

B Interior/Alaska

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Saturday, March 23, 2013

HOUSE PLANT



Erik Johnson of Great Alaska Tree Cutting rigs a tip anchor to the log standing in his booth at the Interior Alaska Building Association's 2013 Home Show on Friday at the Carlson Center. The event continues Saturday and will conclude Sunday afternoon.

Sam Harrel/News-Miner

Bridges to be renamed

River crossings will be named after Con and Nellie Miller

By MATT BUXTON
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JUNEAU — The two crossings over the Chena River flood channel south of North Pole are currently known by the "undistinguished" names of bridge 1384 and bridge 1866, but a bill passed by the House on Friday aims to change that.

North Pole Rep. Doug Isaacson's House Bill 94 proposes to name the two bridges after his city's most influential pioneers, Con and Nellie Miller.

The two started what would become the world-famous Santa Claus House in 1962, two years after they moved to the Interior. Today, the business attracts visitors from around the world with its 42-

foot Santa Claus statue and its own Santa Claus.

In addition to bringing a year-round Christmas theme to North Pole, the Millers were pillars of the community. Con helped the city incorporate and went on to become the longest-serving mayor of North Pole. Nellie served on the school board, as the postmistress and as the town's magistrate and marriage commissioner. Con died in 1996; Nellie died in 2008.

The Miller name is also familiar to Juneau. Con and Nellie's sons, Terry and Mike, both served in the House and in the Senate, holding the distinction of being the only two siblings to have presided as Senate

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News-Miner file photo

Con and Nellie Miller play Santa and Mrs. Claus in 1988. The Millers started the Santa Claus House; now two Chena River bridges will be named after them.

Horse aids boy

By DAN JOLING
Associated Press

ANCHORAGE — A young miniature horse in sneakers is helping a 4-year-old special needs child at an Anchorage public elementary school.

Zoe, a black mare, is a service animal for preschooler Zaiden Beattie at Russian Jack Elementary School. It's the only service horse in an Alaska school — and after multiple online searches, the only service horse Principal Elizabeth Hornbuckle could find at any school in the nation.

Zaiden is one of 300 children in the U.S. diagnosed with A-T, or ataxia-telangiectasia, a genetic

disorder that progressively robs children of their ability to coordinate movement such as walking. Zaiden's mother, Lesley Zacharias, a professional horse trainer, is teaching Zoe to help Zaiden walk steadily until the disease inevitably shackles him to a wheelchair.

"He moves around a lot better and has more energy if he's got a hand on someone, either holding someone's hand or a hand on something," Zacharias said. "My personal goal is first grade with a pony instead of a walker."

The head of the 10-month-old horse only rises to an adult's waist and is almost irresistible to touch,

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Sixth-grader chooses close shave to support anti-cancer effort

sion and no longer takes his prescribed medication, according to charging documents.

The woman who Lawson is accused of pointing the gun at told troopers she was afraid that he was going to shoot her. The woman who was allegedly kicked told troopers it caused her pain that rated a 5 or 6 on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst.

Both Lawson's current girlfriend and another witness confirmed what happened but said the two women instigated the incident.

— Tim Mowry

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At March 2011 recognized miniature horses as service animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Zacharias became determined to find one to extend her son's mobility. Her partner, Joel Beattie, was skeptical, she said, but one by one, obstacles fell.

She couldn't find a baby horse but did locate a pregnant mare in Minnesota that had been used as a therapy horse for children with disabilities. Nine-year-old Gwendolyn was trucked to Washington then transported by ferry and van to Anchorage by Zacharias' sister. Zoe was born in the family's garage in May.

Their long-time landlord surprised them and said, yes, Zaiden could have a service horse inside their rented house. A friend, Deb Turner, became a surrogate mother

motor-coordination.

Right: Zoe uses shoes sold at a Build-a-Bear store to navigate the slippery hard floors at Russian Jack Elementary School

to the little horses, talking neighbors into letting Gwendolyn and Zoe graze on their lawns. A professional seamstress who repairs backpacks for an REI store made a custom harness for Zoe with handholds that Zaiden can grasp.

Even before Zoe was born, educators at the elementary school helped solve problems such as how to keep the horse from sliding on the hard school floors. Hornbuckle, the principal, found the answer with an online search. She learned another miniature horse owner bought shoes at a Build-A-



Bear Workshop store. Zoe now has eight sets.

Many people want to know if Zoe is housebroken. The horse has defecated just twice inside the school, including once "on cue" at a staff meeting after Hornbuckle said accidents were likely to happen.

Zaiden's teacher, Cynthia Temple, said people in the school district have offered her sympathy for having to tolerate a horse in her classroom. She said it was an

easy call because it makes Zaiden's life better.

"My goal as a teacher for all the kids is independence, regardless of their needs," Temple said. "For Zaiden, an independent thing was putting on his coat, which was big feat, and using the zipper. Now Zoe is part of how Zaiden is going to function, walking and getting up from his chair, those little things that I can already see."

The law gives Zaiden the right to walk with his horse

into restaurants and stores but Zacharias has been cautious about public appearances.

"I want it to be appreciated, not just allowed," she said. "I feel a heavy responsibility in being an advocate not just for my son's condition but also for miniature horses and for service animals."

She's keeping a record of her family's experience, perhaps as a guide for others in her family's situation.

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BRIDGES: Isaacson asks for support

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president. Terry Miller, who died in 1989, also served as lieutenant governor and has a building named after him.

During a short House floor speech on the bill, Isaacson asked for his colleagues' support, noting that although his bill wasn't going to dramatically change Alaska, it will honor those

who helped make Alaska what it is.

"There are some bills that we work on that do the heavy lifting that allow us to stay in the land, to live work, play and invest right here in Alaska," he said, while wearing a Santa Claus tie. "There are others that let us celebrate those who settled the land."

The northbound bridge,

known as bridge number 1364, would be named the Nellie Miller Bridge. The southbound bridge, known as bridge number 1866, would be named the Con Miller Bridge.

The bill passed the House with unanimous support and now heads to the Senate.

Contact staff writer Matt Buxton at 489-7844 and follow him on Twitter: @FDNMpolitics.



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Unemployment falls to 6.5 percent

JUNEAU — Alaska's unemployment rate hit its lowest level in 4 1/2 years last month, falling to 6.5 percent.

The state labor department says that seasonally adjusted preliminary rate compares to 6.7 percent in January and 7.1 percent in February 2012.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, last month's mark would be the lowest level in Alaska since August 2008, when unemployment also stood at 6.5 percent.

U.S. employment in February was 7.7 percent.

Bank employee indicted in scheme

ANCHORAGE — Federal prosecutors say a former Wells Fargo Bank employee accused of cashing forged tax refund checks has been indicted.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Anchorage says that 24-year-old Melissa Licelot Duran-Muniz of Anchorage is accused of depositing and cashing two forged U.S. Treasury checks for a total of \$14,478.

— Wire reports