



### A look back

Taking a glimpse at the highlights of 2016.

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### To the Mac's

Rocky Mountain Raiders win marquee event.

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BRENT CALVER/OWW

**RAIDERS FOR THE WIN** – Rocky Mountain Raiders captains, from the left, Hailey McCallum, Kennedy Brown, Ashley Sutherland and Ava Thiessen hoist the Mac's Tournament trophy on Jan. 1.

## More changes coming to EMS dispatch

By Krista Conrad  
Staff Reporter

Changes to ambulance dispatch in southern Alberta are disappointing and won't benefit the Foothills, say officials responsible for 911 service in the area.

Darren Sandbeck, chief paramedic for Alberta Health Services (AHS), said the City of Calgary will take over dispatch for EMS resources within its city limits on April 1, while AHS will provide

EMS dispatch for the remainder of southern Alberta from a centre in southeast Calgary.

The changes announced Dec. 20 come after the City of Calgary made a case to keep its integrated model, which it had substantially invested in, he said.

"The reality is they'll be using our technology, our computerized dispatch platform, our telephone system, our recording system," said Sandbeck. "So effectively it will look like another AHS dis-

patch centre."

The leased space costs AHS \$60,000 per month and for security purposes the exact location of the southern communications centre cannot be released, he said.

Sandbeck said there shouldn't be any disruption of service for Foothills residents, whose 911 calls will be routed to the southern communications centre.

"Nothing really changes for the Foothills; 911 calls are still answered by the Foothills com-

munications centre, EMS calls are transferred off and instead of being transferred to the City of Calgary they will be transferred to the AHS call centre," he said. Sandbeck said the new system will be seamless for the caller and will put everyone on the provincial dispatch platform, which will eventually lead to provincial implementation of the new Alberta First Responders Radio Communications System (AFRRCS).

Suzanne Oel, chair of Foothills

Regional Emergency Services Commission (FRESC) is not convinced the changes to the dispatch will benefit the Foothills region. She said it's putting the needs of the urban population ahead of its rural counterparts.

The City of Calgary has expressed interest in retaining its co-ordinated dispatch rather than using the fragmented dispatch system that has been in place since consolidation in 2009.

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# RCMP recover \$100,000 worth of stolen property

Wheel Staff

Okotoks RCMP have recovered almost \$100,000 in stolen property after finding a pick-up truck and cargo trailer parked in a residential area in town.

Officers on patrol in a residential area on Dec. 29 spotted a white Ford pick-up truck with a 26-foot-cargo trailer hooked to it. When they checked the licence plate numbers, officers found they did

not match the truck or the trailer.

Further investigation revealed the truck was stolen in Beiseker and the trailer had been stolen in Chestermere. RCMP also recovered a Polaris Indy 550 snowmobile, which was stolen in Carseland. Inside the trailer, they found an Arctic Cat side-by-side and a Yamaha Rhino, which were both stolen in Chestermere.

In total RCMP recovered

\$100,000 worth of stolen property.

No arrests have been made at this time and RCMP continue their investigation to identify potential suspects.

Anyone with information about this incident is asked to contact Okotoks RCMP at 403-995-6400. Anonymous tips can be made to CrimeStoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), or online at [www.tipssubmit.com](http://www.tipssubmit.com).

## EMS, continued from front page

With fragmented dispatch service a call received is then transferred to the appropriate agency - fire, police or ambulance, she said. If the caller requires ambulance, the call is forwarded to Calgary, she said. Foothills 911 operators stay on the line to ensure the call is successful so Foothills residents receive the best possible outcome.

With co-ordinated dispatch, calls come to one centre and the necessary services are notified quickly without mistakes in addressing or other information, saving time in emergency response, she said.

She said the changes put the Foothills and the rest of southern Alberta at a different standard than the city.

"We would wonder why it that acceptable for the urban centres to have this type of a standard and for the rest of us we don't get

to have that standard," said Oel. "Fragmenting is unacceptable to Calgarians and other urban centres, but for us it's supposed to be acceptable, and so we question that."

**"We continue to be their experiment, and I don't know where it's going to lead."**

Suzanne Oel  
FRESC chairwoman

With some emergencies, it can pose an issue in getting timely response, she said. If urgent medical help is needed and fire personnel are closer than the nearest ambulance, they will get the call, but Oel said it takes time to reroute back through the Foothills 911 call centre.

"Sometimes there are issues with that, and sometimes the co-ordination and finding of the address is an issue. That's all very important when seconds count," said Oel. "It's really a big deal for us."

She said the expense to operate the southern communications centre is unreasonable, costing more than \$700,000 per year to serve 375,000 people. With 130,000 of the southern Alberta population coming from the 26 municipalities served by Foothills 911, she said FRESC could operate a co-ordinated dispatch at a fraction of the cost, as it has in the past.

"It's a huge amount of money to make themselves a duplication of the AFFRCS-ready system, because we're already doing it, and at about one-third of the cost," said Oel. "We continue to be their experiment, and I don't know where it's going to lead."

# Highwood MLA expects pipeline decision in 2017

## Province: Wayne Anderson says 2016 ending on dark note with carbon tax

By Don Patterson  
Editor



WAYNE ANDERSON

Highwood MLA

Highwood MLA Wayne Anderson is hopeful 2017 will be the year the Town of Okotoks finally sees progress on its longstanding request for provincial funding to build a water pipeline from Calgary.

Anderson said he is "cautiously optimistic" a decision will come this year after recent fruitful meetings he has had with the Town and provincial ministers.

"I think we've found some of the quirks with the bureaucrats for what's holding up the pipeline," he said.

The pipeline ranks high on Anderson's priority list in the Highwood in the New Year, along with a new bridge in High River, expanding high-speed internet, supporting the local economy and creating new jobs.

He said 2016 began on a bright note with united opposition to Bill-6, legislation to include farms under Alberta labour laws.

"I said to myself I'm a lucky guy to have people from rural Alberta who stand up for something they believe in and make their presence known and that's how we started last year and that's in the history books," he said.

Other highlights of 2016 for Anderson include wrapping up the majority of disaster recovery program files, the approval of a new school in Okotoks

and a good year for farmers. However, he said the year is ending on a darker note as the provincial carbon tax is set to take effect on Jan. 1.

"It's ending with more people who will have to put out more of their dollars for this carbon tax," he said.

Anderson believes 2017 will be a tough year in Alberta, despite reports the provincial economy will turn a corner next year.

"They said last year things are going to turn around for 2016," he said. "At the end of 2016 we're not seeing that. In 2017 people personally are going to be hit."

Anderson said drilling activity is down and oil-field service companies are either sitting idle or they are selling equipment south of the border. This will make it even more difficult for the oil sector to rebound as companies will be paying a premium for new equipment, he added.

"It's pretty hard to hear the economy is going to change in 2017 when all of these indicators are moving against it," said Anderson. "Plus with the federal government now bringing in a carbon tax over and above what we're doing, I'm not sure how that's going to play out."

While the recent fed-

eral approval of the Trans Mountain Pipeline and the Line 3 pipeline replacement will help, Anderson believes giving the green light to the contentious Keystone XL and Energy East pipelines will make a real difference.

"Right now 100,000 barrels of oil every day comes into Canada from foreign resources, why isn't it coming from Alberta?" he said. "Venezuelan oil and Saudi Arabian oil are in tankers burning marine diesel, which is the worst fuel in the world, coming up the St. Laurence Seaway and dumping their fuel off at the refineries in Montreal or taking it to Irving refineries out east."

Anderson sees opportunity in the Foothills economy.

However, he said it's important to support local businesses to help them get through the next year.

"Okotoks seems to be bringing in a lot of small to medium size businesses... whether they can sustain themselves is my concern," he said. "Talking to some of the small businesses, their business is down 15 to 20 per cent but some of them are holding steady."

Expanding access to high speed Internet is essential to giving businesses a chance to grow. Anderson wants to bring officials from companies like Axia and Xplornet to High River and Okotoks to meet with residents and businesses about what could be done to improve high-speed Internet service in the area, as well as tap into federal funding in this area.

"If we get fibre optics organizations will be able to move massive amounts of data," said Anderson.

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