

Forecast

Mostly sunny,
windchill of
5 to minus 5.

H 32 L 9

State Patrol reports deer, elk related wrecks

See page 3

Sheriff Pete Palmer prepares for retirement

See page 7



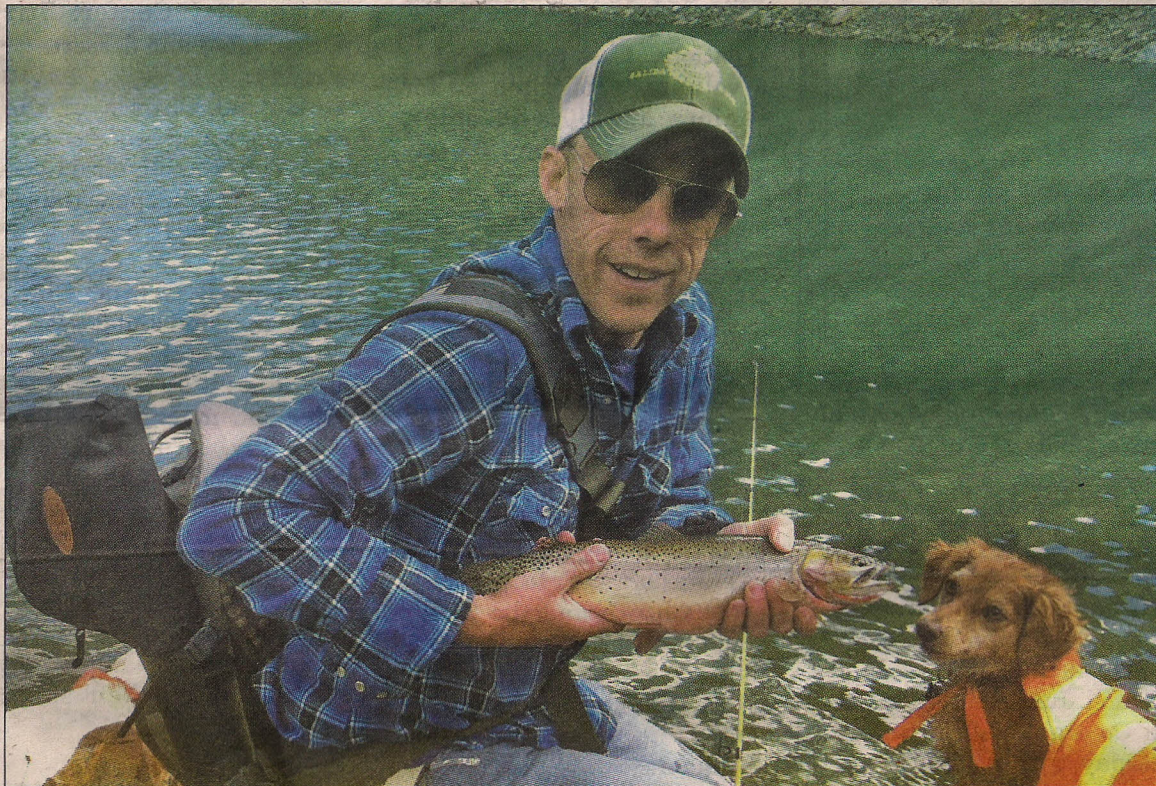
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50 cents



Courtesy photo

Health care open enrollment officially opens

by Ryan Hoffman
Mail Staff Writer

Now that the health care open enrollment period has officially started, local officials are encouraging Chaffee County residents to visit the revamped Connect for Health Colorado website and search from an expanded offering of health care plans.

Since the last open enrollment period in 2013, the number of plans available on the state's online insurance

upgraded so people can search for plans based on medications and on whether or not a preferred physician is covered by a specific plan.

A "hover-text" application added to the website will make it easier for shoppers who have questions about any health care jargon or industry-specific language.

"People who struggled last year won't have the same struggles this time," said Lori Perri, a certified health guide trained to help people sign

Salidan Grant Prill kneels with a cutthroat trout he caught at Island Lake, while his girlfriend's dog, Jupiter, looks on. Prill has fished daily for more than 371 days, surpassing his goal of fishing every day for a year. He said it didn't take long for the thought to become a reality.

Angler fishes for 371 days

by J.D. Thomas
Mail Staff Writer

While the past week has been chilly, snowy and a bit breezy, that didn't stop Salidan resident Grant Prill from continuing his goal of fishing every day, surpassing a year at 371 days in a row.

Prill said he enjoys fishing as a way to get away from the busyness of co-owning The Fritz and Benson's Tavern & Beer Garden.

"When I hit about 50 or 60 days, it looked like I might be able to do it," he said. "When I got to 150 to 200 days, I couldn't not do it.

"I told myself I would try to go for 365," he said. "But I would have been happy to make it to 350."

He's fished locally along the Arkansas River and in the state at Eleven Mile State Park in Park County, Blue Mesa Reservoir between Montrose and Gunnison and in Fort Collins, where Prill lived before moving to Salida.

He also fished in places like Taos, N.M., which he said has expensive fishing licenses, \$35 for 3 days. He also heads to Wisconsin to fish on the lake where he owns a home.

High mountain lakes are some of his favorite places to

fish, he said. Island Lake, near North Fork Reservoir, is one of the most beautiful places he said he and his girlfriend, Stephanie Perko, have visited. "The water looks like something from the Caribbean," he said. "It's a beautiful place that isn't too far away."

Fishing is not a way to get away from his girlfriend, as he believes many people often do, but a way to spend time with someone who wants to go fishing just as much, if not more, than he does, Prill said.

The toughest times to find a place to go fishing are during the FIBArk festival and Fourth of July. "There are gobs of people," he said. "The river gets so crowded. Summer is when the restaurants are the busiest too."

Fly fishing is what Prill and Perko most often do when on the river or at a lake, he said. "I would have to say 85 percent of what we do is fly fishing," Prill said. "The rest is rod and reel, but it depends on what we are fishing for and the weather."

It isn't all trout fishing for Prill either. While he has caught rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout, he has also caught walleye, white, striped, largemouth and smallmouth bass and pike.

He even caught a bird once. "I was casting out and what I

think was a merganser dove down into the water," he said. "It probably dove down 10 feet and I snagged it. I was bringing it in and holding the dog back while Stephanie was getting pecked by the thing." He said the bird got loose but still had a hook in its head.

Other wildlife they've encountered include deer crossing a river and walking up on some elk.

"For me it's about not getting caught up working," Prill said. "I try to get out there for 20-30 minutes a day, although sometimes we end up fishing for 12 hours."

He said he doesn't know what number he'll be aiming for now, most likely 400 days fishing. "Who knows, I may not stop," he said.

"Christmas is tough to get away from the family for an hour. Although some people may want to get away. Scratch that, Christmas is the easiest day to go fishing."

He said not fishing would be weird, like walking out of the house without brushing his teeth.

The next trip outside Colorado will be back to Wisconsin to ice fish with Perko. They had originally planned to fish in Costa Rica, but plans changed.

Courtesy photo

the state's online insurance exchange increased by 25 percent, said Cheryl Walker, Connect for Health Colorado manager in Chaffee and Lake counties.

That means there are more options to accommodate needs on a more individual level. However, it's important everyone shopping on the website knows what they need in an insurance plan, she said.

"People are getting a lot of choices, but that means people need to be a little more educated about their health care needs," Walker said.

To help with the process, Walker and two other staff members are available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to help with any questions or problems shoppers might have.

Although appointments are preferred, people can stop by the office in Room 143 at the Touber Building, 448 E. First St., and receive one-on-one help from a certified expert.

"We are here to get them enrolled," Walker said.

In addition to more choices, shoppers who previously used the exchange will also notice an upgraded website that should be easier to navigate. State agencies spent months working on the website so people can find out if they qualify for Medicaid and sign up without having to visit another website.

Previously, signing up for Medicaid required shoppers to visit two different websites, which made it more confusing, Walker said.

The new website was

up for health care in Chaffee County.

The goal is to get more people signed up for health care.

A little more than 1,000 people in Chaffee County have enrolled in the marketplace since Oct. 1, 2013, Walker said. When you include those people who signed up for Medicaid after the program was expanded, about 11 percent of Chaffee County residents have either signed up for private insurance or Medicaid since the start of the 2013 open enrollment period.

In Colorado, more than 148,000 now have health care through plans purchased on the online exchange in 2014, according to Connect for Health Colorado. State officials recommend everyone, regardless of whether or not they have health insurance, visit the website during the current open enrollment period, which runs through Feb. 15.

"Monthly premiums, benefits and the financial assistance available to consumers who qualify can change each year," Gary Drews, Connect for Health Colorado interim CEO, said in a press release.

"This year, there are some new, less expensive choices available in many regions. We are urging Coloradans to be smart consumers and compare their options before renewing their current plan or enrolling in a new one."

Other than the obvious advantages of having health

Please see FINES, back page

dan who has been central to the effort, told of a woman in her 60s whom they found shivering in the cold. She owned

They've operated on a simple principle: If you make people aware of the need, some-

Jon Fritz, owner of Simple Lodge, has made rooms available at a discounted rate for the cause, and the donated

been staying there recently, Fowler said. During the worst of the storms, others hovered in

the "People Helping People - Chaffee County" Facebook page or call Fowler at Bella Vita at 539-5272.

Fines increase in 2015 for not having insurance

Continued from FRONT page
care, Walker said uninsured residents should sign up for a plan or Medicaid to avoid fines mandated by the Affordable Care Act. Shoppers will need to select a plan by Dec. 15 for it to take effect at the start of 2015.

The penalty for not having insurance for all 12 months in 2014 is \$95 per adult and \$47.50 per child up to a maximum of \$285 per household, or 1 percent of household

income, depending on which one is higher.

Those fines will increase in 2015 to \$325 per adult and \$162.50 per child, or 2 percent of household income, whichever is higher.

The fines are intended to encourage people to sign up for health care, not penalize them, Walker said.

Many people who don't currently have insurance might be surprised to find out they qualify for Medicaid, and even if they don't, there is a

good possibility they could find a plan that requires a very low or possibly even no premium, Walker said.

Those who work seasonal jobs can even switch between Medicaid and private health insurance if their income fluctuates from season to season, Perri said. Such "life-changing" events are one of the only ways to sign up for private health insurance outside the enrollment period.

Even with all the incen-

tives and changes, it can be difficult to persuade people, particularly those who are uninsured and younger people, to sign up for health insurance, Perri said.

It can be very intimidating for people who have never had insurance, and younger people traditionally don't think they need health insurance, but even a low-premium plan with a high deductible is better than nothing, Walker said.

With the Affordable Care

Act fully implemented, health insurance is just like auto insurance: The law requires it, Walker said. Still, people should take everything into account - income and health needs primarily - before purchasing a new plan or renewing a current one.

"I would want to encourage people to think fully and consider the importance of health care in their personal life and their families' lives," Walker said.

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