



Photo by Diana Haecker

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY — Kelly Thrun's kindergarten class was busy making beautifully decorated valentine boxes. Proudly displaying their creative boxes are (left to right) Dawson Evans, Courtney Merchant, Sam Bourdon, Charles Brown, Jonathan Outwater, Kastyn Lie, Erin Johanson, Ashlynn Kowchee, Daynon Medlin and Brayden Bahnke.

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Army Corps review of Rock Creek permits still in progress

By Diana Haecker

A story published in the Alaska Journal of Commerce on February 11 quotes Army Corps of Engineers Col. Kevin Wilson admitting that the corps has made a mistake in issuing a wetland permit for the Rock Creek mine. Wilson is quoted in the article as saying, "We made a mistake. We didn't do a proper job in preparing the decision document."

According to the article, the comments were made during a briefing on the Corps' activities at a February 1 meeting of the Resource Development Council.

The section 404 wetlands permit was issued to Rock Creek mine developer Alaska Gold Company in August 2006. The permit was challenged in U.S. District Court in Anchorage by three individual Nome residents — Sue Steinacher, Jana Varrati and Austin Ahmasuk — and a Nome group called Bering

Strait Citizens for Responsible Resource Development. A month after news of the lawsuit broke, on December 6, the Corps voluntarily withdrew the permit with the argument that it would reevaluate the permit's decision document.

In a request by *The Nome Nugget* for clarification, to tell Nomeites when the Corps expects to be done with the internal reevaluation, the Corps' spokesman Tom Findtner answered, "In response to the U.S. District Court's remand of the permit decision to the Corps of Engineers, the Alaska District is in the process of re-evaluating its decision on the Alaska Gold Company's permit application for the Rock Creek Mine project. We are working diligently to complete the review as quickly and thoroughly as possible. However, there is no set timetable for making a decision."

Asked if the Corps expects to

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AP Photo/Al Grillo

AND THEY'RE OFF !— Shane Barber from Willow and Evan Booth from Nome take off from the start of the 2,000 mile Iron Dog snowmobile race in Big Lake last Sunday. Twenty-eight teams left the starting line for the 1,100 mile ride to Nome before heading to the finish in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Nome Common Council OKs sale of property near port to NSEDC

By Laurie McNicholas

The Nome Common Council approved an ordinance authorizing sale of the City's interest in the "Reindeer Plant," along with property and rights of way adjacent to the plant, to the Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation at a noon meeting Feb. 12. NSEDC will pay \$1 million for

the property which is located in the port area.

Noting that part of the motivation for transferring property from the City to other entities is to get the property on tax rolls, Councilman Jon Larson said he would like to amend the sale contract for the property to ensure that it would remain subject to taxation even if

NSEDC eventually were to sell it to a non-profit entity. Participating in the Council meeting by phone, attorney Brent Edwards advised the Council that NSEDC might want to renegotiate the agreement to purchase the property if the agreement is amended. Edwards is with the law

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Nome has shortage of Iditarod overflow housing

By Diana Haecker

Nome Visitor and Convention Bureau Director Josie Stiles has a recurring problem that is even more pronounced this year. Awaiting the usual March onslaught of visitors to Nome during Iditarod time, she is faced with a shortage in commercial hotel beds and more demand for overflow housing than is offered. As time mercilessly ticks away, Stiles

still needs 24 places for visitors coming to Nome during Iditarod time. And every day, more calls come in with housing requests.

Overflow housing is a fancy word for Nomeites opening their homes to guests and becoming bed and breakfast hosts for the busy time in March when approximately 2,500 visitors flood the 3,500 population.

In addition to Iditarod mushers, their families, handlers and fans, the Lonnie O'Connor Iditarod Basketball Tournament brings in another 40 teams consisting of eight persons per team plus coaches, families and basketball fans.

In a memo to the city manager, Stiles wrote that a steady decline in available commercial accommoda-

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Photo by Diana Haecker

PLUTO EXISTS— During a "space" show performed for parents last week at the Nome Elementary School, Courtney Merchant of Kelly Thrun's kindergarten class represented Pluto in the lineup of stars and planets. The thematic unit for the month of January was space. The class read books about space and the now eight planets, played space games and learned new space vocabulary. The culminating activity was a space program performed for the families.

•Rock Creek —

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reissue the permit for Rock Creek Mine, Findtner responded, "At this point, we still are reviewing the permit application and decision document. A determination on whether to reinstate the permit for the Rock Creek Mine project has not been finalized."

No decision is official until the Alaska District commander, Col. Wilson, signs the decision document. In the case of Rock Creek Mine, a final recommendation has not been forwarded to the commander for approval yet. Findtner said that the decision document for the permit at Rock Creek Mine did not contain sufficient information and analysis regarding all of the data in the official file.

With the voluntary withdrawal of the permit, the lawsuit became moot. US District Court Judge Ralph Beistline last Friday denied the plaintiff's motion to reconsider his judgement of throwing out the lawsuit. However, the Corps said a new version of the revised permit would be available for the plaintiffs to review ten days before it becomes effective.

At press time, the plaintiff's lawyer Vicki Clark with Trustees for Alaska said she had not receive any notice of a revised wetlands permit from the Army Corps of Engineers. Ahmasuk and Varrati said they hadn't received any notice either. Steinacher is traveling and could not be reached.

Alaska Gold vice president Doug Nicholson told *The Nome Nugget* that the Corps has not given Alaska Gold Company any indication of when the internal permit review process would be done. "They made requests for information, but that is about it," Nicholson said.

Rick Van Nieuwenhuys, president of NovaGold Resources Inc. told *The Nome Nugget* that the Rock Creek construction schedule has been delayed as a result of the delays in permitting. "We have been restricted in the wetlands areas that we can disturb, thereby limiting our work efforts. Fortunately, we have so far not had to lay off any of our Nome workforce, as we have been able to re-deploy them onto other jobs around the construction site — mainly pouring cement foundations for the truck shop, mill facilitates and reagent building," Van Nieuwenhuys said. The recent mild weather has also helped, he added. "However, if the Trustees for Alaska, on behalf of the three Nome plaintiffs, do renew their lawsuit on a newly issued permit, as we suspect they will, and they are successful in their request to the Court for a Temporary Retraining Order, then the project will be more seriously delayed. We hope that this does not happen, as we would be forced to lay off most, if not all, of the local workforce," Van Nieuwenhuys said.

"I believe that NovaGold/Alaska Gold followed the process and procedures outlined under the current laws regarding permitting a mine in Alaska. We have held numerous public meetings and we have communicated our plans to the community for several years now. It is disappointing to me that a few local residents of Nome have chosen to launch this action," said Van Nieuwenhuys.

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