

the WATCH

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PHOTOFEST IN FULL SWING — Peaking fall colors and a dose of winter weather have made for some dramatic scenery, like this still shot from a time-lapse image of Sheep Mountain, Ames and the Ilium Valley on Monday evening. The Telluride Photo Festival starts this weekend and looks to be aptly timed as usual. Watch out for leaf peepers. (Photo by Brett Schreckengost)

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THE HISTORIC SCHMID RANCH, likely setting of *The Hateful Eight*. (Photo by Brett Schreckengost)

Tarantino's *Hateful Eight* Will Bring Economic Boost to Telluride This Winter

BY ALLISON PERRY

TELLURIDE — Pending approval from the San Miguel Board of County Commissioners, Quentin Tarantino and a crew of over 100 will transform the Schmid Ranch on Wilson Mesa this winter into a small post-Civil-War town as the set-

ting for Tarantino's next film, *The Hateful Eight*, bringing numerous benefits to the town of Telluride, along with a few high profile celebrities.

Although none of the filming will take place in the town of Telluride itself, the project will

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Family Cries Foul After Blasting Accident at Revenue Mine

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT

OURAY COUNTY — Federal officials have cited the operator of the Revenue Silver Mine for failing to properly report a blasting accident at the mine that led to the Aug. 29 air ambulance evacuation of an injured miner.

In the ensuing investigation, the Mine Safety and Health Administration issued an additional ten "elevated" orders to the mine

operator, reflecting "flagrant violations" of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 and "aggravated conduct constituting more than ordinary negligence."

MSHA issued the orders prior to last week's announcement putting the mine operator on notice of a Pattern of Violations of mandatory health or safety standards, almost ten months after two miners died of carbon monoxide poisoning at the Revenue Mine in No-

vember 2013.

Fortune Minerals Vice President of Operations Mike Romaniuk (whose company took over contractual operation of the Revenue in May as part of a staged acquisition from Star Mine Operations) told *The Watch* in early September that the Aug. 29 accident was not severe enough to report to MSHA, and that the vic-

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Majestic Skies Submits Plans, Moves Forward With FBO

BY GUS JARVIS

MONTROSE — With the deadline to submit detailed building plans for the first phase of its new Fixed-Base Operator facility at the Montrose Regional Airport set for this week, Majestic Skies' Chief Operating Officer Larry Danielle said his company's blueprint is being proffered according to the agreement with the county, and he is excited to move forward on what will be a "good project"

for the region.

Majestic Skies' deadline was Oct. 1, 90 days after the agreement to operate an FBO was signed by Danielle and Montrose County Commissioner David White. The commissioner's approval was the culmination of a sharply criticized proposal and review process that had many in the community concerned about the county government's lack of openness, as well as its willingness to offer up to \$5 million in credit reimbursements to

Majestic Skies.

With the contract's approval process completed, Danielle said that he is ready to begin construction once the needed permits are in place, and has already begun to invest in the project. On Wednesday, Montrose County Aviation Director Lloyd Arnold confirmed that detailed building plans have been submitted to the county, as required by the agreement. Den-

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tim had suffered only “bumps and bruises” and was medevac’d as a precautionary measure.

The accident report on MSHA’s mine data retrieval system supports this statement, indicating that “Evaluation [of the accident victim] revealed only deep bruising. Later evaluation revealed a fractured elbow.”

But according to a family member, the miner also suffered neck and back injuries, torn cartilage in his hip, pelvis and lower back and a torn rotator cuff, for which he will have to undergo several major surgeries on the road to recovery.

“It was a lot more than just ‘bumped and bruised,’” said the family member, who asked to remain anonymous. “He’s pretty messed up. They hid it from the government and didn’t call MSHA.”

MSHA regulations require that mine operators must report certain types of accidents within 15 minutes of occurring – including those where there is “An injury of an individual at the mine which has a reasonable potential to cause death.” (Title 30, Code of Federal Regulations § 50.10).

But Fortune Minerals did not report the Aug. 29 accident to the feds.

Instead, multiple sources have stated that MSHA officials found



LEST WE FORGET – The Miners Memorial statue in Ouray served as a focal point for a grieving community after the double fatality at the Revenue Mine last November. (Photo by Samantha Wright)

out about the accident through a newspaper article published in the Sept. 4 issue of *The Watch*, almost a full week after the accident happened. (At press time, MSHA had not confirmed whether this was in fact the case.)

Investigators from MSHA’s

Rocky Mountain District Office in Denver arrived at the Revenue Mine on Friday, Sept. 5 and launched an investigation, ultimately issuing a total of 11 elevated orders, ten of which met “Significant and Substantial” (S&S) criteria, indicating “reasonable

likelihood that the cited hazards would result in an injury or illness of a reasonably serious nature.”

The accident victim, whose name has not been released by the mine or by MSHA, had 16 years of mining experience. According to his family, he has never been injured in a mining accident before.

As the source from the victim’s family described the accident, the victim and his partner were using stopers to drill a heading 450 feet up in a raise on the Yellow Rose Vein (one of two primary veins in the mine), while a separate crew used explosives in another nearby heading.

According to the official MSHA accident report, the accident was triggered when “Vibration from blasting in an adjacent area caused rock to fall from the rib,” on the side of the raise, “and approximately 20-30 pounds of rock struck the employee in the back of the neck.”

“There could have been multiple injuries or fatalities,” said Ron Renowden, a Silverton resident and retired MSHA District Specialist and Denver Bureau Office Supervisor who has closely watched developments at the Revenue Mine over the past few years.. “This guy is lucky to be alive.”

Romaniuk, meanwhile, told *The Watch* this week that Fortune is “working very hard at changing the safety culture” at the Revenue Mine. “We have implemented a number of changes to the leadership team, and we are on a path to continue to improve the safety of that mine to achieve much higher standards,” he said.

MSHA CITES 92 ‘SIGNIFICANT AND SUBSTANTIAL’ VIOLATIONS

The accident happened less than a month prior to MSHA’s announcement last week that it has issued a Pattern of Violations Notice to Star Mine Operations, which is still listed on MSHA’s mine data retrieval system as the operator of the Revenue Mine.

In fact, Canadian Fortune Minerals has been the operator on the ground since last May, when the company announced the staged acquisition of the mine in a deal that was to close on Wednesday, Oct. 1.

According to Romaniuk, Fortune and Star entered a contractual arrangement in May that was to remain in effect until the closing of the acquisition. “Once the transaction is completed, Fortune will assume 100 percent of the asset and will issue a notice to MSHA of change of control, and all the employees will move from Star to Fortune,” he said.

In its Sept. 25 release announcing the POV notice, MSHA cited 92 significant and substantial violations at Revenue Mine during a 12-month review period beginning Aug. 1, 2013, and ending July 31, 2014.

By all accounts, the POV

notice is not good news for the Revenue Mine. “If you get on notification, it signifies that you [have] serious compliance problems,” said Renowden. According to MSHA’s website, the Revenue Mine is the only mine in the United States to have been issued a POV Notice in 2014.

Fortune Minerals released a statement about the POV Notice last week, emphasizing the company’s focus on safety, and deflecting concerns about the mine’s safety record onto the previous operator.

But with Jim Williams (the co-owner of Star Mine Operations and head of its parent company Star Mine Operations LLC) now seated on Fortune’s Board of Directors, there is some ambiguity as to whether Fortune is really absolved, as a new mine operator, from previous problems inherited from Star Mine.

The lack of clarity regarding who holds ultimate responsibility for the most recent accident at the Revenue is just one more red flag for Renowden. “A lot of guys rely on that mine, but the guys I talk to say it’s not a safe place to go to work,” he said. “I worry about my friends there.”

MSHA still has not issued its final report on last year’s double-fatality at the Revenue Mine, when miners Nick Cappanno and Rick Williams were killed by high levels of carbon monoxide in an area of the mine where explosives had been detonated the previous day. The agency indicated in its recent release regarding the POV notice that the fatality investigation is nearing completion.

As for the recent blasting accident, Romaniuk said there is a “difference of opinion” between MSHA and Fortune about whether the accident should have been reported.

“At the time, based on the first responders’ assessment, it didn’t meet conditions for instantaneous reporting, but that did not stop us from doing the right thing to make sure the injured party received appropriate care,” he said. “Our team did an excellent job and safely got the individual to medical care as quickly as possible. We took it extremely seriously, and took the precaution of having him flown to a hospital.”

Romaniuk said he was not aware that the victim had suffered anything beyond the reported bruising and broken elbow. He added that Fortune has been doing “continuous followup” on the accident victim. “We want to make sure he comes back and is physically capable of performing,” he said.

That’s not very likely, according to the victim’s family member, who said that an MRI conducted on Tuesday this week showed that the “cartilage in his hip is all damaged, and he has six or seven herniated disks in his neck and back. He’s crippled. I doubt if he will ever go back to mining.”

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