IN BRIEF

DOW	NASDAQ	S&P 500	10-YR. T-NOTE	EURO	YEN	POUND
17849.08 ▼128.34	4937.44 ▲7.93	2074.28 ▼6.91	2.05% ▼0.03	1 US $ = .9434 Pvs. day .9449 ▼	1 US $ = 121.39 Pvs. day 121.40 ▼	1 US $ = .6778 Pvs. day .6741 ▲

BUSINESS IN BRIEF

Energy | Xcel bills set to drop on lower natural gas prices

A drop in natural gas prices will lead to about a 9 percent cut — or $9.58 — in the average Xcel residential gas and electric bill for the next three months when compared with the same period last year, the utility said Monday.

The cost of fuel is passed on to customers each quarter through a commodity adjustment — when prices go up or down, so do residential and commercial bills.

The average residential bill, for 632 kilowatt-hours, will drop $3.25 to $70.47 a month when compared with the second quarter of 2014.

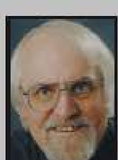
The average gas bill, for 34.2 therms, will decline $6.33 to $28.73. A therm is equivalent to burning 100 cubic feet of natural gas.

Xcel has filed the rate adjustment with the Colorado Public Utilities Commission. If the PUC approves the rates, they would go into effect April 1, the company said.

BRIEFCASE

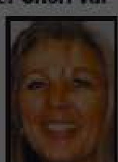
The Nature Conservancy in Colorado, based in Boulder, is excited to announce the election of **Bruce Alexander**, **Kathleen Galvin**, **Annette Quintana** and **Suzanne White** to its board of trustees. The conservancy works to protect important land and water for people and nature. nature.org

Philip Tobias, a Boulder technical and marketing communicator, is serving again in 2015 as the programs chairperson for the Boulder Writers Alliance. philiptobias.combwa.org, bwa.org.



Tobias

Real estate broker **Sheri Valentiner**, of **Valentiner and Associates**, recently negotiated a 1,397-square-foot lease at the Gunbarrel Square Center, 6545 Gunpark Drive, between the landlord and **Karliquin's Game Knight**. Karliquin's moved from the Aspen Plaza in Boulder. valentinerrealty.com.



Valentiner

Barb Silverman, a Boulder broker affiliated with Sotheby's, said she sold the most expensive property of the third quarter in metro Denver. Sold to non-local buyer for $5.2 mil

Employers add jobs in January

Unemployment rate kept at 4.2 percent

By Aldo Svaldi
The Denver Post

Colorado employers added 3,700 jobs between December and January, but about as many people joined the labor force, keeping the unemployment rate level at 4.2 percent, according to a report Tuesday from the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

Private sector employers added 6,400 jobs in January, while governments shed 2,700 positions. The state's labor force grew by about 3,500, which helped keep the unemployment rate steady.

The biggest job gains both monthly and annually came in education and health services, leisure and hospitality and construction.

Professional and business services, a key provider of higher paying jobs, declined between December and January, while the information sector was the only one to suffer an annual decline.

Seth McConnell / The Denver Post

Mike Lage works on the injectors of an semi engine in the shop at Transwest Truck Trailer in Brighton, Colorado. Colorado employers added 3,700 jobs in January.

Measured January to January, nonfarm payroll jobs increased 71,100 with the private sector accounting for 70,500 of that increase. That helped push the unemployment rate down to 4.2 percent from 5.8 percent .

Revised figures show that nonfarm employment rose 3.3 percent in Colorado last year, much faster than the 2.7 percent rate initially estimated and the 1.9 percent rate of job growth nationally.

That momentum should help the state as it absorbs layoffs in an oil and gas sector under pressure due to a halving of oil prices since June.

Oil and gas extraction, including related services, employs about 28,000 people out of the nearly 2.5 million employed statewide, said Alexandra Hall, the state's chief labor economist.

Not all those jobs will go away, but even if half did, those kind of losses are manageable, she said. So far, there aren't any signs that a severe retrenchment is underway.

"Right now we are not seeing anything yet in our unemployment insurance claims," Hall said, adding those claims continue to fall on a year-over-year basis.

Those impacts may remain localized. Weld County, where much of the recent drilling activity has been centered, could prove especially vulnerable, said Gary Horvath, an economist based in Broomfield.

But the hope is that hiring in other areas like construction and manufacturing could employ some of those displaced workers.

"In that area, Vestas is reportedly hiring up to 400 workers, which may offset some of the net job losses in the extractive industries," he said.

Federal Reserve could hike interest rates

By STEVE ROTHWELL
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Interest rates could soon rise in the U.S. for the first time in almost a decade, and that's shaking up financial markets.

If you own stocks of Coca-Cola or Procter & Gamble, you may already see the impact in your 401(k). And if you're making plans to visit Europe, you've probably noticed the dollar has surged against the euro.

These shifts can all be traced back to the Federal Reserve and what it decides to do with rates.

Since December 2008, the central bank has held its benchmark rate close to zero to support the economy by encouraging borrowing and spending. It's been even longer since the Fed actually raised the cost of borrowing. That was back in June 2006.

The Fed wraps up a policy meeting Wednesday and investors will be watching closely for any hints about whether the central bank is weighing a rate hike. Areas of the economy appear to be stuttering, but the jobs market has strengthened, and some analysts think the Fed could lift rates as soon as June. Higher rates are meant to combat

Here's how the prospect of higher rates is shaping stocks, bonds, borrowing and saving:

Stocks:

Losers

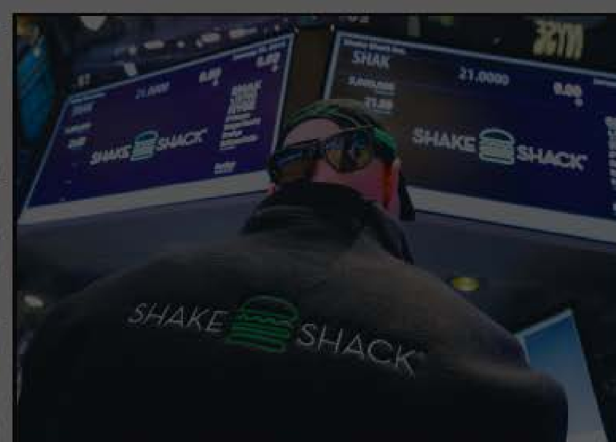
People holding utility stocks have suffered losses this year. Utilities as a group have slumped 7.1 percent in 2015, the biggest loss among the 10 industry sectors that make up the Standard & Poor's 500 index.

These stocks typically pay dividends that are high relative to their companies' share prices. They were in demand last year, when government bond yields fell, and investors wanted them for the level of income they were no longer able to get from bonds.

Now, as yields on those ultra-safe bonds have edged higher, these stocks are less attractive. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note, which had dropped as low has 1.64 percent in January, has climbed to 2.06 percent. Dividend-rich stocks, which carry more risk than Treasurys, look less attractive.

Other stocks that traditionally pay big dividends to investors, such as telecommunications companies, have also started to struggle. Telecoms have fallen 3 percent this month.

Possibly the biggest impact on stocks has been from the currency market, where the dollar has



Richard Drew / Associated Press

Specialist John O'Hara wears Shake Shack promotional hat, sunglasses and vest as he works at his post in January on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Stores, restaurants and media companies should be among the better performers in 2015.

are the second-best performers of the sectors that make up the S&P 500. The industry group is up 4.5 percent since the start of 2015.

Americans' willingness to spend "isn't going to be much affected by the rise in interest rates, it will be more impacted by the fact that the economy is getting better," says Karyn Cavanaugh, senior market strategist at Voya Investment Management. "It's a better economy, it's a better job market, and that's why the Fed is raising rates."

Treasury prices are "very, very much out of line," given the relative strength of the economy, says Paulsen. The unemployment rate has fallen to a seven-year low of 5.5 percent, and most economists expect the economy to grow around 3 percent this year. At 2.06 percent, the yield on the 10-year Treasury note is lower than 3 percent level from six years ago, during the recession.

"The message from the bond market, supposedly, is that the