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Bob McLaurin, Mike Gireau and Zeke Trautenberg share a laugh after rising from one of dozens of group photos at temples on Mt. Wutai Shan. In the background is Pusa Ding Temple.

Delegation to China eyes sister-city status

Slippery eggs, other delights challenge valley group in heart of ancient civilization.

By Johanna Love

The slivers of egg were a deep amber color, with yolks as green as the illustrations in a Dr. Seuss book.

"Oh, my, we cannot try," thought many of the 18 Wyoming residents. "Not to be rude, must we eat them, Dude?"

The Jackson Hole contingent had been in China less than a day after a marathon 60-hour trip to our destination, Taihuai. We had already used a squat toilet, held on white-knuckled as our bus passed giant coal trucks while ignoring oncoming traffic and wrestled with the math of converting a U.S. dollar to 7.64 yuan.

And now, "ancient eggs."

We tasted a roasted rabbit, slurped up ginger-spiced mutton soup and mystery meat. But only about half the delegates were up to the task of eating the never-cooked eggs, preserved in a way we could only imagine. Vinegar? Formaldehyde?

"Ruth Ann, you are going to love this egg," said Mayor Mark Barron as he finessed a gelatinous wedge.

"Yes, I'm going to love watching you eat that egg," retorted his wife, Ruth Ann Petroff, who as proprietress of Hard Drive Cafe, is accustomed to health inspections that might frown on such delicacies.

Nathan Trautenberg, 15, watched as the egg platter, perched on a lazy susan with a dozen other dishes, rotated toward him.

"This is like Russian Roulette," he said. "Who's gonna die first?"

The trip, organized by the Jackson Hole Center for Global Affairs, is a 10-day goodwill mission to the north-central Shanxi province in the People's Republic of China. Our mission is twofold: Considering a sister-city relationship with Taihuai; and pursuing statewide exchange programs that would benefit both lands.

This is the sixth in a series of visits between Shanxi and Jackson Hole residents that began in November 2004, when Shanxi officials partook in the U.S./China Clean Energy Initiative at Spring Creek Resort in Jackson. In June 2004, Wyoming and Shanxi officials signed a memo of understanding on tourism.

On Friday, we flew from Jackson to Denver to San Francisco, where we

caught five hours of sleep before heading to the airport again and boarding a double-decker 747 with hundreds of people, mostly Asian, headed for Beijing. After chasing the sun for 13 hours and jumping ahead of Jackson time by 14 hours, we disembarked, then stretched and fidgeted near baggage claim for two hours while our leaders tried in vain to track down a vanished suitcase.

After cruising through customs without anyone's bag being unzipped, we negotiated the maze-like airport to reach a gate for an hour-long China Eastern flight to Taiyuan in Shanxi Province. To get to the plane, we squeezed onto a bus with dozens of others. Personal space was reduced from two feet to two inches, "like the tram in the 1970s," said Jim Auge, president of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce. Snapshots outside the plane show visible chunks of pollution in the air.

Once in Shanxi, our hosts from the Shanxi Provincial Tourism Administration greeted us and fed us an elaborate dinner before we crashed to finally sleep seven hours.

As we journeyed the 150 miles from Taiyuan to Taihuai on Monday, we passed third-world shacks, piles of coal, fields of corn, people washing clothes in the river. Zeke Trautenberg, 18, a senior at the Jackson Hole Community School, said the landscape seemed to be "a cross between Nebraska, West Virginia and the desert."

The air began to clear as we approached Wutai Shan mountain. After evading the ancient eggs at lunch, we were invited to a Han Buddhist women's monastery called Pu Shou Si. Taiwan-born translator Ruth Pin-Chi Shi said hundreds of female monks had built the compound themselves, brick by brick. We trudged up winding stairs between dormitories to their temple and library, where Pin-Chi Shi demonstrated the monks' kowtow to Buddha.

Barron asked how the monastery is funded, and we received the first of many indirect answers.

"If you believe in Dharma, Buddha, Singha, they will let you have whatever you want if you really work hard and practice all the time," Pin-Chi Shi said.

The monastery is not open to the public, only to special guests of the Chinese government, she said.

On Wutai Mountain, several different kinds of Buddhism exist side-by-side. Pin-Chi Shi said the other sects

See CHINA on 19A



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MAYFIELD

Continued from 18A

While she had little background in land-use planning or development, her time in the vice president's press shop did teach her about people.

"You learn what people want to know and need to hear," she said of her public relations work. "It is gauging people."

While developers have used public relations representatives and spokeswomen in the past, Mayfield's quick rise to the figurehead of choice for big developers took people by surprise. Within less than a year, her list of current and past projects includes some of the largest in the valley. She currently represents Mackay, whose Osprey Creek project on Moose-Wilson Road proposes 74 units and who recently bought and resold the 78-acre Lloyd property near the Cache Creek trailhead. She works for Dave Taylor, who is midway through the approval process for his 39-unit Pine Glades development on the slopes of Snow King Mountain, a hillside subdivision on slopes so steep that it will have to be accessed via a tunnel. Also for a brief period, she worked with Geordie Gillett on his proposed expansion of Grand Targhee.

Mayfield tries to distance herself from her previous work in Washington, but how many people in the valley view her seems to be a reflection of their own political bent.

Former *News&Guide* staffer Jim Stanford blasted her in his blog, *jhunderground.com*, calling her one of "Cheney's angels" and pegging her as the "mouth for every unsavory land deal in Jackson Hole."

"From helping provide cover as Scooter and Big Dick waged a bogus war in Iraq to providing cover as developers wage war on the environment in Jackson Hole, this conservative Southern belle knows where to find the action," Stanford wrote.

Months after his post, Stanford was introduced to Mayfield for the first time.

"It's a challenge because there are people that want to judge me because I worked for the vice president and I don't think that's fair," she said.

The idea that she represents developments that are going to destroy the valley is antithetical to the reasons she moved to Jackson Hole, Mayfield said.

"There is not a lot of land left in Teton County and it's important that developments be the best they can be for the community," she said. "We all care about the environment here. That's why I moved here, and I try to make a project better for each of the stakeholders."

Though the results of her work tend to come at public meetings, she rarely speaks in front of elected officials, leaving that duty to developers and engineers.

Much of her work consists of site visits and meetings for anyone interested in a project. In July, Mayfield stepped out of her white SUV in high heels for a site visit at the old KOA, where Mackay wants to build his neighborhood. She passed out maps, changed into sneakers and immediately began pointing the group of reporters and photographers around the site.

Land designated as the natural resource overlay was at the back of the property; there was an old ditch that isn't in the overlay but may provide moose habitat.

She mixed facts with anecdotes, the implications of land-use planning with stories about knocking on the door of a rundown cabin with a rabid dog. Mayfield said she doesn't formulate talking points for these visits. If there are talking points, she delivers them as conversation. If she cares only for the interests of her client, it doesn't show.

Mayfield said she plans to leave Phaseline in a week, likely striking out on her own. The reasons for moving on are the same reasons she left the White House and moved to Jackson, she said - to live a life centered on what she enjoys, not her job.

"It's been a great experience working for the firm but I am really ready to have a more balanced life," she said. "Focus on fewer projects, have more time to devote to community charities and enjoy trail running, mountain biking, skiing - just have a more balanced life."

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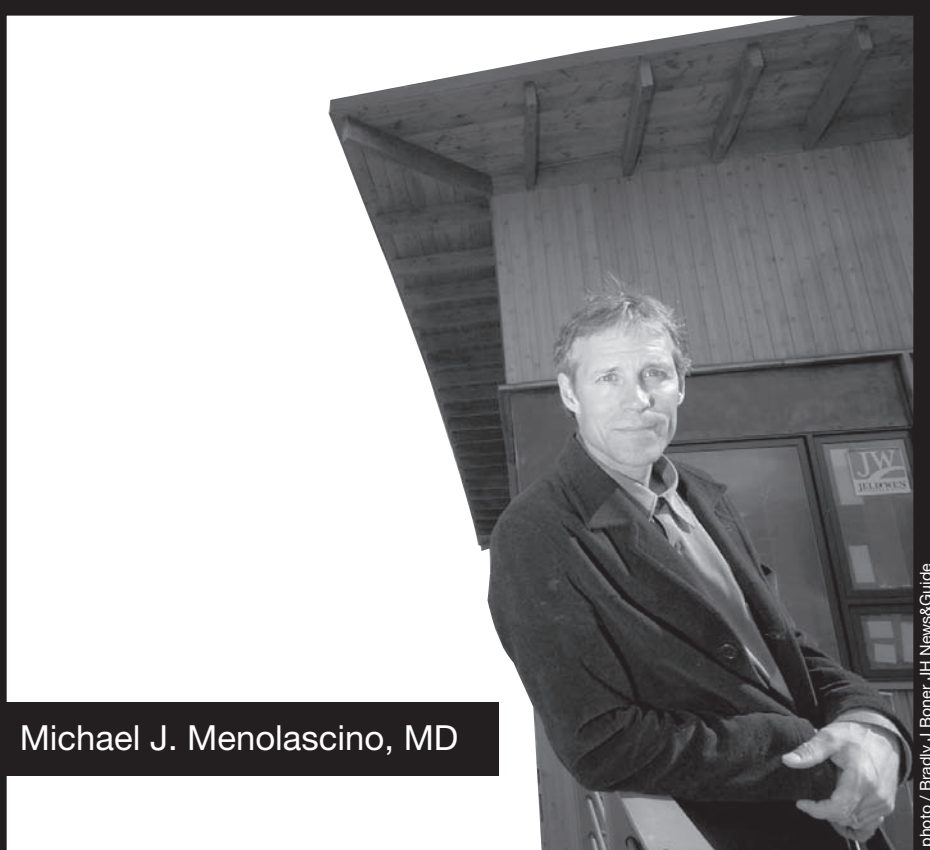
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CHINA

Continued from 2A

are all working for the same thing that her sisters want: to get to the afterworld.

"They have a different angle to get into that door," she said.

Pungent incense burned in ornate vessels, scenting our journey through dozens of religious shrines and temples on Wutai mountain. Known as "The Cradle of Chinese Civilization," it has the sites dating to 68 A.D. They are built into the side of a mountain, and hundreds of stone steps provide a physical meditation to go with the mental one.

At a banquet in honor of our delegation Monday night, the deputy secretary general for Xinzhou municipal government said "We hope Wutai Mountain can give you good health and good feeling."

After a multi-course meal that


involved many toasts to the visitors from afar, Mayor Barron proffered one.

"The mountains here in Wutai are beautiful," Barron said, pausing for translation. "Steep, rugged, and people travel for billions of miles to see them, like the mountains in Wyoming. And my people find spiritual peace in the mountains of Wyoming as they do here in Wutai Mountain. Here's to future relationships."

During the rest of our visit in Shanxi province, we are to visit many more holy sites. We will have conversations about tourism, sister cities, mutual goals and how to proceed with the relationships being built between Wyoming and Shanxi.

In an uncertain global political scene, these small steps are seen by all of us as doing our part to slowly turn distrust between our countries into a mountain of friendship.

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