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City fine tunes STOP program Red light camera fines, rules revised

By TODD G. DICKSON
The Las Cruces Bulletin

The Las Cruces City Council Monday, June 15, agreed to make changes prompted by a new state law to limit fines per offense from civil citations by traffic intersection cameras, more commonly called red light cameras.

When the city council approved the red light cameras for four of Las Cruces' busiest intersections, it set fines ranging from \$100 for the first red light violation or \$80 for going 5-10 mph over the speed limit to \$175 for three or more red light violations and up to \$250 for speeding more than 35 mph over the limit.

The Las Cruces program is similar to ones in Albuquerque and El Paso, but many in the legislative leadership don't care much for the "big brother" feel of the cameras, nor does Gov. Bill Richardson. Instead of passing a law to ban the cameras, lawmakers passed a bill to set limits on fines and dictate procedures for contesting citations.

To comply with the legislation, the Las Cruces City Council made the following changes to its Safe Traffic Operations Program (STOP):

- A fine maximum of \$100
- Having district court assign a review judge, rather than the police department
- Requiring hearings in which the citations are contested following the same rules of evidence as those normally used in district civil cases

Though residents at the meeting had little to say about the changes, they did talk about lingering concerns

See City Council on PAGE A5

Locals 'lift lives' in Juárez

Las Cruces becomes a distribution center for the Free Wheelchair Mission

By BETHANY CONWAY
The Las Cruces Bulletin

Less than a year ago, Dennis Prickett would have never imagined himself driving through the streets of Mexico with four wheelchairs strapped to the roof of a Chevy Suburban.

Part of a three-car caravan carrying 11 wheelchairs to the Casa del Niño y del Anciano Mexico in Ciudad Juárez, Prickett took a major step for the Free Wheelchair Mission (FWM) on Monday, June 15.

He wasn't alone in his venture. A group of five optimistic Las Cruces headed south that morning with the hope of "lifting the lives" of nine disabled people by day's end.

"I am energized. I am pumped," Prickett said as he and the group made their way to the El Paso residence of Pastor Terry Lopez, who would lead them to the home for abandoned children and homeless elderly.

After convincing the FWM to make a quick stop in Las Cruces on their Mobility in Motion tour in May 2008, Prickett knew he could do more to help the nonprofit in its mission to provide wheelchairs to the impoverished disabled all over the world.

Prickett's idea hit a little

closer to home. After sending 10 wheelchairs to Las Cruces' Sister City of Lerdo, Mexico, with the Club de Leones de Lerdo in 2008, he decided it was possible for there to be a distribution center for the FWM's extraordinary chairs right here in Las Cruces.

Created by Don Schoendorfer, FWM chairs cost around \$50 and are easily assembled from a plastic lawn chair, bike tires and cost-effective screws. The durable wheelchairs are perfect for the scantily paved streets and sidewalks found in neglected areas of Juárez.

The next step was raising enough money for a shipping container of 550 chairs.

After a weekend of fundraising, which included a dance at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum and a Pajita Fiesta on the Mesilla Plaza, Prickett saw his dream realized as the group raised more than \$25,000, giving them the resources to buy a full container.

"I knew we would meet the goal," Prickett said, "I did not expect it this soon."

With their spirits high, Prickett, Pastor Ruben Ortega, his wife Gayla, Nellie Chavez — all members of Sierra Vista Community Church — and Erlinda Portillo, who served as

See Juárez on PAGE A4



Irma Zamora Roman, 72, holds her arms out to embrace Dennis Prickett after volunteers from the Free Wheelchair Mission presented her with a free wheelchair Monday, June 15. Zamora Roman lives in the Casa del Niño y del Anciano Mexico, a home for abandoned children and elderly in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Opinions.....A6-A8
- Coming Up.....A11
- Health.....A29-A31
- Sports.....A19-A23
- Business.....B1-B16
- Legals.....B11-B14
- Restaurant Guide.....C11-C13
- TV Listings.....C15-C18
- Brain Games.....C19
- Chile Knights.....E11

NEXT WEEK

Spaceport aims for the sky's limit
Officials break ground on the \$190 million
Spaceport America north of Las Cruces

The 'eyes and ears' for the Weather Service

Las Cruces learn the basics of weather spotting, storm safety

By JIM HILLEY
The Las Cruces Bulletin

Do you know how to tell the difference between a relatively harmless shelf cloud and a potentially dangerous wall cloud?

Can you distinguish between a dustnado and a tornado?

National Weather Service (NWS) Meteorologist John Fawcett lectured a group of Las Cruces area residents Tuesday, June 9, about recognizing wall clouds — which can lead to the development of tornadoes — and a variety of weather-related topics during a training

session for volunteer weather spotters.

More than a dozen Las Cruces area residents listened to Fawcett's lecture in the Emergency Management Center at the New Mexico Department of Health Building on Solano Drive. The free course lasts about two to three hours and is required for anyone wishing to become a weather spotter for the NWS Sky Warn Program. Participants learn weather safety, how to identify hazardous weather features and when it is appropriate to call the service.

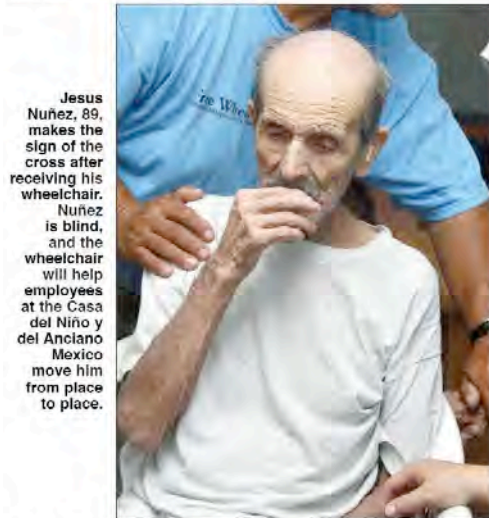
The volunteer spotters play an important part of the weather service's mission

by being the program's "eyes and ears" in the field. Fawcett said despite the development of high-tech equipment such as Doppler radar and satellite imagery, spotters give the agency important observations that radar can miss. "In fact," Fawcett said, "While radar is our primary warning tool, spotter reports help us calibrate the radar."

Before volunteers can become certified, however, they are required to take the class, which stresses two important areas.

First, potential spotters are warned not to take unnecessary chances during

See Spotters on PAGE A5



Jesus Nuñez, 89, makes the sign of the cross after receiving his wheelchair. Nuñez is blind, and the wheelchair will help employees at the Casa del Niño y del Anciano Mexico move him from place to place.



Amputee Juanita Romero Acosta cries tears of joy after being presented with a wheelchair from the Free Wheelchair Mission. Dennis Prickett, right, sponsored the chair presented to Romero Acosta.



PHOTOS BY BETHANY CONWAY

Pastor Terry Lopez is swarmed by children at the Casa del Niño y del Anciano Mexico in Ciudad Juárez.

See more photos on page A31

Juárez

Continued from PAGE A1

coordinator of the local FWM fundraisers, completed a "test run" to Juárez to determine just how they will take the next step – get the chairs to people who need them. They were joined by Terry and Magdalena Lopez of El Paso, as well as Bishop Marco Antonio Salazar and his wife Elizama.

As with all test runs, there were many challenges, but the group arrived at the Casa del Niño y del Anciano Mexico to the sounds of 27 singing children.

Though in need of several essential items – air conditioning, a washer and dryer, school supplies, toiletries, toys – the home's staff treated the group to lunch and showed a great deal of hospitality. While none of the children staying at the home were in need of a wheelchair, should the need arise, Prickett will now be able to accommodate them.

Across the parking lot in the home for the elderly was where the real mission took place. More than 15 seniors call the shelter home, and there were nine lucky recipients to be given chairs that day. Sadly, one woman died that morning, but the group learned of another individual who was added

to their list of recipients.

Of the nine who were given chairs, all of them were overjoyed at their newfound freedom.

"I can't thank you enough. This is wonderful," said 83-year-old Andres Paz as translated by Portillo. Another woman, Irma Zamora Roman, told Portillo the wheelchair was a godsend. Because of Zamora Roman's heart problems she tires easily, and the chair will help her get from place to place.

The most touching case for Pastor Ortega was that of the blind Jesus Nuñez. When he was told the group had brought him a wheelchair, Nuñez responded: "I am blind. Why do I need a wheelchair?" According to the employees at the home, the chair will help them to move him around the building.

"You know that he probably spends a lot of time back there in the back room," Ortega said. Luckily, Nuñez' sister also lives with him in the home.

"What would his situation have been if his sister had not been there?" Ortega asked. "The siblings really touched me in the end. It was an honor to serve in that capacity."

Returning from Juárez, everyone took with them feelings of happiness and sorrow.



Nellie Chavez, Erlinda Portillo and Gayla Ortega pray for Andres Paz, 83, after gifting him a free wheelchair.