailer covered in solar panels. The sun is his fuel, and there aren't any earth-warming carbon emissions pluming out a tail pipe.

The Solar Taxi will be the first solar–powered vehicle to circumnavigate the globe. Palmer, the visionary and leader of the tour, said the big mission is to "show the people of the world that global warming can be stopped, and we can be independent from fossil fuels."

Palmer and his team began their journey on July 3, 2007, in Lucerne, Switzerland. They're planning to make it through 40 different countries on five different continents and end the tour at the World Climate Change Conference in Poland in December.

On Friday, the Solar Taxi team stopped in Minturn for lunch at the Turntable. They were getting ready to head over Vail Pass — their highest–elevation point for the whole trip.