

Dodging the smelter?

► Some residents expected more at public meeting

By Korina Schneider
BLACKWELL - Phelps Dodge officials invited the public Tuesday to hear the company's solutions on cleaning up contamination left behind from the Blackwell zinc smelter, but some Blackwell folks were disappointed in the format in which the meeting was conducted.

Booths lined the inside perimeter of the Kay Room at Kay Electric Cooperative, and individuals were guided through the booths to receive handouts and explanations about the clean-up process that Phelps Dodge plans to undertake.

One booth explained how a groundwater treatment plant will be constructed and how it will work. Other booths were manned by Oklahoma

Department of Environmental Quality specialists, Phelps Dodge officials and officials from the Oklahoma Department of Health.

Phelps Dodge Corporate Communications Manager Jim Telle said he believed conducting the meeting in such a format was what the people wanted.

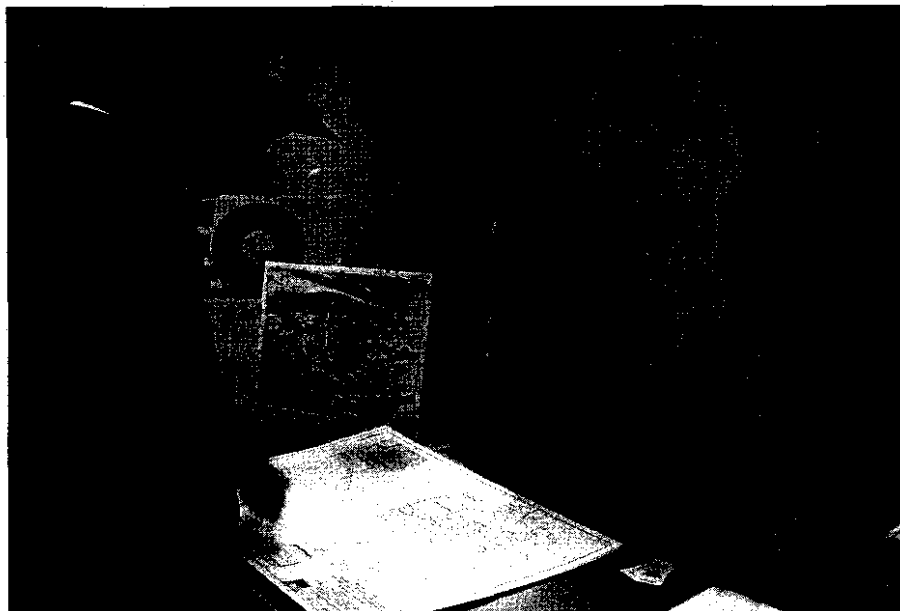
"It seemed that people wanted direct one-on-one conversation and to meet the people with Phelps Dodge," Telle said.

He said the turnout was "excellent," and people arrived as much as a half-hour early.

Some residents, however, wanted more.

"Probably 98 percent of the people who came here expected a meeting," said Larry Fair of Blackwell, who signed up for a voluntary soil sampling program offered by Phelps Dodge.

He was one of almost 50 who will take advantage of the free soil sampling, but



Larry Fair, left, of Blackwell examines a map provided by Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality Project Manager Sara Downard, right, and Brownfield Program Manager Rita Kottke during a public meeting hosted Tuesday by Phelps Dodge in the Kay Room at Kay Electric Cooperative in Blackwell. Standing behind Fair is Blackwell resident Leroy Boman.

Photo by Korina Schneider

he is one of hundreds who is wondering how and when the clean-up process will take place. "It will probably be June before we start sampling,"

said Mike Cooper of the Shaw Group, which will handle the soil sampling for residents who come forward and ask for it.

The soil sampling will precede the final stage of the clean-up process by Phelps Dodge. The last step officials will take will be constructing a groundwater treatment plant to extract harmful contaminants from a plume of groundwater that surrounds the entire city.

Residents who sign up for the soil sampling will be eligible for a free clean-up, if contaminants are found, but attorneys from Nix, Patterson & Roach of Daingerfield, Texas, think random clean-ups will defeat the purpose of ridding Blackwell of the 100-year-old smelter waste once and for all.

"Phelps Dodge has been trying to put Band-aids on a gaping wound," attorney Nelson Roach said.

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Thank you!

Coach John Cope, Coach Ross Doane and the entire Medford Junior High and High School Baseball Teams would like to thank the following for their contributions and donations to the 2007 Marathon/Alumni Game and fundraiser.

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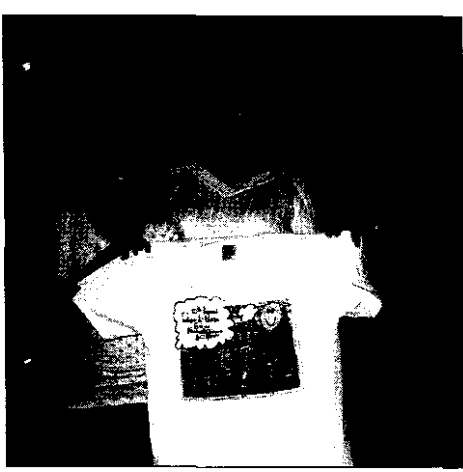
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Tulips move to fairgrounds



Blackwell third-grader Allison Chenoweth displays the design she created for this year's Tulips-A-Bloom T-shirt contest. With Allison are Tulips-A-Bloom Co-chairwoman Deonne Gates, left, teacher Tonya Kelly and Blackwell Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Shane Frye.

Courtesy K...

BLACKWELL - The 13th annual Tulips-A-Bloom Festival kicks off on Friday with the Tulip Follies at 7 p.m. in the auditorium at Blackwell High School.

The theme for the festival this year is "Hee Haw Again." Tickets are \$8 for adults and \$3 for children.

A barbecue dinner sponsored by United Way will precede the follies from 5 to 6:30 p.m. in the high school study center. Tickets are \$8 for adults and \$3 for children under 12.

The Tulip Festival will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the Kay County Fairgrounds.

The event will include exhibits, crafts, food vendors, live music, a quilt and art show, and rides and games and rides.

The annual afghan drawing will

take place between 3 and 4 p.m., and tickets are available for \$1 each at the chamber office.

Entertainment scheduled throughout the day includes the following. All times are approximate.

9:30 a.m. - Welcome from Blackwell Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Shane Frye and Tulips-A-Bloom Coordinator Deonne Gates.

10:05 a.m. - Parkside Elementary kindergarteners.

9:30 a.m. - Parkside Elementary first-graders.

10 a.m. - Washington Elementary second-graders.

10:30 a.m. - Washington Elementary third-graders.

Frye and Gates will present this

year's T-shirt contest winner, third-grader Allison Chenoweth, following the third-grade performance.

11 a.m. - Performance by Fannette Hunt.

11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. - The Tulips-A-Bloom Follies will be at the stage, circulating among the crowd and at the centennial merchandise booth.

Noon - Joe Kreger, cowboy story teller and Oklahoma poet laureate.

12:30 p.m. - Ciara Farrow of Tonkawa. Farrow has appeared on "America's Most Talented Kids."

12:45 p.m. - TNT Gymnastics.

1 p.m. - TNT Gymnastics.

2 p.m. - Parkside Elementary fourth-graders.

2:30 p.m. - Houston Elementary fifth-graders.

3 p.m. - Midnight Blues Band.

4 p.m. - Closing of the festival.

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He said random clean-ups will not solve any problems, and that cleaning up properties for those who voluntarily sign up will not provide solutions for residents who might have contaminated soils but did not sign up for the testing.

"Unless they (Phelps Dodge) do it right, this problem is not going to be over with," Roach said.

In December, Nix, Patterson &

Roach hired Dr. Rod O'Connor from Aqua-Tech Laboratories in College Station, Texas, to perform tests on nearly 50 homes in Blackwell. Most of the homes were located inside the area where the plume of contaminated groundwater exists. Tests were conducted on homes that were built before 1980, when merchants stopped selling lead-based paint,

which was banned in 1978, and on homes built after that time period.

Samples of dusts and soils were taken from "grid sections" of each area in the community, and test results were astounding, according to the attorneys.

O'Connor found that 80 percent of the homes tested in Blackwell were contaminated with moderate to high levels of lead.

Some skeptics have asked the attorneys how much of the contamination was related to lead-based paint inside the homes.

"Our data indicates that the lead in the dust in the houses does not come from the contribution of lead paint," said attorney Keith Langston.

He said that is one flaw Oklahoma Department of Health officials made during their presentation at the Phelps Dodge open house.

Officials from the DOH displayed a chart showing the blood lead levels of children 6 years old or younger who resided in Blackwell from 2000 to 2006.

The blood tests revealed that out of 222 children tested in Blackwell, six children (2.7 percent) had a blood lead level greater than 10 micrograms per deciliter, which is considered dangerous. Two children (.9 percent) tested higher than 20 micrograms per deciliter.

"The numbers are slightly higher than the state level," said Fahad

Khan, surveillance coordinator for the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, a division of the state department of health.

According to a DOH handout, almost 50 percent of Blackwell's homes were built before 1950, when lead-based paint was used commonly, and about 20 percent have been built since 1970.

The flaw, Langston said, is that the testing done by the state did not specify whether children tested lived in homes that contained lead-based paint and no research was done to find out what kind of environment the children were living in.

"The testing procedure is not designed to find contamination," Roach said. "It's designed to not find contamination."

Furthermore, the tests only revealed blood lead levels, not lead levels in dusts and soils inside and around the homes.

"This is the agency that is charged with protecting the public residents of Oklahoma," Langston said. "Scientists cannot speculate and assume lead exposure is coming from lead-based paint. Lead doesn't just ooze out of the paint and into the air."

The results of O'Connor's tests will be revealed in detail and explained during a public forum hosted by the attorneys at 7 p.m. today in the Kay Room at Kay

Electric Cooperative.

Audience participation will be encouraged at the meeting, and attorneys will be on site to answer questions from residents.

In the meantime, Phelps Dodge also is offering a local source of information by opening an office in downtown Blackwell.

The office will be located on East Blackwell Avenue, in the former Arkla gas building. Officials are planning to move into the headquarters by Monday, and the doors will be open for anyone who wants to visit and ask questions about the clean-up process or soil sampling program.

"(Citizens) have a right to know what is the next chapter to the Blackwell zinc smelter," Telle said.

Still, some residents are skeptical and think Phelps Dodge has a hidden agenda.

"All this changed into a political thing for Phelps Dodge," Fair said.

Diane Sabian, a lifelong resident of Blackwell, agreed.

"I think it's just sucking people into something that they don't know what's going on," she said. "These people are playing games with people."

Sabian said she has hired an attorney to deal with any contamination problems that might arise on her property.



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