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County budget games begin

By John Miller

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The Goshen County Commissioners began the arduous task of setting the county budget Tuesday as representatives presented budget recommendations for their respective offices.

Gary Meerkreebs from information technology, Sheriff Donald Murphy and Administrative Captain Bryan Morehouse from the Goshen County Sheriff Office and Gary Korell from road and bridge all spent time before the board with varying degrees of success. All budget proposals and enhancements are preliminary at this point; a final budget is tentatively due July 21.

Information technology discussions focused on reducing the budget Meerkreebs produced, which was \$70,000 higher than last year. IT was allotted \$37,000 for a geographic information system (GIS) to map out Goshen County geography. College interns may see an unexpected windfall as the GIS program was tentatively shelved in favor of \$10,000 in paid internships from college IT programs, saving \$27,000 from the IT budget.

IT was allotted \$353,265 last year, the result of revamping and installing new systems in the courthouse and the Lincoln Com-

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munity Complex. With the prospect of another tight year financially, the goal was to hold IT expenses to a minimum.

Meerkreebs explained much of last year's IT budget was done blind because some townships had not yet been examined to ascertain what kind of new hardware they would require. As a result, some purchases made were too late to be included on last year's budget and were included on this year.

He also said a former employee ordered too many components and as a result he had plenty extra in case any part of the system went down. In addition, the employee and another walked out on the job when Meerkreebs was hospitalized, necessitating assistance from Cheyenne Computing for a fee of \$9,000 to help finish the job.

Much of the discussion focused on properly appropriating IT fees collected from Goshen County townships to be placed into a "sinking fund,"

which would serve as a reserve to repair and buy new IT equipment as needed. Meerkreebs assured them that all fees collected would be split two-thirds into necessary repairs and one-third equipment upgrades.

Murphy and Morehouse presented a plan relatively the same as a year ago, with total benefits estimated at \$250,700 and a payroll of \$550,943. A 2.87 percent retirement increase for all government employees sanctioned by the state of Wyoming was

included in the benefits, although the county is under no obligation to absorb the increase in its totality. The additional retirement money could cost the county \$92,000.

Korell's budget fell far short of the \$4.13 million he was allotted last year, of which road and bridge used but \$1.68 million. Sensing he needed to continue trimming, Korell came in with much the same as was used last year. "Whatever it takes to keep my people employed, we're willing to do it,"