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More than 5,000 attend Christmas lighting ceremony at historic hotel

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GLENWOOD SPRINGS — In the early years, the Hotel Colorado would close its doors during the winter and wouldn't open them again until the warm breeze of spring thawed the valley.

But those were the old days.

Now, winter is one of the most celebrated times at the historic hotel. Thanks in part to partners of Creative Dimensions in Denver, Kerry Koepping and Janet Koelling, who have a passion for holiday decorating. For the past 14 years, the hotel has held the annual Holiday Lighting Ceremony the day after Thanksgiving to kick off the holiday season.

"It's a big community event," Koepping said.

Last year, Koepping estimated that 5,000 people attended to watch the flipping of the switch. That's a pretty big turnout considering the first year there was no crowd at all.

"It's really grown into an international sized event," Koepping said.

"We've had volunteers from all over the state and as far away as Canada to help with decorating."

"It's doubled in size," said Larry McDonald, general manager of the Hotel Colorado. "This year it's evolved even bigger than ever before."

Providence Hospitality Partners, LLC manages the hotel. In 1992, Koepping and Koelling were hired by Providence to do the marketing for them. That's when the two fell in love with Glenwood Springs and the Hotel Colorado.

"We work for hotels all over the country," Koelling said. "But this hotel and the event is our 'labor of love.'"

The two wanted to do a lighting ceremony after visiting the Grove Park Inn located in Asheville, N.C., one year during the holidays.

That's where their fantasies about creating something similar bloomed. But, they wanted theirs to be bigger and more elegant. All they needed was the right hotel.

When Koelling and Koepping started working for the hotel, Koelling heard a story about the Hotel Colorado during World War II.

Apparently, the hotel was a recovery unit for injured soldiers who'd just returned to the states.

The story goes that one of the nurses working at the hotel decorated the building with lights and ornaments one holiday season, because she became "taken by the spirit."

That same spirit fueled the two's inspiration.

"We wanted to recreate what she had done long before," Koelling said.

The first year of the event, Koelling and Koepping started work for the Hotel Colorado in February. That December, they were decorating the place for Christmas.

"It needed to become a legacy for the community," Koepping said.

And a legacy it is.

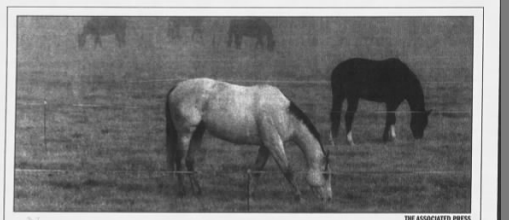
Each passing year, the crowds have grown at the hotel. It's become so big that Koelling and Koepping haven't been able to see the lighting ceremony for the last four years because the hotel has been booked full.

"The lighting isn't important for us," Koelling said.

"For us, the decorating is what we enjoy. The lighting ceremony is for the people to enjoy."

For McDonald, the lighting ceremony is the best event of the year.

"It's so emotional and such a great experience," he said. "When the lights finally go on and you see what's been done, you want to go back and do it all over again."



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEFORE THE STORM

Horses graze in a paddock Monday morning along Lookout Road near Boulder, where colder temperatures from an approaching winter storm caused fog in low-lying areas.

Man accused of threatening pair with gun

By MIKE SACCONE
The Daily Sentinel

A Clifton man suspected of pulling a gun on his ex-girlfriend Saturday night was arrested Sunday afternoon, though not before he led police on a brief chase.

Albert James Nickerson, 22, homeless, was arrested Sunday around 4 p.m. when deputies from the Mesa County Sheriff's Department responded to a report of a fight on 32 1/ 8 Road.

Upon arriving at the scene, deputies cuffed Nickerson on suspicion of felony menacing and having several warrants out for his arrest.

"I opened the driver's side door to unlock the passenger door," Deputy Wayne Kean reported. "Albert took ... off in a sprint north on ... 32 1/ 8 Road from the west side of 465 32 1/ 8 Road."

Kean reported in Nickerson's arrest affidavit that he and two other Sheriff's Department officials chased Nickerson onto Coronado Way where the suspect fell.

Nickerson was booked into the Mesa County Jail shortly after 8 p.m. Sunday.

The night before Nickerson's arrest, his ex-girlfriend, 22-year-old Brandy Chapman, had informed deputies that Nickerson had threatened her boyfriend, 23-year-old Cody Guerrero, with a gun outside her home.

According to Nickerson's arrest affidavit, he came by Chapman's home to pick up some of his belongings around 9 p.m.

Shortly after Chapman told Nickerson that she would bring Nickerson's property out to his car, she reported hearing Guerrero say, "Don't point that thing at me!" according to the affidavit.

"(Chapman) said she saw that Albert was holding a gun and pointing it at her," the affidavit said. "(Chapman) said that Albert had the sleeve of his shirt covering the majority of the gun, but she could see the barrel of the gun."

She told deputies that Nickerson then told her he had "a bullet with your name on it" — a threat, the affidavit said, Nickerson also made to Chapman earlier in the day.

Nickerson retreated to his car, but not before telling Chapman he would return in 20 minutes with a stick of dynamite.

Chapman then called the Sheriff's Department.

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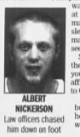

ALBERT NICKERSON
Law officers chased him down on foot

ABUSE: He resigned from job

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and to apologize to his wife, who was sitting in court.

"During the 15 years that we were together, I can honestly say I have never intentionally harmed Mrs. Medina physically or mentally," Medina said.

Medina was first arrested this year on suspicion of domestic violence in March. The charges were later dropped.

He was arrested again in August on suspicion of domestic violence-related charges. Medina was again placed on administrative leave.

According to Karee Salaz, spokeswoman for the Colorado Judicial Branch, Medina resigned in August.

Retired Colorado Court of Appeals Judge Edwin G. Ruland, who is also overseeing Medina's domestic relations case, said he hoped the plea agreement will help Medina and his wife do what is best for their children.

"I think this disposition helps in that goal," Ruland said. "I hope both of you can dedicate your efforts to that in the future."

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Missing nurse probe expands to Texas

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LITTLETON — With no new leads in Colorado, investigators searching for a missing Air Force nurse have asked for help from authorities in Texas.

Nannette Dotson, 33, an intensive-care nurse at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, was last seen Nov. 19 when she left her 16-month-old daughter in the care of her brother at his home in this Denver suburb.

Authorities in Texas are examining Dotson's computer and talking to the father of Dotson's daughter.

"We've received a formal request from the Jefferson County sheriff department to assist them in their investigation of that missing person," Capt. Jim Rickhoff of the Bexar County sheriff's department told the Rocky Mountain News in a story on its Web site Monday.

Dotson went out line dancing at the Grizzly Rose the night before she disappeared and her brother, Tony Dotson, 34, said he received a phone call from a man who said he danced with her there. Tony Dotson said the man told him he helped her dodge two other men who were flirting with her and wanted to take her to breakfast.

She returned to her brother's home in the early hours of Nov. 19 in her brother's car.

"You always wonder, did someone follow her home?" Tony Dotson said.

But Jefferson County spokeswoman Jacki Kelley said investigators have talked with several men Dotson met while out dancing but that none of the interviews yielded any new leads.

She said there is no information that points toward foul play.

"There seems to be two camps, that either she had some involvement in her own disappearance, or that potentially something tragic has happened to her. We have no information to support that one theory is more credible, or more likely, than the other. We simply have nothing new Zero," Kelley said.

When she left her brother's house on Nov. 19, Nonnie Dotson said she planned to go shopping, spend time with friends and possibly have dinner. It is unknown whether she walked or caught a ride.

Her cell phone had been traced to southwest Littleton but had not been found.

SENTENCE: Blood test showed drugs in system

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worse.

Tuttle told the court that Martinez had moved his family south of Grand Junction "exclusively because of this incident."

He said Martinez has been unable to trust people the way he did before the incident.

Deputy District Attorney Rob Zentner said for these reasons, the danger Alexander forced upon the community and his history of drug use, the 80-year sentence was appropriate.

Zentner said any time drugs are involved in a crime, suspects such as Alexander should expect to confront lengthy prison sentences.

Blood test results introduced at trial revealed that Alexander was under the influence of alcohol and marijuana at the time of shooting.

However, the prosecution also presented evidence during the trial of Alexander's long history of drug abuse, including methamphetamine and other narcotics.

"Those people choosing to abuse illicit drugs before proceeding to menace and assault innocent victims, those criminals go to prison," Zentner said.

"Period."

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