

Big Sky

March 12 - 25, 2021
Volume 12 // Issue #6

Special section: One year in a pandemic

BSRAD greenlights Workforce Housing Project

The problem with lead bullets

Ophir Miners hoops season recap

Arts Council auction features young artists



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ON THE COVER:

David Nigh, MD, Bozeman Health Deaconess Hospital Emergency Department and Piper Kmetz, RN, Bozeman Health Stroke Registrar show off their PPE on April 3, 2020 at a time when health systems across the country were having trouble finding PPE. The gown's they're wearing were produced by Simms and represented a unique partnership between Bozeman Health and Simms. The project was partially funded by the Yellowstone Community Foundation and the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. PHOTO BY TYLER DUKE

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Special section: One year in a pandemic

On March 15, 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic halted operations at Big Sky Resort. In the year since, we have all reeled from a multitude of unknowns. Among these unknowns, however, the Big Sky community's perseverance shone through.

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BSRAD greenlights Workforce Housing Project

The Big Sky Resort Area District board recently granted the Big Sky Community Housing Trust \$1.4 million for workforce housing, a project undertaken in partnership with Lone Mountain Land Company. The project is expected to provide 100 deed-restricted units for workers in Big Sky.

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The problem with lead bullets

Whether you've lived in Big Sky for one year or 50, eagles are a part of our landscape. Unfortunately, most of them—like the ones gaining recent social media attention—are stricken with the same debilitating ailment: lead poisoning.

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Ophir Miners hoops season recap

Despite a self-described "weird season" due to the pandemic, Ophir Miners boys' basketball team head coach Ben Holst says shifting the team schedule brought new athletes to the court, revealing new abilities and rising stars.

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Arts Council auction features young artists

Twenty young artists presented their work at the Big Sky Arts Council's Auction for the Arts on Feb. 22 through 27. Their work is now displayed in The Rocks and available for silent auction to benefit the Big Sky Community Food Bank.

Opening Shot



In April 2020, Explore Big Sky took to the streets to document the rapid changes necessary to keep businesses open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured are three Lone Peak Performance employees showing off their PPE. Now, a year later, EBS talked to the Big Sky Community and asked everyone to reflect on the past year living with COVID-19. Check out Section four to see how the community has risen to the challenge. OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTO

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25 TOWN CENTER AVENUE | 145 TOWN CENTER AVENUE | 66 MOUNTAIN LOOP ROAD | 181 CLUBHOUSE FORK



Question: Women’s History Month started as Women’s History Week in 1981 celebrating women and their contributions to American society. Thinking about historical women and the purpose of Women’s History Month, who is a woman who has inspired you or who you look up to?



Katie Bagby
Big Sky, MT

“I look up to my birth mom. She actually went through a tough situation and I really look up to how strong she was when she went through that. She gave me up so that I could have a better life and have a father figure in my life, so I really look up to her, she’s a very strong woman.”



Sylvia McMinn
Big Sky, MT

“I look up to Sarah Palin. I think she has a lot of strength and courage. I think that she has a lot going for her that the rest of us could use if we tapped into some of her strength and courage.”



Miranda Clements
Big Sky, MT

“My older sister Kara inspires me. Today she is married, a mom of three and works a full time job for Boeing handling multimillion dollar deal proposals. On top of that, she is committed to her passion for health and fitness as a beach body coach. Her passion for all her endeavors in her life is inspiring and contagious. She simply is a super woman in so many areas of her life and I don’t know how she does it.”



Victoria Richards
Salt Lake City, UT

“I would say my mom is someone I have always looked up to. Her and I have always been really close, and she just gets after it in every aspect of her life—with her career, kids, everything she does in the outdoors: skiing, hiking, backpacking, and all of that. She is the kindest person ever, so she is a huge inspiration.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Reflection for International Women’s Day

As a woman, wife and mother in business I have experienced firsthand the complexity of both being the only women in a room as well as being surrounded by other women competing against each other. On this International Women’s Day recognized on March 8, I want to challenge myself and others to remember a few things:

We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.
Asking for help is not a weakness, it’s a strength.
You can do hard things.
Failure can bring you your best success.
We rise by lifting others.
Her success is not your failure.

The pandemic has affected many women disproportionately—many of us have felt scared, lonely and overwhelmed at all there is to be done at work and at home. Trying to keep up with the social media belief that everyone can do everything and look great while doing it. Your partner, family and friends may be supportive, but these feelings can still haunt you. Do not feel ashamed. There are brighter days ahead and there is help available to you.

You can talk to someone 24/7 confidentially at Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 (Talk) and locally we are fortunate to have additional support lines through Women in Action (bigskywia.org) and the Help Center (bozemanhelpcenter.org).

Sarah Blechta
Big Sky, Montana

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BETTER TOGETHER

A monthly District bulletin

BIG SKY RELIEF

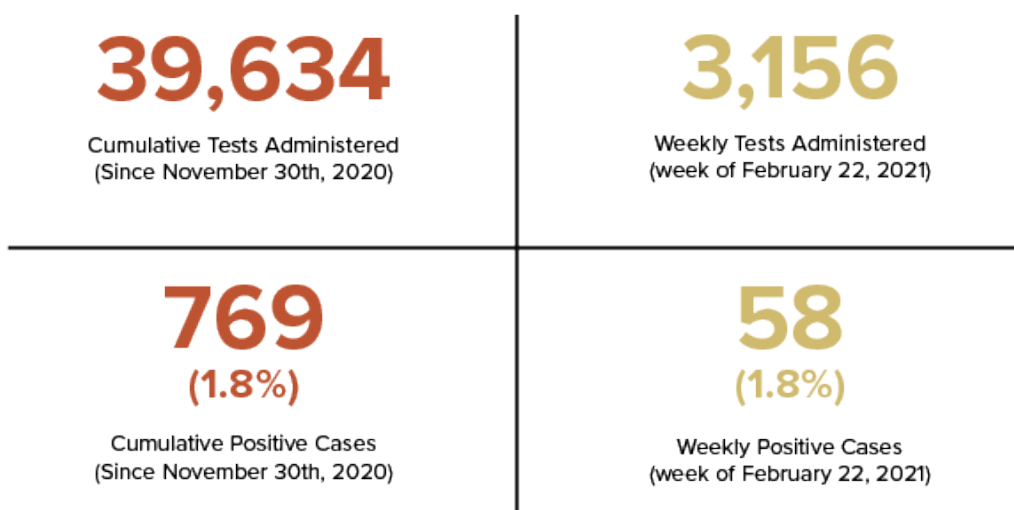
TESTING ENDING SOON

HELP BIG SKY CROSS THE FINISH LINE!

- Who:** Residents and Employees of Big Sky (age 18+)
- What:** Free Community Surveillance Testing
- When:** THE LAB leaves Big Sky on **April 9th, 2021**
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- Why:** Big Sky Lab processing ends **April 9th, 2021**
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Visit: BigSkyRelief.org/testing for more details

Community Testing Dashboard



VACCINATION CLINICS

- Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center (Big Sky)
- Gallatin-City County Health Department (Bozeman)
- Madison Valley Medical Center (Big Sky)

Visit: BigSkyRelief.org/vaccinations for up-to-date vaccine clinic information

Did you know...

Big Sky Resort Area District is a founding partner of Big Sky Relief.

District Events

FY22 Funding Applications Available
ResortTax.org/funding



Board Meeting*
@ 9:00am
Via Zoom



FY22 Funding Application Deadline
ResortTax.org/funding



Board Meeting*
@ 9:00am
Via Zoom



Memorial Day
Office Closed



Application Review Meeting #1*
@ 5:30 pm



Application Review Meeting #2*
@ 5:30 pm



*All meetings are open to the public and held via Zoom. Public comments are welcome and highly encouraged.

Visit ResortTax.org to join.

Now Accepting Funding Applications

The District is accepting applications for the FY22 (July 2021-June 2022) funding cycle beginning March 1, 2021. As required by law, an applicant must be a legal entity formed under the laws of the State of Montana. The applicant must be located within the Resort Area District. The applicant must be a governmental unit, corporation, or limited partnership with the capability of being legally bound by an agreement. Applications must be completed using the online application portal and submitted by Thursday, April 15, 2021, to be considered for funding.

For more info visit: ResortTax.org/funding



U.K. COVID-19 variant in Gallatin County

GALLATIN MEDIA CENTER

BOZEMAN – The Gallatin City-County Health Department provided additional details on three cases of COVID-19 in Gallatin County that were classified as a variant strain of the virus. Based on contact tracing data associated with the cases, the following is known:

- All three cases are Gallatin county residents and live in different parts of the county;
- All three cases are under 50 years old;
- One case was hospitalized but is no longer in the hospital;
- All of the cases are recovered and have been released from isolation;
- The health department has not identified any evident connection between the three cases;
- None of the cases reported any recent travel history.

Health Officer Matt Kelley said the lack of connection between the cases and absence of travel history are indications that the variant form of the virus may be circulating widely in Montana, a fact that should not be surprising considering the variant has been detected in well over 40 other states. He said the identification of the cases should be a reminder to all Montanans why it's important to continue taking precautions to prevent spread, including avoidance of large groups where social distancing is difficult, continued use of face coverings in public settings, staying home when sick, frequent and thorough hand washing, and getting the vaccine when available to you.

Jeremy Kopp selected as Gallatin County's undersheriff

GALLATIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

BOZEMAN – Gallatin County Sheriff Dan Springer has selected a sheriff's office captain to be his undersheriff.

This week, Jeremy Kopp was chosen to be the next undersheriff for the Gallatin County Sheriff's Office.

Undersheriff Kopp is a native Montanan who graduated from Anaconda Senior High School before beginning his career of service in the U.S. Army in 1994. That is where he found his professional calling in service to his country and later public service to his community with the Gallatin County Sheriff's Office.

For the last ten years, Undersheriff Kopp has served the citizens of Gallatin County as a patrol deputy, coroner, crisis negotiator, sergeant of patrol and detective divisions, Search and Rescue Commander and, most recently, Captain of Patrol. He lives in the county with his wife of 25 years, who is a social worker, and two children who attend school in Three Forks.

"It is an incredible honor to be entrusted with the appointment of Undersheriff," said Kopp. "I am excited for the opportunity to continue to serve the citizens of Gallatin County and work with our great staff in this capacity. It is a great time to be in public service in Gallatin County as we face many opportunities with our continued growth."

Gianforte expands COVID-19 vaccine eligibility

EBS STAFF

BIG SKY – Gov. Greg Gianforte addressed Montanans at a March 2 press conference, announcing that with the impending arrival of a third COVID-19 vaccine—the one shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine—that he is expanding eligibility, effective Monday, March 8.

Under Phase 1B+, Montanans over the age of 60, as well as those 16 to 59 with liver disease and asthma, will be able to receive the vaccine. This will open eligibility for nearly 140,000 additional Montanans. He reminded viewers that despite the approval of the new vaccine, there still remains a shortage, and that those eligible may not be able to receive it immediately.

According to the COVID-19 state dashboard, as of March 9, morning, about 314,522 total doses of the COVID-19 vaccine had been administered statewide, with 117,763 Montanans fully inoculated.

Yellowstone Club Snowmaking Project on track for 2021-22 ski season

EBS STAFF

BIG SKY – Eleven years after the Water Solutions Forum was convened in Big Sky, a proposed solution to reclaimed wastewater issues is coming to fruition.

At the March 9 Big Sky County Water and Sewer District board meeting, Rich Chandler, environmental manager at the Yellowstone Club gave a presentation on the current status of the YC's project to make snow with treated wastewater.

After talking with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality in 2018 and receiving strong support for the project, the YC is now engaged in the process to obtain a permit to use wastewater in this way. Permits of this sort have been issued in other states, but this would be the first one in Montana.

The project will make use of 25 million gallons of wastewater to make enough snow to cover 55 skiable acres in an 18-inch base of snow. According to Chandler in his presentation, 75 to 80 percent of the wastewater would be sourced from the water and sewer district and 20 percent would come from the club.

The goal is to have the snowmaking project up and running for the 2021-22 ski season.



GET OUT

THE WINTER RIDE ISN'T OVER YET

Winter tends to stick around in West Yellowstone – which is a great thing for snowmobilers. There are still miles and miles of snowmobile trails all around West Yellowstone that are just waiting to be explored. If you love to ride or have always wanted to try, you've got to get to West Yellowstone.

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Headwall Sports provides affordable, quality, consigned gear for all



Sean Doherty has been owner and operator of Headwall Sports in Jackson Hole for eight successful years and saw an opportunity in Big Sky. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – Every year, outdoor gear that hasn't fulfilled its full potential is given away, sold, returned or thrown out. Every year, there's a skier, or hunter or climber who has their wistful eye on a new piece of gear with an enormous price tag. Sean Doherty, owner of Headwall Sports in Big Sky, is determined to close that gap.

Headwall Sports is Big Sky's newest sporting good shop and utilizes used but high quality consignment items to fulfill inventory. Doherty has been owner and operator of Headwall Sports in Jackson Hole for eight successful years and saw an opportunity in Big Sky. After searching for the right location for four years, seeing the growth of the area in the last few months encouraged him to make the leap.



Headwall Sports features gently used, high-quality consignment gear at an affordable price. They value customer service and a well-organized store. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

"Big Sky is probably one of the only places I've left Jackson for to ride in the winter," said Doherty. "I've always been intrigued by it, and I like the raw Montana feel. It's a really nice getaway. I couldn't ask for a better situation."

Doherty is originally from Upstate New York, moved to Park City, Utah for a stint, and has lived in Jackson Hole for 15 years. Since purchasing the Jackson Hole location, he has transformed it into the Headwall Sports consignment gear shop it is today. He says since the soft opening of the Big Sky store on Jan. 22 the community has been overwhelmingly supportive.

Headwall Sports aims to price items at half their original price and Doherty and his staff place a focus on customer service and quality items. When working with consigners, they look for gently used items under five years old—the ones that still deserve a full life of adventure and are still a great investment for the purchaser.

They accept all outdoor categories of gear from camping, backpacking, biking, fishing, ski, snowboard and some casual clothing items. Doherty also carries a few new gear items from quality, affordable suppliers he can stand by.

"Skis should not cost that much," Doherty says of some brand new items. "One of the beautiful things is sometimes one of the newest [items] makes it into my store. A true skier, he knows what ski he wants. He doesn't care if its 10 years old, because he knows how it skis."

Doherty really just believes that gear should be affordable for everyone. He hopes Headwall Sports can close the economic gap between those who can buy



Roma is Headwall Sports' gatekeeper, and responds well to pets and treats. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

an expensive, brand new pair of skis right out of the shrink-wrap and those who may use those skis for the remainder of their lifetime a few years later. Much of the time, he says, gear people bring in is barely used at all. And sometimes, it is right out of the wrapping.

"We get so much stuff in my store that's been used four times, and we can sell it to people who are going to go out and use it," Doherty said.

Organization too, is key at Headwall. With items organized by size and appropriately labeled, customers can shop for gear without the chaos that comes with most thrift stores. He and his staff are well informed, and are available for questions.

Pre-pandemic, Headwall Sports in Jackson would regularly host an event called State of the Snowpack, which he hopes to bring to Big Sky as well. He'd invite the local snow science professionals out for a presentation, order local pizzas and beer, and invite the community in for some useful backcountry information. He says those events bring in anywhere from 60 to 100 people.

"When we have those talks and you look around the room you see there's a sense of community—whether you've been here for 30 years or 3 years," Doherty said.

When he's not running his store, Doherty fills his time with skiing, biking and "anything outside," as well as traveling between his two stores, a commute he doesn't complain about. Meanwhile, you can find him and his dog, Roma, manning the counter of Headwall Sports in the Bighorn Center off of Gallatin Canyon Road just before Lone Mountain Trail.

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BSRAD awards funds for Workforce Housing Project

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – In a unanimous vote, the Big Sky Resort Area District board granted the Big Sky Community Housing Trust \$1.4 million in funds for the Workforce Housing Project, undertaken in partnership with Lone Mountain Land Company, after five months of being held in “pending” status.

The housing trust originally applied for the funds during BSRAD’s FY21 fall allocations cycle and the board classified the request as pending, the first time the board has ever placed a project in that status, asking for more information before they voted.

The recommendation to fund the project came from a subcommittee created by the BSRAD board to gather further details about the project, which was comprised of partners including Daniel Bierschwale, executive director of BSRAD; Kim Beatty, legal counsel to BSRAD; Steve Johnson, BSRAD board member; Grace Young, BSRAD board member; Bayard Dominick, VP of Planning and Development at LMLC; Justin Bain, principal of CrossHarbor Capital Partners; and Laura Seyfang, executive director of Big Sky Community Housing Trust.

“We’re super excited about it,” said Seyfang. “To really bring affordable workforce housing to fruition takes effort by lots of people working together, especially in this town. The reason it’s so difficult to develop these things is it’s very hard to make them work financially. This contribution from resort tax was essential to making this formula be a success.”

With the allocation of BSRAD funds comes contingencies to ensure that public funds are utilized appropriately. A few of the requirements, according to Bierschwale, include a Fair Market Value property appraisal of the land, additional approval from the Big Sky County Water and Sewer District, and, in the future, reports on rental income.

The entire Workforce Housing Project is estimated to come in at \$54.8 million with \$9.8 million of that going to the housing trust’s building A, which is the portion of the project supported by BSRAD. The resort area district will provide 22 percent of the \$9.8 million and will be supplemented by 19 percent from philanthropy and 59 percent from federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.

The other buildings—B, C and D—will be paid for, owned and managed by CrossHarbor.

“[The project] represents a true public-private partnership wherein multiple parties in our community have come together and are contributing to the long-term health of our local housing market,” said Matt Kidd, managing director at CrossHarbor.

In total, the housing trust will request \$2.2 million from BSRAD over a three-year period, according to Bierschwale. This year the award was \$1.4 million; in 2022, it will request \$600,000 and in 2023 it will ask for the final \$200,000 needed to finish the project.

All four buildings will yield a total of 100 deed-restricted workforce housing units. The deed restrictions will ensure that rents remain at affordable levels in perpetuity, according to Seyfang. Rental rates will be determined based on the average median income of residents in Gallatin County and units in building A will be more heavily regulated since the funds to build them will largely come from LIHTC grants.

According to Seyfang, no one will ever pay more than 30 percent of their income to rent any of the units.

Each building will contain a variety of units since, Seyfang says, the goal is to target various income levels and renters. Unit styles could include dorm style, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom, she said.

Building A will be owned and managed by the housing trust and developed by LMLC alongside BlueLine Development Inc. a development and consulting company based in Missoula. Building A will contain between 21 and 24 units, the final number to be determined once BSCHT can consult with the Gallatin County Planning Commission.

“The good news,” Seyfang said, “is we can put as many units on the property as are going to physically fit within the easement.”

This news comes after a review of zoning laws concluded that the project will not need to apply for density bonuses. A density bonus, according to the Montana Department of Transportation website, is “an incentive-based tool that permits developers to increase the maximum allowable development on a property in exchange for helping the community achieve public policy goals.”

In addition to the housing trust’s ownership of Building A, LMLC has also committed to reserve a minimum of 20 percent of the units in buildings B, C and D for local businesses outside of CrossHarbor control and allow the housing trust to oversee those units.

The need for workforce housing in Big Sky cannot be overstated. Data gathered in a 2018 Community Housing Action Plan shows that by 2023 there would be a deficiency of 1,144 housing units in Big Sky if no action is taken. When a total of 730 other planned affordable housing projects are taken into account, there is a projected deficiency of only 414 units in Big Sky.

“The needs are great,” Bierschwale said. “We all know that both small and large employers contribute to that overall need. We’re thrilled to see that we’re beginning to actually march toward achieving the overall deficit of workforce housing in the community.”

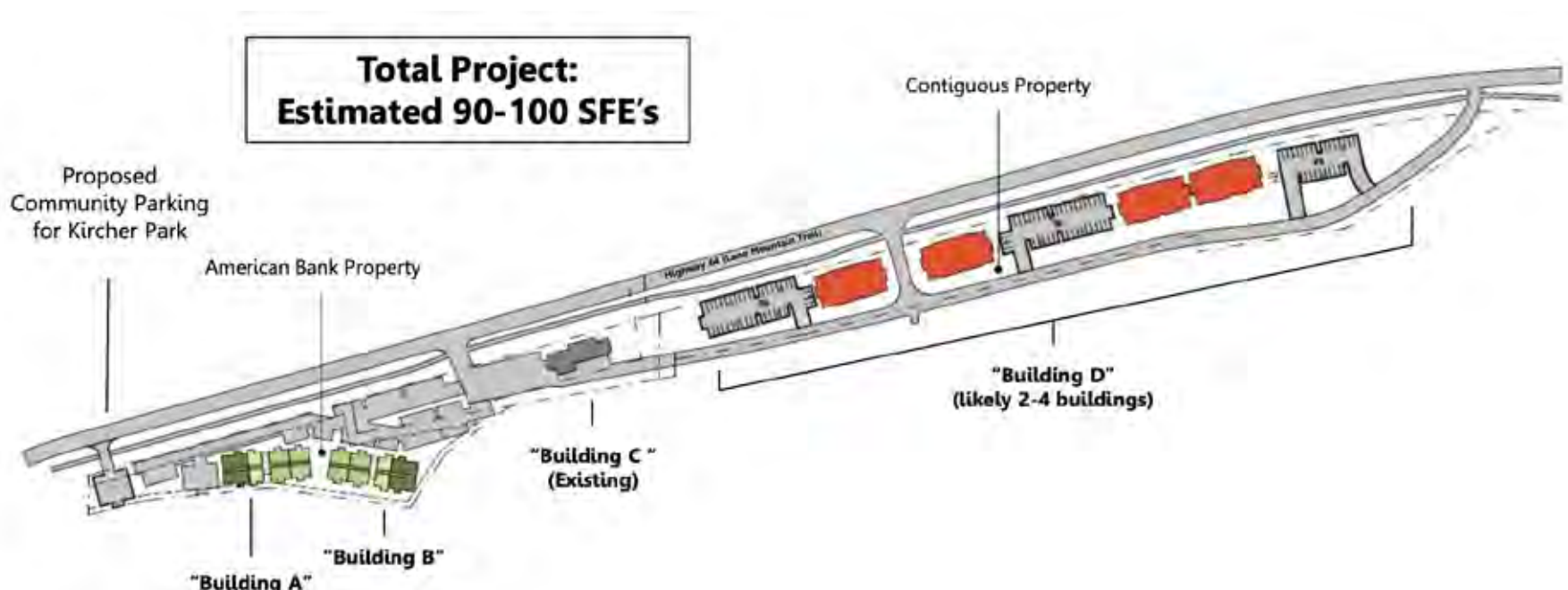
Now that the housing trust has secured a portion of the funding for the project, next steps include obtaining annexation into the water and sewer district and applying for LIHTC funds.

The water and sewer district is holding a special board meeting, tentatively slated for March 23 to make a decision on annexing the project. The entire development is estimated to require 100 SFEs, which, according to Bierschwale, would come out of the 500 SFEs set aside by an interlocal agreement put in place as part of the 1 percent for infrastructure tax approved by voters in May of 2020.

According to Seyfang, the initial LIHTC application is due the second week of April. A final answer on whether or not the project will receive the requested federal funds is expected in October. Each year, only a handful of competitive LIHTC applications are approved in the state of Montana, according to Seyfang. BlueLine developers are helping the housing trust with its application to the federal program and will continue to be involved in the development of the project, Seyfang said.

Assuming all goes well and the project gains the necessary SFEs and funding, the housing trust’s plan is to break ground in May of 2022 and have the first units occupied in summer of 2023.

“I’m always an eternal optimist,” Seyfang said. “I do believe that when you work hard on a problem, you can almost always solve it. I feel like we’ve got a lot of the right people working together now and figuring out how to pull together to get this issue under control, because it is doable. Not easy, but doable.”



JOIN US FOR **BIG SKY'S BIGGEST WEEK!**

SUMMER 2021 LINEUP

FRIDAY, JULY 16

3-5pm - Big Sky Art Auction Preview / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

6pm - Big Sky Community Rodeo / Big Sky Events Arena

9pm - Street Dance / Town Center Plaza

SATURDAY, JULY 17

4-7pm - Big Sky Art Auction / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

SUNDAY, JULY 18

TBA - Mutton Bustin Pre-Ride Competition / Big Sky Events Arena

6pm - Big Sky Bingo Night / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

WEDNESDAY, JULY 21

11am-5pm - Big Sky PBR / Western Sports Foundation Golf Tournament

5pm - Farmers Market

6pm - Golf Tourney Reception

7pm - Big Sky PBR Kickoff / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

8pm - Live Music / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

THURSDAY, JULY 22

12-6pm - Big Sky PBR Basecamp Vendor Village Open / Town Center Plaza

2pm - PBR Meet & Greet / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

4pm - Live Music / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

7pm - 10th Annual Big Sky PBR Night 1 Bull Riding / Big Sky Events Arena

TBA - Music in the Mountains Concert

FRIDAY, JULY 23

12-6pm - Big Sky PBR Basecamp Vendor Village Open / Town Center Plaza

2pm - PBR Meet & Greet / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

4pm - Live Music / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

7pm - 10th Annual Big Sky PBR Night 2 Bull Riding / Big Sky Events Arena

Following Bull Riding - Jason Boland & The Stragglers

SATURDAY, JULY 24

12-6pm - Big Sky PBR Basecamp Vendor Village Open / Town Center Plaza

2pm - PBR Meet & Greet / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

4pm - Live Music / PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza

7pm - 10th Annual Big Sky PBR Championship Night 3 Bull Riding / Big Sky Events Arena

Following Bull Riding - Robert Earl Keen

VIEW MORE DETAILS AT BIGSKYPBR.COM

*events and timing subject to change; stay tuned to bigskypbr.com for the most current events schedule

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BSRAD to debut scoring system for resort tax funding

BY JASON BACAJ
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

BIG SKY – The Big Sky Resort Area District opened its annual allocation cycle this month, which carries several changes this year as the district’s board looks to refine its decision-making process. Among the changes are an application scoring system and the ability to form three-year interlocal agreements with outside governmental bodies.

The last 12 months certainly weren’t easy for the Big Sky community. But Daniel Bierschwale, executive director of BSRAD, said that all things considered the community has weathered the pandemic relatively well.

“With a light at the end of the tunnel and an eye on the coming summer season with vaccines and shots starting to get into arms, we feel this is going to be a productive summer in Big Sky,” Bierschwale said.

BSRAD was braced to see tax revenue cut in half after Big Sky Resort suspended operations last spring, Bierschwale said. Part of the preparation for that worst-case scenario was splitting the annual allocation cycle into two six-month cycles and pausing direct infrastructure projects.

As the months unfurled, however, tax revenue rebounded from the springtime dip. The first six months of fiscal year 2021—which runs from July 2020 to June 2021—showed 12 percent growth over the year prior, according to the most recent BSRAD financial report.

One overarching goal BSRAD has for this allocation cycle is to become more intentional, objective and strategic with how the board decides to fund projects, according to Bierschwale. In order to accomplish that, the district is rolling out a scoring system.

The most recent draft of the scoring system has 13 total categories, with an emphasis on matching funds, diverse sources of funding, long-term vision and financial sustainability. Each application will go through a review and be assigned a score out of 100. A copy of the scoring system is available in the packet for the March 10 BSRAD board meeting.

Bierschwale noted that, regardless of an application’s score, the final decision rests with the five board members.

“It’s a tool in the toolkit to be able to evaluate collaboration, planning and efficiency of projects,” Bierschwale said. “This first go-round it’s a draft for us to utilize and adapt ... to meet the community needs.”

Along with the scoring system, BSRAD aims to become more strategic in how it disburses money by entering into interlocal agreements with outside government entities, such as Gallatin and Madison counties, Bierschwale noted. The agreements would last three years and provide the benefit of allowing Bierschwale and the district board to forecast upcoming expenses and more effectively plan where to direct money over the long term.

“One thing we’re shifting toward is really evaluating our fund use and forecasting out three years and really trying to understand what capital improvements are coming down the pipe,” Bierschwale said.

Applications for the upcoming allocation cycle are open until April 15. The five BSRAD board members will make their final decision in June on which projects will receive funding.

IMPORTANT FY22 FUNDING CYCLE DATES:

Monday, March 1st | Applications Live
Wednesday, March 3rd | Application Training/Q&A Session
Thursday, April 15th | Application Deadline
Wednesday, May 12th | Questions shared with Applicants
Wednesday, March 26th | Applicant Responses returned to District
Monday, June 7th | Application Review Meeting 1
Thursday, June 10th | Application Review Meeting 2



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BASE community center is on track for a soft opening in December of 2021 with programming starting up in January of 2022. PHOTOS BY GABRIELLE GASSER AND BRANDON WALKER

BASE community center construction progresses

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – From a steel skeleton in October to a roughed-in building ready for siding, construction of the new BASE community center in Town Center is visibly progressing.

BASE, which stands for Big Adventure, Safe Environment, is slated to be open to the Big Sky community in January of 2022. The official timeline posted on Big Sky Community Organization’s website has the opening scheduled for December of 2021, which, according to Kate Ketschek, chair of the Big Sky Community Organization board, could still take place as a soft opening. She explained that “with how COVID-19 is impacting supply chains and the construction industry in general, we realistically think it will be January of 2022 when we’re ready for programming.”

When it’s completed, the building will feature a 1,300 square foot climbing wall, a bouldering area, a gymnasium as well as office spaces and facilities for four nonprofit organizations. The community center will also include a wide array of programs including youth activities, fitness classes, climbing courses, and most importantly, a central indoors space in which the Big Sky community can gather.

The first shovels broke ground in July of 2019 when the BSCO, which is heading up the project, held a ceremony in Town Center Park for Big Sky’s first community center. Vertical construction of the building officially began in May of 2020.

Langlas and Associates is heading up construction and a construction committee consisting of BSCO staff, Ciara Wolfe, V.P. of philanthropy for the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, and Chad Wilson, director of construction at Big Sky Resort, among others, is overseeing the project. The Big Sky Skating and Hockey Association and the Big Sky Arts Council, two organizations that need the park space to continue with their missions and programming, are also involved.

Dan Ross, project superintendent with Langlas and Associates, is pleased with the progress to date. “All our mechanical, electrical and plumbing are roughed in on the second floor and all of our hydronic heat is roughed in on the first floor,” Ross said.

Even amid a global pandemic that has caused concrete prices to soar and supply chain disruption, BASE construction has continued largely unhindered.

“Delays in materials or procurement of materials can be a little frustrating,” said Ross, “[but] overall the project is going very well. We’re right on track and everything’s going smoothly.”

The new BASE building will be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certified, meaning construction follows a set of guidelines to build an environmentally responsible building. Some green features will include solar panels on the gymnasium roof, a green roof on the first floor and 55 geo wells that will help to regulate the temperature of the building.

“It’s a very complex building,” said Ross, noting that earthquake resistant features add to the complexity. “The architecture and the engineering that went into it is amazing. The other aspect of that is the Platinum LEED goal that we’ve set and integrating all those systems that help conserve energy and benefit the building.”

Fifty-five geothermal wells have been drilled 450 feet into the ground all around the park and help circulate air through tubes to maintain a baseline temperature of 55 F in the building, according to Ross.

In addition, according to Ross, the building is designed to reduce waste so there will not be a lot of construction debris and a lot of it will be recycled.

The need for a community center was originally identified in a 2017 needs-assessment survey conducted by BSCO and then-CEO Ciara Wolfe. In that survey, Big Sky residents identified a community center as their No.1 priority in a Big Sky Parks and Open Space Plan compiled by BSCO.

In December of 2018, BSCO bought the land in Town Center Park and the adjacent gravel parking lot to secure parkland for the community center. Then, in April of 2019, the organization launched the most ambitious fundraising effort Big Sky has seen to date, “ALL IN. BIG SKY,” which netted over \$20 million.

According to Ketschek, the nonprofit will hold one last fundraising push in the fall of 2021 to cover any outstanding costs the project may incur.

“We’ve been working really hard,” Ketschek said, “assigning tasks so every employee at BSCO is very connected to getting BASE open right now.”

Though BASE will not be open until next January, Len Hill Park, the 3.3-acre parcel encompassing BASE, the ice rink and the area formerly known as Town Center Park purchased by BSCO in 2018, will open, new-and-improved for the summer of 2021. The expanded park will feature an updated stage, new sod and a landscaped boundary according to Ketschek.

“We are so grateful for the vision of our past CEO, Ciara Wolfe, in partnership with the previous landowner, the Simkins family, and donor, the Leonard Hill Charitable Trust, to have the opportunity to protect this community space in perpetuity,” Ketschek said.

In addition to the current features, there is talk of expanding the community center in the future, including the potential of a swimming pool, which would likely be built on the land where the tennis courts are currently located purchased by BSCO in January of 2020. In the initial survey, the Big Sky community identified the desire for a pool, but a more immediate need for a community space to gather in, according to Ketschek.

In January of 2021, BSCO purchased land in the community park along Little Coyote Road where the tennis courts are currently located in anticipation of Phase 2 construction.

“We felt it was most fiscally responsible to get BASE up and running and grow the membership before looking to Phase 2,” Ketschek said. “Once we accomplish that, we’ll begin to gather community input as to what Phase 2 could look like.”

She also added that BSCO has already secured enough single-family equivalents, or water rights, to construct a pool if the Big Sky community expresses that desire in Phase 2.

“It’s such a huge move forward in our community,” Ketschek said. “Especially during COVID, it’s really come to light how much of a need there is for increased programming from kids to adults. Having a safe place for kids, it’s going to be an alcohol-free building and behavioral health will be tied [in] which is really important for our community.”

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SECTION 2: ENVIRONMENT & OUTDOORS, SPORTS, AND HEALTH



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Riding the storm on Mt. Elbrus pg. 22New Ultrasound Services at
Big Sky Medical Center pg. 26

The lead bullet

As eagles suffer from lead poisoning, hunters look to alternatives

BY MIRA BRODY

SOUTHWEST MONTANA – On Feb. 9, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks posted on their Facebook page, a photo of a golden eagle stricken by lead poisoning. On Feb. 21, the Montana Raptor Conservation Center posted a photo on their Facebook page of a young bald eagle that barely recovered from the same affliction.

Whether you've lived in Big Sky for one year or 50, eagles are a part of our landscape.

Unfortunately, most of them—like the ones gaining recent social media attention—are stricken with the same debilitating ailment—lead poisoning.

“Ninety-eight percent of the eagles that we bring in have lead in their system,” said Jordan Spyke, director of operations and development at the Montana Raptor Conservation Center. Spyke has been with the MRCC for nine years and says the organization intakes about 50 eagles annually. “Lead is not found in the environment where animals can ingest it, so all the lead is put here by hunting or fishing activities.”

In the 1970s, thanks to the research of prominent epidemiologist Philip J. Landrigan, the U.S. government began better understanding the dangers of lead in everyday items, such as gasoline and house paint, leading them to outlaw and better regulate its use.

Yet, it's still used to shoot and kill the food we harvest in nature. Lead bullets are the most prevalent type of ammunition in the hunting world, and when a hunter shoots and hits an animal, such as a deer, elk, or even ground squirrel, the bullet fragments into tiny, ingestible pieces. Although lead poisoning affects all scavengers—in addition to raptors, lead has also been found in grizzlies—golden eagles are particularly aggressive toward a fresh kill.

“Golden eagles, they dominate carcasses,” said Mike McTee, a researcher at Florence, Montana-based MPG Ranch. “We've put game cams on different carcasses across Montana and eagles just show up. They push off bald eagles—they'll even push off coyotes. It's a really big food source for them in the winter.”

MPG Ranch supports conservation through research and education programs and McTee was involved in a research project titled Widespread Lead Exposure in Golden Eagles Captured in Montana. In the winter months between 2011 and 2018, he and a team captured 91 golden eagles and tested their blood lead levels. Ninety-four percent had elevated blood lead levels and eight of the eagles were above clinical exposure, suffering from a loss of coordination and other psychological and neurological disorders.

When an eagle ingests a lead fragment while feeding on a carcass, the stomach acid breaks it down and the lead enters the bloodstream, making its way into the bird's fat stores, explains Spyke. Lead then leeches into the bird, so even if the bird is found and



This bald eagle was rescued by the Raptor Center on Feb. 22. He was suffering from a blood lead level that was too high for their machine to register after ingesting a bullet fragment. This was their 11th eagle intake of 2021 and of the nine they tested, all of them had lead in their system. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MONTANA RAPTOR CONSERVATION CENTER

can receive treatment, its blood lead levels are still rising. Of the birds the MRCC treats for lead, there are potentially hundreds more that never receive care.

Lead poisoning robs the body of calcium and iron and stops muscle reproduction. Spyke says when they find a lead-poisoned bird, oftentimes their talons are clenched rendering them unable to hunt. Some are lethargic and unresponsive. A lot of the birds die of starvation and dehydration, he says. When MRCC and their partnering veterinarians are treating a lead poisoned bird, they will work to replenish its fluids, then, through an intermuscular injection, start chelation therapy, a common lead poisoning treatment. The ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid in the injection bonds to the lead and filters it out of the bloodstream. Although the treatment is expensive and requires a significant amount of work, Spyke says they treat every single bird in need.



Shooting ground squirrels is a popular pastime in Montana. An X-ray provided by the Montana Raptor Conservation Center shows the fragments in a marmot shot with a lead bullet, which will soon be consumed by a scavenger. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MONTANA RAPTOR CONSERVATION CENTER

Although alternatives such as copper, steel, alloy, bismuth and tungsten bullets are a bit more expensive, removing lead from the environment is an immediate win for suffering birds.

“We're not about outlawing lead, we're just trying to educate people on hunting and recreating responsibly,” Spyke said. “A lot of people who have been shooting these bullets for generations just don't know. I think it's about just trying to spread the word.”

Montana is in the perfect position to spark change. The Northern Rockies, particularly the portion in southwest Montana, is a highway for migratory raptors. As they migrate from Alaska and Canada, these birds rely on mountain updrafts and ridges to navigate. They also rely on local kill during Montana's long rifle season to feed through the winter months.

McTee suspects the recent ammunition shortage, fueled in part by the pandemic, hasn't helped, as bullets of any kind become harder to keep in inventory—according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation U.S. ammunition purchases increased by 139 percent during the first half of 2020 when compared to the same time period in 2019. It's possible too, he says, that alternative bullet manufacturers aren't in the position yet to take over all ammunition production, if lead bullets were outlawed overnight.

In education programs, MPG Ranch and MRCC have made efforts to educate the public about the dangers of lead ammunition, and other organizations, such as the North American Non-lead Partnership, have joined in. Its cofounder, Leland Brown, knows this isn't a problem that can be solved overnight. His partnership works with organizations trusted by the hunting community to build credibility and share information without creating unnecessary conflict, which only creates barriers.

“Regulation and laws are really as good as people's belief in them,” Brown said. “You can ban everything you want, but unless you have a community that supports that then regulations aren't worth the paper they're put on.”

Ultimately, Brown says, hunters and nonhunters alike have the same goal: maintain a healthy habitat. And Brown's goal is communicate these mutual values in a way that doesn't alienate or divide. “They have to be given the information and in a way that connects to them,” he said.

The future, Brown says, looks promising.

“We've really started to see a change coming,” he said. “The hunting community is realizing this isn't some animal rights group saying this, that it has real impacts. It takes a lot of work to get there. We're really trying to make sure we talk to people before that negative conversation does.”

THE NEW WEST



BY TODD WILKINSON
EBS ENVIRONMENTAL COLUMNIST

Is there life after working as a Yellowstone Park ranger? In the case of Mimi Matsuda, a Bozeman resident and one of the most exciting contemporary wildlife artists of her generation, the answer is not only “heck, yes,” but it comes with an exclamation point.

Matsuda’s collectible art, which is a mix of both coveted originals and imagery that appears on limited edition lithographs, T-shirts, coffee mugs, dinner plates and even COVID-19-era masks, is noted for its whimsical, colorful anthropomorphizing of our region’s most iconic critters.

Originally a science major in college, Matsuda’s visual bestiary is an outgrowth of her work as a naturalist-interpreter in Yellowstone with a keen eye for observing both humans and animals, and, of course, great talent as an artist. I asked her about some of the people who influenced her style and evolution as a painter.

“My mother was an art teacher and I was raised with creative outlets everywhere,” Matsuda said. “My great grandfather, William Muir, was a commercial illustrator in New England, illustrating some of Webster’s Dictionary and Winchester Rifles. Growing up, I soaked up the art of great illustrators like Norman Rockwell, NC Wyeth, and Maxfield Parrish. Rockwell really tapped into instantly conveying human emotion. I loved Robert Bateman and Bev Doolittle; we had their large picture books at home to marvel over. I admire Rosa Bonheur, French animal painter from the 1800’s [and] also greatly admire Bozeman artist DG House, whose friendship and mentorship has been heartfelt and golden.”

Matsuda was well aware of the combination of Thomas Moran’s paintings and William Henry Jackson’s photographs that helped convince



“Once Upon A Time,” an acrylic painting by Mimi Matsuda. IMAGES COURTESY OF MIMI MATSUDA

From Yellowstone ranger to artist, Mimi Matsuda celebrates wildlife

Congress to pass legislation creating Yellowstone in 1872. Matsuda in her own way has tried to elevate ecological awareness through her art and as her stature has risen, she has supported conservation efforts.

“There are endless ways to portray wildlife through art,” she said. “Gather a group of artists together and have them paint the same subject and I bet you’ll see dozens of different interpretations. My wildlife art centers on drawing a direct link from animal to human viewer. I think my art resonates because [viewers] recognize themselves, or someone they know, in the art.”

One of her pieces, “Wildlife, Watching,” has been transforms animals into “wildlife watchers” carrying cameras. “Mountain Goat, Mountain Bike” is a favorite of mountain biking parents introducing the sport to their kids. “Birds of a Feather” is a favorite of fly fishers who love to spend time with friends on the water. Meanwhile, “Worth the Wait” has been seen by millions visiting Old Faithful.

Depicting a raven hoping to snag a taste of ice cream, it has a double entendre reminder for tourists to be patient until the world’s most famous geyser erupts. She has seen the impact of Yellowstone literally change peoples’ lives for the better.

About working in the park “as a dream job come true,” Matsuda reflects on of her favorite activities—helping young park visitors complete a series of learning tasks that enabled them to become inducted into the Junior Rangers program.

“A large part of my job was to listen and learn from visitors,” she said. “Many times I would spend time just listening to people recount their stories from the past. It was wonderful to share experiences and to observe wildlife on guided hikes, along with my groups. I was a ranger-naturalist for so long that some of the children I inducted into Junior Rangers came back to visit me as grown adults. It made me feel so happy.”

Today, Matsuda herself is a mother of twins and helping the wild country she loves become imprinted on them.

I asked her to explain her belief that there is a connection between all life forms as sentient beings.

“The true push behind my art is this: I put viewers in the perspective of animals so that they realize that animals have a whole suite of desires/goals/needs alike to ours. We are closer to other animals than we realize. We are the same underneath. Their lives are as authentic and as worthy as our own.

“It is not our species’ place to rank other species as greater or lesser. It is my wish for humanity to be gracious enough to allow all other species the right to live out their lives. Our species would truly suffer from the loss of the animals from this planet. I think this is a vital fight.”

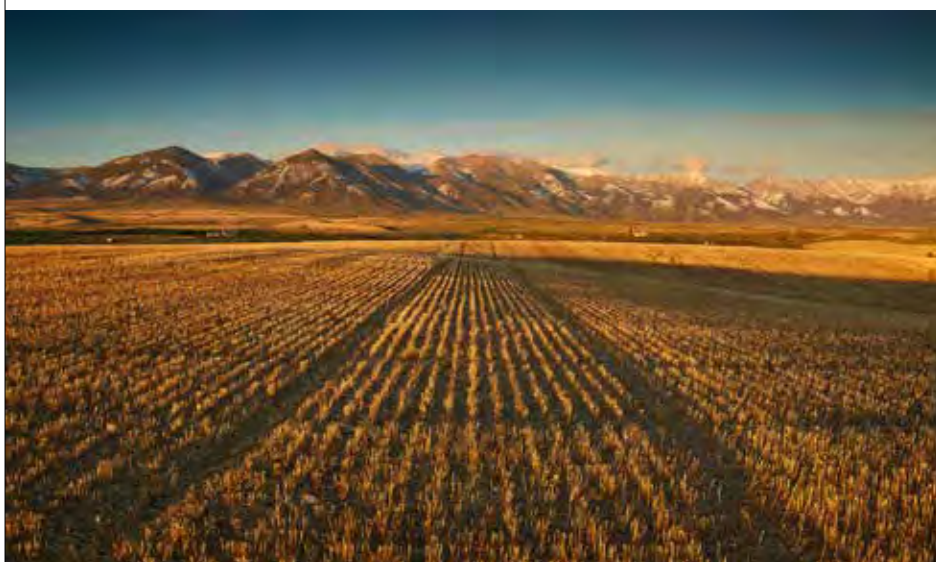
Visit mimisatsudaart.com to view Matsuda’s work.

Todd Wilkinson is the founder of Bozeman-based Mountain Journal and is a correspondent for National Geographic. He also authored of the book “Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek,” featuring photography by Thomas D. Mangelsen, about famous Jackson Hole grizzly bear 399.



Mimi Matsuda at her studio in Bozeman. IMAGES COURTESY OF MIMI MATSUDA

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Water Wisdom

Adopting a herd mentality

BY DAVID TUCKER
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

On Nov. 5 and 6, 2020, an unpermitted, wind-driven wildfire burned 650 acres of the Gallatin Wildlife Management area adjacent to the Gallatin River just south of Big Sky. When the smoke cleared, left behind were the charred remains of riparian vegetation. Among the remains, dozens of elk bones.

While the animals hadn't burned in the fire, the blaze revealed the extent to which elk feed in the area. Anyone who's spent time in Big Sky has likely noticed the large herd of elk that winter in the Porcupine drainage, sometimes coming to the river's edge to water, and sometimes crossing Hwy. 191 entirely and venturing into the ever-developing Gallatin Canyon neighborhoods. The Porcupine drainage is vital winter range for this herd, and November's wildfire destroyed much of their food source.

In early January 2021, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks along with the Custer Gallatin National Forest decided to monitor elk behavior within the Porcupine drainage during their annual flight count. The agencies wanted to see how elk were responding to the burn, given that they were likely under additional stress due to lack of readily available vegetation.

From fix-winged aircraft, agency biologists scanned for elk from the air, making note of sign such as hoof prints in the snow. In the burned unit, they saw just six elk. In an adjacent, unburned unit, they counted 110.

While it's likely that this larger herd had been moving through the burned unit based on the sign biologists saw from the air, it was clear that the unburned unit has been doubly important for the Porcupine elk this winter.

But another factor complicates this story—the human factor. The Porcupine drainage



During the seasonal closure from Dec. 1 to May 15, users are required to remain on official U.S. Forest Service system trails, marked in green. MAP COURTESY OF MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

sees a lot of consistent recreation traffic all winter long, and hikers, skiers and dog-walkers tend to spook elk and disperse them.

This adds extra stress during an already anxiety-ridden time of year, and it could be changing elk movement patterns, according to biologists. Later in the survey, biologists observed 193 elk in the Taylor Fork drainage, where averages are usually between 25 and 100. In Porcupine, where they tend to see upward of 200 elk, they counted just over 100.

While it's well documented that recreation has some impact on wildlife behavior, this shouldn't be relevant in Porcupine in the winter and spring months. Why? From Dec. 1 to May 15, all users are prohibited from leaving official USFS system trails, of which there are only two in the Porcupine drainage.

This spring, adherence to this restriction will be even more important. After a fire, vegetation usually comes back strong and healthy, and it's likely the Porcupine unit will see significant elk feeding, if the animals feel safe.

Staying on the trails, keeping our dogs under control and respecting our wildlife neighbors is a small sacrifice to make in order to ensure elk thrive on our public and

private lands. We're lucky enough to have wildness right out our front doors, and we want to keep it that way.

In the coming weeks, as the snows start to melt and hillsides begin to green, remember that we are visitors. We are going for a walk in the living room of these elk, running through their kitchen and hiking where they rest their heads.

In the same way that we clean, drain and dry our fishing gear or practice catch and release, we can stick to the trail. By doing so, we do our part to preserve what makes the upper Gallatin River watershed so special—its wild character, wildlands and wildlife.

David Tucker is the communications manager for the Gallatin River Task Force.

Sometimes, poison is the only thing that works

BY TED WILLIAMS
WRITERS ON THE RANGE



Three percent of Earth's land mass is comprised of islands, but 95 percent of all bird extinctions have occurred on them. Main cause: Mice and rats introduced by humans.

Only 10 percent of the world's islands are rodent-free, but a rodenticide called brodifacoum is changing that. On hundreds of treated islands recovery of native plants and wildlife has been swift and spectacular.

Consider rugged, 1,450-square-mile South Georgia Island in the Subantarctic. Before mice and rats disembarked from whaling vessels it had been Earth's richest seabird rookery. For three years it's been rodent free thanks to a \$13.5 million project in which brodifacoum was applied by helicopters. All 33 bird species are surging back. South Georgia pipits, for example, had been virtually eliminated; now their vocalizing drowns out the roaring of elephant seals.

On the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge of Palmyra in the South Pacific rats killed millions of seabirds representing 10 species, decapitated hatchling sea turtles, decimated 10 species of land crabs and consumed seeds of imperiled *Pisonia* trees, halting all reproduction. Today the entire ecosystem has recovered thanks to brodifacoum treatment in 2011.

In 2012 the estimated rat population on the Galápagos island of Pinzón was 18 million. All Pinzón giant tortoises hatched there were at least 150 years old because rats had eaten juveniles. In December of that year brodifacoum killed every rat. Within months hatchling Pinzón tortoises appeared for the first time in a century and a half -- produced by animals raised and repatriated by the Santa Cruz Tortoise Center.

On the Farallon Islands National Refuge, 27 miles off San Francisco, mice introduced by sealers threaten to extirpate 4000 ash storm-petrels -- half the planet's population. In autumn the ground undulates with mice. Sit down, and they crawl all over you.

Before mice infested the refuge burrowing owls rested briefly on their fall migration. Now they linger into winter, gorging on mice. With seed shortage mice turn to cannibalism, then starve, so owls switch to ash storm-petrels. Enough mice survive that their population explodes again when new seeds appear.

Meanwhile mice expose sea lions and seals to deadly pathogens, spread seeds of invasive plants, devour pollinators of native plants and consume two rare species found nowhere else -- Farallon camel crickets and Farallon arboreal salamanders.

Since 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has tried to restore ecological health to the Farallons, but it's continuously intimidated by opponents of all poisons in all situations.

To restore island ecosystems brodifacoum applied by trained wildlife professionals is an absolute necessity. But brodifacoum abused by the public is an absolute disaster for mainland ecosystems. These are two thoughts opponents of island recovery can't grasp simultaneously.

Animal-rights activist Maggie Sergio proves the old saw that one concerned citizen can make a difference. She proves also that this isn't always a good thing.

Sergio has whipped the City of San Francisco, the California Coastal Commission and the public to a froth of fear and loathing. Her online petition against the project has 39,000 signatures.

Sergio's screeds in the Huffington Post and elsewhere include such fiction as: "1.3 metric tons of brodifacoum" will be dropped by helicopter. There isn't enough brodifacoum in the world to drop 1.3 metric tons; 1.54 ounces would be dropped, this to be mixed with 1.3 metric tons of grain. And: "The pesticide label for 'Brodifacoum 25' indicates that up to 24 pounds per acre will be applied." No, "Brodifacoum 25" contains 25 parts brodifacoum per million parts grain.

These and other untruths are recycled by the media, the Coastal Commission, the city, WildCare and the Ocean Foundation. One might suppose that the foundation would defend ocean mammals and rare ocean birds. Instead it frets about imagined cruelty to mice and possible by-kill of super-abundant western gulls.

The Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't need permission from state bureaucrats to manage wildlife belonging to all Americans. But scolded by the Coastal Commission, it's re-revising plans it has revised and re-revised for 17 years.

Zach Warnow of Point Blue Conservation Science retains hope: "I don't think we'll win over opponents; but we'll get this message to the undecideds: We're in a time when people are doubting scientists, and we need to get back to trusting the scientific process that's been so well represented in this project."

The Service will again plead its case to the Coastal Commission at a hearing tentatively scheduled for May. Comments should be sent to: farallonislands@coastal.ca.gov

Ted Williams is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He writes about wildlife for national publications.

Ophir Miners knock down hoops season

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY – The seventh- and eighth-grade Ophir Miners boys basketball team recently finished their season with a near .500 record of 4-5.

Fourteen players took the court for the seventh- and eighth-grade Miners team this year including seven eighth graders and seven seventh graders on the roster.

Head coach Ben Holst called it a “weird season” due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Big Sky School District continues to grow, Holst said that a constantly shifting schedule complicated the season for a team that also welcomed new athletes to the court. Holst also coaches the Miners’ football team and said he was familiar with a majority of his roster this season but also enjoyed meeting and working with the athletes that he didn’t previously know.

“That’s probably the highlight for me is new faces and seeing guys find new abilities over the course of the season,” Holst said.

The seven eighth graders will have the opportunity to move up to join the junior varsity and varsity Lone Peak Big Horns teams next season.

Holst served as an assistant coach for the varsity boys’ program this season and is optimistic about the team’s future. He pointed to collaboration between coaches at various grade levels and a constant presence after multiple coaching changes at the varsity level in recent years.

“But I think we’ve turned a corner and the Lone Peak program should see ... gradual steps of improvement each year for the next several years,” he said.

Following a 23-17 victory over the Amsterdam Cougars on Feb. 18, the fifth- and sixth-grade Ophir Miners boys team capped off an undefeated 12-0 season.

“What I’m most excited about is watching the continuous improvement, and along the way watching this group of boys play together so well,” said fifth- and sixth-grade coach Al Malinowski.

The 15-player team was comprised of 12 sixth-grade students and three fifth-graders. Almost every fifth- and sixth-grade Miner scored a point this season—one of the team’s goals, Malinowski said—as 14 players found the score sheet and five different athletes paced the squad in various games with team-high scoring efforts.

Malinowski described the players as “unselfish” and said they’re willing to pass to an open teammate even if they have an opportunity for a shot.

“If anything the confidence that I see developing in this group—the confidence in their individual abilities, but just as importantly in the overall team and each other—is what I was most excited about seeing come out of this season,” Malinowski said.

When it came time for the fifth- and sixth-graders to toe the free-throw line, more often than not they were successful. The team hit foul shots at a rate of better than 50 percent over the course of the season with a 52-for-102 collective effort.

The 12 sixth-grade students could join the seven returning seventh graders to form a deep seventh-and-eighth grade Ophir Miners boys’ team next season.

Meanwhile, the Ophir Miners girls’ team, which began play in November, concluded



The fifth- and sixth-grade Ophir Miners basketball team finished their season with a perfect 12-0 record. PHOTO COURTESY OF AL MALINOWSKI

their season in early December. At the middle-school level the winter athletics season consists of an early and

late portion, and the boys and girls rotate schedules every other year. As a result, next season the girls will participate in the latter portion.

Due to low-athlete turnout, grades five, six, seven and eight were combined to form the 11-player roster. Two eighth graders, three seventh graders, five sixth graders and a fifth-grade student comprised the Miners’ team. OMS played eight games this season, according to Lone Peak High School Athletic Director John Hannahs.

“I mean they did a lot with their numbers,” Hannahs said. “There is some real talent in that group for sure, so that’ll be exciting to watch those seventh graders and sixth graders play their seventh- and eighth-grade year.”

Hannahs added that he is hopeful more girls will participate at the middle school level next season.

The eighth-grade students could move on next season to join as many as eight returning athletes who competed for the Lone Peak High School Lady Big Horns varsity team this year. The seventh- and sixth-graders will remain to form a seventh- and eighth-grade team next season, depending on athlete participation, according to Hannahs.

This Month in Sports: A return to ‘Madness’

BY AL MALINOWSKI
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

After nearly a year of COVID craziness, a return to college basketball’s March Madness will bring a welcome sense of normalcy to many sports fans. Admittedly, while the obsession with the NCAA bracket over the coming weeks could be perceived as a type of sickness, at least we know it will only stick around until the first weekend in April.

Last year, college seniors were robbed of the opportunity to play in their final tournament, since the 2020 NCAA men’s basketball tournament, often referred to as March Madness, was one of the first major events that was cancelled due to the pandemic. There was an obvious void as the end of winter approached and there was no mention of Cinderella stories or bracket busters.

Tournament time comes with the harsh truth that the next game could be the last. Indeed, most basketball players will have their seasons end with a loss. Even if the likelihood of victory is remote, emotions can be overwhelming when an athlete has to accept the reality that their basketball season, or career, is over.

The passion that comes with those “win-or-go-home” stakes can sometimes orchestrate the most unexpected upsets. The enjoyment of watching the NCAA basketball tournament includes rooting for the underdog to upset the higher seeded team, and it’s thrilling. Oftentimes the team names are less important than their tournament seeding, unless, of course, you picked them in your bracket.

The frequency of upsets is one of the appealing aspects of the tournament. It’s also what attracts so many prognosticators to try to successfully predict the outcome of each game by completing a bracket. The American Gaming Association estimates roughly 70 million tournament brackets are completed each year.

When you’re completing a bracket, predicting the upsets is the biggest challenge, and it always happens. Lower seeds defeat higher seeds every year. The difficulty is trying to determine which teams have those motivated players and coaches who aren’t willing to let their season come to an end....at least not in that round.

Over the years, No. 16 seeds gave some top seeds several scares, but it wasn’t until 2018 that the ultimate upset finally happened. Remember 2018? The year No. 1-seed University of Virginia lost their first game of the tournament, becoming the first No. 1 seed to lose to a No. 16 seed? The pundits lost their minds along with so many of us who had UVA going deep in the tourney.

As I wrote this story, I could immediately remember that Virginia was the team who lost, but I had to be reminded that they lost to UMBC. Who? I also admit I had to Google “UMBC” to be reminded that the acronym stood for University of Maryland-Baltimore County. I guess I didn’t pick UMBC in my bracket that year.

Al Malinowski has lived in Big Sky for over 25 years. He has coached middle school and high school basketball at the Big Sky School District for 22 of those years. He believes participation in competitive athletics has been critical in establishing his core values.

Ski Tips: Riding the storm on Mt. Elbrus

BY DAN EGAN
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

This article is an excerpt from “Thirty Years in a White Haze.”

In May of 2000, my brother John and I were in northeastern Canada on the frozen coast of Ungava Bay on the Arctic Ocean in Nunavik in a blinding windstorm. I had been separated from my group and was seeking shelter from the wind against a big piece of ice. John, Dean Decas and cameraman Eric Scharmer were with the Inuit guides, a hundred or so yards away. I was shaking from a flashback of being lost in a snowstorm on Mount Elbrus in Russia, ten years earlier.

We were on a 20-day trip to make a television documentary on adventure tourism in northern Quebec. Our main goal was to ski Tower Mountain, a stand alone, sphinx-like pyramid on the border with Labrador. A year earlier, John and I had spoken about a reunion trip back to Mount Elbrus but decided a new adventure would be a better than going back to the site of such tragic loss.

However, here I was hunkered down in another wild storm—scared, unable to find my way in the Arctic, remembering Elbrus where I was trapped for over 38 hours, lost in the storm that killed a dozen climbers on Elbrus.

Since the mid 1980s, John and I built a reputation for skiing the world’s most remote locations. We traveled throughout the Eastern Bloc at the end of the Cold War, skied with Kurds in Turkey during Desert Storm, pioneered heli-skiing in Chile, skied the Martial Glacier above the Drake Passage on the southern tip of Argentina and snuck into Lebanon to ski in the mid 1990s.

This was how I found myself on Mount Elbrus, Russia, pinned down by a massive snowstorm, at 18,500 feet above sea level. Elbrus has a higher annual death toll than Mount Everest—there were eleven deaths on Mount Everest in 2019, one of the deadliest years in the mountain’s recorded climbing history. As recently as 2016, thirty climbers were estimated to have died in attempts on Elbrus in a single year. In 2004, 48 perished trying to reach the summit.

My brother John was far below in the storm raging on Elbrus back in May of 1990. We had traveled there with an expedition consisting of 23



Dan Egan and brother John take flight in Zermatt, Switzerland. PHOTO BY DAVE ROMAN

people from nine countries. The expedition was coordinated by Degré7 skiwear and the plan was we would hike up the eastern peak, then ski down. So far, it wasn’t going well. May 2, 1990 would become one of the most disastrous days in the mountain’s climbing history.

On the night of May 1, a storm raged briefly, but broke by morning. So, with the skies clearing above, I left John behind and made way for the top, it was a decision that would ultimately, leave me stranded.

“The storm came up from the bottom of the mountain and [was] only getting worse,” John would later say.

But the storm had yet to reach me, I was climbing with Alfred Jimenez-Segarra, a Spanish member of the expedition as we approached the summit, we dropped our packs to lighten our load.

On the summit we soon were blanketed by the storm. Luckily, we were not alone. A Russian guide who introduced himself as Sasha convinced us to come with him and his fellow Russian climbers.

The situation grew worse. One of the climbers fell through a crevasse, forcing Sasha and I to rescue him. As the storm grew it became everyman for himself, after digging for four and a half hours, I laid down in my snow cave. Snow was piling up outside, winds reached 100 miles an hour, I was vomiting blood and began experiencing hallucinations.

That night I pondered my life. When it came to my ski career, I wanted to blow it wide open into something bigger, this ultimately brought me to Mount Elbrus, facing death, dealing with the realities of my career choice.

In the end Sasha and I rescued 14 people and arrived at the base of the mountain at midnight on May 3, 1990. The 1990 Degré7 expedition deeply affected my life it formed internal reactions I couldn’t control for years afterward.

Walking off that mountain it was the beginning of my adult life as I know it today. Looking back, I was 26 years old, and I’ve come to realize that skiing almost killed me and saved me, all at the same time.

Extreme skiing pioneer, Dan Egan coaches and teaches at Big Sky Resort during the winter. His steep camps run Feb. 25-27, March 4-6 and March 11-13. His newest book, “Thirty Years in a White Haze,” will be released in February. Visit White-Haze.com for preorders and autographed copies.



Dan jumps the Berlin Wall. PHOTO BY DAVE ROMAN



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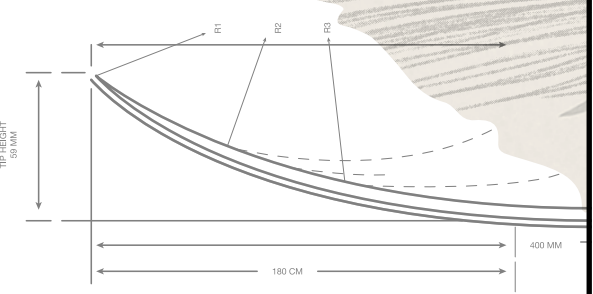
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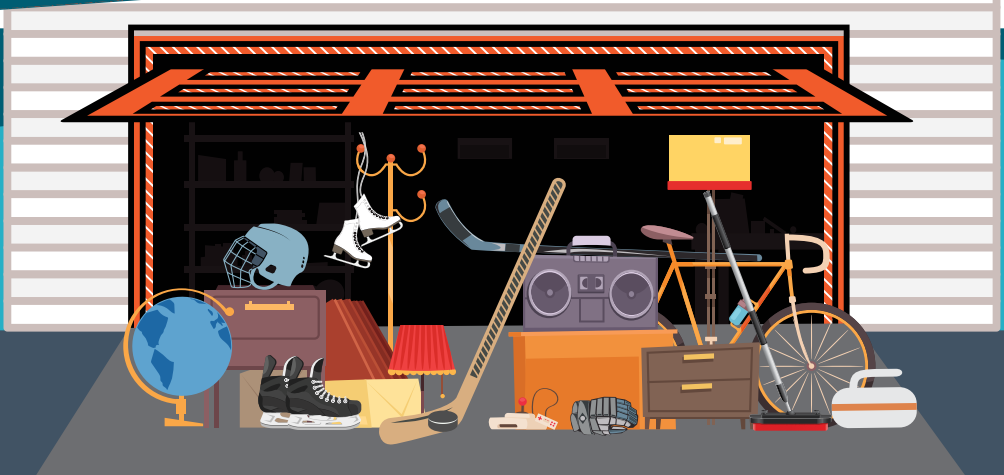
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New Ultrasound Services at Big Sky Medical Center

BY PATRICK STRAUB

Armed with the most current technology in ultrasound imaging, the Big Sky Medical Center continues to improve health care for the community. Adding ultrasound services in Big Sky has been a goal of Bozeman Health for years, and now patients from West Yellowstone to Gallatin Gateway can enjoy less travel and high-quality care.

Big Sky Medical Center's new Philips Epiq ultrasound machine is another cornerstone of the options of premium care at the growing medical center. Along with the Epiq comes Big Sky Medical Center's resident ultrasound technologist, Virginia Jacobs. Jacobs was previously based in Bozeman but now brings her years of expertise to Big Sky.

"We can now image everyday issues right here in Big Sky," Jacobs says. "Our machine is brand new, has all the updates and current software, and images can easily be shared with our team of specialists in Bozeman."

Ultrasound technology is often synonymous with pregnancy and gynecologic care, and Jacobs is a Registered Diagnostic Medical Sonographer with credentials in OB/GYN and abdomen. Jacobs explains that useful ultrasound imaging is crucial for diagnosing a variety of health concerns.

"We can diagnose everything from lumps and bumps to blood vessels and organs," she says. "Here in Big Sky we now have a great tool that doesn't involve radiation or a long drive to Bozeman for diagnostic imaging."

Big Sky Medical Center's new machine is designed to assist patients with a variety of potential life-threatening short- and long-term health concerns.



Adding ultrasound services in Big Sky has been a goal of Bozeman Health for years, and now patients from West Yellowstone to Gallatin Gateway can enjoy less travel and high-quality care. PHOTO COURTESY OF BOZEMAN HEALTH

Jacobs can look at a patient's blood vessels for blockages and narrowing or enlargement. Additionally, liver, kidneys, gallbladders and other soft-tissue abdominal organs can be imaged in Big Sky.

Ultrasound, also called sonography, uses high-frequency sound waves to create images of organs and structures in a body. There are no known risks to an ultrasound exam and most exams require little or no preparation. A few might require the removal of jewelry or monitoring a patient's daily or nightly intake of fluids.

"This is a great service to have here in Big Sky," says Jacobs. "Patients have easy access to our facility and our great staff aims that they have a positive experience."

All of this while getting a highly trained ultrasound technologist and a brand-new machine. The commitment to keeping Big Sky healthy doesn't stop with Jacobs, as she provides all imaging results to the radiologists in Bozeman.

"Our radiology team in Bozeman is exceptional," she adds. "We can also go beyond Bozeman and Big Sky as the imaging results can be sent to doctors throughout the country."

For locals in Big Sky, diagnosing nagging pains is crucial to enjoy all that Big Sky offers, but for vacationers, having access to easy care may be important to keep the vacation rolling. Because Big Sky is now a nation-wide destination often requiring long flights or long drives, many travelers may experience leg pain or difficulty adjusting to the lengthy travel or altitude.

"With ultrasound now here in Big Sky patients have quality imaging and access to radiologists, but don't lose the small-town personal touch," says Jacobs.

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Yours in Health

The benefits of acupuncture

BY DR. ANDREA WICK
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Acupuncture is an ancient form of Chinese medicine. It's been around for thousands of years and has been given more and more recognition from mainstream medicine over the last two decades or so.

Acupuncture opens meridians, or energetic pathways related to organs and glands, in the body. When an acupuncturist inserts needles into the skin, the needles help to rebalance "qi" or life force energy. Placing needles in a meridian helps to open the channel and maintain normal energetic flow. This is helpful if the meridians are stagnant or blocked since blocked channels can result in disease or distress to the system.

There are 14 different meridian channels and 360 acupuncture points in the human body, and each relates to different organ and gland functions including the lungs, heart, spleen, kidney, liver, small intestine, large intestine and stomach.

When an acupuncturist first assesses a patient, they conduct a thorough health history while checking pulse points and the tongue. Pulse points allow the practitioner to diagnosis where the qi or energy may be disrupted, thus leading to a more specific treatment. During a tongue diagnosis, the acupuncturist is looking at the color, shape and coating of the tongue to more accurately discern what may be going on in the body.

"As an acupuncturist, I treat the body, mind, and spirit," says Kallie Harrison, L.Ac, LMT, RN at Big Sky Natural Health, adding that acupuncture helps treat pain and stress associated with the pain, allowing the patient to become more aware of the mind-body connection. "I believe it's about meeting each

individual where they are at in their health journey and reminding the body of its innate ability to heal itself."

According to John Hopkins Medicine and the National Institutes of Health, acupuncture also helps with infertility, addiction, headaches, lower back pain, arthritis, nausea, depression, anxiety, and digestive issues, among many other afflictions.

Additional research from the National Institute of Health finds that acupuncture can help in treating chemotherapy nausea and vomiting, and in postoperative dental pain as well as fibromyalgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, addiction and even stroke rehabilitation.

Physiologically, acupuncture causes the release of endorphins, or "feel-good" chemicals, along with peptides in the central and peripheral nervous system. These chemical releases result in changes of neuroendocrine function and are an extremely powerful response.

Other forms of stimulation to the meridians of the body without the use of needles include: moxibustion, cupping, acupressure and gua sha. Moxibustion is heat therapy used to stimulate the flow of energy in the body. Cupping is a suction method where cups are placed on the body to help relieve pain and create more blood flow. Acupressure uses physical pressure and finger placement to stimulate meridians and channels. Lastly, gua sha is a tool that is used to scrape the skin in order to relieve pain and tension. Acupuncture is a great modality to try if you are looking for a more holistic approach within your healing journey!

Dr. Andrea Wick is a chiropractor and applied kinesiologist. She graduated from Life University in Marietta, Georgia, and now practices at Healing Hands Chiropractic in Big Sky. She has a passion for holistic healthcare and being active in the outdoors.

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BUSINESS, A & E,
DINING & FUNYoung artists join in
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Our unseen oceans pg. 40


 Making it in Big Sky: The Lodge at Big Sky

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – The Lodge at Big Sky has operated since 2001, sporting multiple names and boasting a storied history rooted in the glory days of Chet Huntley.

The Patel family acquired the Lodge in 2011 and Shivam Patel has been the general manager for six years. His wife, Kruti, serves as the assistant general manager of the Lodge. Shivam originally came to Big Sky six years ago to supervise a carpet renovation on the property. Two days into his visit, the general manager at the time quit, and Shivam has been in Big Sky ever since.

Kruti married Shivam and moved out to Big Sky to join him in the hotel business. “Our marriage was arranged, and I still don’t know if she fell in love with me first or Big Sky,” Shivam said.

The Patel family has been in the hotel business since 1990, a few months before Shivam was born, and for him, it has been a lifetime career. He explained that he loves the customer service aspect of the general manager job and the opportunity to meet the many interesting people who visit the hotel.

EBS sat down with Shivam to learn more about the Lodge and its colorful history.

Explore Big Sky: *Tell me about the history of the Lodge?*

Shivam Patel: “I believe that this was originally land used by Chet Huntley as a horse pasture or ranch. I currently have four horseshoes that I found on our property and I have been told that this was the case as well. I was also told that the property was given to one of the Kircher’s wives in a divorce settlement and was originally built as a Holiday Inn Express. I believe the second owner renamed it the “Mountain Inn” then “The Lodge at Big Sky.” I have a few pieces of apparel and collateral that still has the old Mountain Inn logo on it. That’s all I’ve pieced together over the years. I’m sure some of the locals that have been here for 20-plus years could tell you a more vibrant story than I could as I’m learning new facts every year.”

EBS: *What sets the Lodge apart from other hotels in Big Sky?*

SP: “Independent ownership. Especially now that River Rock Lodge and Buck’s T-4 Lodge have been sold. There’s a level of customer service and care that just can’t be given in a corporate environment. That’s the biggest benefit of staying at the Lodge at Big Sky. Kruti and I are at the hotel from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day during the season and much more during the holidays. We feel as though it’s our responsibility to ensure that everyone’s—most times hard earned—vacation goes off without a hitch. Most people we speak with say they’ve been waiting a year or more to visit Big Sky and the area. It’s our duty to make sure they’re leaving smiling.”

EBS: *Why should travelers choose the Lodge?*

SP: “Kruti and I are here every day during each season and don’t take a day off till it’s over. It’s very rare if we are not on a first name basis with a guest if they are staying more than four nights.”

EBS: *Tell me about some of your amenities?*

SP: “The hotel is laid out like your typical limited-service hotel, but our rooms are about 50-100 square feet larger on average. My favorite part of our rooms is the 10-foot ceilings throughout all four floors of the hotel. We’ve built many hotels over the years stressing to the franchises that taller ceilings play a trick on the eyes to make them feel larger. The person who designed this hotel

apparently had the same thought process as we do, and we always get compliments on the size of our rooms and ceiling. The main focal point of our hotel is our Great Room, which has the best view in Big Sky. That’s a fact. The Great Room during the day is where we serve our breakfast where people eat while enjoying the gorgeous Lone Peak alpenglow in the winter. At night, we have our own private bar that we operate for hotel guests only to enjoy in the Great Room by our fireplace, on the patio in front of our firepit, or in our aquatic facilities. We have one indoor pool, an indoor hot tub, and three outdoor hot tubs for guests to use. Our hotel also has fitness facilities, ski and bike storage, and a winter shuttle to take guests to and from the Resort.”

EBS: *Has it been difficult adapting to CDC guidelines during COVID?*

SP: “On the staffing side, we’ve all come together as a team. All of us are working together to ensure that guests are abiding by our and local rules to keep everyone safe.”

EBS: *When is your busiest time?*

SP: “That’s now changed three times since I moved here. Winter was the busiest when I first got here. Then the Chinese tourism boom rolled through, and then the summer became the busiest. Those months were the funniest as we had 95 percent of our rooms filled by tour buses so our parking lot would always be empty during the day. It was a daily occurrence where someone would stop by to ask if we were open for business. After Big Sky became a part of the Ikon Pass the winter is again our busiest time.”

EBS: *What is the best business advice you have ever received?*

SP: “My dad always says, ‘If you fail, fail fast, and try again.’”

EBS: *Anything else that you would like to share?*

SP: “It makes me proud to be a part of my little slice of Big Sky history. In the last six years, Big Sky has grown up so much, and I don’t see it stopping anytime soon. When I first moved here, Big Sky was skiing’s best kept secret. Now, almost every guest that visits our hotel is here for the first time, and the secret is out. I’m excited to see what the future holds for Big Sky.”



Shivam and Kruti Patel serve as the General and Assistant Managers at the Lodge at Big Sky. They can be found at the Lodge from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day of the winter season ensuring their guests have a great experience. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHIVAM PATEL

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BIG SKY EVENTS CALENDAR

Friday, March 12 – Thursday, March 25

If your event falls between March 26 and April 8, please submit it by March 17 by emailing media@outlaw.partners

Friday, March 12

Friday Afternoon Club
EBS Facebook Live, 5 p.m.

Live Music: TruckerDawg
Tips Up, 8 p.m.

Saturday, March 13
Saturday Sweat
Moving Mountains, 8 a.m.

Live Music: Luke Flansburg
Tips Up, 8 p.m.

Sunday, March 14
Slushly Slalom
Bridger Bowl, 10 a.m.

Sunday Brunch
Mountains Walking Brewery, Bozeman, 10 a.m.

Monday, March 15
Trivia Night
Pinky G's Pizzeria, 7 p.m.

Sunrise Karaoke
American Legion, Bozeman, 8 p.m.

Tuesday, March 16
Live Music: Rich Mayo
Kountry Korner Kafé, 6 p.m.

Bingo Night
Molly Brown, Bozeman, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, March 17

Glide Big Sky
Town Center, 2 p.m.

Spring Equinox Sonic Wash
Santasha Wellness Center, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 18
Live Music: The Damn Duo
Tips Up, 8 p.m.

Thursday Night Ice Climbers
Hyalite Canyon, 6 p.m.

Friday, March 19
Friday Afternoon Club
EBS Facebook Live, 5 p.m.

Live Music: TruckerDawg
Tips Up, 8 p.m.

Facial Gua Sha Class
Santasha Wellness, 7:15 p.m.

Saturday, March 20
Saturday Sweat
Moving Mountains, 8 a.m.

Live Music: Josh Moore
Tips Up, 8 p.m.

Sunday, March 21
Molly Hayes Spring Equinox GS
Bridger Bowl, 10 a.m.

Live Poker
Cat's Paw, Bozeman, 3 p.m.

Monday, March 22
Trivia Night
Pinky G's Pizzeria, 7 p.m.

Public Skate
Haynes Pavilion, Bozeman, 2 p.m.

Tuesday, March 23
Service Industry Night
Blend Wine Bar & Gallery, Bozeman, 7 p.m.

Sunrise Karaoke
Bar IX, Bozeman, 9 p.m.

Wednesday, March 24
Super Smash Bros Game Night
El Camino Bar, Bozeman. 6:30 p.m.

Live Music: Josh Moore
Bozeman Taproom, 7 p.m.

Thursday, March 25
Live Music: The Damn Duo
Tips Up, 8 p.m.

Derma Rolling Course for Home Use
Santasha Wellness, 7:15 p.m.

Thursday Night Ice Climbers
Hyalite Canyon, 6 p.m.



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Young artists join in annual art auction

Proceeds help community food bank efforts

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – “The minute somebody touches paint to a canvas, they’re no longer future artists,” Gina Dee said. “They’re artists.” Judging by the colorful canvasses that hung in the foyer of the Lone Peak Cinema during the Arts Council of Big Sky’s annual Auction for the Arts, Big Sky just gained 20 new artists.

Dee is the director of designs and special projects at Provincial Store Fixtures Ltd. here in Big Sky and headed up the “young artist” program, which was part of the weeklong auction event, as a way to encourage children in the community to use art as a mode of self-expression. Through word of mouth, Dee was able to gather the kids in small socially distanced studio sessions in the week leading up to the auction.

In addition to painting for the auction, each artist was tasked with writing their own artist statement explaining their piece and what inspired them.

Their youngest artist, Elise, 3, painted a giraffe in a snowstorm. Bode began painting a scary monster, until he found out the event was intended to be happy, so he made a happy monster. Norma painted a scene of what her upcoming birthday party would look like. Silas painted his family’s new kitten, with the number “99999” on his collar, since he had meowed 99,999 times since they had brought him home.

“Each of these kids did something that they felt in their heart,” Dee said. “I asked every child that came in, ‘Is there anything you want me to download as your inspiration, or do you want to come from the heart?’ Well, most of them knew the day before they were coming. So that is something you don’t want to squash.”

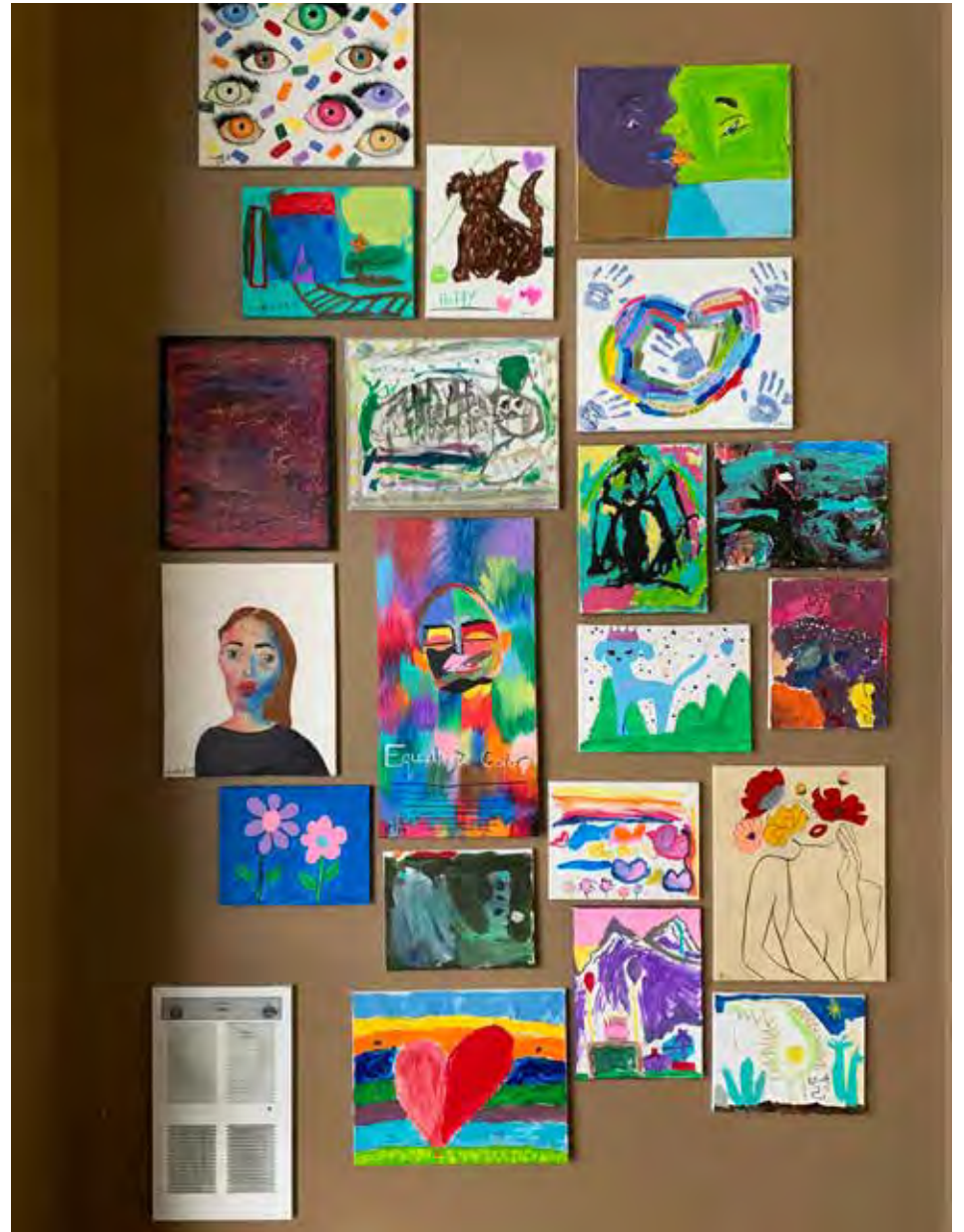
The pieces have been moved to The Rocks Tasting Room & Liquor Store and will be available for purchase through March 15 via silent auction with all proceeds going to the Big Sky Community Food Bank. So far, four have sold and \$2,000 has been raised—Dee’s goal is \$5,000.

“I’m obsessed with the food bank,” Dee said. “I wish I could quit my job and run it but I can’t.” Originally from Burlington, Ontario, she and her husband witnessed the disparities affluent towns such as Big Sky often experience.

“People just assume that there’s no need for a food bank, but I find the more affluent the town, the more prevalent the need is for the workers. And it gets overlooked.”

Interest in the exhibit has spread—Olive B’s expressed interest in hosting the next group and Dee says she hopes to continue bringing more young artists through and continuing to raise money for a good cause.

“I work in construction, but I was born and raised in the arts,” Dee said. “This gives me an opportunity to touch art again and do what’s passionate to me on



The young artist exhibit hung in the Lone Peak Cinema foyer during the auction event and is now at The Rocks for silent auction. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTS COUNCIL OF BIG SKY

top of my job, so to me it had to be twofold: I love the arts, but it needs to do something for someone, to help something.”

She says too often in life, we have to “stay in the lines,” but art allows us—and teaches us—to break out of those boundaries and explore our creativity.

The Arts Council’s art auction spanned from Feb. 22 through 27, featuring a limited-capacity in-person cocktail hour and a successful online auction featuring over 70 different local artists. China Reeves, the Arts Council’s events coordinator, says since this year the event was virtual, and a weeklong, it brought in some new participants.

“The art is just more accessible and as the Arts Council, that is something we’ve always strived to do, is the make art accessible and get everyone participating,” Reeves said of the auction event. “This has in some ways has allowed us to do that on a larger scale.”

Katie Alvin, the Arts Council’s development director, says this is their most profitable auction to date. 77 out of 82 different pieces were sold and they estimate that over 300 people were actively bidding on items throughout the week.

The Arts Council is currently working to raise money for a variety of programs, including their after-school programming, and are hoping to create a dedicated space for ceramics at the new BASE Community Center currently being built in Big Sky Town Center. Those interested in purchasing an art piece from the young artists exhibit can talk to the team at The Rocks or email Dee at gina.dee@hotmail.com.



A group of young artists holding their creations after an evening in the studio. PHOTO COURTESY OF GINA DEE



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Big Sky Brews:

Pink Boots Session IPA celebrates women's role in brewing

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – If you're an avid beer drinker, you'll be humbled to find that beer has shaped much of mankind's journey through history, and not just by offering an alcoholic beverage for times of sorrow and celebration. According to the Discovery Channel documentary "How Beer Saved the World," brewing has played a role in mathematics, commerce, medicine, writing and food preservation. Although modern brewing has the stereotype of being a man's occupation, it has been well documented that women played an irreplaceable role in beer's history.

According to Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine, because men were out hunting, women were tasked with gathering ingredients for their family's meals and planting and harvesting crops like barley and wheat. As far back as ancient Mesopotamia, women were preparing, alongside a hearty meal, fermented beverages, including a low-alcoholic beverage used in daily religious ceremonies.

Through the centuries, brewing was a craft passed down through women, and rural America was no exception—although founding father Thomas Jefferson often receives the credit for being the brewer in his family, it was actually his wife Martha who provided the family recipe.

Today, the tradition of women brewers is carried on by the Pink Boots Society. Pink Boots is a nonprofit organization that a few notable, modern-day women-owned breweries include: Fort Point Beer Co. in San Francisco, CA; Freemont Brewing in Seattle, WA; New Belgium Brewing in Fort Collins, CO; Lost Coast Brewery in Eureka, CA; and Cabinet Mountain Brewing Co. right here in Libby, MT.

If you find yourself in Big Sky with some time to kill, you can even pick up your own pint of Pink Boots Session IPA at Beehive Brewing.

Brewmaster Andy Liedberg says they purchased a hop blend that donates money to the Pink Boots Foundation as well as a Montana Craft Malt from Butte. He added that the female Beehive crew worked with Hanna Turner from Montana State University's Malt Quality Lab to perfect the Pink Boots IPA. It was released just in time for International Women's Day on March 8 and is a great addition to the brewery's current lineup.

The Pink Boots Session IPA is a mellow ale at 5.4 percent ABV and Liedberg says they used about 22 pounds of hops. It's smooth, crisp and perfect to pair with a lunch sandwich from neighboring Roxy's Market, or to top off a day of spring skiing at Big Sky Resort.

Pink Boots will only be available until they run out, so grab a pint your next time through town and lift a glass for the women in your life.



Pink Boots Ale uses a hop blend that donates money to the Pink Boots Foundation. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

AMUSE-BOUCHE

Amuse-bouche refers to an appetizer, and by French translation means, "to entertain the mouth." It offers a glimpse into what you should expect from a meal. Also it's free, compliments of the chef.

Waste not want not



BY SCOTT MECHURA
EBS FOOD COLUMNIST

Recently, I listened to a woman on a popular news outlet list, as one of her concerns of global warming, imminent global food shortage. This immediately caused me to question that statement.

Imminent? That's a strong word.

It seemed a preposterous comment, given what I knew about food production, handling, regulations and waste.

Years ago, I spent two days on a fascinating tour in California's Salinas Valley, otherwise known as "America's salad bowl."

I scolded myself for being so naïve as to be shocked when I saw the amount of lettuces and salad greens that were casually discarded on the valley floor. Kicked, stomped, dropped and driven over like trash, as much of these foods are harvested, an equal amount is not.

And that was but one field, in one valley.

Then the strawberry fields. Before you pine over the Beatles song, most every strawberry that is beautifully ripe never sees the inside of a clamshell. But rather, the ones that do get packed in the fields for sale are predominantly white. The reason being that if they're ripe at that point, they will be moldy, rotten or otherwise subpar by the time it makes it to your local grocery store shelf. Seems logical enough. However, I watched as those wonderfully crimson little gems were discarded over the shoulder of a young migrant worker like a kid on the beach looking for the perfect seashell.

For most of the African continent, daily caloric intake per person has increased each decade since the 1960's. Most Africans take in, on average, about 1,500 fewer calories than Americans on a daily basis. On the surface this sounds like an alarming discrepancy, but when you eliminate Hot Pockets, Ben & Jerry's, Chick-fil-A and Krispy Kreme donuts from the American diet, the calorie intake, turns out, is almost identical.

Perhaps you'll recall my experience from a previous article in which I had a brief confrontation with a woman at a Bozeman convenience store when I tried to stop her from throwing away three large boxes of frozen pizzas simply because their dates were expired (an oddity in and of itself, given the amount of preservatives in a frozen pizza.)

Expiration dates are cause for a shockingly high amount of food waste. Milk's dates in particular change from state to state, and the most inconsistent in the nation is Montana. By using the classification "best if used by," an unbelievable amount of milk goes down the drain.

Finally, according to Tara McKenzie of the University of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia, almost 90 percent of tomatoes harvested from just one Queensland farm get discarded. Markings, odd shapes, too small or too large are all grounds for dismissal.

These are but a few examples into the world of wasted food, poorly distributed food and a painfully large degree of government involvement and regulations.

With annual traditions like the Nathan's Hot Dog eating contest and television shows like Guy's Grocery Store Games, to my way of thinking, we don't have a food supply problem, nor will we ever. It simply doesn't pencil. What we do have is a disconnect with diet, which foods should be prioritized, and what real food is.

So the next time we're told that climate change is causing a global food shortage, reflect on how disrespectfully we regard food that our cultural vanity allows us to discard a perfectly good tomato, simply because it isn't pretty.

Scott Mechura has spent a life in the hospitality industry. He is a former certified beer judge and currently the multi-concept culinary director for a Bozeman based restaurant group.

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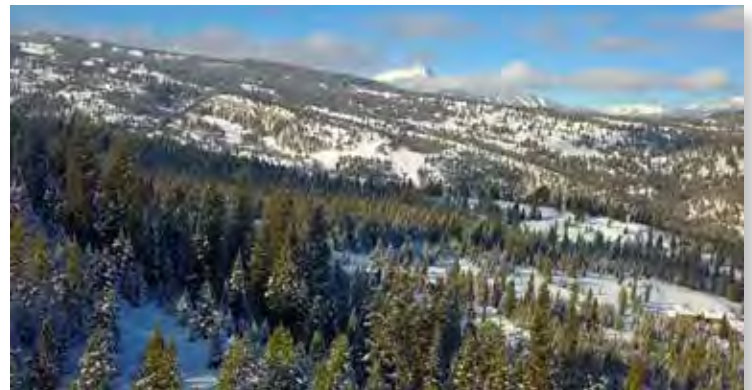
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American Life in Poetry: Column 833

BY TED KOOSER,
U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Li-Young Lee is an important American poet of Chinese parentage who lives in Chicago. Much of his poetry is marked by unabashed tenderness, and this poem is a good example of that.

Editor's Note: This column (486) is a reprint from the American Life in Poetry archive as we bid farewell to Ted Kooser, and work to finalize the new website and forthcoming columns curated by Kwame Dawes.

I Ask My Mother to Sing

She begins, and my grandmother joins her.
Mother and daughter sing like young girls.
If my father were alive, he would play
his accordion and sway like a boat.

I've never been in Peking, or the Summer Palace,
nor stood on the great Stone Boat to watch
the rain begin on Kuen Ming Lake, the picnickers
running away in the grass.

But I love to hear it sung;
how the waterlilies fill with rain until
they overturn, spilling water into water,
then rock back, and fill with more.

Both women have begun to cry.
But neither stops her song.

American Life in Poetry provides newspapers and online publications with a free weekly column featuring contemporary American poems. The sole mission of this project is to promote poetry. American Life in Poetry seeks to create a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. There are no costs for reprinting the columns; we do require that you register your publication here and that the text of the column be reproduced without alteration.



Corner Quote

“The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls.”

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- ACROSS**
- 1 Babism founder
 - 4 New York canal
 - 8 Down with (Fr., 2 words)
 - 12 Where (Lat.)
 - 13 Wheel
 - 14 “Dream Girl” playwright
 - 15 Compass direction
 - 16 King Atahualpa
 - 17 Apple
 - 18 Ice pinnacle
 - 20 Legal title
 - 22 Salt
 - 25 Muslim deity
 - 28 Rumor personified
 - 31 Court cry
 - 33 Hawaiian frigate bird
 - 34 Soft drink
 - 35 Poke
 - 36 Reek
 - 37 Buddhist column
- DOWN**
- 1 Kiss
 - 2 Priest
 - 3 Beer (Ger.)
 - 4 Heath
- ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE**
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BIG SKY BEATS

Lord Huron’s “Vide Noir” BY GABRIELLE GASSER

Lord Huron is an American indie folk band formed in 2010 by Ben Schneider. The original name, Lake Huron, was a tribute to the great lake that Schneider grew up visiting. The band’s most popular song, “The Night We Met,” is from their second studio album “Strange Trail” and it has been streamed over 700 million times. However, the best way to listen to Lord Huron is by playing an entire album, in order, from start to finish.

The band’s most recent album from 2018 “Vide Noir,” which translates to “black void” from French, is a self-contained story intended to be experienced as a whole. The album is inspired by the city of Los Angeles at night and weaves a compelling narrative of a main protagonist searching for a lost lover.

“I started imagining “Vide Noir” as an epic odyssey through the city, across dimensions, and out into the cosmos,” Schneider said in a 2018 press release. “A journey along the spectrum of human experience. A search for meaning amidst the cold indifference of the Universe.”



The album’s twelve songs range in tone from peaceful and relaxing to grittier indie rock interludes, all tied together of course by Schneider’s evocative lyrics.

BACK40

For Explore Big Sky, the Back 40 is a resource: a place where we can delve into subjects and ask experts to share their knowledge. Here, we highlight stories from our flagship sister publication Mountain Outlaw magazine.

Noun: wild or rough terrain adjacent to a developed area **Origin:** shortened form of “back 40 acres”

Our Unseen Oceans

How the water beneath our feet connects us

BY BAY STEPHENS

Imagine you are a droplet of water, carried within a gathering cloud over the wide valleys and rugged mountain ranges of southwest Montana. When the cloud's mass becomes more than the air can support, you begin careening earthward along with a host of companions.

Some land on trees, rocks, or trickle into ponds only to be blasted by the sun back into the atmosphere. Other droplets run over the surface of the land into mountain streams, which babble and tumble to join the roll of an ever-growing river. You, along with a select group, land on rich black soil and soak into the ground. As you go, some of your friends find themselves sucked into plant roots to be pulled by a chain of water molecules back into the atmosphere. But you continue to sink down, down into the soil.

How much water is in this basin you now occupy? This question comprises a hydrologist's bread and butter.

Wherever the water lands, and wherever it ends up, only a finite amount is available to satisfy the needs of every faction that shares the basin. In “closed basins,” such as the Gallatin River Basin where Bozeman is squarely nestled, more surface water has been legally doled out than actually exists, making the question “How much?” even more important. But when it comes to water, there's far more than meets the eye. In fact, the majority of the resource lies underground, escaping visible scrutiny.

The Hidden Resource

Beneath our feet—a mile, 150 yards, even five feet down—unseen waters move slowly through the ground. These “aquifers” come in various shapes, sizes, salinities and depths. Out of sight and mind, most of us have only an inkling of how our lives intertwine with these buried reservoirs.

Globally, underground water sources represent 96 percent of freshwater available, excluding glaciers and icecaps, according to the 2017 Montana Climate Assessment, which looked at climate change effects throughout the state.

These subterranean storage units range in size about as much as rivers do, from underground puddles to buried oceans, and some are heavily utilized as traditionally dependable water sources. Insufficient rainfall in the arid West makes agriculture without irrigation unfeasible for certain crops, so aquifers supplement surface water draws or are the primary source sustaining many farms and communities.

In Montana, about half of the state's population depends on groundwater for domestic water needs, as it's often the only available water source. In some parts of the West, these groundwater stores have been depleted to the point where scientists and water managers have begun to count down the years until some aquifers have no more to give.

When it comes to using water, a balance must be struck and must account for groundwater, not just surface water. Ideally, the resource is equitably distributed between agricultural, environmental and industrial/municipal uses: the three-legged stool.

The agricultural portion of the stool affects groundwater in marked and interesting ways, and changing irrigation practices can precipitate changes to the underlying aquifers in places like the Gallatin Valley.

Beyond the reach of written history in the Americas, sagebrush carpeted the Gallatin Valley. As homesteaders settled the area, the sea of soft green gave way to cultivated fields watered by canals that diverted part, or all, of the Gallatin River's water, to flood the fields so crops would grow.

Along with being labor-intensive, flood irrigation is often seen as inefficient and detrimental to rivers and streams because of the volume of water it requires to fill a ditch and convey the life-giving stuff to a farmer's fields. Organizations with vested interests in keeping water in rivers for wildlife have collaborated with irrigators to safeguard instream flow, sometimes leasing water rights from agriculturalists or helping them line ditches to prevent leaking, therefore requiring less diversion from rivers.

Most crops only require one to two feet of water to grow, yet flood irrigation douses fields in up to five and a half acre-feet over the course of the growing season, according to John LaFave, a hydrogeologist with the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology.

“That's way more than a crop needs to grow,” LaFave said. “So that begs the question: What's happening to all that water that's being diverted?”

One and the Same

Running out of the house with his brothers as a kid, Pat Byorth would strap a fishing rod or shotgun across the handlebars of his one-speed Stingray bike and ride out of town to shoot pheasants or catch fish. The Byorth boys cowboied on ranches and backpacked in the summers, hunted in the mountains and prairies surrounding their hometown of Billings, Montana. A love for the mountains, fields and streams of the West grew like Bitterroot flowers out of Byorth's young days in untamed places.

“We were kind of raised feral,” Byorth said, smiling at fond memories. “We just ran wild, literally, out in the wild.” Strong-built and tall, Byorth has gentle eyes that complement his short brown hair and grey-flecked moustache. His life and work have revolved around the natural world, especially its rivers, which still connect him with Mother Nature on a profound level.

As a former fisheries biologist on the Madison and Gallatin rivers and now an attorney with Trout Unlimited, Byorth, who was also recently appointed to the Fish and Wildlife Commission, has always focused on waterways, but his scope has expanded to encompass groundwater as well.

While it was once thought that groundwater and surface water were distinct from one another, it's now scientifically understood that they comprise one entity, one body, one resource.

“Rivers are the expression of the water table,” as Byorth put it.

Illustrating this, Byorth says, when a river runs high and full-bore, such as during spring runoff, someone on the bank wouldn't have to dig far to find groundwater: It will be at the same elevation as the river. On the flip side, in late August when the river is low, one would have to burrow far deeper to reach the substance.

Essential to river health, groundwater is the only reason mountain streams continue running in the late summer heat when the mountain snowmelt is spent. According to Byorth, groundwater stays between 36 and 42 degrees Fahrenheit, keeping coldwater fish like wild trout cool and happily respiring in the oxygen-rich water. The death knell for these aquatic residents is when water temps rise above the dreaded 82.5 F mark. The less water in a river, the higher its susceptibility to temperature fluctuations.

Groundwater also supplies river baseflows when winter has locked everything up in wind-swept snowdrifts. The warmer-than-air groundwater discharging from riverbeds prevents the waterways from freezing completely. For either temperature extreme, coldwater fish rely on groundwater for survival, spending much of their time near segments where it joins the river.

In fly-fishing capitals like Bozeman, healthy fish correlate to a thriving economy, so when access is limited, business feels the pinch. On occasions when rivers hover above 70 degrees for a prolonged period of time, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks can implement partial and complete fishing closures on stretches to reduce the stress on fish, which has happened on the Gallatin five of the past 10 years, according to Byorth.

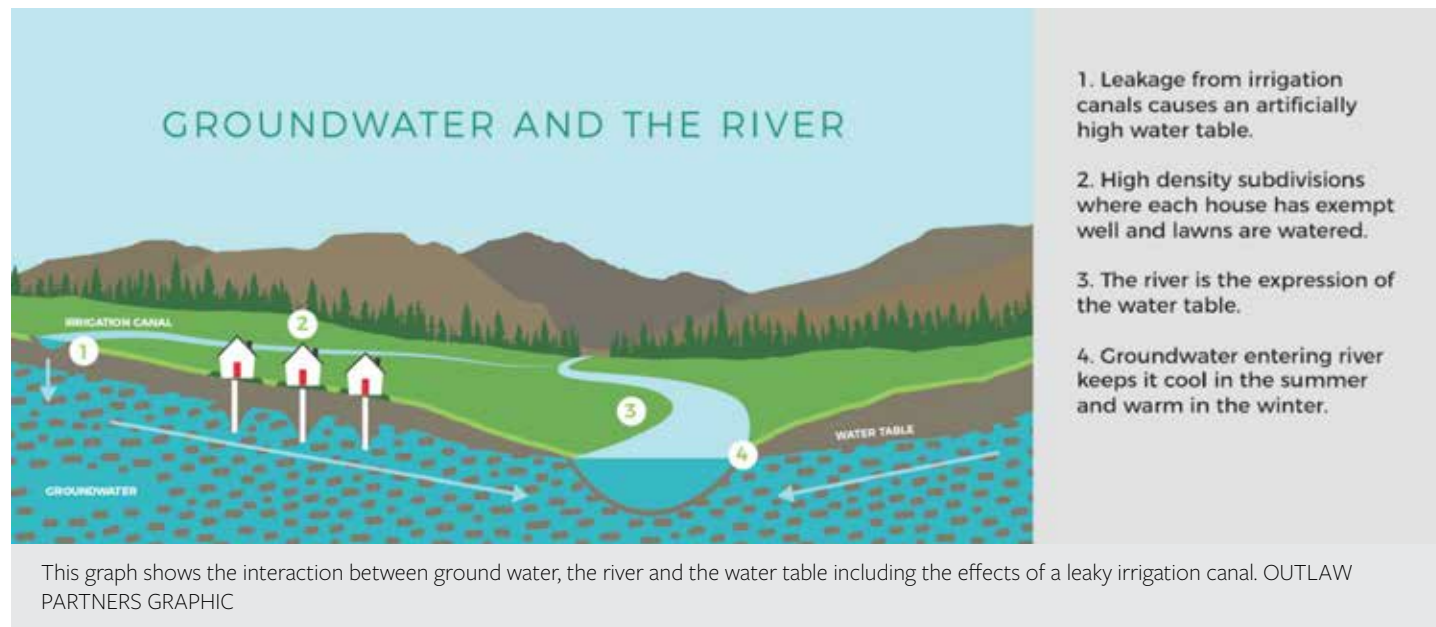
Using an integrated, relational database and mapping program developed by members of World Bank, Byorth demonstrated how a 42-day closure between July 19 and August 29, 2017 resulted in a loss of \$984,000 in tourism revenue and \$196,000 in income. According to the database, the closure cost the local economy approximately \$24,000 per day.

The Builder's Dilemma

Bozeman is growing—aggressively. With an estimated growth rate of 3.6 percent between 2016 and 2017, according to a U.S.



Southwest Montana is renowned for its fly fishing, but some anglers may not realize how groundwater keeps the river cold in the heat of late summer and warm enough in the chilled heart of winter for coldwater fish to thrive. PHOTO BY KENE SPERRY



1. Leakage from irrigation canals causes an artificially high water table.
2. High density subdivisions where each house has exempt well and lawns are watered.
3. The river is the expression of the water table.
4. Groundwater entering river keeps it cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

availability of traditional surface-water sources (e.g., dry stock water ponds or inability of canal systems to deliver water in a timely manner) force water users to seek alternatives,” the assessment states.

In the Gallatin Valley, a network of 64 wells monitored between the Gallatin Local Water Quality District and the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology keeps tabs on the groundwater and its quality, but more is better when it comes to monitoring, says GLWQD District Manager Tammy Swinney.

“It’s always good to have more data,” Swinney said. “More information allows you to make better and more well-informed decisions. In my opinion, you could never collect enough groundwater quality or water-level data.”

Census Bureau report released last year, the population was expected to breach 50,000 by 2020 and stands to double in 20 years if the growth keeps up.

More people require more places to live, which means more building and increased demand on water resources. Although the city of Bozeman relies primarily on surface water from Sourdough and Hyalite creeks to provide drinking water, according to the city’s website, homes and subdivisions built beyond the municipal water system must look elsewhere for the resource. For a period, the easiest solution was to punch what are called “exempt” wells.

Intended to give small-scale appropriators a break from the hassle and cost of acquiring a permit when they posed little threat of affecting neighboring water rights, exempt wells aren’t required to obtain a permit from the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to appropriate water, so long as the well draws remain beneath specific rate and volume thresholds.

Although the wells worked in most areas of Montana, such as where ranchers live miles from the nearest neighbors and draw small volumes to water livestock, things got complicated in counties where growth was off the charts and subdivisions were popping up like spring flowers.

In response to a statutory amendment in 1991 reducing the flow rate allowed under the exception and adding a volume limit, DNRC changed the definition of exempt wells in 1993. This gave latitude for huge developments to be built wherein every house had its own well, each able to draw “35 gallons per minute or less, and ... not [exceeding] 10 acre-feet a year,” according to the statute. Regardless of the size of a subdivision, developers could dig wells, apply for, and receive certificates from the DNRC without any review on the impact to other water-rights holders or the environment. The definition change sent ripples throughout certain counties in the state.

In Gallatin County, where Bozeman is located, the county commission processed 498 subdivision applications and recorded 13,321 exempt well certificates of completion between 1990 and 2007, according to an article in the *Journal of Contemporary Water Research and Education*. Many of these “straws” pulled groundwater destined for the Gallatin River and other tributaries.

Part of the issue with exempt wells in large subdivisions was that they didn’t play by the same rules that large permitted wells or senior rights holders do, though they could potentially draw the same or even a bigger volume of water. It’s difficult to know their exact effect, but exempt wells could suck water from the aquifer with little to no oversight or enforcement, while the Gallatin River runs dry and hot, and while irrigators receive the backlash for it from an angry public.

Although the DNRC recognized that exempt-well uses were outpacing the legislative intent of the wells, and intended to change it, they were hindered by the legislative committee overseeing water law changes in the state and then sued before the department could modify the definition, according to a DNRC Declaratory Ruling.

“Those definitions were developed for specific reasons of the time,” said DNRC Water Rights Bureau Chief Millie Heffner. “And at the time, really, there weren’t a lot of subdivisions occurring. It was primarily agricultural use.”

In a 2014 district court ruling, the definition was reverted to a 1987 version that allowed 35 gallons per minute or less and up to 10 acre-feet a year per project, not per well. Under the ’87 definition, an entire subdivision, which would be considered one project by DNRC, could now only withdraw the amount an individual well could under the previous definition. This limited developments outside central water utilities to between five and 10 homes, depending on water-use restrictions.

The change dramatically slowed development in the county, focusing subdivision construction to areas with established water and sewer districts, according to developer Kevin Cook of Gene Cook Real Estate in Bozeman. He added that the definition change made building more complicated and expensive for developers, meaning pricier homes for buyers.

“It’s just changed the game,” Cook said. “Is it good, is it bad? I say it is what it is ... You’ve got a new set of rules, just go play by the new set of rules.”

Land, Climate and Water Budgets

Whiskey’s for drinking and water’s for fighting over, as the adage goes. The essential resource has always been scarce in the American West, and the history of conflicts surrounding it bears testament.

And no more water is on its way, at least according to climate projections. The Montana Climate Assessment predicts warming temperatures will likely reduce snowpack at mid and low elevations, while earlier snowmelt will cause earlier peaks in spring runoff, resulting in decreased late-summer water availability.

“Groundwater demand will likely increase as elevated temperatures and changing seasonal

Although she thinks no organization alone can gather truly robust data, Swinney says partnerships between organizations to share information could work powerfully, ideally revealing shared gaps in data that could then be filled. The information could map out the best ways to mitigate water usage, maintain a high water table and slow the exodus of the resource from the Gallatin Valley, thus helping to alleviate conflicts related to the need for water.

“If we can keep more water in the valley,” Swinney said, “especially in those critical times of the summer when irrigators need it, fish need it, recreationists want it, homeowners want it, then we need to find a way to keep as much of the water that enters our watershed here as long as possible before it leaves.”

At key locations and times of year, Swinney says managed flood irrigation in the Gallatin Valley might help maintain the high water table on which both well owners and the river rely. It could also act as an artificial replacement for a decreasing snowpack that has historically held water late into the summer. The materials we choose to use for our driveways, sidewalks and parking lots can also contribute to aquifer recharge and slowing water down.

“The more we grow, the more impervious surface we’re going to have,” Swinney said. “We’re going to have more roads, more sidewalks, more parking lots, more rooftops, more driveways.”

As rainwater or snowmelt hit these impermeable surfaces, the water sweeps all the sediment, debris and mechanical fluids from cars into storm drains, which send the grimy cocktail straight into the streams lacing through Bozeman. Impervious surfaces facilitate water leaving the valley quicker, polluting waterways in the process.

Officials with the city of Bozeman are working to address this issue, pushing for land-use choices that leverage the filtering power of soil to slow and clean water destined for streams. Using pavers akin to those employed by the Roman Empire to build roads, the city built a patio surrounded by a “water-wise garden” outside City Hall as an example for others to follow.

“We’re really trying to model best practices when it comes to stormwater management,” said the city’s stormwater program coordinator, Kyle Mehrens. Pavers allow water to percolate down into the soil, acting as flood control, water filtration and preventing water that’s laden with fish- and insect-harming pollutants from rushing over concrete to the nearest stream, according to Mehrens.

The city also broke ground on a pilot infiltration garden just south of Langhor Park that catches stormwater and filters it through the garden’s soil before it joins Mathew Bird Creek, allowing clean, soil-filtered water to join the stream as was the case before Bozeman existed.

The effects of these projects and choices may seem small, but they add up when it comes to keeping water in the valley. After all, we have a budget to keep.

The Contradiction of the West

When it comes to protecting the marvels of the natural world in the midst of growth and change, Byorth says complacency is the enemy. Many of Montana’s rivers were thrashed in the past 200 years, used for sewage or contaminated by mines. A grinding, multigenerational struggle has returned them to their current legendary status, but there’s more to be done.

“Without the policy changes, or cultural changes that let policy change, the Montana that I grew up in, the Montana that I love so much — the streams, the rivers and fish and the ospreys and eagles and lynx, you name it — won’t be here,” Byorth said. “Won’t be here for my kids and my grandkids.”

Yet water is also necessary to grow the food we eat and to supply drinking water for the homes in which we live.

Water management in Western states is far from simple, especially with its complex history. Stewarding the resource successfully will require approaching the task on a case-by-case basis, so that communities within basins come together to decide how their watersheds should be managed. Partitions between and within communities will have to be dismantled, replaced by citizens rallying over shared goals.

Otherwise, the contradiction of the West will persist. People will come to seek the solitude of a quiet stream and fish beneath vaulting skies, but in doing so will contribute to the demise of their surroundings. In seeking to enjoy the marvels of this Western landscape, we stand to instigate their disappearance.

More than any other resource, water has defined the region’s past and will continue to define its future. Water cannot be an afterthought in the West because here, we’re not getting any more.

A version of this story was first published in the Summer 2019 edition of Mountain Outlaw magazine.

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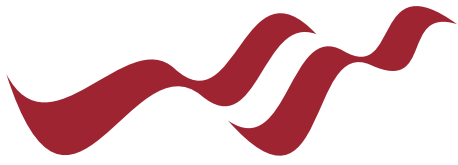
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COVID-19: A YEAR IN REVIEW

MARCH 12, 2020 TO MARCH, 12, 2021

As we reach the one-year mark since we began feeling impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Big Sky, there is much to reflect on. Collectively we experienced a multitude of unknowns, but Big Sky united as a community. Here are the stories and heroes who made the year a little easier.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

Dear friends and neighbors,

It's been one year since our world was turned upside down. On March 15, 2020, I was interviewing Big Sky Resort President and COO Taylor Middleton on what was the final ski day of the season. One month early.

And that's when it felt "real." The Big Sky community was nervous and confused. Everyone was on edge. At EBS, we didn't know what the hell we were going to do. So, I wrote a letter:

A dear friend recently sent me this quote: "For all that we speak, as a culture and a people, of victory and defeat, of good and evil, of hero and coward, it is none of it quite true. The truth is that the greatest victory is to endure with grace and humor, to stay in the game, to achieve humility."

Novelist, poet and editor Brian Doyle wrote these words in his collection of essays, "One Long River of Song." And they have never rung truer.

We remain locked in battle with an unseen force. It's stopped humanity in its tracks, affecting every element of our lives and the world over. The COVID-19 coronavirus is taking lives. It has upended the world economy and nearly every other facet of life.

In our small community, we're seeing the toll as well. Big Sky Resort closed a month early over mounting concerns of the virus's spread, and many of our restaurants and small businesses have been forced to close or adapt. And fast.

At Explore Big Sky, we've had our cages rattled along with all of you. In the face of COVID-19, we're working from home, tightening our belts with the rest of the community. And we're rising to the challenge alongside each of you. In an effort to adapt to this temporary new normal, we're ramping up our reporting both in the print edition of EBS and on our digital platforms to bring you the information you simply need to know.

This special edition of EBS is meant to represent a moment in time, one we hope you'll keep and share with future generations. It's a moment when we came together as a community. These are times that try our collective will and threaten our livelihood.

But we live not in fear. We live in Big Sky. We are neighbors and friends. We are ski partners and hiking pals. Thank you for your continued support during these unsettling times. Remember to reach out to each other and remain connected. Show patience and humility. Grace and humor. And stay in the game.

In rereading this letter, I'm incredibly proud: of my team, of our community, of everyone who stepped up and played their part in Big Sky over the past year. I know that together we can weather any storm and that we'll come out on the other side.

#BigSkyStrong,

Joseph T. O'Connor, Editor-in-Chief

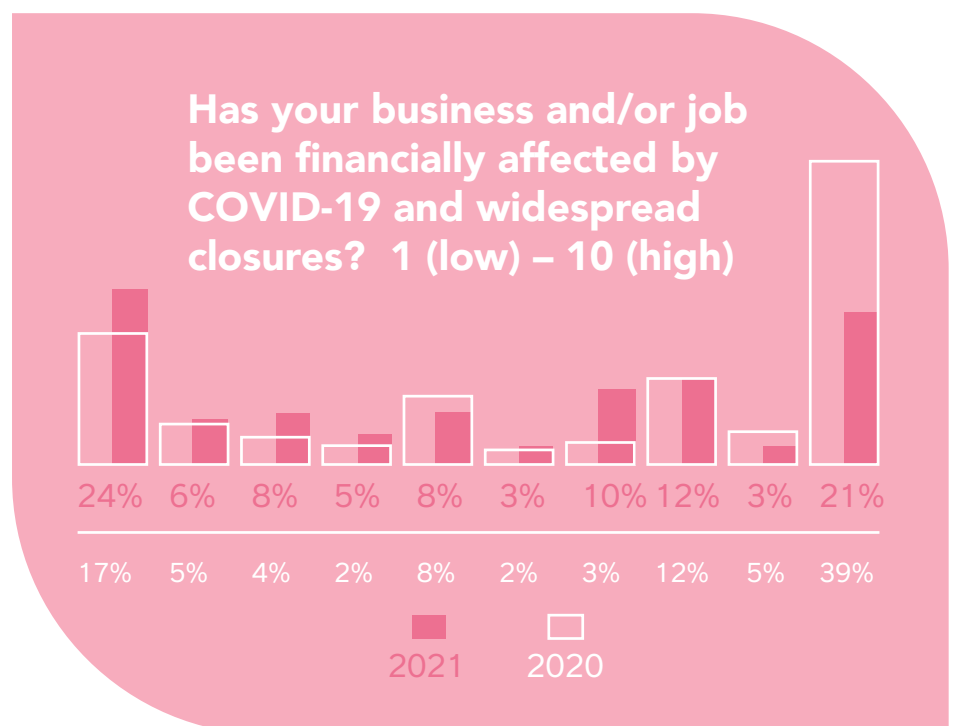
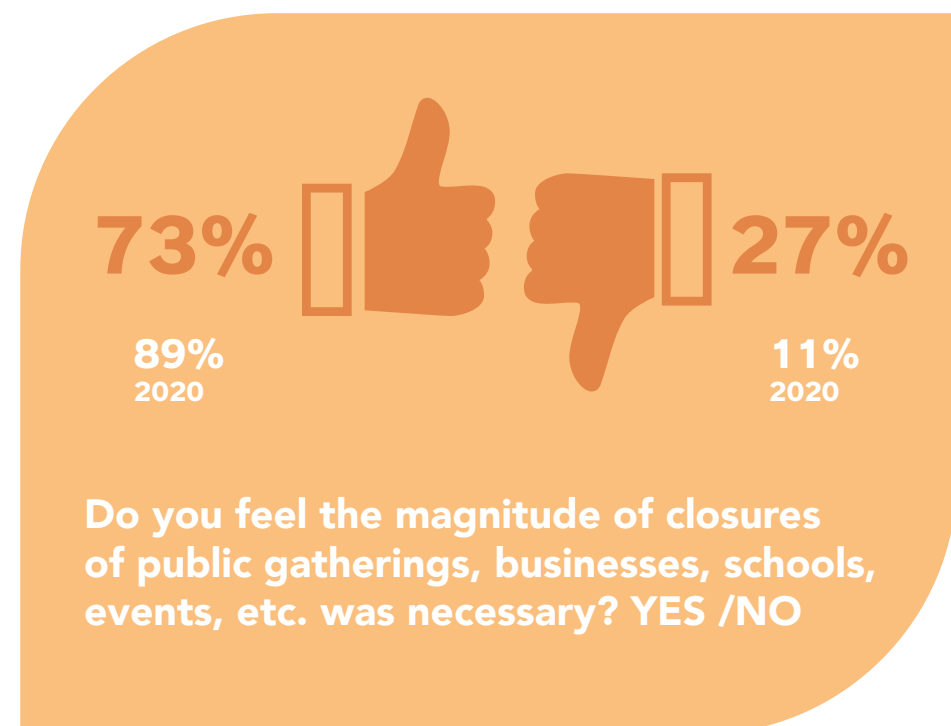
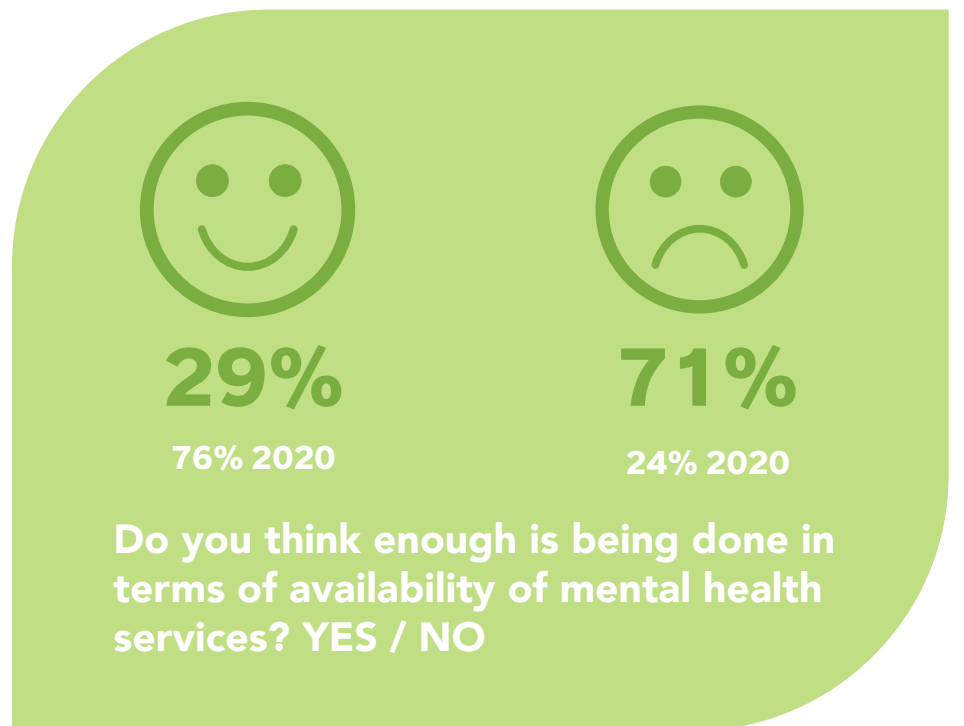
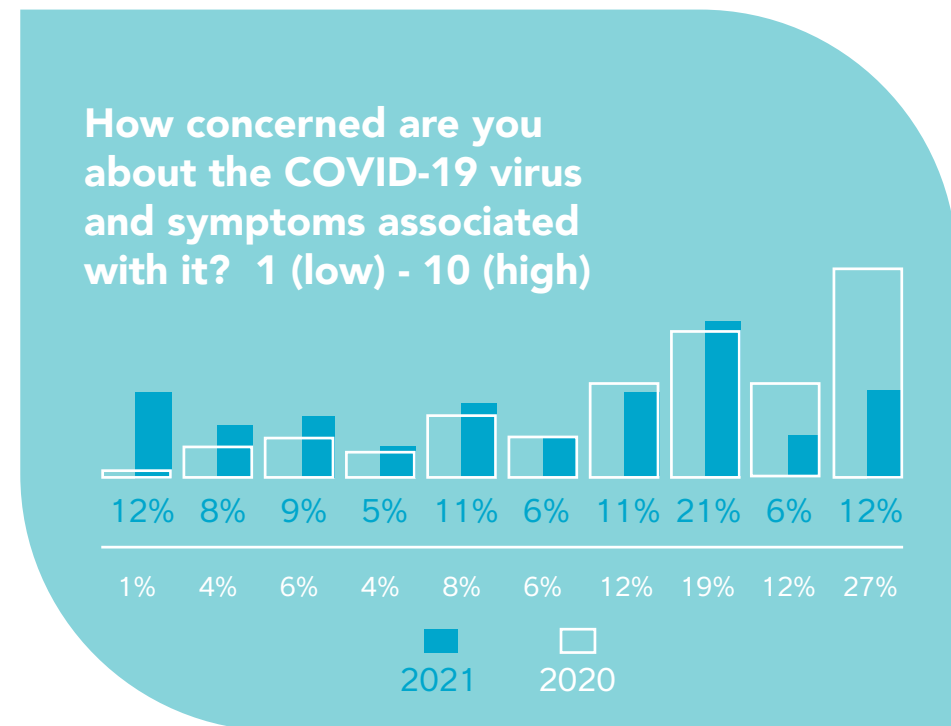
EBS COVID-19 TIMELINE MARCH 12, 2020 - MARCH 12, 2021

3/12/20

Montana Gov. Steve Bullock declares state of emergency

Big Sky community COVID-19 survey

In March of 2020, EBS surveyed the community about the novel coronavirus that had just shut down operations at Big Sky Resort and brought our community to a standstill. One year later, we asked the community to weigh in again and reflect on the impacts of the pandemic on their lives. This graphic compares the responses from March 2020 to March 2021.



Big Sky Medical Center: Five years of community care

Just over five years ago, Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center opened its doors to provide expert, compassionate care close to home for full- and part-time residents, and visitors to the greater Big Sky community. Licensed as a CMS-certified critical access hospital, BSMC offers 24/7/365 emergency medical care by board certified physicians.

The not-for-profit BSMC also runs a medical inpatient unit, diagnostic imaging center, laboratory services and a retail pharmacy. The primary care clinic offers both family medicine and behavioral health services, and much of the medical center's life-saving work has been made possible through the generosity of local donors.

The emergency department is dedicated to providing advanced and personalized medical care to every patient who comes through the doors. Board-certified emergency and family medicine physicians treat patients with the latest standards of care and of its six treatment rooms, two are equipped specifically for trauma cases and one for patient observation. A heated helipad for air ambulance transport is located adjacent to the emergency department.

3/15/20 Big Sky Resort suspends operations and Gov. Bullock orders closure of all K-12 public schools

BSMC's emergency physicians and clinical staff treat injuries and illnesses including initial treatment of heart attack and stroke, as well as stabilizing trauma victims. While orthopedic injuries make up the largest percentage of winter cases, these highly trained and experienced providers care for patients with a variety of issues and injuries all year long.

The inpatient unit handles medical admissions for conditions requiring care for fewer than 96 hours. Shelled space within the current structure was built out in 2020 thanks to the generosity of Big Sky Relief and the community to accommodate an additional four inpatient beds to help ensure BSMC was prepared to care for an increase in inpatients as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The diagnostic imaging center, staffed by registered radiology technologists, offers general radiology services. These include digital X-ray, a 64-slice CT scanner, an MRI suite with a 1.5 Tesla unit, and ultrasound services. These new ultrasound services provide enhanced imaging for those needing general, vascular, or OB ultrasound as part of their regular health and wellness care, as well as for emergent situations.

At the 24/7 laboratory, clinical laboratory scientists conduct commonly ordered lab tests for clinic practitioners, emergency testing for the emergency department and testing required for hospital patients.

An inpatient pharmacy is staffed by registered pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. The pharmacists are available to answer questions and concerns about prescriptions, potential drug interactions, or anything else regarding patient medication. Residents and visitors can have imaging and laboratory tests performed at BSMC on an outpatient basis, and can refill, transfer and order new prescriptions at the expanded pharmacy, which also carries over-the-counter and retail items.

Not all patients at BSMC come through the doors with immediate medical needs. Wellness healthcare available at the Family Medicine Clinic offers pediatric, adult, women's health and prenatal care, meeting the goal of promoting the health and well-being of the local and visiting population by providing accessible, comprehensive and high-quality primary medical care for all ages. BSMC also provides Behavioral Health services in the clinic by a board certified psychiatrist in both child and adolescent and adult psychiatry.

The medical center is convenient for residents and visitors in Big Sky, West Yellowstone, Yellowstone National Park and eastern Idaho, and BSMC physicians provide services one day a week on a rotating basis at Community Health Partners in West Yellowstone.

With a focus on safety, quality and the patient experience, Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center has become an integral part of Big Sky, meeting many of the community's health needs and helping Bozeman Health fulfill its mission to improve community health and quality of life.

3/18/20 First confirmed COVID-19 case in Big Sky

NONSTOP HEALTHCARE



Big Sky Medical Center
334 Town Center Avenue

Emergency Department 24/7/365

Family Medicine Clinic
Weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Retail Pharmacy
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COVID-19: Looking back at the past year

A community adapts to life during a pandemic

BY MIRA BRODY AND GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – We all vividly remember the day Big Sky Resort closed. It was March 15, 2020. After a last lap down Liberty Bowl, you might have seen the “LIFT CLOSED” gates sealing off the bottom of Powder Seeker as chairs came to a final halt. A few skiers lingered, stalling the inevitable, until the only option was to turn their skis downhill, drifting home and back to a quickly changing world.

3/20/20 Gov. Bullock orders closure of all dine-in food and bar service and BSRAD launches Big Sky Relief Fund

In the weeks to come, we’d face a stay-at-home order, Gallatin County’s first COVID-19-related death, business and school closings, and a statewide mask mandate. Amid the chaos, however, resilience persisted and the Big Sky community showed just how strong it is in the face of adversity.

On March 20, 2020, a mere five days after initial shutdowns left the community reeling, the Big Sky Resort Area District, Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, Moonlight Community Foundation and Spanish Peaks Community Foundation announced a joint effort to revive Big Sky Relief, a local aid group that first launched in 2009 in response to the Great Recession. The 2020 objective: provide funding to assist the community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The resort tax district initially pledged \$1 million to the Big Sky Relief Fund to help the Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center manage the pandemic and the three foundations quickly matched that amount. To date, Big Sky Relief has invested more than \$2 million in the Big Sky community through three pillars: response, recovery and resiliency.

As part of the initial response, Big Sky Relief invested \$500,000 in BSMC to construct four new rooms and purchase five ventilators, then provided \$465,000 in grants to local businesses. Finally, as part of an effort to ensure the community’s resilience, Big Sky Relief directed its resources toward increasing behavioral health services and developing long-term programs to support lasting impacts of the pandemic.

“There’s a very committed group of individuals and organizations in the community that allows us to stay nimble and adapt when something like this occurs,” said Daniel Bierschwale, executive director of the resort tax district. “I hope that we continue to embody the spirit of Big Sky Relief through collaborations with our funding partners, the foundations.”

The past year hasn’t been an easy one, and numerous community members put in hard work to keep Big Sky safe. The stay-at-home order implemented by Gov. Steve Bullock on March 26, 2020 raised concerns about the future.

“We were confronted with shutting down our operations which was clearly the right thing to do,” said Sam Byrne, managing partner of CrossHarbor Capital Partners, the asset management firm in charge of the Yellowstone Club and Spanish Peaks Mountain Club. “But we had real concerns over the well-being of our employees both from a health perspective and from a financial and community perspective.”

Once the initial shock of the closures wore off, Bierschwale and BSRAD had their work cut out to predict the future impacts of the pandemic on tax collections. In May of 2020, the resort tax district put together a COVID-19 scenario planning summary consisting of dozens of interviews and hours of research that would help the district make fiscally responsible decisions amid the new pandemic reality.

The efforts of BSRAD and Big Sky Relief have helped carry the community through the last year, and the work isn’t over yet, says Ciara Wolf, committee chair of Big Sky Relief and V.P. of philanthropy for the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation.

“We’re not out of this pandemic,” Wolfe said. “We still have work to do. One of the areas that is going to have long standing impacts because of the pandemic is behavioral health.”

4/27/20 First COVID-19 death in Gallatin County

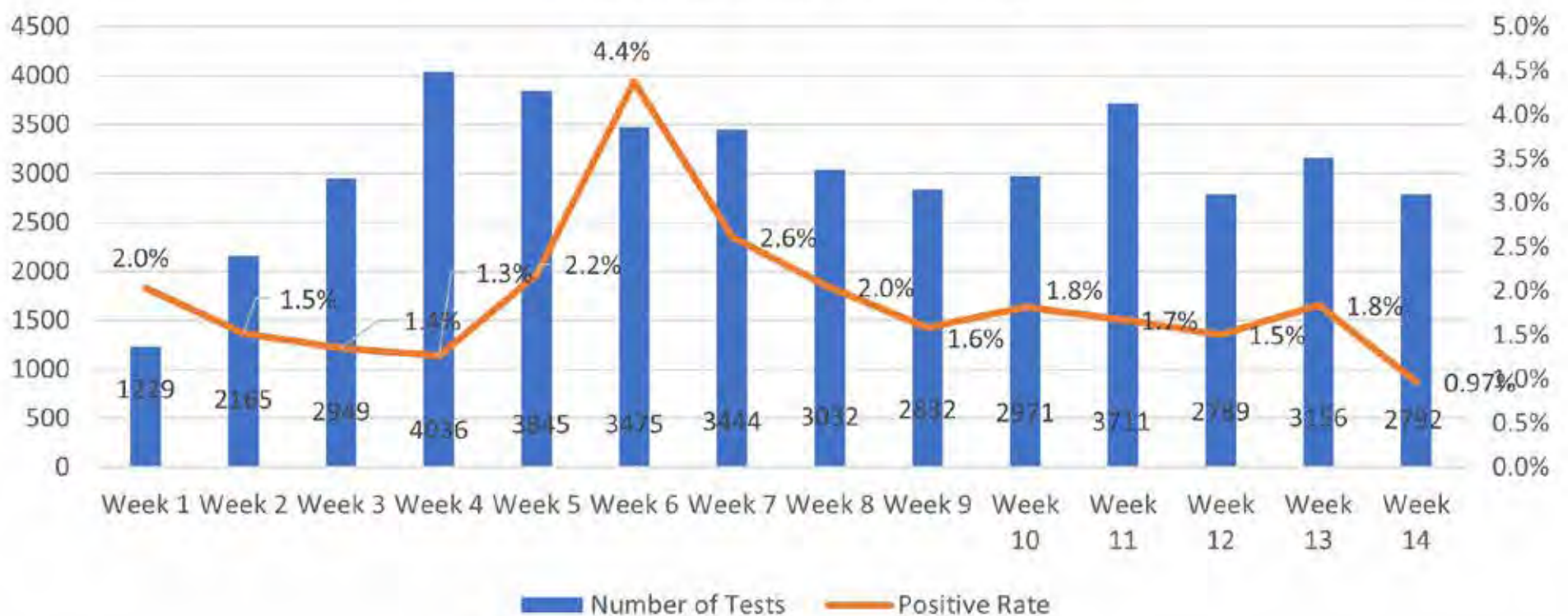
Byrne echoed Wolfe: Big Sky Relief is here to stay.

“We’re by no means done with our commitment to continuing to invest in the community and into the health of the community,” he said. “We have lots of plans for the long haul to continue to support community health during the pandemic and then for many years thereafter.”

In addition to grants and behavioral health services funded through Big Sky Relief, the organization also started a surveillance testing program in Big Sky.

Starting on Dec. 7 of last year, 450 tests were available each week for asymptomatic individuals living in Big Sky. The funds for the \$4.5 million testing program were gathered through public, private and philanthropic

Big Sky Surveillance Testing



The five-month surveillance testing program in Big Sky has administered over 42,000 tests and identified 800 positive cases since it began in December 2020. GRAPHIC COURTESY OF BIG SKY RELIEF.

6/1/20

Montana moves to Phase 2 reopening plan

6/1/20

Yellowstone National Park opens Montana entrances

sources, according to Bierschwale. Large employers accounted for 50 percent of the funds, philanthropic contributions made up 25 percent, and resort tax funding made up the final 25 percent when the board committed \$750,000 to the program, he said.

As of EBS press time on March 10, the surveillance testing program had administered more than 42,000 cumulative tests and identified approximately 800 positive asymptomatic cases.

The testing program has seen strong community participation so far, said Bierschwale, adding that he hopes interest will persist through April 9 when the mobile lab leaves Big Sky.

“We need people to continue to participate to see this through to the finish line,” he said. “We’ve seen the community make great strides in decreasing the prevalence of COVID-19 our community. We still have approximately five weeks of the winter season ahead of us and we need to stay diligent in ensuring that we’re all participating and doing our part in bringing that winter season to a close without having an impact on the safety and health of our community.”

Bierschwale pointed to the Big Sky School District as an indicator of surveillance testing success since Feb. 15, when the district was able to return to 100 percent in-person learning. In addition, he said the fact that Big Sky Resort has remained open this season ensures that tax collections for the community at large are on par with last year.

The program also allowed approximately 20 different Big Sky businesses to identify exposures, test employees, and get back up and running quickly, Bierschwale said.

At the helm of pandemic efforts in Gallatin County is Gallatin City-County Health Department’s Health Officer Matt Kelley. In an eerie coincidence, one year from the week that COVID-19 shut down our community, three cases of the U.K. variant were confirmed in Gallatin County, the first reported in the state, bringing with it similar unknowns.

However, with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s recent approval of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the light at the far end of the tunnel seemed to shine a little brighter.

“The road, it’s been challenging and science is about learning,” Kelley told EBS during a March 5 press conference. “It’s about being flexible and being open to new ideas, adjusting to the new reality, and we’ve been doing that in a political environment that sometimes wasn’t always super friendly to that free exchange of ideas. None of us have been through a pandemic before. None of us had seen this virus. As hard as it’s been, I just can’t be more proud of the team that we’ve been working with.”

Kelley praised a variety of local emergency personnel teams, including the Department of Emergency Services, Bozeman Fire Department, Hebgen Fire District, Big Sky Fire Department, the city of Bozeman, and the city of Belgrade, among others, for their collaboration and leadership during the pandemic.

“It was the learning opportunity of a lifetime and we are going to be taking many COVID legacies into the future with us,” said Bozeman Health COVID-19 Incident Command Lead Kallie Kujawa, who joined Kelley at the press conference. “How to build relationships and change things at the pace that we did was phenomenal.”

Kelley reminded the community that COVID-19 cases are still plateauing from last summer’s peak and that numbers aren’t yet low enough for the community to lower its guard. As of March 8, Gallatin County is vaccinating those in phases 1B+, 1B and 1A, which covers frontline workers, residents and staff in long-term care facilities, first responders, those over 60 year of age, American Indians and people of color, and those with high-risk medical conditions.

“We have some things to look forward to and some reasons for hope,” said Kelley, pointing to the three vaccines being distributed at an expanding clip. “But we also have some vulnerabilities. These variant strains of the virus are concerning, and so it’s really important that as we work to get these vaccines distributed everybody continues to do their part to slow down transmissions. We’re not done with this yet.”

Today, the lifts at Big Sky Resort are still spinning, whisking skiers up to the mountain peak that watches over the community below. In order to make this possible, resort officials this season implemented various new health and safety measures including requiring face coverings in public areas, following social distancing protocols, and not loading chairlifts at full capacity.

“I’m incredibly proud of our teams that have pivoted countless times to make this season a success,” said Troy Nedved, the resort’s general manager, praising the collaborative effort from the Big Sky community. “We hope that soon the resort will be fully operational, firing on all cylinders and welcoming all guests to safely enjoy the best that Big Sky has to offer.”



The first doses of the Moderna vaccine were administered in Big Sky on Dec. 23 to nurses at Big Sky Medical Center. PHOTO BY GABRIELLE GASSER

As of EBS press time, more than 1,000 people in the Big Sky community have been vaccinated, according to Taylor Rose, director of clinical services and operations at BSMC. And with more doses en route, BSMC is planning to implement more vaccine clinics over the next couple of weeks, Rose said.

The arrival of the vaccines has provided a sense of hope to many and sparks the question: What next?

“I’m an eternal optimist, but I think the future is bright,” Wolfe said. “I think sometimes you go through really hard things like this and you create models and systems that work that then can help for years down the road. I really see us being able to do a lot of great work together and we have learned a lot as a community.”

7/15/20

Gov. Bullock issues mask directive for the state of Montana



From March 15, 2020 to March, 15, 2021 the Big Sky community has come together and adjusted to the new pandemic reality. One year after Big Sky Resort shut down early, Explore Big Sky talked with community members to see how they adapted their personal lives.

How have you adapted your life over the past year? Plus: What have you learned?



Dr. Tyler Martinez
Doctor of Osteopathy, Big Sky Medical Center

“With COVID we’ve definitely had to change and adapt our life pretty significantly. Very limited travel, very limited going out and socializing, learning the term social distancing in the first place. It’s been a lot of hanging out with very close friends or very close family and doing whatever it takes.”



Emily Voorheis
Team Lead of Clerical Staff, Big Sky Medical Center

“COVID-19 has really taught me how to transition into more of an integrated lifestyle. So really working on differentiating between work and home life, and also bringing in the idea that not everybody is as in tune with what’s going on as we are. As hospital staff we get a little bit more information, although not a lot more, but we have to look at it through a new set of eyes with every patient.”



Chaney Coleman
Emergency room RN, Big Sky Medical Center

“Here in the ER we have PPE that we were used to with just flu and things like that prior to the pandemic so wearing PPE for a full year has been a different way to do our clinical practice. I think we’ve adapted, luckily for us, we haven’t really had any limited resources, so I’ve never felt compromised which was nice.”



Bryan Livergood
Clinical Engineer and Inventory Agent, Big Sky Medical Center

“I learned many things. Being in supply chain and biomed there were certainly challenges in making sure that the hospital is supplied with the proper PPE and medical equipment. There were certainly strains in the supply chains, but we were able to adapt and were able to keep the needed supplies and equipment on hand.”



Daniel Bierschwale
Executive Director, Big Sky Resort Area District

“Other than eating a lot more takeout my life has changed drastically since the beginning of the pandemic. One major thing that I’ve learned is not to take those that we love and care for, for granted. I have been very thankful for the opportunity to be able to connect with those that I love during the pandemic.”



John Haas
Founder and President of the Spanish Peaks Community Foundation, Founder and President of Haas Builders

“Personally, I spent a lot more quality time with my family and close friends, making meals, getting outside, enjoying time together. Overall, I ended up spending a lot of time figuring out how to simplify all levels of my life and focus on the important pieces. Foundation-wise, Spanish Peaks Community Foundation ended up raising and giving away as much money as we have in the past. We also raised an extra \$250,000 this year for the Big Sky Relief Fund, which I was involved with.”



Jana Bounds
Reporter, Lone Peak Lookout

“What I’ve learned over the past year with COVID is the value of other human beings in our lives, and that we need to have the willingness to ask for help. That includes from our family and friends but also people in the community. We saw the best and the worst of humanity at play in 2020. And I think we are very fortunate to be in Big Sky.”



Mandy Hotovy
The Wilson Hotel, General Manager

“I’ve noticed that each of our businesses are more and more in support of one another. Everyone in the community has put forth the effort to make sure that we all have our masks on when entering any establishment. Roxy’s has been amazing as well with providing businesses with gift bags that include social decals, masks for our teams, hand sanitizer solution, etc. It’s great that we have all been able to share our common practices with one another. That has helped each of us keep on top of our cleanliness and social distancing techniques, that way everyone feels safe and comfortable during these uncertain times.”



Hannah Bray
*Outside Operations Supervisor,
Big Sky Resort*

“The first thing I’ve adapted this year is my new social norm. This year I have learned that I have my three really good girlfriends and we hang out in places where it is socially distant and safe. The biggest thing I’ve learned is how important my three really good friends are and my friends and family. When you don’t see your family for so long and then you get to see them you really cherish those moments.”



Jamie Walter
Post Master, Big Sky Post Office

“We’ve had some of our workers run mail out to a car. We have some callers who say ‘I don’t really want to come in,’ and sometimes if they need to buy stamps or they have a P.O. Box—so we kind of changed it so people could just show us a text. We also had people bring us food and snacks and that’s typical during Christmas time but during the pandemic we have such an upload of packages come through because people were getting their stimulus checks, people were at home bored so literally we haven’t had a break. So a lot of people were just constantly telling us they appreciate us, which is really nice to hear.”



Alex Omania
Owner, Lotus Pad

“The most important thing I learned, and it translates into the business, is that it’s never as bad as you think. Ever. There’s always a way to navigate a problem when you concentrate on the solution instead of the problem: always looking ahead. It’s like riding a bike: you never look at the tree, you look at where you want to go. The biggest thing I learned was to stay positive: to look for solutions, not problems.”



Shawna Winter
Managing Broker at the Big Sky Real Estate Company

“I have been taking as many precautions as possible, keeping distance, adapting to wearing masks, and trying to embrace the fun accessory aspect to it. I thought, you might as well make this whole experience as fun as possible and incorporate it into your fashion. As far as the real estate industry, you have to gauge how sensitive, your clients are to the pandemic. That’s just a constant understanding the people that you are working with and respecting, how they feel about it.”



Fernando Rodriguez
UPS Driver

“Covid has affected me personally with my job as a UPS driver in that it is much busier. Amazon is always a big thing as far as delivery, but it has just gotten to be a lot more orders. Where there used to be 4 or 5 of us and now there are like 7 of us drivers just to get done in a proper day’s time-- 9 or 10 hours. As far as what I’ve learned, I guess my opinion is masks do work. Out of all of us drivers, only one of us has gotten COVID-19 this year, which I think is pretty good considering how many people we see each day.”



Grace Ganoom-Grein
High School Program Director & Math Teacher

“At Discovery we’ve always been conscientious about teaching to the individual and making sure that we are addressing each individual kids’ needs and we’ve had to do that even more so this year. So I think we’ve learned how to best address kids in different ways in different settings and levels of comfortability.”



Libby Flach
Big Sky Discovery Academy Student, age 16

“I was at a completely different school setting last year at Ophir, so I didn’t really know what it was like here before COVID, but I guess doing online school was really different and it’s much harder to motivate yourself when you’re not in school so I’m really happy that there’s less people here so we can be in-person and be socially distanced and with masks on. I’ve adapted to it pretty easily.”



Annel Garcia
Big Sky Discovery Academy Student, age 16

“Because of quarantine I was able to spend time with myself in a way. So I got to learn and grow and learn who I am and I didn’t have to focus as much on what might be going on around me. Instead I got more freedom to be able to express myself more. ... I’ve seen people respecting other people’s boundaries more, like their personal space. Because before I feel like in the lift lines people would stand really close and get onto chairlifts, but people keep their distance more.”



Kevin Germain
Board Chair, Big Sky Resort Tax District

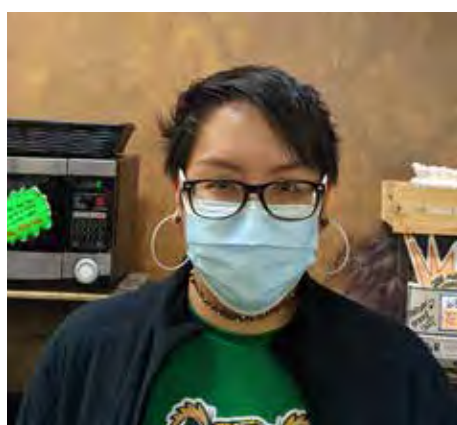
Community: people, in true Big Sky fashion, saw a need and they rose to the occasion. The whole Big Sky Relief effort happened within a week. It happened unbelievably quick. From Resort Tax to the philanthropy groups everybody just saw the need and jumped in.

Life is short. Value the people around you. I think everybody took a step back and reprioritized things. That has been the last year for me.



Jeremy Harder
Lead Facilitator of Creativity and Innovation, Big Sky School District

“As I reflect on this past year the silver linings and the cohesiveness of our community is what stands out most. Ironically neighbors, colleagues and family members have become more supportive than prior to the pandemic. The random acts of kindness are a prevalent theme ... We should be grateful for the Big Sky community and proud that we have supported each other so when things return to whatever the new normal becomes we don’t forget that we are a strong supportive community that cares for each other.”



Monica Franklin
Cashier at Country Market

“I became more mindful of what I could do every day during my shift to keep myself and everybody else safe. What I learned was patience. A lot more patience, dealing with customers, how to handle difficult situations in which people didn’t want to wear a mask and how to keep calm under stressful circumstances.”



Sean Doherty
Owner, Headwall Sports

“I do find that because we live in a smaller community ... that we’re more on the human level. I’ve lived in New York City, where I could sit right across from you like this for an hour a day, every day for 10 years and never speak a word to you. People just being nice to each other and respectful to each other and understanding that everyone is operating under a little bit more stress and strain—that was really cool to feel in a small community with a local population.”

EBS news team reflects on pandemic experience, bolsters digital effort

EBS STAFF

Full-length versions of these stories were originally published in EBS over the past year. Visit our website to read more.

BIG SKY – The date was March 15, 2020. On that day, one particular shutdown notice rocked the Big Sky community: Big Sky Resort announced that it would suspend ski operations for the remainder of the season, more than a month ahead of schedule.

Explore Big Sky Editor-in-Chief Joe O'Connor and Local Editor Brandon Walker sat at a table tucked in the back of the empty Outlaw Partners office pondering next steps as southwest Montana entered the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

12/7/20

Surveillance testing program launches in Big Sky

It was then, huddled at the table, that the game plan changed for the EBS editorial team. Reversing the traditional model that the paper had followed for years, the staff flipped the script and began publishing news online as it broke, disseminating information to the community as fast we could churn it out.

"I can tell you, myself and my team, we're going out and we're busting our tails every day to tell you the truth [and] to bring readers information they need," O'Connor said. "We decided we weren't going to put our heads in the sand, and instead adjusted our approach to the quickening news cycle."

The EBS team has worked relentlessly to cover the progression of the virus within Gallatin County while still bringing readers additional pertinent news. Now, we want to take an opportunity to tell you our story.

"My thoughts and feelings on COVID-19 haven't changed much since it got here in March," said EBS New Media Lead Mira Brody. "We're living through something no one really has before and information changes every day. That forces you to be nimble and accepting and patient. So, I've been trying to embrace those life skills."

We've worked from home. We've grown accustomed to Zoom meetings. And we've had to navigate the pandemic just like you, our readers.

Since March 15, 2020 the EBS team estimates they have uploaded around 10,000 original and externally sourced articles, press releases and briefs containing information that references or is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, while attempting to process and formulate our own thoughts of the virus and best practices to take throughout the pandemic.

And the effort has manifested itself in a digital surge. During a 30-day period spanning from late May into the final week of June, EBS tracked more than 300,000 pageviews on explorebigsky.com, roughly double the current average amount for the previous 30-day period. In addition, the number of subscribers to the EBS Town Crier e-newsletter increased from roughly 8,000 subscribers in February to about 16,000 by mid-March.

"I think that's a testament to the quality work we're doing, but also the amount and regularity of the stories that we're getting out there," O'Connor said.

Coinciding with the bolstered page views, the number of articles published per day in the month of July has increased, averaging more than four articles uploaded to the explorebigsky.com website each day.

"EBS's digital presence will make local, independent news available to our community in a timely manner. That's something that is so unique in our country and I hope no one takes for granted," Brody said. "It will also allow us to grow so we can better serve Big Sky for the long-haul."

Check out explorebigsky.com for daily content and to sign up for the popular Town Crier e-newsletter, and visit our Facebook and Instagram pages for more breaking news.



The EBS team works to finish the final edits on the latest edition of Explore Big Sky. PHOTO BY ME BROWN

12/11/20

FDA gives emergency-use authorization for Pfizer vaccine

Amid distance learning struggles, a community comes together

Discovery creates learning center to support working parents

BY MIRA BRODY
EBS STAFF

BIG SKY – No matter how much time has passed, memories of an elementary school classroom remain vivid: the nametags, cubbies, colorful graphics framing every window, a chalkboard and a glass tank on the back counter with a reptile or goldfish, a mute observer to academic ventures.

A pandemic, however, compromises many of these experiences particularly the tangible, face-to-face element that is so important in early education.

In March 2020, the Big Sky School District board voted to move all classes to an online learning format in response to Gov. Steve Bullock's stay-at-home order until the conclusion of the school year.

At an Aug. 6, 2020 BSSD board meeting, the board voted unanimously to start the 2020-21 school year with a blended model of 50 percent occupancy and 50 percent virtual learning on an every-other-day rotation. They also released a school reopening plan, outlining the district's strategy for regular temperature checks, hygiene and sanitation guidelines.

Robbeye Samardich has lived in Big Sky for 22 years. An account manager at Hammond Property Management, Samardich and her husband have two kids, second-grader Parker at Ophir Elementary and 4-year-old Mateo, who attends Morningstar Learning Center.

When schools closed in March, Samardich felt jolted. Without any sense of closure, her daughter Parker would no longer see the teachers and friends she had grown close to. "I was extremely supportive of getting them back in the classroom," Samardich said. "But I understood that this was not a decision to take lightly."

When BSSD released the school models, Samardich voiced her concerns to the board, and reached out to school councilors for direction. Her concerns were not only of the



Substitute teacher Betsy Funk helps student Scottie Rose log onto her online class in the Geyser Whitewater Expeditions building amid kayaks and wetsuits. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

emotional impacts that isolating children might have on their development, but also the logistics: Being a dual-working household, she struggled to balance distance learning with providing for her family.

The new Discovery Learning Support Center was spearheaded by Discovery Academy's Head of School Nettie Breuner and Outreach Director Hannah Richardson. It's a vision supported by a multitude of other community organizations, including Big Sky Resort, Women in Action, Big Sky Chamber of Commerce, Big Sky Community Organization, Gallatin County United Way and Childcare Connections.

Local educators Sam Riley, Richard Sandza and Nadia Razavi came on as the team of educators, and Breuner says within 24 hours of releasing an informational flyer about LSC, they had 20 parents interested.

"I think [the program instructors] are collaborating well with our teachers and certainly we're all part of the same childcare network in Gallatin County," said Dustin Shipman, BSSD's superintendent. "Instead of the students attending virtually, the students are still attending class from our school, just from a distance."

With COVID-19 restrictions in place, the program can take up to 40 students per day. The teachers follow BSSD's curriculum schedule, providing a place for the kids to learn, interact and regain that social aspect of education, Richardson says.

The program costs parents \$200 a month; the rest is funded through the Yellowstone Club Community Fund.

"One of the things that has come out of COVID is this tremendous act of collaboration," Richardson said, noting that meeting this need is merely an extension of Discovery Academy's existing initiative. "The really cool part is just me trying to remember every single person who contributed. It really is incredible the connections we've formed assessing community needs."

A community tradition the pandemic couldn't stop

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – It would be strange to see a flatbed trailer laden with 180 individually wrapped slices of pie being toured around your neighborhood cul-de-sac. Then again, a lot of the COVID-19 adaptations we've witnessed this year have been unconventional. Ashley Dodd wasn't afraid to get creative when the pandemic deemed it unsafe to host the regular 150 guests at her annual Pie Party, a tradition now in its seventh year.

Dodd and her family—husband Matt, daughter Piper, 10, and son Jasper, 7—have been living in Big Sky full time for the last seven years, and for each of those years they have hosted what they call a Pie Party in their home, usually at the beginning of each December.

Dodd, an avid baker by both trade and hobby, bakes upwards of 20 different pies, and invites the community into their home to take a slice and enjoy a neighborly visit. While her first year they had about 60 guests, the event has since grown to between 120-150 people, Dodd estimates. Impossible to host safely this year due to COVID-19, Dodd and her family got to work using her baking skills and a trailer.

"There's a lot of downsides [to COVID-19] but the upside is that people have been so creative," Dodd said.

On the afternoon of Sunday, Dec. 6, 2020, the family drove counter-clockwise from their home at Rainbow Trout Run, down Limber Pine Place, up Sage Drive and



Ashley and her children, Piper and Jasper, pass out slices of pie during the Pie Parade. PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHLEY DODD

back down toward the Big Sky Fire Department, distributing pies as they went. The pies then completed their journey through Fire Pit Park, and back to the Dodd's house. All slices of apple, mixed berry, chocolate satin (Dodd's personal favorite), key lime, lemon curd and salted honey found a home, and the donation box they displayed for the Big Sky Community Food Bank collected \$300.

"I'm so happy with how the Pie Parade turned out," Dodd said. "Although we didn't see as many people as we normally would have, we saw a great number of our friends and neighbors and were able to bring a little holiday fun. My kids really enjoyed helping out, and riding on the trailer, and we're proud of the contributions we were able to raise for the Food Bank."

Dodd is no stranger to the value of community involvement. After moving to town full time, she took the position as head baker at the Hungry Moose Market and Deli before transitioning to a role at Ophir Elementary, where she has been cooking and baking for the school's lunchroom for the last three years. Dodd is also a part of the Big Sky Community Theater and a participant of the Big Sky Virtual Kitchen, founded by Richard Sandza with the Big Sky Community Organization.

"I just think the more involved you are in your community, the more you're going to care and be a steward in your community," Dodd said. "The more involved you are in different groups and activities, the broader experience you have. I think that gives you a better idea of what the community needs to function and to function well; what we need to grow ... and where we can find opportunities to find joy."

Distilleries convert booze to hand sanitizer

Bozeman Spirits leans on ingenuity, flexibility to fill critical need

BY JOSEPH T. O'CONNOR

BOZEMAN – When John Haas got the call in March of 2020 he knew it was an important one. It was from friend and business associate Jim Harris who was offering a delivery.

Harris wanted to know if Big Sky needed hand sanitizer, a product in high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Haas, owner of Haas Builders in Big Sky and founder of the Spanish Peaks Community Foundation, jumped at the offer.

"I said 'Great. I'll take everything you have,'" said Haas, noting that the Big Sky Community Food Bank, Morningstar Learning Center, and a number of construction sites as well were in dire need of sanitizer.

At a time when businesses are closing doors, restaurants are limited to pick up or delivery options, and personal protective equipment is in short supply across much of the country, one unlikely sector is using ingenuity to lend a hand to an overloaded supply chain.

Distilleries around the U.S., including in Montana, are turning lemons into lemonade—or, rather, booze into hand sanitizer.



Jim Harris of Bozeman Spirits hands off his distillery's latest product, hand sanitizer, to Big Sky local John Haas for distribution to the Big Sky Community Food Bank. OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTO

The distillery is making approximately 35 gallons of hand sanitizer per week and with additional supplies and bottling options, the Harris family expect to produce about 100 gallons per week in the near future.

For Jim and Mary Pat Harris, remaining nimble in a time when not everyone can find such flexibility is a key to their company's success.

"It gives us a huge sense of purpose right now and since Jim and I are right in downtown Bozeman, community is our core," Mary Pat said. "It always has been."

Rising to the top during these difficult and uncertain times are ingenuity and community, two crucial areas that don't appear to be in short supply in southwest Montana.

"Everybody is reaching into their bag of tricks, what they're good at, and it seems to be endless the number of people who are coming out and helping in ways that they can help," Haas said. "It's so great to have everybody reaching in and saying, 'We've got this. We're going to do our part.'"

12/18/20

FDA gives emergency-use authorization for Moderna vaccine

When Gallatin County forced the closing of the tasting room at Jim and Mary Pat Harris's 6-year-old Bozeman Spirits distillery, the couple decided they wanted to help. Now, Bozeman Spirits along with Wildrye Distillery and numerous others across the state are providing homemade hand sanitizer to front-line workers including first responders, grocery stores and construction workers, and even UPS.

"We've been fielding calls nonstop these last few days," Mary Pat said. "Every phone call opens up a whole new realm of what people are going through ... It's been great to just talk to people and hear their needs, what their story is, what they're doing; helping those people on the front lines who are staying open that need to, for food, our healthcare workers."

The Harris family have converted some of the distillery's production into a hand-sanitizer assembly line of sorts, though it still requires a fundamental understanding of chemistry. They're using the distillery's high-proof alcohol and following the formula set forth by the FDA and WHO with set ratios of hydrogen peroxide and glycerol then letting it sit for 72 hours before bottling.

12/23/20

First vaccines administered in Big Sky

Matt Kelley: beyond the name

BY BRANDON WALKER

BOZEMAN – As many Gallatin County residents continue awaiting the latest COVID-19 updates and guidelines from the Gallatin City-County Health Department, one name continues to circulate in unison: that of GCCHD health officer, Matt Kelley.



Gallatin City-County Health Department health officer Matt Kelley. PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHY COPP PHOTOGRAPHY

Kelley has been in his current role with GCCHD for a little over a decade. His name has become well known to many as the pandemic has progressed, but there's more to Kelley than simply his name.

He grew up in Wales, Wisconsin. The oldest of three kids, he has a sister and a brother. A self-described 'cheese head', he is an avid Wisconsin sports fan at heart. Kelley enjoys the full scope of outdoor activities that Gallatin County has to offer, from fishing to camping to skiing—although they aren't at the top of his list currently.

"These days my hobby is, every time I have a chance, spending time with my kids and wife," he said. Kelley and his wife, Cathy Copp, reside in Bozeman with their daughter, Laila, and son, Henry.

Kelley earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and a minor in political science from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. After graduating from DU,

Kelley accepted a position as a business and city hall reporter for the Omaha World Herald in Omaha, Nebraska. A couple of years into that role, Kelley was transitioned to the position of Washington D.C. bureau reporter, in which he covered Capitol Hill throughout the majority of the 90's.

While working in D.C., Kelley met Copp—the pair lived on opposite sides of the street from each other. Copp and Kelley were finishing preparations for a two-year Peace Corps stint in Mali, West Africa, all while arranging their own wedding. Barely six months after the couple said "I do", Kelley and Copp began their work with the Peace Corps in January of 2004, Kelley as water and sanitation volunteer and Copp as an agricultural volunteer.

When he returned to the U.S. Kelley attended graduate school at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, where he graduated with his master's degree in public health.

In March of 2010, Kelley's current role as GCCHD health officer became available. He accepted the position and remarked that he has spent the past 10 years compiling the best team of professionals that he possibly could. "We're dealing with this pandemic and that team is what keeps me going," Kelley said. "That team is what gets us through day to day at the health department and overall incident command."

Facing down an unprecedented health crisis, the former journalist and Peace Corps volunteer, along with his staff are navigating unknown waters. "The hardest part of my job right now is that you're really trying to balance the human cost of this pandemic against the economic cost, which also has a human cost," he said. "...It's a huge responsibility and I think it's been really important to me that this is a community effort because no one person in this situation has all the answers and that there's tradeoffs to everything and we need leadership and I'm trying to provide that leadership."

Big Sky surveillance testing program takes off

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – The Big Sky surveillance testing program tested 600 residents during its first week of operation yielding three positive cases.

Moving forward, there will be 450 tests a week available for Big Sky residents on a first-come-first-served basis.

The \$4.5 million surveillance testing program is made possible through the efforts of Big Sky Relief partners including the Big Sky philanthropic community, and Big Sky Resort Area District, as well as community employers, and Visit Big Sky.

The first week the program hit a slight roadblock when a piece of communication equipment in the mobile lab failed and a replacement part had to be shipped in. This hiccup accounts for the longer turnaround times the first week as all the samples gathered had to be shipped out to California.

In the future, turnaround times should be much shorter. According to Daniel Bierschwale, executive director of the Big Sky Resort Area District, a recent lab report indicated the average turnaround time for results is 16 hours.

The testing program is intended to test asymptomatic individuals frequently through the winter in an effort to keep the Big Sky community open and safe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 50 percent of COVID-19 transmission is through people who are not experiencing symptoms.



Each week, 450 tests are available for asymptomatic Big Sky residents. PHOTO BY JOE O'CONNOR

The program is not meant for symptomatic individuals. Symptomatic individuals are encouraged to call the Bozeman Health COVID hotline and go to the Big Sky Medical Center to get tested.

"Surveillance testing is the systematic testing of a community to identify asymptomatic individuals, isolate and quarantine positive contacts, and then contact trace those positive individuals," Bierschwale said. "It's about frequency of testing and ensuring that as many people as possible are participating gives us a good understanding of what the spread is."

"Based upon what we heard from the community, we added an overnight 24/7 drop off, which is in the chamber foyer," Bierschwale said. "It's a secure drop off that we can pick up on a daily basis so if someone wants to drop it off there, they're able to do so very easily at their convenience."

1/22/21

Gallatin County releases COVID-19 vaccine notification system

2/12/21

Gov. Gianforte lifts mask mandate for state of Montana

If there are any special circumstances that prevent residents from picking up a test kit during the allotted times, they may call the BSRAD office and ask for Bierschwale who will be happy to help.

Visit bigskyrelief.org for the most up-to-date information on surveillance testing in Big Sky.

First COVID-19 vaccines administered at Big Sky Medical Center

BY BELLA BUTLER AND MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – On the top floor of the Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center in a closed off hallway, three nurses received the hospital’s first doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 23, 2020.

“We’ve just been waiting for this,” said Kelly Reynolds, one of the first Medical Center nurses to receive the vaccine, which received emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Dec. 18. “Obviously this year has been horrible for everyone in our community. It’s scary. And I think this is the first step to getting back to some normalcy.”

Big Sky Medical Center was allotted 100 Moderna vaccine doses for the first round, enough to vaccinate the entire staff. Similar to the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, which was given FDA emergency use authorization on Dec. 11 and administered to staff at Bozeman Health Deaconess Hospital on Dec. 14, the Moderna vaccine requires two doses, spaced 28 days apart.



Ody Loomis, a nurse at the Big Sky Medical Center, receives the first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine in Big Sky. PHOTO BY GABRIELLE GASSER

facility, received 800 doses of the Moderna vaccine on Dec. 23, 2020 to inoculate the remaining healthcare workers in the Bozeman Health system who were not vaccinated with the previously distributed Pfizer vaccine, of which Bozeman Health received 975 doses.

On the same day that the first round of vaccines were administered at the Big Sky Medical Center, the Gallatin City-County Health Department unwrapped its own package of 300 Moderna COVID-19 vaccine doses.

Gallatin City-County Health Department Health Officer Matt Kelley said in a Dec. 23 virtual press conference that they are distributing the vaccine with three primary goals in mind: safety, timeliness and transparency.

“Frankly, to see that vaccine come out of the box today, I don’t think there was anyone in the room that didn’t have goosebumps and there might have been a few tears here and there, or at least strong-willed people trying to hold back tears,” Kelley said. “I think when you’ve gone through

something like we’ve gone through—as a community, as a nation, as a world—to be able to see innovation and see those vaccines roll across the threshold is really pretty special.”

Kelley noted that although a vaccine is now available, the communities in Gallatin County still need to follow guidelines published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The best way to honor and thank those on the frontlines, he said, is to wear masks, wash your hands, keep your distance and stay home if you’re sick.

2/27/21

FDA gives emergency-use authorization for Johnson & Johnson vaccine

“I didn’t even feel it,” one of the nurses said with a smile after receiving the long-anticipated shot.

The rest of the Medical Center staff will receive the first dose of the vaccine over the next few days,said Lauren Brendel, system director of marketing and communications for Bozeman Health and public information officer for the Bozeman Health Incident Command team. Bozeman Health Deaconess Hospital, Bozeman Health’s flagship

3/8/21

Montana enters phase 1B+ of vaccine distribution





Please join us!

Celebrating 5 Years of Caring

You are cordially invited to attend our virtual celebration on

Friday, March 12, 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

Participate via the live stream at
BozemanHealth.org/support-our-mission/live-events

In December 2015, surrounded by donors and community members, we celebrated the opening of Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center. Now, we are coming together virtually to celebrate the five year anniversary of this care site, as we continue to provide expert, quality care to the greater Big Sky community.



BOZEMAN HEALTH
BIG SKY MEDICAL CENTER