

Western Slope entrepreneur offers services to a growing energy industry as he ...

Seeks leaks

Phil Castle
Business Times

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

For more information about American Leak Detection, call Fred Grutzmacher at (970) 856-7921 or send an e-mail to fnbgrutz@wildblue.net.

Fred Grutzmacher uses a variety of equipment to locate leaks, including sensitive listening devices and infrared cameras. In addition to homes and businesses, he serves energy firms.

Business Times photo by Phil Castle

The same equipment and expertise Fred Grutzmacher uses to locate leaks in homes and businesses also apply to a growing market for the Western Colorado entrepreneur: the energy industry.

Thousands of miles of buried natural gas and oil pipelines crisscross the region, he says. "There's just a huge, huge infrastructure out there." Moreover, companies face strict requirements to install and maintain pipelines with zero tolerance for leaks.



Grutzmacher operates the American Leak Detection franchise for Western Colorado, but also serves clients in Wyoming and parts of Utah and New Mexico.

He says his services save time and money in quickly pinpointing leaks without having to dig up entire pipelines to unearth the problem.

Grutzmacher has worked in the industry for 17 years. He started an American Leak Detection franchise in Colorado Springs in 1991.

He sold the franchise in 1997 and subsequently went to work for the company at its corporate headquarters in California.

He became responsible for research and in that role was involved in developing the equipment and techniques he uses himself on the job. He also was involved in training and assisting franchises around the world. He's worked in 35 states and six countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and South Korea.

Grutzmacher eventually left the company and settled in Cedaredge, but got back into the leak detection business in 2006 when he opened another franchise.

He works with a variety of clients, from individual homeowners to businesses to water districts. Given the surge in energy exploration and development activity in Western Colorado, he's increasingly called upon to work with energy and pipeline companies and the firms that provide support services.

Grutzmacher uses a variety of equipment to locate leaks, including several types of sensitive listening devices that can detect even the faintest sounds. He also

uses sophisticated probes that detect minute amounts of such trace gases as helium that are pumped into pipes and rise through the ground at the location of a leak. In addition, he uses computerized listening equipment that correlates the sound associated with a leak from two points and calculates the distance to that leak.

Using computerized listening equipment, Grutzmacher recently pinpointed a half-inch hairline crack in a 655-foot length of pipeline buried north of Parachute. Crews had been digging for three days searching for the leak. Grutzmacher took about 30 minutes to find the spot.

Grutzmacher said leaks in oil and natural gas pipelines often are discovered when those pipelines are tested after installation or during maintenance. Pipelines are cleaned, filled with water and pressurized to well above normal operational levels.

Discovering a leak and locating a leak are two very different things, though.

And that's where Grutzmacher comes in. "To me, that's what it's all about. It's providing a service." ■

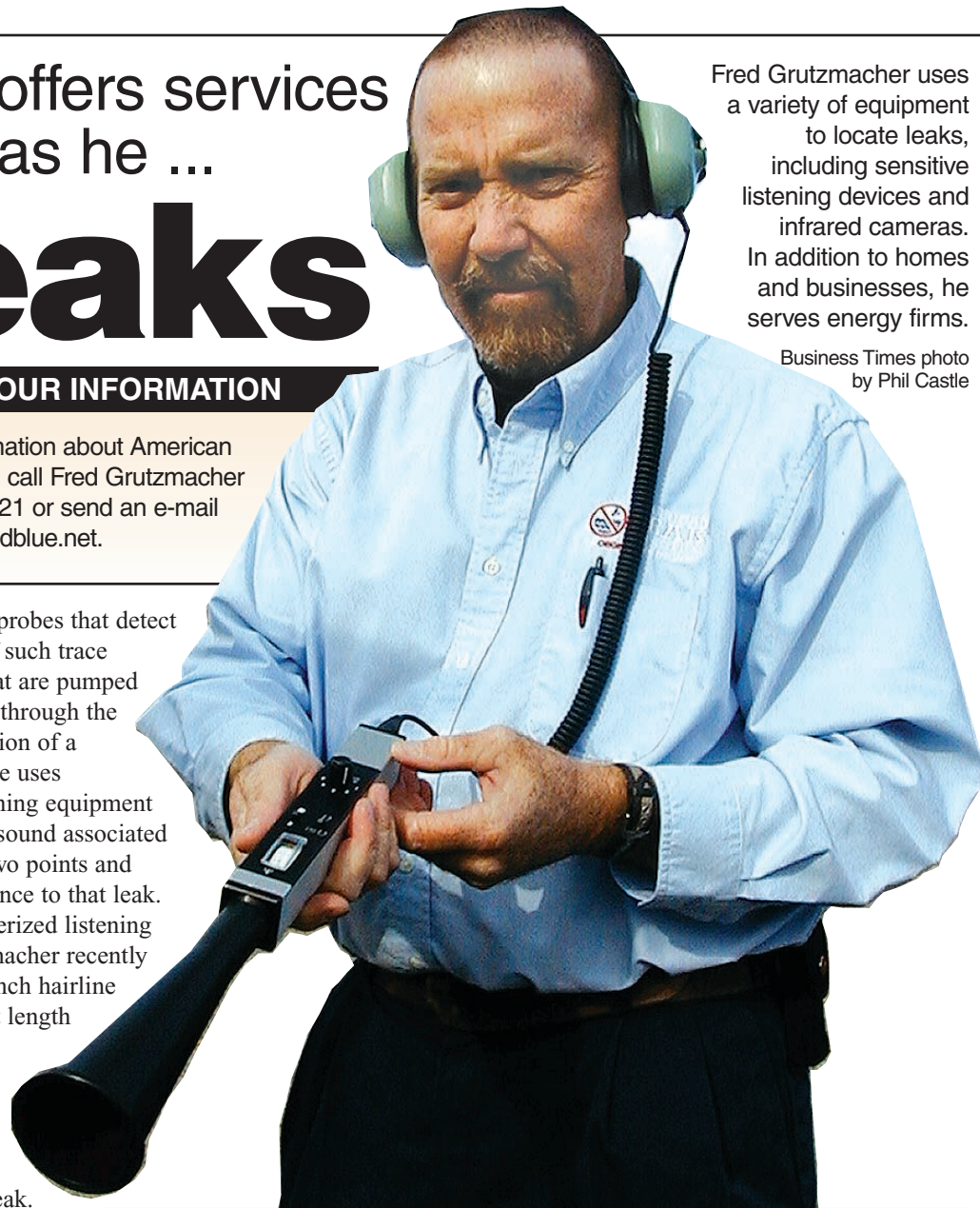


Photo courtesy Fred Grutzmacher

Fred Grutzmacher used computerized listening equipment to pinpoint the location of this half-inch hairline crack in a 655-length of buried pipeline filled with pressurized water. While crews had dug for three days searching for the leak, Grutzmacher took about 30 minutes to find the spot.