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Life and land from the heart of the Yellowstone Region

FREE

Big Sky

May 22 - June 4, 2020
Volume 11 // Issue #11



Harbor's Heroes to the rescue

COVID-19: A firsthand account

**Big Sky Resort opens
for summer**

Artist profile: Kira Fercho

**Gyms, theaters and museums,
reopen slowly**



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ON THE COVER:

Staff advisor Kate Eisele and the officers of the Lone Peak High School National Honor Society took part in the sixth annual Harbors Heroes 5k run on May 17. Left to right: Eisele, Michael Romney, Laney Smith, Jackson Lang, Ivy Hicks PHOTO BY PAUL BUSSI

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Harbor's Heroes to the rescue

In January of 2015, Harbor deWaard died suddenly and tragically. Every year since his passing, the Lone Peak High School National Honor Society has organized Harbor's Heroes Run, a 5k color run in deWaard's honor. On May 17, in spite of challenges instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic, competitors took part in the sixth annual run.

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COVID-19: A firsthand account

For many, life is slowly returning to a semblance of the normalcy we had before the COVID-19 pandemic seized the world. Chris Lohss is also working his way back but his story has a wrinkle others have worked to avoid: He was diagnosed with COVID-19.

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Big Sky Resort opens for summer

After Big Sky Resort halted winter operations a month early, a sun is on the horizon for recreationists itching to get back on the mountain. Resort officials announced their reopening plan for the summer 2020 season starting May 22.

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Artist profile: Kira Fercho

Kira Fercho knew from age 2 that she wanted to be a professional painter but she also knew it wouldn't be the easiest career to pursue. Now at 40, Fercho has one of the few artist-owned and -run galleries in the area.

19

Gyms, theaters slowly reopen

For many, gyms are a place to gather with your crew and blow off steam. As the second wave of businesses open under Gov. Steve Bullock's revisions to Phase 1, which include gyms, museums and movie theaters, summer may look a little different.

Opening Shot



Lone Mountain stands as the faint light of sunset colors the sky behind. PHOTO BY KG CONTENT

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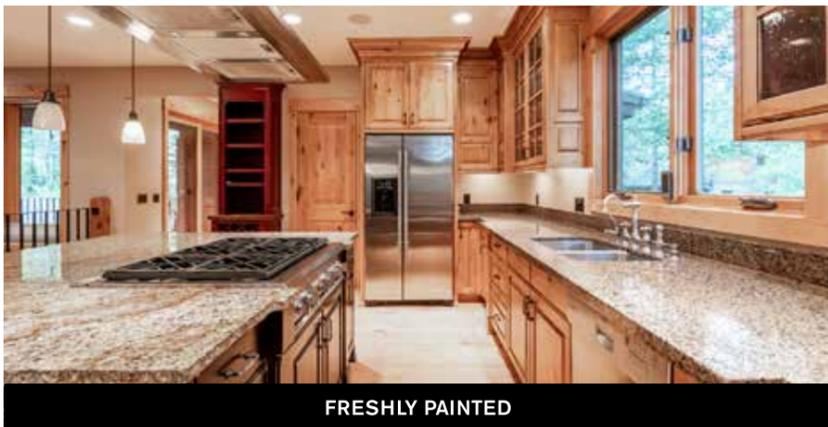
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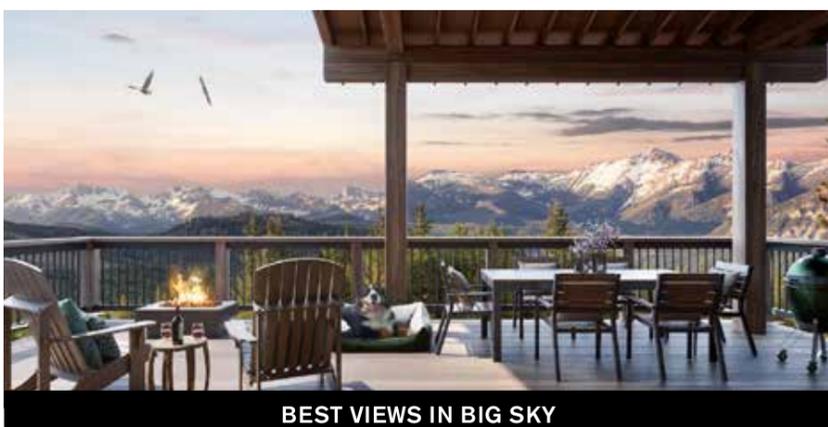
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LETTERS

Essential workers paid less for more risk

To the Editor,

Benefits of unemployment are beginning to outweigh those of being employed. Most essential workers make less than \$15 per hour in jobs that put them in contact with potential carriers of COVID-19, putting themselves and their families at risk. The \$600 bonus each week for unemployment is more money than most frontline workers make in a 40-hour week, making furlough irresistible for many. This includes workers at grocery stores, fast food restaurants, gas stations, hardware stores, food delivery services and more. Stores that allow customers inside are now required to do twice the amount of work in the same amount of time. Many workers spend their days constantly cleaning door handles, counters, shopping carts and baskets trying to do everything they can to protect their health as well as anybody coming into the stores. However, this does not guarantee immunity from COVID-19, workers put in hours and hours of

cleaning but it only takes one person, not washing their hands, not wearing facial coverings, licking their fingers to count money to pay for groceries, or bringing their family into the store to buy one item. As an essential worker, I would love to stay at home, knowing I am safe, while bringing home additional money, but I know the importance of the work I do. On April 7, the Senate proposed a Heroes Fund to try to give back to essential workers. The goal of the Heroes Fund is to encourage people to continue serving on the frontline during this pandemic. The Heroes Fund will provide recruitment incentive funds to help employers attract potential candidates, retain essential workers, and assist the families of those who died while working in these roles.

Thank you for your time,

Megan Rhead

YNP opening poses economic opportunity, risk to public health

BY MATT KELLEY AND LANDER COONEY

The National Park Service's decision to begin reopening Yellowstone National Park brings with it economic opportunity, along with significant risks to public health. Balancing those risks and opportunities will be a major challenge for our region during the summer of 2020.

This week's reopening of Yellowstone's two Wyoming park entrances will put pressure to swing the gates in Montana at West Yellowstone, Gardiner and Cooke City. The awakening of the park will bring tens of thousands of visitors from all over the U.S. and international destinations. The park attracts as many as four million people from all points of the globe in a typical non-pandemic year. Those visitors will spend money in hotels, restaurants and gift shops and some are also likely arrive carrying the virus that causes COVID-19.

The risks and rewards of reopening are magnified in West Yellowstone, traditionally the busiest entrance to the park and also one of the most remote with limited healthcare services. The population of West Yellowstone grows exponentially in the summer, from a remote town of roughly 1,300 year-round residents to a bustling tourist hub with up to 15,000 people during high season. Even during non-pandemic times, the single health care clinic in West Yellowstone can, at times, be challenged to meet community needs during high season.

Those challenges will be much bigger during this pandemic. The obvious (and justified) concern is that some of the many thousands of visitors will bring new cases of COVID-19. Three people in West Yellowstone have tested positive for the disease so far in May. The challenge will be heightened by visitors suffering from altitude sickness and dehydration, both common ailments in the summer with some symptoms similar to COVID-19. Also concerning is that some seasonal workers live in close quarters, an environment that could accelerate an outbreak.

These challenges help explain Montana's cautious approach to reopening. To be sure, work is well underway to manage risks and respond to the challenge. The town of West Yellowstone is working with Gallatin County, local public health officials, and local health care providers—Community Health Partners and Bozeman Health—to expand local capacity for COVID-19 testing and clinical services. Those partners also are planning for isolation and quarantine of new cases.

Officials inside the park also are taking important steps. Those actions include laudable decisions to ensure that employees are provided single-occupant housing that avoids shared sleeping quarters. The Park Service will also prohibit large tour buses during Phases 1 and 2 of reopening, limiting the potential problem of quarantining dozens of people who have spent hours or days in close quarters with someone who has the disease. The Park Service has also committed in its reopening plan to increase cleaning and disinfecting, as well as sharing information regarding infection rates, testing capacity and the ability to isolate infected employees. The phased reopening of park services is also an important part of the park's plan for managing the opening in a responsible way. Looking ahead, certain other steps will be critical to opening the park as safely as possible. Those steps include:

- Expanded, ongoing and coordinated testing and public health surveillance inside the park and in gateway communities. This will require frequent and regular communication between health officials in Montana, Wyoming and inside the park to share data on new cases, testing capacity, and healthcare access. This can be achieved through shared commitment from local public health, state health departments, health care providers and the National Park Service.
- Continued limitations on the size of groups entering the park. It is known that large tour buses entering the park bring with them increased risk for outbreaks of diseases such as norovirus. In recent years, norovirus outbreaks have impacted hundreds of park visitors and staff at Yellowstone and other national parks and tour buses have played a role in disease transmission. Local communities do not have resources to provide isolation and quarantine to dozens of tour bus passengers at one time. Prohibiting tour buses during Phases 1 and 2 is an important first step to preventing disease transmission during the summer of 2020. Any move to allow large buses in 2020 should only happen if the Park Service and companies that run the buses have a clear plan for caring for sick passengers and their co-travelers.
- Shared commitment to a unified response and coordinated decision-making in the event that we detect sustained community spread of COVID-19 in the park or in the surrounding communities. This includes a collaborative effort to manage known cases and unified decision-making as we progress through the park's phased reopening plan, as well as the possibility of closing operations if necessary. This should also include clear protocols for tourists who are diagnosed and who may be unable or unwilling to isolate or quarantine locally.
- Federal or state funding will be necessary to support the expanded testing and healthcare needs within some gateway communities. Even with the park's reopening, the gateway communities will need financial assistance to respond to the public health and safety challenges created by the park's reopening. Without support from state or federal partners, the efforts to expand health care services will be constrained and risks will grow.

Our best chance to manage the risks and opportunities of reopening Yellowstone relies on a unified effort of local, state and federal partners to increase testing, coordinate the use of limited healthcare resources, conduct careful surveillance and take prompt and decisive action to prevent disease spread. The health of our communities and the ability to keep the park open, depend on the success of this shared effort.

Matt Kelley, MPH, is Health Officer of Gallatin City-County Health Department.

Lander Cooney is Chief Executive Officer of Community Health Partners, the federally qualified health center serving Gallatin and Park counties.



Memorial Day honors those who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving our country, who are you honoring and how do you plan to celebrate them?



Kate Eisele
West Yellowstone, MT

“As a kid, Memorial Day was always a time in my family where we gathered together with my aunts, uncles, cousins and grandmother to get our family cabin in the UP ready for summer use. We also visited my grandfather’s grave and left red geraniums. Today it is still a time for family, reflection and renewal. I will be remembering both of my grandfathers, who both served in WWII. I’d like to plant geraniums in their honor and memory.”



Mandy Hotovy
Big Sky, MT

“We’re honoring everyone that’s involved when it comes to military, for anyone who’s helping out during this whole COVID-19. We [at the Wilson Hotel] have a lot of essential workers who are in-house. We’re definitely going to be putting something together for any of our guests who are going to be in-house right now. Everyone has been working very hard and taken all of the safety persuasions.”



Katherine Miller
Bozeman, MT

“My grandfather was a colonel who flew the Berlin airlift in WWII earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, which is a high honor, and my father was a captain in the 3rd Infantry [Division] ... A funny story: he had a cousin in Germany he was unaware of, a Herr Doctor, which is also a high honor. His cousin came to the states to visit after the war was over, and they somehow got connected. They compared notes and were shooting the stuff, and realized they had actually fired at each other. His cousin was an anti-aircraft gunner ... my grandfather flying a B17 had apparently bombed him, and they laughed about it and thanked each other for being such crappy shots.”

Zach Hinte
Bozeman, MT

“It’s a perfect question because my dad is a retired Navy Seal. So I’d be honoring him and his service to this country. And what am I



going to be doing? I think the first thing is probably giving him a call and expressing that. I think it’s important that people know how great this country is because of people’s sacrifice, you know, all military personnel. I think a lot of people don’t understand that if you wake up and you’re alive and you get to get in your vehicle and go to work, you should be grateful for that opportunity.”

Important changes to primary election voting procedures

BY GALLATIN COUNTY ELECTION MANAGER, CASEY HAYES

Election Day is right around the corner. These past few months at the Gallatin County Election Department have been both strenuous and rewarding. We’ve worked through the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that voters can register and receive a ballot for the June 2 primary election. With guidance from the Gallatin City-County Health Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we are working in earnest to ensure that voting is being conducted in the safest manner possible.

The directive issued by the Governor’s Office in March affected many aspects of the June 2 primary election. Not only is this an all-mail election, the late registration period was shortened to just one week prior to the election.

Beginning on May 27, voters who need to make changes to their registration or people who have not yet registered to vote must appear in-person at the Gallatin County Election Department in the Courthouse in Bozeman. The maximum occupancy of the election office at this time is five voters. Please call ahead to ensure that we can’t find a solution to an issue by phone or email.

Return postage for this election is prepaid—you don’t need a stamp. The last day a ballot should be returned by mail is Wednesday, May 27. While a ballot

mailed after this date might arrive in time to be counted (i.e. no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day on June 2—postmarks cannot be accepted), it is best to deposit your ballot rather than mail it after this date.

In order to ensure that voters have multiple options for returning their ballots, we will have ballot drop-off locations throughout the county on Election Day only. These will be located in the parking lots of the usual polling places.

Polls will not be open for this election. A voter cannot be issued a ballot or mark a ballot at the drop-off locations. Voters whose ballots have been damaged in any way and need replacements should contact the Election Department immediately.

The Gallatin County Election Department is committed to ensuring safe, fair and open elections. We request that voters seal their ballot envelopes with tape rather than saliva. This will not affect whether or not the ballot is accepted or counted but this precaution will help keep election officials safe while they work to serve the voters of the county.

If you have questions about this election or any election-related questions, please contact the department at 582-3060 or gallatin.elections@gallatin.mt.gov.



Crews to repair stretch of Highway 191 between West Yellowstone, Big Sky

BIG SKY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BIG SKY – Work is about to begin on the stretch of U.S. Highway 191 between Big Sky and West Yellowstone, one of the most traveled roads in the state during summer months. Repairs will begin May 11 and will cover the 20-mile stretch between Tepee Creek Trailhead to U.S. Forest Service Road 986.

Montana Department of Transportation crews are going to repave roads, repair bridges, replace guardrails and add rumble strips and are taking advantage of the lower volume of traffic due to the park being closed during coronavirus concerns.

The project costs \$9.4 million and is expected to wrap up in the fall.

For more information, visit bigskychamber.com

Phase 2 reopening starts June 1 Gov. Bullock announces plan to welcome summer visitors to state

EBS STAFF

At a May 19 press conference, Gov. Steve Bullock outlined Phase 2 of the state's reopening plan which will begin June 1, nearly one month from when Montana entered Phase 1. Phase 2 guidelines discourage gatherings in groups of more than 50 people where social distancing cannot be achieved, will allow for bars, restaurants, casinos and gyms to operate at 75 percent capacity, allow bowling alleys to reopen, while also lifting the 14-day quarantine for out-of-state travel and incoming visitors.

Gov. Bullock is working with Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Cam Sholly on reopening the north, northeast and west entrances to the park and anticipates they will have a plan in place by June 1. Gov. Bullock also plans to work with gateway communities to properly deal with the influx of tourism in the summer months as those entrances open by establishing test centers and surveillance systems to trace community spread.

"Montana has truly been an example for the rest of the nation in our response to this global pandemic, I have no doubt we can continue to be that example," said Gov. Bullock. "We appreciate our visitors and we want to make sure those visitors don't bring problems from their home state to our home state."

He said in the coming weeks businesses and those planning events should work with public health officials to determine if they are within Phase 2 guidelines and that an event's cutoff threshold is up to leadership based on current circumstances in that community.

"We cannot prevent all COVID-19 cases but there are things that we can do to allow Montanans some sense of a normal life and prevent major outbreaks or overwhelming our state's healthcare system," said Gov. Bullock.

Under Phase 2, the following guidelines will remain the same: all those with underlying health conditions should continue to self-isolate, nursing homes will continue to discourage outside visitors, employers should encourage telework when feasible and all individuals should practice social distancing and good hygiene.

Body found in Big Sky, man detained

EBS STAFF

BIG SKY – The Gallatin County Sheriff/Coroner has confirmed that 68-year-old Big Sky resident David Green was found deceased in his garage May 12. According to a county press release, the sheriff's office and the chief deputy coroner are currently investigating the death.

"We have not released [the cause of death] yet because that is part of the investigation," said Gallatin County Sheriff Brian Gootkin. "As soon as we can, we will."

On May 12, Gallatin County detectives located a van they believed to be connected to the investigation of Green's death parked at Silverbow

Community gives thanks to frontline workers through sidewalk chalk

BIG SKY DISCOVERY ACADEMY

BIG SKY – A collection of Big Sky organizations and community leaders have joined forces to organize a Sidewalk Chalk Day of Gratitude on Saturday, May 9.

Together, the Arts Council of Big Sky, Big Sky Chamber of Commerce, Big Sky Community Organization, Big Sky School District, Discovery Academy and Women In Action invite community members to share their gratitude for healthcare workers, food service employees, educators, non-profits and first responders whose vital work is keeping our community safe and running while allowing those of us who are vulnerable to stay home.

"The impacts of Covid-19 are far-reaching across our community and it is vital that we take a moment and thank our local heroes and spread joy through our community that has remained strong, despite these challenging times," said Camp Big Sky Manager, Richard Sandza.

On Saturday, May 9 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., free chalk stations will be available at various locations in Town Center and Meadow Village, including the Big Sky Medical Center, Food Bank, Discovery Academy and Ophir Elementary School. Everyone is encouraged to leave messages of thanks and artists of all skill level and ages are welcome to share their talent.

"After we are done thanking the frontline workers, the hope is that families and businesses will bring chalk back to their homes, storefronts and neighborhoods to leave notes and drawings for everyone to enjoy," said Jean Behr, Executive Director of Women In Action. "We want to spread gratitude everywhere across our community and celebrate our resilience."

The Art Walk will take place later in the day from 2-5p.m. Local businesses are encouraged to participate by welcoming chalkers while they stroll around town.

"As we return to what will likely be a new normal," said Discovery Academy Community Outreach Director Hannah Richardson. "It is important we maintain appropriate social distancing, even as we participate in events like these that make Big Sky the community we all love."

Music in the Mountains canceled

EBS STAFF

The Arts Council of Big Sky announced on May 15 that the free summer concert series known as Music in the Mountains and other ACBS events have been canceled for the summer of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Without knowing what the future looks like for crowd gathering or when Montana will move to Phase 3 of the state COVID plan, we feel this is the best situation for the health of our local community, as well as for the artists, crew and audience," ACBS said in a press release. "It's just too hard to plan without knowing when things will open up, and we feel that large crowds won't be gathering anytime soon."

Hurlbut acknowledged the community's assumed disappointment but said ACBS hopes to present an exciting series next summer.

Among the canceled events are:

- Music in the Mountains
- July 4 celebration
- Bravo! Big Sky classical music festival
- Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

Condominiums and identified the owner as Sean Patrick Murphy. Upon being detained, Murphy resisted arrest, struggled, kicked a computer on his way out of his home, and was eventually handcuffed and assisted to the patrol unit, according to a May 13 affidavit from the Gallatin County U.S. Justice Court. He was arrested on a misdemeanor charge of obstructing a peace officer after refusing to comply with detectives.

Murphy was taken to the Law and Justice Center for questioning, then to the Gallatin County Detention Center and has since posted bond. The Gallatin County Sheriff's Office along with the chief deputy coroner are currently investigating the death and stated in a May 18 press release that there is no concern for public safety.

"I know there are a lot of rumors and people are worried but there's nothing to be worried about," Gootkin said.

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COVID-19: A firsthand account

BY BRANDON WALKER

BOZEMAN – Shortness of breath, severe fatigue and a complete loss of taste and smell: these are the symptoms described by Bozeman local Chris Lohss. He was diagnosed with COVID-19 in March.

For many, life is slowly returning to a semblance of reality before the COVID-19 pandemic seized control of the world. For Lohss, one of 478 Montanans and 1,528,235 people nationwide diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, the path back to “normal” has been long.

“All the unknowns really kind of freak you out when you’re sitting in bed and you’re aching and your lungs are getting attacked by this thing,” Lohss said. “It kind of gives you a little reality check.”

At 49 years old, maintaining an active lifestyle, Lohss lives in Bozeman with his wife Sharon, 48, who also tested positive for COVID-19 in March. He’s owned and operated his own construction company, Lohss Construction, for nearly three decades, what he calls “normal life” for him and Sharon.

Unsure where exactly he contracted the virus, Lohss began to experience COVID-19 symptoms on March 17. “I thought I had a little flu bug, felt better, went ice climbing with some friends and the next morning it was like I got hit by a truck,” he said.

After Bozeman Deaconess hospital doctors told him that, at the time, testing capacity was limited, Lohss returned home to quarantine where his symptoms worsened, ultimately leading to a second request for a



Chris Lohss is a Bozeman resident who was diagnosed with COVID-19 in mid-March. His bout with the virus has been lengthy. PHOTO BY KENE SPERRY

COVID-19 test. He received his positive test confirmation later that week.

“I was kind of shocked that I actually had it,” he said. “I thought it was just a nasty bug and after I tested positive it did kind of come back after I got out in the woods that day. [After] I got tested, then it really set in for another four or five solid days.”

Lohss recalled the earliest symptoms being body aches, fever and an undeniable lack of energy, finding simple tasks like retrieving the mail completely wiped him out. The virus reached its peak about 10 days after his diagnosis, robbing him of his sense of smell and taste while also constricting his breathing.

“It feels like somebody’s got a cam strap around your chest and it’s tightened down,” he said.

Even with the virus in full control, Chris struggled to remain in bed. He kept up with work tasks and described venturing out for an 80-mile snowmobile ride with his son, feeling completely drained afterward.

“We really can’t afford to just forget about work and really take the time we needed to get through this, so I think that definitely prolonged my symptoms,” he said. “Just trying to muddle through the work, as Sharon did as well ... I don’t think that did us any favors.”

After displaying no symptoms for four days, the Gallatin City-County Health Department told Lohss he was no longer at risk of viral transmission. He tried normal tasks once again, but things still weren’t entirely normal.

After the health department issued him a clean bill of health, Lohss ran into a friend walking her dog and admitted to her that he had tested positive for COVID-19. Her reaction, Lohss said, was like many who learn someone tested positive for the virus.

“Their eyes just kind of light up and people are like ‘Woah, step back from this guy,’ he said. “Then my dog was kind of running around her dog and ... panic set in a little bit, like ‘hey, don’t let our dogs touch.’”

Lohss continued to feel a stigma in public. When a hospital receptionist asked if he had been in contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19, he admitted that he himself had been diagnosed. The body language of the people in line behind him shifted. He got some questioning looks.

Now, over two full months after first experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, Lohss says the lingering effects are finally dissipating. “Slowly I’m getting back to my normal self,” he said. “It is kind of bewildering how long it’s taken.”

His wife Sharon is not experiencing the same rate of recovery, however, still grappling with the virus. Both her and her husband’s experiences are further proof of how unique each individual experience with COVID-19 is.

Lohss described his bout with COVID-19 as a “moderate” case. He was never treated at the hospital, but he did receive an Albuterol inhaler to assist him with his shortness of breath.

He’s now focused on the road ahead. While he’s glad that the economy is beginning to reopen, he also urges everyone to remain diligent to help prevent further spread.

“[If] you’re at the grocery store or the drug store and you don’t know if that person has an immune deficiency or they’re a cancer survivor or what not, put your mask on,” he said. “You don’t know if you’re carrying it.”

Even after testing positive for COVID-19 antibodies, Chris possesses a deep fear of contracting the virus again. His message is simple: “I don’t care how healthy you are, you don’t want it.”

(COVID-19 statistics correct as of EBS press time)

Big Sky Eyes covers Big Sky mouths

Dr. Perlman makes masks for community members

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY – On April 15, Big Sky Eyes owner and optometrist Dr. Erica Perlman pivoted, joining the ranks of others that have taken to their sewing machines to make masks for themselves and others. After Center for Disease Control and Prevention directives suggested clinics accept only in-person office visits deemed essential, Dr. Perlman took action. In addition to accepting patients for essential visits, on her business Instagram account, she posted an offer for anyone in the Big Sky community in need of a face mask to contact her and when completed retrieve a free handmade mask from Big Sky Eyes.

“As a healthcare provider I started to think ‘What else can I do to try to help the community stay healthy’ and so that’s when... I started posting that I could make masks,” Dr. Perlman said. “I, thankfully, learned how to sew back when I was a kid in high school, so you know it was a skill that I hadn’t used in quite a while.”

She dusted off her sewing machine and got to work making more than one hundred masks for community members—she stopped keeping track after reaching triple digits.

“Being a healthcare provider it’s in my blood to help,” she said. “That’s why I went into the field.”

Dr. Perlman described that she has received two waves of mask orders, each correlating with the Instagram posts on her businesses Instagram account. Currently she is caught up with all the requests she has received and continues to complete masks on an as-needed basis.

It took some time and ingenuity to get her mask making process off the ground. When Dr. Perlman began, she found that many necessary items to construct face masks were in short supply, leading to a shift to the use of hair ties instead of elastic straps and donations from community members.

Upon completion, recipients of the masks unsuccessfully insisted on providing Dr. Perlman with donations for her efforts as she turned them down. Grateful, newly mask-donning community members turned to other creative measures to show their appreciation. From bottles of wine to banana bread and even pizza, Dr. Perlman witnessed the effects of her actions.

“Some people did say that on my behalf they donated to Big Sky Relief fund, so that was really nice, but by no means expected,” Dr. Perlman said. “...These are scary times for all of us and it’s important for us to show love and support for people.”

Inspired by the same feeling of love and support that she described, when she and her husband, Ryan Walker, relocated to Big Sky last fall, Dr. Perlman jumped at the opportunity to assist her neighbors.

“I feel like everyone was all about making me part of the community and so you know part of that is I want to give back,” Dr. Perlman said. “...It just makes me feel like I’m part of something and I love that. That’s why we moved here, that’s why we, you know, opened up the practice here, and that’s why we want this to be our permanent home.”

Dr. Perlman continues her efforts on behalf of the close community that she holds dear, accepting all donations of supplies, including hair ties and fabrics. To avoid points of contact with mask recipients, Dr. Perlman simply tapes the completed masks, in a Ziploc bag, to the front door of Big Sky Eyes and notifies individuals that their mask is ready to be picked up.

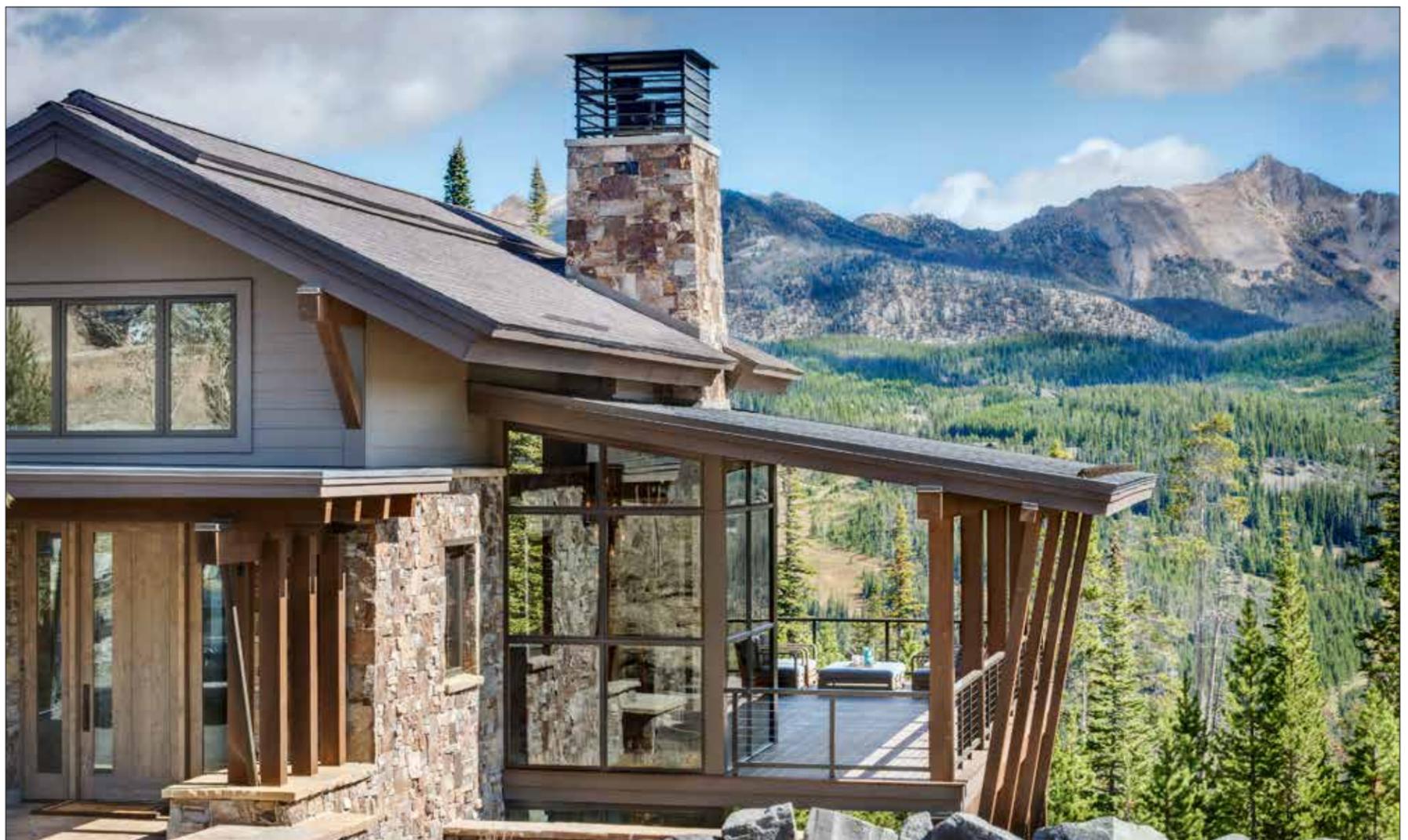
“I always think of that Mr. Rogers quote, ‘When things go bad look for the helpers.’ I always hope that I can be a helper,” she said.

Dr. Erica Perlman of Big Sky Eyes—simply stated: A helper.

“I just hope that all of us can get through this together and I know Big Sky can because we are a tight community and people do lend a hand when people need it,” she said.



Hand-sewn masks constructed by Dr. Erica Perlman. PHOTO COURTESY OF ERICA PERLMAN



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Big Sky philanthropist provides BASE with foundation

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – When Dr. Patricia Gordon got her first locker at Moonlight Basin, she felt like the luckiest person in the world. The licensed medical oncologist, since arriving in Big Sky nearly two decades ago, has fallen in love with the mountain, met her late husband, Len Hill, been comforted by her community after Hill's death five years ago, taught their grandchildren how to ski, started a thriving global nonprofit and, most recently, provided the new Big Sky Community Center, BASE, with a place to call home.

When it comes to giving back to her community—and the world for that matter—Gordon is an expert.

Gordon remembers being at the Riverhouse Grill one afternoon when a bus full of children pulled up for lunch. She said they appeared to be in different stages of cancer treatment and quickly learned that they were with the adaptive recreation organization, Eagle Mount.

After chatting with their program director, Gordon learned that the children had been looking forward to a talent show and dinner that evening, but that their host had dropped out. Gordon stepped in, invited the children to her and Hill's home at the Yellowstone Club, set up a makeshift stage and fired up the barbeque. The tradition stuck for 12 years until it was officially adopted by the YC.

"The Yellowstone Club became not just a second home, it became part of our DNA," said Gordon. "It was our real circle of family and friends. After Len's death five years ago, those were the friends who got me through it."

"Len told me, 'We are no longer guests of Big Sky. We need to donate to our community,'" said Gordon of their generous donation of \$500,000 to what is now Big Sky Medical Center's Len Hill emergency department.

When word spread that the land Big Sky Community Organization sought for BASE was up for sale, executive director Ciara Wolfe, knew exactly who to reach out to.

"The land was up for sale to developers and that got my attention," said Gordon. "I said, absolutely."

Gordon's 1.5 million dollars was not only the first donation made to the community center, but secured the land that workers began construction on just last month where the community of Big Sky will gather for generations to come.

Philanthropy that crosses borders

Right now, much of Gordon's energy goes toward CureCervicalCancer, the nonprofit organization she founded that travels to resource-poor countries around the world, screens women for pre-cervical cancer, and treats it before it develops further. In August 2014, she formally retired from clinical practice to lead CCC and start her second career as a non-profit leader and international women's health advocate.

"My only regret is that I didn't do it sooner," said Gordon. "It's been the most rewarding professional thing I've ever done in my life. I often feel that it's not really me even doing it."

300,000 women die of cervical cancer a year, yet the disease is 95% preventable. The death of a matriarch in these countries has a domino effect—when children are orphaned, sons will often drop out of school and turn to gangs. On top of that, a death from this type of cancer is extremely painful and undignified, yet it is the leading cause of cancer deaths in low-resource countries.

Treatment technology used in developed countries does not work well in resource-poor countries, so Gordon's clinics utilize a technique endorsed by the World Health Organization known as "See and Treat" which takes less than 15 minutes and it has a nearly 100 percent success rate. It involves a low-cost tool called a cryotherapy gun that treats pre-cervical cancer lesions.

CCC is responsible for 100 sustainable clinics around the world from Vietnam, Kenya, Haiti to Guatemala that not only treat patients, but also educate and empower nurses of those clinic's people with a new job skill, making them more employable.

"You can see how meaningful the services are in the community," said Rea Palsule, CCC's program director. Palsule is utilizing her experience with CCC and applying to medical school. "You see your impacts pretty quickly when you're on these trips."

The most difficult part, she said, is creating a comforting atmosphere for individuals so they will in turn accept the screening. Once they are though, the affect is contagious—women come back with their friends and family and the benefits of their work in these clinics is quickly spread through word of mouth. Women walk for miles with children in tow for treatment and for many, this is the first time they've ever seen a doctor.

"After we've arrived we're in a room in the middle of a slum with no air conditioning, dirt everywhere and room dividers made of sheets for privacy," said Gordon. "There is no time in my life where I am where my shoes are. All of a sudden everything else in my life is gone and the only thing I'm supposed to do is be right there."



Dr. Patricia Gordon's CureCervicalCancer organization has opened 100 sustainable cancer screening clinics in underserved communities all over the world. PHOTO COURTESY OF CURECERVICALCANCER.ORG

Finding a home for BASE

After flying around the world treating cancer, Gordon settles into the mountain town Big Sky dwellers call home and sets her sights on improving the community that has given her so much over the years. She believes a community center is vital to Big Sky's physical and behavioral health, providing its people with a home for much-needed services.

"Without the working people of Big Sky, without the people who run our restaurants and serve us and at the grocery store and run the lifts, Big Sky is nothing," Gordon said. "To not have a proper place for those people to work out, to read a book in, to bring their children to rock climb at, what have we done? We owe it to them."

Gordon cited the reputation ski towns hold for drug abuse, poor mental health and a middle-class workforce that relies on more than one job to get by and how much relief she feels a community center would offer.

"A behavioral health center is imperative," she said. "We must provide this to our community. It's not even a luxury, it's just something we have to do."

A fervent philanthroper, Gordon is one who refuses to be indifferent to the needs of her community and is one of many giving spirits that makes Big Sky a place with heart.

Big Sky wastewater to be tested for COVID-19

BY BELLA BUTLER

BIG SKY – On May 8, the Big Sky Relief subcommittee of the Big Sky Resort Area District board approved a grant of nearly \$80,000 for the Gallatin City-County Health Department to fund COVID-19 wastewater surveillance.

Initially, the health department submitted an application to receive resort tax funds from the tax collected for the Fiscal Year 2021 allocation for which the allocation period will begin in June 2020. Because the health department's ask was intended for a COVID-19-related project, the BSRAD board chose to reposition the request to come through Big Sky Relief, a group created in March in order to support community issues spurred by COVID-19.

When Big Sky Relief was established, the BSRAD board passed a resolution that granted authority to a subcommittee, comprised of board members Sarah Blechta and Steve Johnson, to award dollars from the fund to local nonprofit or government organizations. This resolution allowed Blechta and Johnson to approve the \$79,696 granted to the health department for the purpose of wastewater surveillance.

The resort tax board has been active in pushing the initiative to expand testing capabilities in the community of Big Sky, and the health department's request for funds was in response to board chair Kevin Germain and BSRAD Executive Director Daniel Bierschwale inquiries about how the board could support this effort in Big Sky.

"It appears that testing and surveillance are going to be the key to safely reopening the economy," said Bierschwale, emphasizing the importance of making data-driven decisions in a time when public health is at stake. In order to create a more comfortable and safer environment for both visitors and residents, he added, Big Sky needs to improve testing and surveillance capabilities. Having more locally sourced data will also provide GCCHD with information to better inform county wide decisions.

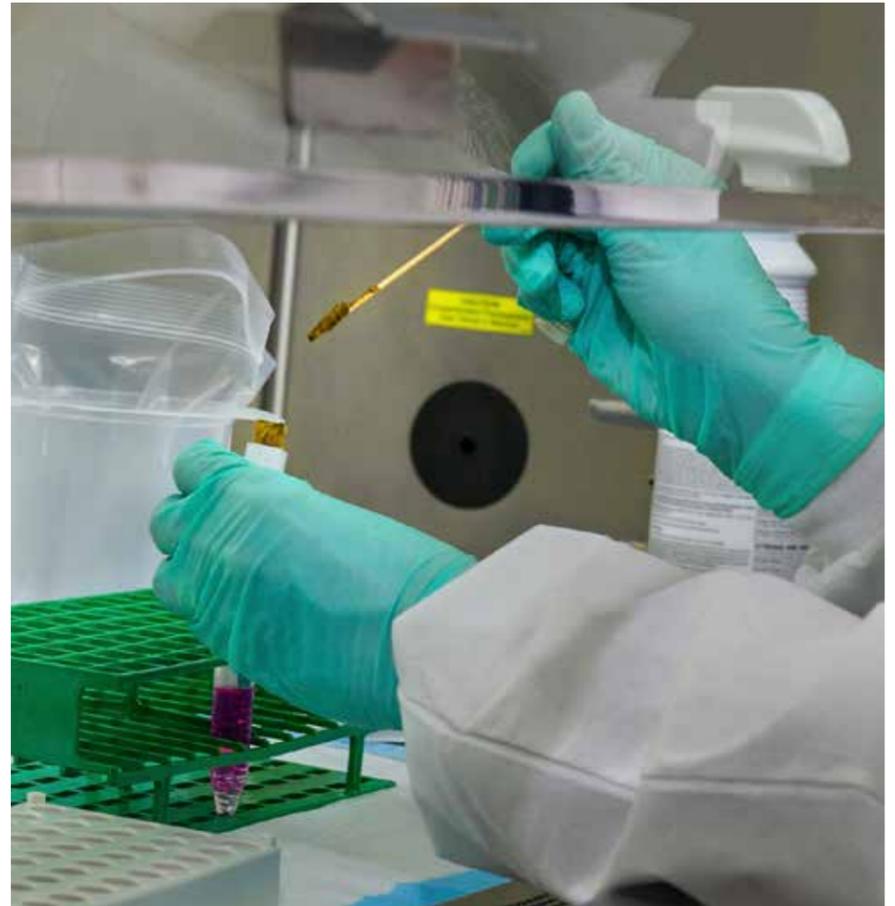
Matt Kelley, GCCHD health officer, said that while individual testing often misses asymptomatic people, those unwilling to be tested, or those inhibited by a lack of testing materials and access, the wastewater surveillance isn't limited by the same factors; it's inherently more inclusive. "Everyone uses the restroom," Kelley said.

More than a dozen research groups around the world have started testing wastewater as a way to approximate the number of COVID-19 cases in a community, according to an article published in *Nature* in early April. During a 17-day period in March and April, Montana State University associate professor Blake Wiedenheft's research team collected wastewater samples from Bozeman's Water Reclamation Facility to test for the virus, which is shed in feces. Their results revealed trends that lined up with those being illuminated by individual testing data.

"It's unlikely that we are going to have enough resources to be able to test enough people to be able to get a really high penetration onto the population and know what the prevalence is," Wiedenheft said. "I think it's a really important complement to individual testing to do community testing, and the way to do community testing that is a cost-effective way to measure the amount of SARS-CoV-2 [the virus that causes COVID-19] in a community is to monitor the wastewater."

The process performed by Wiedenheft's team requires an automated sample collector that creates a 24-hour composite by drawing samples every hour from incoming untreated wastewater. The composite is then brought to a lab where the organics and other extraneous materials are sorted out before the sample is tested the same way that swabs from individual tests are processed.

At this time, researchers are able to conclude viral presence, abundance and trends from wastewater. Wiedenheft said that next steps will be translating those statistics into estimations of individuals infected, an advancement he believes is not far off.



Wastewater surveillance will begin in Big Sky to test for the presence of COVID-19 in the community. Funded by a Big Sky Relief grant, the test will be processed in a Montana State University lab. CDC PHOTO

Following Gov. Steve Bullock's stay-at-home directive in March, Wiedenheft said that, like individual testing data, the Bozeman wastewater surveillance revealed that viral abundance had plummeted to a point undetectable by the test. He clarified that just because the virus is not detectable doesn't mean that it is not present in the community.

While the viral load is still minimal, local experts will look to the surveillance as one indication of a viral resurgence. In the health department's application for resort tax funding, it was indicated that the bulk of the grant—\$29,886—would be used to fund more extensive testing in July, followed by \$9,962 worth of testing per month through the end of the year.

The health department, which did not have additional capacity in its budget to fund the surveillance, according to Kelley, is currently facilitating connections between communities in the county, like Big Sky, who are interested in adopting the surveillance practice with funding and testing labs. Big Sky's wastewater surveillance will go through Dr. Seth Walk's lab at MSU. Big Sky County Water and Sewer District employees will also be volunteering hours to assist with operational procedures on-site at Big Sky's wastewater treatment facilities.

"In the absence of a municipality, the resort tax district has the fiduciary responsibility of ensuring that we are spending our money as wisely and effectively as possible," Bierschwale said. He added that this project, as well as other Big Sky Relief efforts, are working toward turning on resort tax collections in a safe and healthy way that meet all the needs of the Big Sky community.

On May 19, Gallatin County commissioners voted to use county dollars to fund wastewater surveillance in West Yellowstone. Bozeman wastewater testing will continue, and a funding partnership with the City of Bozeman is in the works. Wiedenheft made reference to other countries that have recently moved to allocate federal dollars to wastewater surveillance to provide for a more holistic picture of viral presence.

While the United States federal government has yet to do so, Wiedenheft said that many states are taking progressive approaches to monitoring for the virus, and he believes Montana could be among them.

Sixth annual 5k honors local boy

BY BELLA BUTLER



Harbor deWaard poses with his mom, Candice Brownmiller, in one of his favorite superhero costumes. deWaard's love for superheroes is recognized through the costume component and name of the annual Harbor's Heroes 5k run. PHOTO COURTESY OF CANDICE BROWNMILLER

BIG SKY – When Harbor deWaard woke up in the morning, he would go to his costume box and select which superhero ensemble he would wear for the day—Spiderman and Captain America were among his favorites. The 5-year-old boy didn't wear his superhero costumes because it was Halloween or because he was going to a birthday party, they were simply what he wanted to wear. His mom, Candice Brownmiller, says it was because he was actually a superhero, he just didn't know it.

In January of 2015, deWaard died suddenly and tragically. Every year since his passing, the Lone Peak High School National Honor Society has organized Harbor's Heroes Run, a 5k color run in deWaard's honor. This year, on May 17, in spite of challenges instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic, NHS estimated a turnout

of 95-100 participants who ran in the sixth annual 5k, which was restructured to comply with social distancing.

With every intention to continue a community-favorite tradition, NHS pivoted from the formerly planned large community race to a virtual version. Participants ran a suggested 5k course offered via the Harbor's Heroes website in small groups of family and friends, while also sharing photos to the website. Even in the absence of the colored powder that usually decorated the course (and the runners) in past years, tie dyed capes and vibrant superhero masks made for a spirited display of recognition for a deeply missed friend and son.

"I worry about Harbor's spirit getting lost out there," Brownmiller said, expressing gratitude toward NHS for finding a way to still host the run despite the circumstances.

One year ago, Brownmiller was hiking through Virginia in the midst of a downpour on the Appalachian Trail on the same day as the run. It was the first she'd missed since deWaard's passing. She pulled over on the side of the trail, sheltered under her backpack cover and listened through her phone as her friend, Jackie Robin, ran through the park in Big Sky passing the call around the event so community members could connect with Brownmiller while celebrating deWaard.

Be it distance or a global pandemic, nothing has stopped Brownmiller from being a part of the event every year and she says in some ways, it's been a source of healing. "It's a great way for me to see the community to get back together to honor him."

Part of the effort to keep deWaard's spirit alive in the Big Sky community is the Women in Action scholarship in his name. Each year, the scholarship supports local recipients' experiences at a summer camp. In past years, registration fees from the run have contributed to the scholarship fund. This year, donations collected on the Harbor's Heroes website for the scholarship totaled \$2,500.

The scholarship often supports students who were friends of deWaard's, and Brownmiller thinks it's a special thing for them to receive a scholarship in his name. Prior to this year's event, the NHS's Education and Outreach program worked with deWaard's former class, now in fifth grade, to write poems to express their memories of deWaard. Many of the poems, which are available on the Harbor's Heroes website, feature phrases that recount deWaard's compassion like "lover of friends" and "I will never forget him."

Ruth Blodgett, an NHS member, said that the experience of working with the students on their poems was an emotional one, even over the digital platform, Zoom. "When those kids [who remember deWaard] get to explain what he was like, you can tell that they really cherish him and cherish his memory," she said. "I think it's very helpful for them to heal when reflecting on who he was as a person."

Dr. Kate Eisele, the NHS advisor, said that the treasured community event is also an opportunity for NHS students to practice the core ideals of NHS: leadership, service and character.

"Connecting with the memory of Harbor allows students to reflect on life and their place in the world and the character they want to project to the world," she wrote in an email to EBS. "Harbor inspires us all to be giving, caring and joyful in our lives."

Many of deWaard's friends shared ways that they remember him in their lives, like playing outside and dressing up in a superhero costume. Brownmiller has her own ways of remembering, too. Brownmiller and deWaard used to work together at the Big Sky Community Food Bank, where deWaard would work hard knowing he could earn a treat if he did well. Now, as an employee at the food bank, Brownmiller enjoys working at a place where she can feel connected to her son.

Every year when the run rolls around, Brownmiller believes it's something deWaard would love, and she says she knows he's there in spirit. She can picture his big cheeks opening up for a smile, happy to see all of the friends he cared for so dearly, dressed up as the superheroes he loved, the superhero they all remember him to be.



Mike Firth, Candice Brownmiller and Jackie Robin cruise through the photo section of the course, where photographer Paul Bussi captured celebratory moments of the superhero participants. PHOTO BY PAUL BUSSI



deWaard is remembered as being funny, compassionate and a great friend. His classmates, who are now in fifth grade, wrote a collection of poems in deWaard's memory. The poems are compiled on the Harbor's Heroes website, which was created by the Lone Peak High School National Honor Society. PHOTO COURTESY OF CANDICE BROWNMILLER



A group of runners give their best mid-stride pose. PHOTO BY PAUL BUSSI



A group of young runners and their families, adorned in colorful superhero costumes, round a corner along the 5k course. PHOTO BY PAUL BUSSI



Not all participants completed the course on foot. John Romney, barely recognizable under a green wig, skated the 5k. PHOTO BY PAUL BUSSI



Max Romney shoots a thumbs up and confident grin with a snowy Pioneer Ridge in the background. PHOTO BY PAUL BUSSI

Resort recreationists rejoice

Big Sky Resort dirt and turf opening for business

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – After Big Sky Resort halted lift operations a month earlier than expected for their winter season due to COVID-19, sun is on the horizon for recreationists itching to get back on the mountain. Resort officials announced their reopening plan for the summer 2020 season, starting with golf on Friday, May 22, just in time for Memorial Day weekend, and mountain biking to follow June 26.

Historically, Memorial Day is one of the resort's busier weekends and the Big Sky community is preparing for a potential influx of visitors by following guidelines from local health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The resort is working with Madison County Public Health and the health department's sanitarians to train staff on proper sanitation guidelines including employee health screenings before every shift, sneeze guards at point-of-sale locations, frequent hand washing and encouraging card payments in lieu of cash.

"We've been working close with both Big Sky Resort and the Yellowstone Club," said Melissa Brummell, Madison County's public health department director. "Our general guidance at the Board of Health is to follow Gov. Bullock's directive. We don't have anything more stringent in place, so we've been working with them on some of the basics, making sure they're able to open safely regarding his orders."

Reservations for tee times and golf memberships are available on the resort's website including season-long access at a discounted rate for a limited time. The Bunker Deck and Grill at the Big Sky Golf Course will be open daily starting Friday, May 29 for breakfast, lunch and dinner and will offer limited outdoor seating, delivery on the course and takeout options to encourage safe social distancing practices.

Alongside mountain biking, scenic lift rides at Big Sky Resort will open for the summer season on Friday, June 26. Both Ramcharger 8 and Explorer chairlifts will run daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and the Swift Current lift will run on Saturday and Sunday throughout the summer for biking and scenic rides. Vista Hall and Vista Bar in Mountain Village will be open daily beginning June 26 as well.

"We're committed to compliance with the state guidelines," said Stacie Mesuda, the resort's public relations manager, adding that although the resort is

following Bullock's directives, the dynamic nature of the situation makes it hard to predict what the season will look like later in the summer. "We're all hoping for a sense of normalcy, to be out on trails hiking, biking and riding again."

Operationally, the resort relies on out-of-state and international employees for a portion of their workforce. Mesuda noted that they will continue to adjust staffing levels to accommodate their phased reopening plan, and that the resort is communicating Bullock's 14-day quarantine rule, but could not comment on whether or not the resort would be opening job opportunities to non-locals this summer.

Visit Big Sky, the Big Sky community's marketing and management organization, launched a campaign at the beginning of the pandemic with the language "visit Big Sky later," encouraging out-of-state visitors to keep the town of approximately 3,000 full-time residents in mind for future plans, but to respectfully stay home in hopes of maintaining minimal outside spread to the community. In preparation for Memorial Day and the resort opening, Visit Big Sky is encouraging all visitors to honor Bullock's directives, and are partnering with local businesses to ensure they feel safe as visitors arrive.

"We are looking at in-state Montana resident travel and communicating to our fellow Montanans to come visit," said Visit Big Sky CEO Candace Carr Strauss. "We all have done our job as Montanans to flatten the curve so let's get folks to move about the cabin."

VBS is distributing packages for businesses that include hand sanitizer, gloves and masks for all employees as well as animal paw-print stickers they can place on the floor to indicate six-foot spacing in queue areas. The stickers will be available for pickup at the VBS office by the end of the week and available to all public-facing businesses.

"The other part of this is that the workers need to be modeling that behavior," Carr Strauss said. "If we expect guests to wear a mask, the business owners need to as well. It needs to go both ways."

Big Sky Resort is encouraging all incoming visitors to visit bigskyresort.com for information on social distancing and safety practices in light of COVID-19. It also recently announced 2020-21 ski pass information, which this year includes loyalty pricing for all returning skiers and a flexible credit policy should the resort not open this coming winter season.



Big Sky resident Lila Scott hits the mountain biking trails at Big Sky Resort last August. The resort will reopen for the season beginning with golf on May 22. PHOTO BY KG CONTENT

OUTLAW™

News from our publisher, Outlaw Partners

Town Hall panelists discuss thoughtful, logical reopening

EBS STAFF

During the eighth installment of Big Sky Town Hall, panelists spoke of a safe, Phase 1 reopening, particularly of the travel industry and the hardships it has faced in the past and how it compares to the current COVID-19 crisis.

Guests included Brian Sprenger, airport director at Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport; Taylor Middleton, president and CEO of Big Sky Resort; Kirsten King, owner of Big Sky Vacation Rentals; Daniel Bierschwale, executive director of the Big Sky Resort Tax; and Jeremy Harder, lead facilitator of creativity and innovation at the Big Sky School District.

Sprenger said the airport's air traffic in April was 3.1 percent of normal, taking them back about 50 years. However, he said they've so far experienced a slow recovery in May and was overall optimistic about the future of the airport he's been at the helm of since 2009.

"We'll come out well on the backside, we just don't know when that'll be," he said.

All inbound passengers are being screened with temperature checks by the National Guard. The airport also uses sneeze guards and is practicing social distancing in the terminals. Most airlines, with the exception of Allegiant, are requiring all passengers to wear face coverings. Sprenger said this could be a new normal for some time, at least through the summer.

The resort is kicking off Phase 1 of their reopening starting with the golf course on May 22, followed by mountain biking later in June once the snow melts. The pandemic interrupted one of Big Sky's largest capital improvement projects, which included additions to the Ramcharger 8 lift and major renovations to the Swift Current lift, which have both delayed until next summer.

King, no stranger to serving out-of-state visitors, said occupancy hit a low in March when Gov. Steve Bullock's stay-at-home order went into place. Her team have come up with creative ways to serve their homeowners and get through this time together as they prepare to welcome visitors back to Big Sky when it is safe to do so.

Bierschwale, who also serves on the Big Sky Relief board, says the organization has recently shifted to planning for long-term needs of those affected by the pandemic as the community moves toward recovery. With allocated funds from Big Sky's resort tax, they've allocated funds toward wastewater surveillance, a project in partnership with the Gallatin City-County Health Department and Montana State University that tests viral loads in the area's sewer system.

The Town Hall capped the evening with some light banter between 20-year Big Sky local Jeremy Harder and moderator Joseph T. O'Connor in Harder's classroom—a safe, six feet apart (tape measure included).

"I learned that I can't plan way ahead, which I think is beneficial. It has to be organic," said Harder of the changing face of education through the pandemic.

"I think 70 percent of a classroom is building a relationship with the students," said Harder. "It's a challenge to not be in the room with someone, to feel what they're feeling. You lose that aspect and that's so huge in education."

Harder and O'Connor closed out the night by congratulating the class of 2020 graduates who will be "walking" in a part-drive-through, part-virtual ceremony this coming Saturday.

Outlaw partners, EBS launch advertiser grant program

OUTLAW PARTNERS

Outlaw Partners and Explore Big Sky have launched a newly minted grant program to support local and pan-Montana businesses through uncertainty spurred by COVID-19. The EBS GO! Grant offers a dollar-for-dollar match on media and marketing services for the months of May, June and July 2020.

There is no better time to focus on marketing your business than right now; uniquely, marketing in a downturn creates opportunity to build brand loyalty and accelerate growth faster than your competitors. The EBS GO! Grant will help businesses get the most out of every dollar spent and position them for success as we continue to navigate through the pandemic.

To apply, each business must fill out the grant application form found at explorebigsky.com/grants

The business will then be contacted by Outlaw Partners, publisher of EBS, if it is deemed eligible for the grant.

The application period ranges from May 10-30.

Outlaw Partners will match dollar-for-dollar what is spent by each individual business, up to \$1,000 per month, with a minimum purchase of \$500. This special grant offer will cover the following forms of media and marketing buys:

Explore Big Sky newspaper print ads
"Town Crier" e-blast newsletter banner ad placement

Friday Afternoon Club concert series sponsorship
Direct-to-consumer email campaigns

Please reach out to sam@theoutlawpartners.com with any and all questions on the grant application, along with those pertaining to specific marketing opportunities offered through the grant.

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SECTION 2: ENVIRONMENT, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



pg. 23 Grand Teton Parks to reopen



pg. 26 Fuel, Oxygen and Heat



pg. 31 Big Sky Events Calendar

THE NEW WEST



BY TODD WILKINSON
EBS ENVIRONMENTAL COLUMNIST

By now you may have heard the news: Jackson Hole Grizzly 399 still walks the earth and on May 18, the same day Grand Teton National Park opened to the public again, she was spotted with four new cubs.

The average number of cubs in a litter for a healthy grizzly mother is two but her brood size isn't what makes 399 most extraordinary. She is 24 years old and has managed to survive for nearly a quarter century navigating the highway and frontcountry of Grand Teton and the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

During that time, because she's been so visually accessible, millions of people around the globe know of her and she is, without question, the most famous living bear right now on the planet.

I learned a lot about 399 while writing the book "Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek, An Intimate Portrait of 399, the Most Famous Bear in Greater Yellowstone," featuring the photographs by nature photographer Thomas Mangelsen. Tom noted his admiration for 399 when he was featured a couple of years ago on 60 Minutes, and counted among her biggest fans is Dr. Jane Goodall.

Mangelsen makes his home near Moose, the small outpost that serves as the headquarters for Grand Teton. After grizzlies disappeared from Jackson Hole by the 1960s, and except for maybe an occasional bear wandering south from Yellowstone, no one ever thought the "great bear" would find residence in that valley again.

But today, grizzlies inhabit the Cache Creek drainage just east of the town of Jackson, Wyoming, and they are showing up in many places where they haven't been seen in a century. They are in the Hyalites south of Bozeman, in both the Gallatins and Madisons around Big Sky and even the Tobacco Roots.

The story of 399, because of her remarkable longevity, has made the wonder of grizzlies tangible to a lot of people who otherwise viewed them as nameless, obscure bears that are supposed to be feared and reviled instead of understood and regarded as the intelligent creatures they are.

Early in her life, 399 mauled a visitor who was attending a conference at Jackson Lake Lodge and who stumbled upon her and three cubs as they were dining on an elk carcass. The hiker survived and the Grand Teton Park Superintendent at the time, Mary Gibson Scott, decided the bear's actions—defending a carcass—fell under normal behavior.

Thus, 399 and her cubs were spared; it proved smart on Scott's part and lucky for those of us who enjoy following her. Over 399's life, there are at least 22 bears (cubs and cubs born to her cubs) in her bloodline. It shows how important a single female griz can be to a population.

Grizzlies are part of the mystique of Greater Yellowstone. They are part of why millions of people normally come here in the non-winter months. Griz are the epitome of what it means to have wild places. And yet, it's not easy being a grizzly. There are many perils.

Griz 399 emerges

Most famous bear in world returns at age 24 with four new cubs

Approximately half of 399's descendants have died in various run-ins with people, from being shot by hunters and removed for eating livestock on public lands to being hit by cars.

As scientists have noted, if we respect grizzlies by giving them space, especially mothers with cubs, if we don't do dumb things, if we are more responsible with our actions on the trail and with our trash, if we carry bear spray, and if we adopt tolerance instead of clinging to old frontier mentalities, we can live with bears.

All around the world, the prospects for mammalian omnivores and carnivores, from polar bears to lions and tigers, are bleak owed to climate change and rising numbers of humans. Whether we can live with grizzlies in the wildest ecosystem left in the Lower 48 is up to us and it is a reflection of our values and intelligence future generations will judge.

It's true that the allure of seeing a grizzly in the center of Greater Yellowstone helps fuel a nature-tourism economy worth more than \$1.5 billion annually. But grizzlies allow us to know a caliber of wild country that has vanished nearly everywhere else and no price can be put on that.

I just read a statistic: Every year, 20 people die in misadventures related to domestic cows. Many will be injured in our region after being thrown from the backs of horses. Some will be bitten by dogs. Others will come down with diseases from ticks and mosquitoes. And yes, people will perish in avalanches and boating accidents.

The risks posed by grizzlies to humans are low, so long as we keep our wits. The gift they offer us, of reminding us to be wide awake as we navigate this spectacular region we call home, is priceless.

Thank you Grizzly 399 for helping to open our eyes and hearts to what a bear family looks like. Best of luck to you and your quartet of cubs.

Todd Wilkinson is the founder of Bozeman-based Mountain Journal and is a correspondent for National Geographic. He's also the author of "Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek," about famous Jackson Hole grizzly bear 399.



Grizzly 399 demonstrates to her cubs how to hunt elk a few years ago in Grand Teton National Park. PHOTO BY THOMAS D. MANGELSEN

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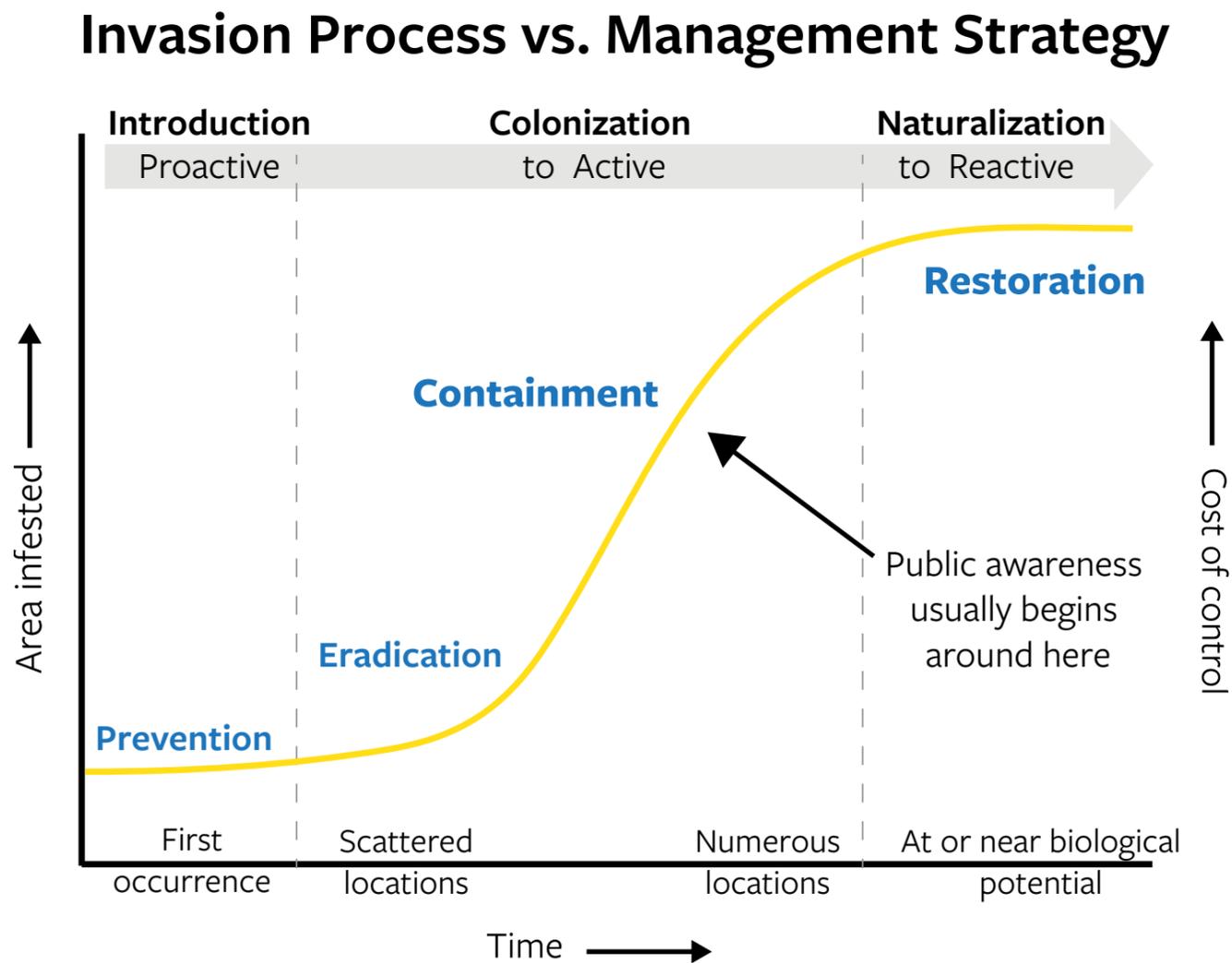
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Coronavirus model for invasive species

BY JENNIFER MOHLER
EBS CONTRIBUTOR



as professionals within the discipline of invasive plant management.

One of the most obvious parallels is the importance of prevention, early detection and rapid response. ‘Flattening the curve’ has been stated repeatedly by experts keeping us informed about the pandemic; the rationale behind this phrase is that by slowing the spread of the disease, medical providers will have more time and resources to treat those in need, and ultimately save more lives. Graphics used to display this concept remind me of those commonly used by educators and practitioners of invasive plant management when we preach the importance of detecting and eradicating a new invader early in order to prevent widespread establishment and associated negative ecological and economic impacts (see figure to left).

The value of prevention is difficult to measure, whether in the context of public health or invasive plant management. In the field of invasive species management, one statistic often shared is that \$1 spent on prevention and early intervention saves \$17 in later expenses, on average (OTA 1993).”

BIG SKY - Imagine this: an alien organism is introduced into a novel system, and because there are no natural controls, it can spread at an alarming rate and cause serious, even irreversible damage to the system. Sounds a lot like the current coronavirus situation, right? You may not realize it, but the very same processes relate to invasive species. Invasive species are a human-caused issue, either introduced on purpose or by accident, and as such, I believe we are obligated to do as much as we can to prevent the spread of these “alien” invaders.

It’s an interesting time to be a resource conservationist. We know the importance of the outdoors for our mental, physical and emotional health and work tirelessly to protect the resources that are now providing an invaluable outlet for us during this pandemic.

I’ve struggled over the years to convey the threats that invasive plants pose to our ecosystems, as the impacts are rarely immediate nor disturbing enough to grab the attention they deserve. There are no dead waterfowl in a contaminated water body, no bears breaking into homes to get food and no fish floating to the surface of polluted waters to sound the alarm. It’s akin to the frog in the pot analogy; The frog does not know he’s being boiled to death until it’s too late.

But a few days ago, the Monthly Weed Post, written by Dr. Jane Mangold, invasive plant specialist at Montana State University, arrived via email and it really hit home. Dr. Mangold writes:

“On a (solitary) trail run last weekend, I contemplated parallels between information and guidance provided to us from medical experts, public health specialists, and local, state, and national leaders and what we promote

Dr. Mangold’s message underscores the importance of proactive measures when it comes to invasive species management and maintaining a healthy, sustainable, and resilient ecosystem. Big Sky is fortunate that, in general, we are still at the bottom of the curve. On the other hand, unless our community commits to “flattening the curve” of invasive species spread, invasive plants have the potential to increase unchecked and forever change this landscape.

If you travel to other areas of the state, the battle against invasive species has already been lost. Entire hillsides are covered with little else but spotted knapweed. Riverbanks are lined with leafy spurge. Elk migrate elsewhere in search of native plants to survive. Wildflower populations are decimated, and the pollinators that are sustained by them are gone. Water is no longer filtered by native plants, resulting in reduced water quality and quantity. Costs to maintain trail systems increase, and hunting access on private lands is denied.

For those of us who are fortunate to combine our work with our passion for conservation, this pandemic provides a unique opportunity to further our message, strengthen our resolve, and recommit to protect and restore damage that we cause to our natural environment.

Jennifer Mohler is the executive director of Gallatin Invasive Species Alliance, a non-profit focused on protecting natural resources from the threats of invasive species. You can reach her via gallatinisa.org or find her at the newly built native demonstration garden at Crail Ranch.

Water Wisdom

Sowing a Healthy Gallatin

BY DAVID TUCKER
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

As I set out to write this article about landscaping, native wildflowers, and summer irrigation, it's dumping snow and below freezing. Ahhhhhh, spring in Montana. The calendar might say one thing, but Mother Nature always has her own plans.

Regardless of spring's temperamental weather patterns, now is the time to start planning your summer gardens or landscaping upgrades. As you do, keep the river in mind—the choices you make could have positive ripple effects across the watershed, especially if you choose to plant native species.

Summer irrigation on an average year accounts for seven to eight times more total water use than winter, even though winter sees far higher visitation. Most of this use can be attributed to irrigation, primarily on grass lawns and golf courses. "Native landscaping saves water big time," says Jennifer Mohler, executive director of the Gallatin Invasive Species Alliance. "Once plants are established, they do not need supplemental irrigation.



Strategic landscaping and irrigation practices can contribute to a healthier watershed. PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID TUCKER

They are ideal for the lazy gardener. You need no supplemental irrigation. Once those plants are established, they're bomber." According to Mohler, because native plants have evolved in our semi-arid ecosystem, they do not need fertilization, and require only normal rainfall.

Sodding your property with green grass has other negative consequences, as well. It destroys native vegetation that provides habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and introduces invasive species that can wreak havoc on an

ecosystem. This type of landscaping also involves heavy fertilizer use, pollutants that can be harmful to aquatic life when flushed into our streams and rivers by stormwater runoff or snow melt.

As more native flora is torn up and replaced with sod lawns, the problem grows—but it does have a solution.

Landscaping can have such a large impact on water quality and quantity that the Gallatin River Task Force is launching a Trout-Friendly Landscaping certificate program. "The program encourages the community to create sustainable landscapes suitable for our mountain environment," says Emily O'Connor, program manager for the Task Force. "A sustainable landscape is beautiful, functional, easy to maintain, environmentally friendly, and defensible from wildfire. Each yard and landscape in Big Sky is part of the Gallatin Watershed, and the landscaping choices we make and business practices we follow influence water quality, habitat, and recreational opportunities."

Luckily, those choices needn't be difficult ones. The certification consists of following trout-friendly landscaping guidelines for plant selection, soil improvement, practical turf areas, efficient irrigation, chemical reduction and lastly, erosion control and streamside buffers. The landscaping guidelines address different ecosystem threats; taken together they all contribute to improved water quality and increased water quantity.

Overwatering your lawn—something many of us are unintentionally guilty of—wastes more than water. It's also a drain on your wallet and a drain on your time. Because native landscapes require almost no maintenance, you have more time for fishing, hiking, biking, and rafting, and isn't that why you live here? To spend time outdoors recreating, not time working on your lawn?

Many of us hike mile after grueling mile to see a meadow filled with sage or a hillside speckled with wildflowers. We choose organic and local at the grocery store and opt to "shop small" because we value community development and supporting our neighbors. Why not apply a similar value system to our lawns? By planting a trout-friendly lawn we can connect to the wild places we love, instead of tearing them apart.

Get started with your trout-friendly certificate by visiting gallatinrivertaskforce.org.

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

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Here's how to save the Colorado River

BY BRUCE BABBITT
WRITERS ON THE RANGE



Bruce Babbitt, Writers on the Range contributor.
PHOTO COURTESY OF WRITERS ON THE RANGE

It is no exaggeration to say that a mega-drought not seen in 500 years has descended on the seven Colorado River Basin states: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona and California. That's what the science shows, and that's what the region faces.

Phoenix, Denver, Las Vegas and San Diego have already reduced per capita water use. Yet they continue to consume

far more water than the river can supply. The river and its tributaries are still overdrawn by more than a million acre-feet annually, an amount in consumption equaled by four cities the size of Los Angeles.

To close the deficit, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the states have been struggling to apportion the drastic cuts necessary.

So far, the parties have proceeded by adhering rigidly to historic doctrines: first users have absolute rights, though those rights were based on rosy projections of the river's annual flow.

For example, In Arizona the six million residents of Phoenix and Tucson will lose 50 percent of their share before California gives up a single drop.

Nevada, which has a 2 percent share, the smallest of any state, is called on to take more cuts ahead of California, which has the largest share, 29 percent.

Within California, water to 20 million residents in cities will be completely shut off before farming districts adjacent to and within the Imperial Valley take any cuts.

And in the upper basin, the states of Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico are faced with draconian reductions in their entitlements because they must deliver water to the lower basin states.

Brad Udall, a water scientist at Colorado State University, warns that something must give, that we cannot continue with a system that increasingly "violates the public's sense of rightness."

There is a better, more equitable pathway for reducing the deficit without forcing arbitrary cuts. It involves 3 million acres of irrigated agriculture, mostly alfalfa and forage crops, which consume more than 80 percent of total water use in the Basin.

By retiring less than 10 percent of this irrigated acreage from production, we could eliminate the existing million acre-foot overdraft on the Colorado River, while still maintaining the dominant role of agriculture. Pilot programs in both the upper and lower basins have demonstrated how agricultural retirement programs can work at the local level. What's lacking is the vision and financing to bring these efforts to a Basin scale. Fortunately, there's a precedent

administered by the Department of Agriculture; it's the Conservation Reserve Program, established in 1985 by the Congress. It authorizes the Farm Service Agency in the Department of Agriculture to contract with landowners to retire marginal and environmentally sensitive agricultural lands in exchange for rent.

Farmers who join the Conservation Reserve remain free to return the lands to production at the end of the renewable contract period, typically 10-30 years.

The national Conservation Reserve currently holds nearly 22 million acres under contracts with more than 300,000 farms. This legislation has strong support from the farming community and in the Congress, which appropriates nearly \$2 billion each year for the program.

With this precedent, it's time to create an irrigation reserve program. To work, it must be voluntary, and farmers who participate must be adequately paid for the use of their irrigation rights.

A new irrigation reserve on a Basin scale will also require significant public funding. But the mechanism for financing an irrigation reserve is already available in existing federal law.

In 1973, faced with deteriorating water quality in the river, the Basin states came together and persuaded the Congress to enact a law known as the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act.

To fund salinity control projects throughout the Basin, the Congress allocated revenues from the sale of hydropower from Hoover Dam, Glen Canyon Dam and other federal dams throughout the Basin.

Three hydropower accounts—the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund, the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund and the Hoover Powerplant Act—continue to capture and allocate revenues to basin projects. Congress should now add financing of an irrigation reserve to the list of eligible expenditures.

With these two precedents, the Conservation Reserve Program and the Salinity Control Act, we have the road map to establish a basin-wide Irrigation Reserve. I urge the seven Basin states to make common cause and join together to obtain Congressional legislation.

Bruce Babbitt is a contributor to Writers on the Range.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively discussion about Western issues. He served as Secretary of the Interior from 1993-2001.



The Hoover Dam is one of 15 dams that plug the Colorado River. PHOTO BY CLAY BANKS

Yellowstone, Grand Teton parks to reopen May 18

EBS STAFF



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK – On Monday, May 18, Yellowstone National Park’s east and south gates opened to tourists for the first time in months, following both seasonal and COVID-19 shutdowns.

However, while both of Wyoming’s entrances will be available to public access, the opening of all three Montana gates, including that at West Yellowstone, is pending a decision tentatively scheduled for release June 1.

Similarly, Grand Teton National Park opened on Monday, May 18.

Yellowstone Superintendent Cam Sholly admits the plan is neither perfect, nor agreeable to all with interests in the park’s reopening.

“What I’m going to announce is out-of-the-box, it’s different, it’s not exactly going to be incredibly popular with some of you,” Sholly said in a phone call with regional business leaders Wednesday, reports the Jackson Hole News and Guide.

Following Wyoming’s May 8 lifting of out-of-state travel restrictions, the state requested their entrances be open. Meanwhile, Montana will lift the 14-day out of state quarantine on June 1, according to Gov. Steve Bullock’s May 19 announcement. Park and Treasure State officials are in conversations on next steps for their gates.

The reopening of Yellowstone will provide Wyoming with “useful experience as we look ahead to opening other areas of the park, provide a boost to Wyoming’s tourism industry, and help get America’s economy up and going again,” Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon said in a statement.

For the time being, travel around the park will be limited to the lower loop, which includes Lake, Canyon, Norris, Old Faithful, West Thumb and Grant Village, and park officials will encourage the use of masks and facial coverings. Access to certain sites will be metered, facility cleanings will become more frequent and barriers have been installed to provide protection where needed.



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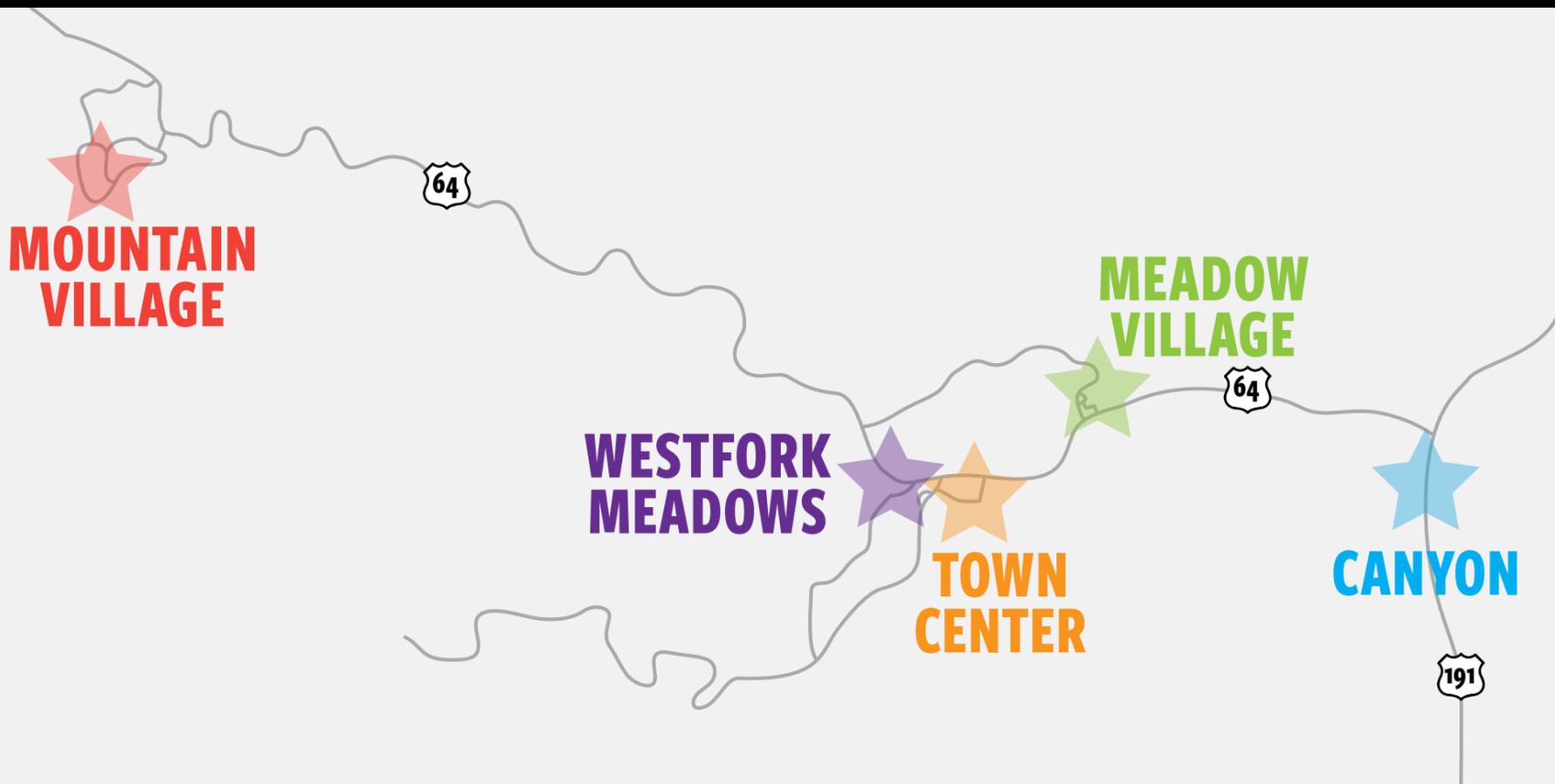
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Fuel, Oxygen and Heat

To better fight intensifying wildfires, the Bureau of Land Management works to diversify its ranks

BY EMILY STIFLER WOLFE



Hotshot crewmember Caroline Ward assists with conducting a back burn operation on the nearly 40,000-acre Millers Complex fire in southern Oregon. PHOTO BY JAKE MURIE

Jenna Lyons loved fighting fire. Part of an elite hotshot crew that deployed to fires around the West, she spent two summers in her early 20s hiking into the backcountry, carrying a loaded pack and sleeping on the ground for weeks at a time. Her crewmates, all men, were good friends, and together they cut down trees, dug fire line for 13 hours straight, and worked all night setting prescribed burns.

But there was one thing she loathed. At the end of a long day, she'd walk into the fire camp cafeteria and several hundred men from other fire crews would look up from their plates, visually undressing her. The soot and dirt covering their faces contrasted the whites of their roaming eyes. "It's the most disgusting feeling I've ever had," Lyons said.

She wanted to disappear. Often the only woman in the room, Lyons knew her crewmates had her back, but still. She'd look down at her phone, or go eat alone in the crew vehicle. It happened on almost every big fire.

The male-dominated world of wildland fire in America grew out of a culture laid down more than a century ago. Back then, civilian men were pulled from saloons and brothels to fight the Great Fire of 1910, which burned 3 million acres in the Northwest. Today, stories like Jenna Lyons' are familiar to the few women who work in the field, and because firefighters work together across organizational boundaries, these experiences aren't confined to a particular government agency.

In March 2018, PBS NewsHour ran a two-part story about gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault in the Forest Service's fire program, exposing a workplace in which perpetrators are rarely punished, and reporting can stifle or end a victim's career. Since then, dozens of women have told me that the policies in place to prevent these problems are not effective.

This wasn't the first time the fire services were in the hot seat. In 2016, Yosemite Chief of Fire and Aviation Kelly Martin testified before Congress about the harassment she experienced during her career, and numerous allegations of sexual misconduct came out of Grand Canyon National Park.

In response, the Bureau of Land Management's Fire and Aviation leaders created a task force focused on diversity and employee well-being. Launched in November 2016, the Employee Centered Retention Team found that BLM suffered from the same issues as other firefighting agencies. They're now working on education and mentorship programs, and on May 1, 2018 published a long-term plan to diversify hiring and improve retention.

The BLM's efforts aren't just about gender parity. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, wildfires in the West now occur nearly four times as often as they did in the 1980s, burn more than six times the land area, and last almost five times as long. Increasing diversity on fire crews is about the need to fight fire more effectively in the face of a warming climate.

"I've always learned that if you have the same kind of people with the same backgrounds, experiences and education, when faced with challenges, they're most likely going to come up with some of the same solutions," said Howard Hedrick, second in command of the BLM fire program. "If you have a more diverse group, I think you'll come up with much better solutions."

The conversation right now is focused on women, especially since the #MeToo movement brought the topic to the forefront. But in the long run, Hedrick said, this will also be about hiring a workforce with ethnic, racial and educational backgrounds representative of the communities they serve—and treating them well enough that they stay.

BLM manages a 10th of the country's landmass, or 247.3 million acres, more than any other government agency. Housed under the Department of the Interior, the agency oversees grazing, oil and gas leases, recreation, conservation and other uses. As of July 2017, it had more than 10,400 employees, and nearly 3,000 in its fire program. Of those in fire, 18 percent were women. Among firefighters, particularly the high-level hotshot and smokejumping teams, the ratio is much lower.

The agency's 11 hotshot crews employ one to three women on a typical 20-person team, in 2018 there were three female smokejumpers of 140 nationwide. The six-person engine crews that comprise most fire line employees usually have one or two women, or none. Between all federal firefighting entities—the BLM, the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—the number of women in permanent fire operations positions hovers around 12 percent.

Few women and minorities apply to work on the fire line in the first place, and retention is difficult for all employees. The job's physical nature is self-selecting, plus most positions are seasonal, based in remote locations, and require long stints away and out of cell reception—all of which double as risk factors for harassment and assault.

Simply injecting women into the workforce isn't effective. Armed forces in Canada, Norway and Australia have used the critical mass approach to gender integration, a social theory suggesting that 15 to 30 percent of a minority is necessary for that group to succeed. But fire leaders still remember the 1981 settlement to a class action lawsuit that forced the Forest Service in California to match the civilian workforce's gender ratio, at 43 percent women. To fulfill the consent decree, as it's still known, women were sometimes promoted over more qualified men, leading to resentment, attrition and degradation of institutional knowledge.

That resentment still lingers. "I was told three years ago during a friendly conversation with a male coworker that I was only hired because I was female," wrote Lorena Williams in a High Country News opinion piece published in April 2018. "Women are often seen as intruders, as tokens who were only hired to meet some kind of quota. We are treated as pariahs in our professional fields, regarded as little more than sexual-harassment cases waiting to happen."

Even so, she wrote, firefighting culture is not inherently hostile. "For every coworker that has excluded me from the 'boys' club,' 10 others have made me feel welcome and safe in a professional work environment."

Like Williams, the women I interviewed for this story said their experiences on the fire line were generally positive. They spoke highly of male coworkers and friends, and of the work itself. But at some point, almost all commented on the gender-related conflict they put up with to succeed.

"On one side of the fence, this job is so cool," said Lacey England, a former firefighter with the Gallatin helicopter rappel crew in Montana. "I get to go places, work really hard, be outside, work with good people. But on the other side of the fence is my daily environment. This culture I'm working with wears me down a little bit more every day. ... That's why women leave. It's just not worth it."

Sixteen firefighters attended the Women and Leadership conference at Boise State University in September 2016. Afterward, they were supposed to brief fire leadership on what they learned. Instead, half of them recounted the discrimination and harassment they'd experienced on the job. Some of them cried. Jolie Pollet, then second in command of the BLM fire program, still calls it the "gut punch session."

"Here I was—a woman—I can't just say, 'Thanks for your time. Have a good year,'" Pollet said.

So, Pollet and Hedrick, head of BLM fire at the time, hired the diversity and inclusion task force. The assignment: Identify core challenges in the agency's fire program. With 29 years of fire line experience between them, the three women on the task force devised a plan that included the lowest ranking firefighters and went up the chain of command. They drove to five Western states over three months in early 2017, meeting with more than 150 employees to gather information on workplace culture. Early on, at a district in Utah, they asked a group of mostly men about family-life balance and the lack of female firefighters, but the conversation stalled. So, they switched tacks. "How is it for you, having a family?" they asked. "What do you struggle with?"

"You could see the looks on their faces," said Tiffany Fralie, a member of the task force. "We heard, 'I don't have a relationship with my kids,' and, 'I'm divorced now because I'm never home.'"

After airing their own frustrations, many men relaxed enough to discuss women on the fire line, and harassment. Female firefighters, however, rarely opened up. In one instance, a woman pulled them aside afterward. "I couldn't speak up," she said. "I have to work with these people."

That May, 100 BLM leaders met in the conference room at the Red Lion Hotel in Boise, Idaho, to learn about the initiative. They talked about how strength and toughness were often valued in hiring and promotion, above communication and emotional intelligence. They brainstormed ways to improve work-life balance for firefighters. And they discussed how those with families needed more support—especially women, who are often pushed out of the career during or after pregnancy.

After the two-day training session, reactions were mixed. "One of the comments was, 'I thought this stuff ended in the '70s,'" said task force member Jamie Strelnik.

When the assignment ended soon after, that summer's massive fire season was already ramping up. Ten million acres burned nationwide, 153 percent of the 10-year average. The team figured the project was over, but a handful of participants from the training ran with it. Some started mentorship programs at home. One male supervisor helped a female engine boss return to the work after having a baby.

SUCCESS WILL REQUIRE BUY-IN from leaders at all levels, and those people have limited resources and competing needs—like putting out fires. Other challenges include the inherent elitism of a life-and-death job, the current political climate, and the fear of speaking out.

"You don't want to be labeled as that person," said Fralie, who experienced harassment while working on an engine crew years ago. Coworkers would ask what she thought of women in porn magazines, and made explicit comments directed at her about the size of their genitalia, but she didn't recognize it as harassment because she was so assimilated to the culture. Now the acting center manager of a fire dispatch center in New Mexico, Fralie says reporting a transgression would still be hard.

"It hurts you professionally and in your personal life, because most of the people you work with are your friends," she said. "It's not a culture where we're free to talk about things or call people out."

The two firefighters on the second BLM diversity and inclusion task force are now bucking that trend, both personally and professionally.

In February 2018, Strelnik went public about the repeated sexual harassment and retaliation she experienced over her 17-year Forest Service firefighting career, a #MeToo moment she says was made possible by the catharsis of working on the initiative. Amos Lee, a supervisory engine module leader at BLM's Boise District, isn't ashamed to say he wants to spend time with his family instead of being gone for six to nine months each year. Many firefighters do, he says.

This time the assignment is focused on implementation. The project list includes providing family housing and childcare facilities for employees in rural areas; re-evaluating physical testing requirements; and supporting independent, state-level education and mentorship programs. One of their top recommendations is hiring a permanent diversity and inclusion employee, a position BLM fire leadership is now in the process of creating.

Because the task force is based at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, which houses all federal wildland firefighting entities, their work has the potential to influence fire culture across the board. And the Forest Service is following suit. Interim chief Vicki Christiansen rolled out an action plan that has included listening sessions with all 30,000 employees, establishing a support structure for victims, and chartering an employee advisory board to gather ideas and solutions for improving the work environment.

For fire to occur, you need fuel, oxygen and a heat source. Diversity won't change that, but it can change how we interact with fire.

In the dry heat of August 2001, Sara Brown flew into a small, backcountry blaze in Zion National Park with another female firefighter. As the helicopter pilot circled the landing zone, a quarter-acre fire smoldered around a single, tall ponderosa pine. On the ground, alone, they saw no flames or smoke coming from the tree. Brown's partner suggested they cut it down in case there was a fire at the top. This is how firefighters have done things for a century, and how they are trained today. But Brown, who had more experience, took a step back.

"It was a big, beautiful, living tree," she wrote later. "If it wasn't obviously burning, why cut it?"

They put out the ground fire, camped under the stars, and found not a sign of smoke in the morning. As they hiked away, Brown looked back at the plateau and saw the lone tree on the horizon. She knew they'd made the right choice.

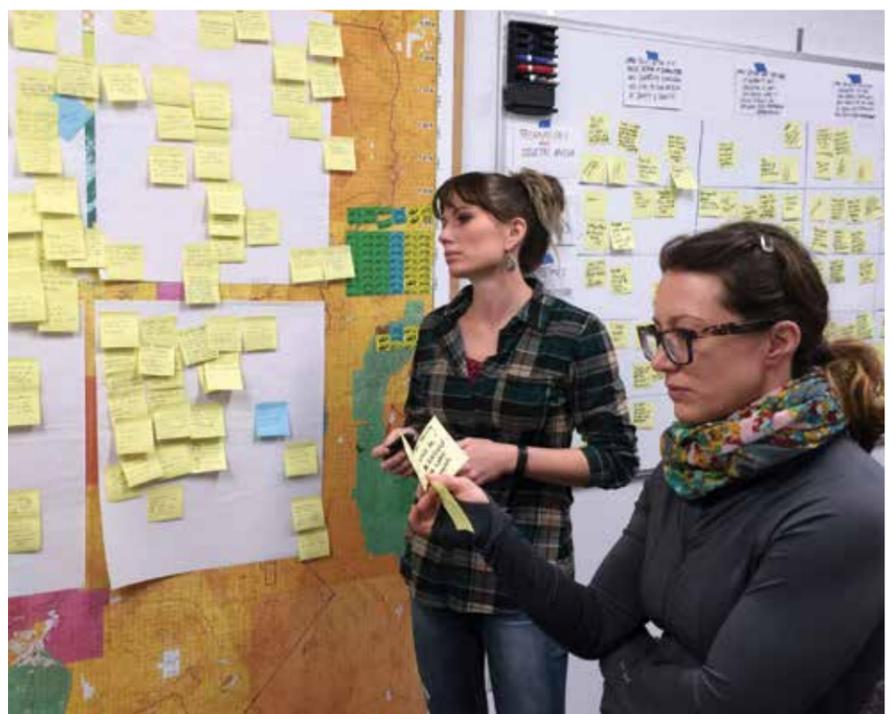
Now a Ph.D. fire ecologist studying the intersection of social pressures and fire science, Brown says we have built ourselves into a dangerous, expensive, ecologically unsound realm, in terms of fuels and our perceived control of fire. "We are quickly realizing that we probably never had control, and we certainly aren't going to have control in the future."

Brown says the change that's needed—allowing more fires to burn, and increasing use of prescribed fire—will require altering the political landscape and public perception, as well as a major perspective shift for fire managers.

"Hopefully that shift in the relationship to fire will allow a more diverse view to truly be at the table," she said. "I think women have a strong role in making that shift."

A version of this story originally appeared in the summer 2018 issue of the Mountain Outlaw magazine.

This story was supported by a grant from the Solutions Journalism Network, a nonprofit dedicated to rigorous and compelling reporting about responses to social problems.



Above: Tiffany Fralie and Jamie Strelnik in Carson City, Nevada, analyze ideas after meeting with firefighters across the state.

How Big Sky's performing arts center responds to new barriers

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – The most unsettling thing about producing virtual shows, according to Warren Miller Performing Arts Center Executive Director John Zirkle, is ending them. After a theater performance, you usually applaud, look around at your friends, family and neighbors, and filter into the lobby to grab a nightcap and revel in the energy of the evening. After a Zoom performance, Zirkle ends the meeting, the screen goes dark and there is silence.

This disconnect is the price being paid in order to do the very opposite—keep people connected during a time where theaters are forced to darken their stages and postpone and cancel performances. WMPAC The Performing Arts Center, an artistic staple of the Big Sky community since it opened its doors in 2013, is grappling with adapting their marquee in an industry that usually thrives on bringing people together.

Zirkle, who is familiar with remote communication from working with artists and industry leaders around the country, reached out to friends and colleagues to see if they might be interested in his proposed adaptations. He cited his frustration toward the barrage of contrived corporate sympathy emails that went out after the pandemic began, feeling that they did nothing to alleviate the issues people were facing. Instead, fueled by positive responses in the community, he devised a plan.

Despite the novel challenges brought about by the pandemic, the theater is adapting and has presented a handful of successful Zoom shows so far, including a poetry reading with Billy Collins, which gathered 250 people virtually, and a performance by the Portland Cello Project, which brought in over 500 viewers from all over the country.

“We check in with people by presenting engaging, artistic content,” Zirkle said. “Rather than asking how people were doing, we said ‘Here is what we do. If you’d like to engage, here’s how.’”

The positive feedback has kept him and WMPAC’s communications manager Rikka Wommack going. After each show, attendees are encouraged to leave a token of their thoughts through a feedback form on WMPAC’s website, and the outpouring of support has been phenomenal.

“I’m a critical care nurse, so this pandemic is technically what I signed up for years ago,” said one commenter. “But it’s the selflessness of artists who share their talents in an effort to buoy humanity that makes me tear up lately. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

It was clear to Wommack that a 45-minute break from the world is a welcome break for many. Zirkle referenced a recent article about musicians performing over the phone for patients in Intensive Care Units across the country, providing perhaps what is most needed these days: comfort.

“Now that we’re in a world that exists in a binary of essential and nonessential workers,” said Zirkle, “we have to ask ourselves, in our own lives ‘Are the arts and the release from tragedy and crisis essential to me?’”

Art, said Zirkle, is not necessary for immediate survival. Not up against food, water and shelter, at least.

“As far as I’m concerned you can accomplish those things without art,” Zirkle said. “You can’t eat paint and [art] is hard to sell right now. But as someone who works in the arts, I need a purpose.”

Zirkle recently worked with a group of ninth through 12th graders to stitch together, from individual Zoom clips, a rendition of “Sing” by the a cappella group Pentatonix, which he describes as “pushing the extremes of what virtual technology will allow us.” WMPAC is continuing their virtual performances as well: Saturday, May 9 they hosted a pop musical based on the true story of America’s first Congresswoman, Montana’s Jeannette Rankin and Saturday, May 16, they are broadcasting local high schooler Emma Flach’s senior recital, ensuring that she gets the opportunity to perform for her community.

He likens their virtual shows to parlor concerts, when people would attend intimate piano concerts in the musician’s or a host’s home. This negates the need for a venue, something Zirkle does struggle to accept. According to Zirkle, venues are what make these artistic experiences personal, and people care more about what’s happening in their immediate community, an element the virtual world removes.

“This is just a room,” he said in a Zoom interview with EBS on May 6 from the theater itself, gesturing to the empty rows of seats behind him. “It’s the people in it that makes it special.”



In a photo from 2018, the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center stands empty, much as it does today while theaters remain closed due to their nonessential nature. PHOTO COURTESY OF WMPAC

Kira Fercho brings bold strokes to Montana's landscape

BY MIRA BRODY

Kira Fercho knew from age two that she wanted to be a professional painter. She also knew it wouldn't be the easiest career to pursue, but at 40, she has one of the few artist-owned and run galleries in the area. She doesn't produce prints, so each is unique, specializing in Western Tonalism and Russian Impressionism, creating bold color families,



Kira Fercho is a modern impressionistic oil painter who has training in Russian Impressionism and Western Tonalism. PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRA FERCHO

neutrals and sometimes layering many glazes on top of each other. While most artists in the oil paint medium stick to the one or two different styles, Fercho paints fluently in seven or eight.

"It's kind of like speaking seven or eight different languages," Fercho said. "I have a handwriting and people recognize that as my handwriting. I'm very intentional with every single brush stroke—even soft colors are laid in there with heavy intention."

She attributes a lot of her style choices to Loren Entz, known as a "cowboy artist," and one of the best portrait artists in the world. Fercho's formal education is from Montana State University, Billings, and Scottsdale Artists' School and she worked as a licensed therapist for many years before turning to painting full time. Putting herself through school as a single parent in her 20s and climbing in her successful career as a therapist, Fercho realized at age 31 if she didn't make the leap, she never would.

"I couldn't keep up with everything," she said. "I had to make the hard decision to give up the job that I had worked so hard for. It was a huge risk and I've been really lucky that it's worked out so well."

Montana born and raised, Fercho paints what she knows—Montana's scenery, people, animals and the culture of the west. She describes her work as an "homage" to what she loves rather than an escape.

When asked when she finds herself most inspired: "Every second of every day," she laughs. "I always say I'd be the worst person to commit a crime in front of because everything I see, I could draw exactly. Painting for me, it's like catching a waterfall in a teacup—I can't get it out of me fast enough."

Fercho is supportive of the community that inspires her. She donates her work to every nonprofit she can, calling them "the foundation of our community—if you're ever in a position in life where you can give something to make society better, I think you should. It rewards you."

Of her process, Fercho said she sometimes cringes at pieces she did years ago, but said it is a reminder of growth. "I'm excited to see what I'll be able to paint when I'm 90. It's just part of learning and getting better," she said.

Although a self-proclaimed workaholic, Fercho says it is her husband who grounds her and reminds her to slow down. Together, they raise Fercho's 19-year-old daughter, their 4-year-old daughter, and his two sons from a previous marriage. They live in Billings during the school year where he teaches, and come to Big Sky during the summers to run her studio.

"I turned 40 this year and was trying to think back at the last 10 years and pick out the things that were the best moments. They were little things like packing lunch for my daughter or going on a picnic," she said, noting that those are really the moments in life that matter.

Fercho enjoys doing custom commission work with clients to fill their home or office with something unique and beautiful, sometimes traveling to Scottsdale, Arizona or Jackson, Wyoming to collaborate.

"I enjoy using their energy that would otherwise be beyond something I probably would have done myself," she said. "People have unique ideas and visions for things."

Fercho prides herself on maintaining a welcoming, clean and friendly environment and notes that even during a pandemic, a gallery is one of the safest places you can still enjoy some normalcy because you can't touch anything. Her Big Sky Gallery in Town Center opens for the summer on June 20, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.



FerchoProtector Fercho's Big Sky Gallery in Town Center will be opening for the summer season on June 10. PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRA FERCHO

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BIG SKY EVENTS CALENDAR

Friday, May 22 – Thursday, June 4

If your event falls between June 5 and June 18, please submit it by May 27 by emailing media@outlaw.partners

Friday, May 22

Dance Party with Camp Big Sky
email: camp@bscomt.org, 4 p.m.



Kevin Fabozzi and Tom Murphy perform live for Friday Afternoon Club fans on Friday, May 8.
PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

Friday Afternoon Club
EBS Facebook, 5 p.m.
Good news—the Friday Afternoon Club is continuing through summer! As the weather warms up, we will be moving from our virtual stage and out into the sunshine, location TBD. For now, grab your favorite beverage every Friday at 5 p.m., a couple family members and tune into Explore Big Sky’s Facebook

Live for a variety of local bands and a new weekly cheers sponsor. Special thanks to our hosting sponsors who have helped make this event possible: Big Sky Town Center, Visit Big Sky and Arts Council of Big Sky.

Monday, May 25

Virtual Preschool Science Series
Montana Science Center Facebook, 10:30 a.m.

Moving Mountains Live Virtual Workout
Join: <https://zoom.us/j/156227497>, 12 p.m.

Great Big Sky Baking Show
Virtual Kitchen Facebook, 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 26

Moving Mountains Live Virtual Workout
Join: <https://zoom.us/j/156227497>, 9 a.m.

Middle & High School Tutoring for Spanish Speaking Students
Join: meet.google.com Meeting code: [tutoriaELL](https://meet.google.com/tutoriaELL), 3 p.m.

Big Sky Virtual Kitchen
Virtual Kitchen Facebook, 5 p.m.

Wednesday, May 27

Arts Council of Big Sky’s Art to-go
Available with school lunch pick up, 11 a.m.

Youth ELL tutoring with Discovery Academy
Join: meet.google.com meeting code: [youthELL](https://meet.google.com/youthELL), 2 p.m.

Middle & High School Tutoring for Spanish Speaking Students
Join: meet.google.com Meeting code: [tutoriaELL](https://meet.google.com/tutoriaELL), 3 p.m.

Arts & Crafts with Camp Big Sky
email: camp@bscomt.org, 4 p.m.

Thursday, May 28

Youth ELL tutoring with Discovery Academy
Join: meet.google.com meeting code: [youthELL](https://meet.google.com/youthELL), 2 p.m.

Friday, May 29

Dance Party with Camp Big Sky
email: camp@bscomt.org, 4 p.m.

Friday Afternoon Club
EBS Facebook, 5 p.m.

Saturday, May 30

DIRT VERT HURT virtual Trail Running Series
Bozeman Running Company Facebook, 11 a.m.

Monday, June 1

Virtual Preschool Science Series
Montana Science Center Facebook, 10:30 a.m.

Big Sky Virtual Town Hall
EBS Facebook, 5 p.m.



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SECTION 3:
BUSINESS, HEALTH,
SPORTS & FUN



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PENDLETON
pg. 39 PBR continues return to Competition



pg. 42. Absolute best cinnamon rolls



Making it in Big Sky: OZssage Therapeutic Spa

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY – OZssage Therapeutic Spa hopped into the Big Sky business scene back in 2001. Today, owner Jacquie Rager and her team are still going strong, even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions.

OZssage has made some adjustments to their already extensive cleaning practices by replacing all linens, swapping out face cradles from massage tables and cleaning restrooms after every client, even eliminating an entire massage room and the steam room from their offerings to help limit occupancy and maintain the rigorous cleaning schedule.

OZssage reopened for business on April 28 following a nearly six-week closure. The spa was progressive in their closing procedure, implementing a three-week phase out of services. They began by limiting their offerings to only returning clients, followed by a reduction in staff before ultimately closing up shop.

Rager said that in 20 years of business she has never succumbed to a sickness that forced her absence from work, adding that the spa lends itself well to cleaning and sanitization practices.

Explore Big Sky: *How has your daily work routine been impacted by COVID-19?*

Jacquie Rager: The spa has always been in compliance with OSHA rules [and] Montana state sanitation, so as far as having hospital-grade disinfectants, you know as far as wiping benches down, doing all that sort of stuff in between clients, I mean we're pretty familiar with it and we do it... The biggest thing is that our private steam room is not in operation for clients at the moment.

EBS: *Shoulder season fluctuations aside, how do you believe the virus will continue to affect your businesses?*

J.R.: I've been in business for 20 years. I've built this business from one room to the spa that we have now and I have a really good return clientele and I've had great employees over the years... I'm still expecting, for this summer, that I will have more clients wanting to get in than I will have staff.

EBS: *How quickly do you run through cleaning supplies?*

J.R.: I actually have plenty of wipes, I have plenty of cleaner, I have hand sanitation; I mean we have it all. Actually, I've been helping people get some, like ordering it for them.

EBS: *What is the most challenging piece of equipment to clean within the spa?*

J.R.: It would be the steam room, but we've taken that out of operation due to COVID-19. It will remain out of operation until we have a better understanding and government direction on it.

EBS: *Are you receiving an influx of bookings as life slowly returns to normal?*

J.R.: Yes, it is slowly picking up and we're hoping to release some preseason specials soon.

EBS: *Have the stresses of the pandemic inspired a trend in a certain treatment option?*

J.R.: In actuality reflection of that, there's some clients that have been coming in that normally don't have time or their schedules don't work with what we have open for availability, so we're seeing more of those people regularly because there's more flexibility in their time and our time.

EBS: *What did you miss most about the spa during its closure?*

J.R.: I did enjoy coming back and working with my clients, you know because I have a lot of weekly clients so there's a relationship there with the clients. It's more than just working with them so, [in] that regard, you know I'm seeing the girls again, so it's been great. But I can't say that I did not enjoy being told that I was not allowed to work for four weeks.

EBS: *What is your favorite part of every workday?*

J.R.: Definitely doing the actual massage, like helping clients and... in the offseason I got to study more—stuff that I couldn't get to during season—so definitely you know getting back into books and now getting back into the day where you can actually implement that and make a difference.

EBS: *What's the best business advice you've ever received?*

J.R.: Look at the big picture, but it's really about looking at the big picture so that you can expand and bend with what's going on in your own life and what's happening in your employees' lives and client's lives and business life. Be able to adapt. Not just pivot: adapt.



OZssage reopened for business April 28. The spa intensified their previously extensive cleaning practices and is asking all employees and patrons to wear masks. PHOTO COURTESY OF JACQUIE RAGE

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Enjoying the Ride: Times like these...

BY SCOTT BROWN
EBS CONTRIBUTOR



These truly are unprecedented times. It's hard to grasp the magnitude and how rapidly life has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tens of thousands of Americans have died and fallen ill, while there are nearly 30 million American's unemployed and the unemployment rate is approximately 15 percent. That rate is the highest since The Great Depression and a full 11 percent higher than just three months ago when we stood at roughly 3.5 percent unemployment.

So-called "social distancing" is the standard in every aspect of our lives and there remains considerable uncertainty and debate surrounding the path/life of the virus and what acceptable new norms of society will look like as well as how long they will persist.

Despite these harsh realities, I am reminded of lyrics to one of my favorite Foo Fighters songs "It's times like these we learn to live again." States are slowly starting to "reopen for business." Global quarantines both self-imposed and mandated are being lifted. Apple and other "Big Data" companies are seeing clear signs that our fellow citizens are on the move; returning to work, stores, parks etc.

As a certified financial planner, I am also reminded, for many of us this is a good time to build a budget or revisit our household budgets. I believe this to be true whether you are currently unemployed, retired or simply worried about your employment status and the overall state of the economy. It's also true for small business owners who are concerned about their declining revenue or even the long-term viability of their business.

Budgets are the cornerstone to any long-term financial plan. In fact, budgets are one of the keys to most individuals and households financial success. They are essentially

a spending plan that can not only help you identify poor spending habits but can also be the foundation for reaching your long-term life goals.

Starting a budget is fairly simple. In fact, it's not much different than the planning involved when you are preparing to take an epic ski trip, golf trip or backpacking trip with your buddies. You begin by writing down your total income from all sources. Next, list all of your expenses and attempt to subtract to zero. It is easier to start with a monthly budget and then annualize your budget as you begin to see things more clearly. Annual budgets are extremely important for individuals or households where one or more earners have irregular incomes. This would include those working on commissions or tips, in retail hourly shift work or small business owners to name a few.

Expenses include your fixed expenses like food (beer money), rent/mortgage, car payments, utilities etc. or you can consider these your bare necessities or must haves. Variable expenses are things that are important to you and those you love and generally make your lives more enjoyable. These could include, hobbies, dining out, travel, and even gifting. I can hear Dave Grohl again "It's times like these to give and give again."

Finally, it is important to try to budget for savings. Savings are what will drive your version of the "American Dream." This of course differs for everyone, but for most this would include marriage, home ownership, a new car, sending your kids to college, a once in a lifetime trip with your loved ones and hopefully retirement. Once you have created your budget you will have your own formula for financial accountability, transparency and most importantly success!

I hope you found this helpful reminder to be valuable and that you and your loved ones continue to be resilient and stay well during these difficult times. Remember, before you embark on your next life adventure, set your sites on your goals and keep enjoying the ride!

Scott L. Brown is the Cofounder and managing principal of Shore to Summit Wealth Management. His wealth management career spans more than 25 years and he currently works and lives in Bozeman with his wife and two sons.

Gyms, theaters, museums get the green light

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – For many—particularly during Montana’s shoulder season—gyms are a place to gather with your tribe and blow off steam in the seemingly endless interim between powder season and trail season. As the second wave of businesses open under Gov. Steve Bullock’s revisions to Phase 1, which include gyms, museums and movie theaters, getting in shape for the summer may look differently.

“We’re definitely excited to open,” said Jenna Merritt, Lone Peak Performance’s patient coordinator. “We were keeping pretty good contact with our clients during the shutdown by social distancing outdoors with personal training, it’s just not the same as being back in the gym again.”

Restrictions at gyms include operating at half capacity with strict sanitization and physical distancing requirements and closing off sitting areas such as lobbies. Personal training sessions may be offered with strict adherence to physical distancing guidelines and trainers and trainees are encouraged to wear masks. Indoor group classes, including yoga and pilates classes, are not yet allowed under this amendment,

On Friday, Lone Peak Performance opened their facility to those with scheduled personal training sessions and have plans to open the gym to members in the coming weeks. The Big Sky gym is requiring everyone to answer a questionnaire upon entry that asks about health, recent travel and social activities. Ridge Athletic Clubs in Bozeman, have even hired a “health guard” who will be charged with assisting club members in maintaining social distancing in locker rooms and sanitizing equipment throughout the day.

Despite multiple revisions of Gov. Bullock’s phased reopening plan, and communications to their members with varying dates as we all reacted to changes to the stay-at-home order, most gym owners are not only happy to be open, but are aware of the reason for the caution and devoted to the safety of their customers.

“I’m excited to be able to open our doors when we can actually hold classes that are more conducive to the students being there rather than being in this fearful state,” said Callie Stolz, owner of Santosha Wellness Center in Big Sky. She has been offering essential services, such as acupuncture and ayurvedic medicine throughout the pandemic, and reopened for massage, private yoga, far-infrared sauna and BEMER sessions this week.

Theaters and museums are adapting and preparing for reopening as well. At a health board meeting on May 13, Health Officer Matt Kelley noted that one reason movie theaters were included in this amendment is because patrons’ movement is limited—they queue for tickets and remain seated for the duration of the movie. Theaters can then be easily sanitized between shows.

Restrictions for theaters include increasing time between events to allow for thorough cleaning, operating at half capacity, groups not related or living together to sit at least six feet apart and employing ushers to monitor and enforce physical distancing. This reopening applies only to movie theaters and excludes live events such as live theater or music shows, which are not expected to be permitted until Phase 3.

Alicia Harvey, Museum of the Rockies director of marketing said the museum is planning to open to the public on Wednesday, June 3. They are also planning some time for museum members to visit May 28 through May 31 and will release further details regarding hours and new visitation policies in the coming weeks.

“This is all imperfect because we’ve never done this before,” said Kelley at the health board meeting, in which the board voted to work in harmony with Gov. Bullock’s phase amendments. He mentioned he cannot yet make decisions about large summer events but said he does not believe we’ll move into Phase 3 anytime soon. “I think the elected officials are just trying to make the best decision to find that balance. It can’t be all about public health and it can’t be all about the economy, so we’re just trying to do our best.”



The Santosha Center in Big Sky Town Center was open for essential services during the stay-at-home order and recently opened their doors to individual classes during Gov. Steve Bullock’s Phase 1 reopening amendments. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

Life 101

Life 101: COPING WITH FOGO – FEAR OF GOING OUT



BY LINDA ARNOLD
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

While you may be familiar with FOMO – Fear of Missing Out – a new phenomenon is now sweeping our country. FOGO – Fear of Going Out – is appearing, as businesses and establishments start to open up.

After being in COVID-19 quarantine for nearly two months, some folks will be emerging more cautiously. On the flipside, there are those who are chomping at the bit to get back into circulation. And those caught somewhere in the middle.

Getting our economy going again – and getting people back to work – is a priority. And so are the public health issues. Too bad there’s not an owner’s manual!

Baby Steps

FOGO is the inversion of FOMO, explains author Mark Manson. Those with FOMO have anxiety they may be missing out on something by staying in, while those with FOGO fear they may compromise their health by going out – at least temporarily.

When the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths consistently decrease, as we all eagerly anticipate, confidence will be built back. We’ve adapted our business meetings – and even family/friend gatherings – to ZOOM, Skype and FaceTime. Now, we’re able to tiptoe back out.

I’m just wondering how lingering doubts – and the habits we’ve formed during quarantine – will affect our judgment. There are those who say it’s too soon to reopen. And others who say we can’t stand the rising unemployment numbers – 36.5 million Americans at this writing. Levels not seen since the Great Depression are quite sobering. It may take a while, though, to ramp up our collective confidence – and achieve this tricky balancing act.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

On the social front, folks may weigh risks and benefits more closely. Will those birthday parties continue as “drive by” parades? I’ve actually found those quite endearing. Then again, we’re social animals. And there are definitely qualities that are lost in translation when we’re unable to connect directly.

You may find yourself on edge. Events and travel, for instance, come with lots of question marks. The Big Sky PBR has been voted “Event of the Year” by PBR bull riders for seven consecutive years (2013-2019). Will we get the chance to get an eighth this summer?

Trends

It’s a little early to see what new trends could emerge from this pandemic. Will companies opt for continued remote working and fewer buildings? Large venue events may reconfigure their delivery methods. I’ve actually enjoyed tapping into some of the virtual concerts. There’s something quite humbling about seeing Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Keith Urban and Adele in their basements!

With predictions of future rounds of COVID-19 – perhaps with mutations – we’ll continue taking things a day and a week at a time. Especially since a vaccine and treatment options are down the road.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

I’m holding the vision we’ll emerge with more gratitude when our freedoms are restored. And more compassion. Like the sentiment of thanking military men and women for their service, it looks like a greater respect is being developed for those who have kept things going for us. You may be taking the opportunity – as I am – to thank this new class of heroes for their service.

We’ve all been affected by this great equalizer. As we emerge, let’s take our collective experience out into the world – and not forget its lessons.

Linda Arnold is a syndicated columnist, psychological counselor and Founder of a multistate marketing company. Reader comments are welcome at linda@lindaarnold.org or visit www.lindaarnold.org for more information on her books.

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Golf Tips from a Pro:

BY MARK WEHRMAN
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Welcome back golfers!

Big Sky Resort Golf Course opened May 22nd for the 2020 golfing season. This year will obviously be different than past years in many ways. One thing is for certain, golf is going to be one of the few things that can be counted on as a safe and healthy activity for all ages.

There are certain things that come to my mind right away when thinking about the positive aspects the game of golf provides. Golf is one of the few activities or sports that can be played while still maintaining social distancing. Golfers get to be outside, getting exercise while practicing a safe social distance. Golf, not being a team sport, doesn't require a group of people congregating in close quarters. With the ability to book tee times, purchase season passes, and even sign up for golf clinics online, we can minimize the risk of customer-employee interaction if that is the intention of our golfing guest. We, of course, want to see as much of the golfers as we can and are hoping to interact with all in a safe manner.

We have made many changes in our day-to-day operations to also minimize certain risks. Most changes are temporary. Foam will be put in the bottom of the cup. Please do not touch or remove the flagstick. No bunker rakes, benches, bathrooms, and ball washers on-course. No water coolers will be available. We do plan to provide on-course F&B delivery along with having a beverage station available on the course. No trash cans will be available. Please pack your trash with you. Golf carts will be cleaned and sanitized before and after each use. More space will be provided on the practice range. Club washing buckets will be provided but no chairs, trash cans, or sand and seed buckets will be set up.

I know this all sounds like a lot, but these are recommended guidelines that all golf courses are following to reduce the risk of people touching the same equipment and areas. As I said most of this is temporary and with good fortune, we will be at phase 3 and back to normal sooner than later. Also, I truly

feel that once you get to Big Sky Resort Golf Course things will not seem that out of the ordinary. By the time or season really ramps up in July we are hoping to plan for a full tournament schedule with a few changes to logistics, etc.

I, myself, plan on taking advantage of the social distancing by doing more walking and less riding. We will, however, be leaving the cart riding decision up to our golfing consumer. Meaning if both players are comfortable riding in the same cart they are allowed. Those that are not comfortable we will be accommodating as possible in getting you your own cart, inventory dependent, of course. Having said all of that I want to welcome you all back for another great summer of golf and wish you nothing but long, straight shots and lots of one putts!

Mark Wehrman is the Head Golf Professional at the Big Sky Resort Golf Course and has been awarded the PGA Horton Smith Award recognizing PGA Professionals who are model educators of PGA Golf Professionals.



Mark Wehrman (left), accompanied by Dr. Gary Wren (right), a PGA Master Professional and Hall of Fame member. PHOTO COURTESY OF VAUGHN JENKINS, PGA

CONSTRUCTION ON THE BIG SKY BRIDGE DECKS PROJECT BEGINS AFTER MEMORIAL DAY.

**BIG SKY
BRIDGE DECKS**

PROJECT KEY

- 1. Little Coyote Road Bridge
- 2. Lone Mountain Trail Bridge
- 3. Highway 191 Bridge

WHO	WHAT	WHERE
The Montana Department of Transportation.	Replacing or repairing 3 bridge decks in Big Sky. Bridge decks are the surface vehicles drive on.	1. On MT 64, near Little Coyote Road. 2. On MT 64, near US 191. 3. On US 191, 2 miles north of MT 64.
<h3>WHEN</h3> May 26 (approximate) – November 2020.	<h3>HOW</h3> Single-lane closures 24/7. Work first occurring on MT 64 bridges, then moving to US 191 bridge in fall.	
<h3>WHY</h3> The bridge decks have deteriorated and can no longer be patched.		

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- PROJECT HOTLINE:** 406-207-4484, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
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PBR continues return to competition

BY BRANDON WALKER

Divino seizes final PBR event victory in Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA – The Professional Bull Riders tour held its final event at the Lazy E arena in Guthrie, Oklahoma, May 16-17, with Lucas Divino besting the competition in a highly-competitive final round. Divino beat out Alex Cerqueira by less than three event aggregate points to claim the victory.



Jose Vitor Leme squaring off with Sambuca. Leme completed the ride and earned a score of 87.25. PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDY WATSON, BULL STOCK MEDIA

Both Divino and Cerqueira completed all three of their rides over the course of the weekend; the duo were the only competitors to do so. Divino captured the victory, following a seventh place finish the previous weekend, by scoring 257.25 aggregate points as opposed to Cerqueira's 254.75.

Cerqueira shared the highest scoring ride honors from the weekend's competition with North Dakota native, Stetson Lawrence, with both riders cashing in rides of 91.25 in the championship round. Lawrence continued a streak of strong showings placing third after coming in fourth the weekend prior, with an aggregate score of 179.25.

35 competitors hopped onto the back of a bull in PBR's third event since its return from the COVID-19 shutdown. Divino earned \$18,250 for his performance with Cerqueira and Lawrence raking in \$14,625 and \$12,125, respectively.

"PBR's three weekends of closed events at the Lazy E Arena went about as smoothly as we could have ever imagined in an unimaginable situation," said PBR Commissioner Sean Gleason. "We got people in and out safely, culminating with a very exciting broadcast on CBS to finish the first half of the Unleash The Beast schedule. I want to thank the riders, stock contractors and crew who put their faith and personal discipline into a process that is showing the entire country how we can get back to work again."

PBR will next host events in Las Vegas for the majority of June with no spectators in attendance, but the sport continues to pioneer strategies for returning to competition, announcing they will welcome fans on July 10-12 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Leme captures PBR Cooper Tires Invitational victory

OKLAHOMA – In the second installment of professional bull riding's return from the COVID-19 suspension of competition, the top ranked PBR rider in the world, Jose Vitor Leme, captured the commanding victory after completing all three of his rides on the weekend of May 9-10.

Taking place at the same arena in Guthrie, Oklahoma as the PBR competition on April 25-26, Leme finished with an event aggregate score of 261.50 to outlast his competition. He was followed by Cody Teel's score of 176, while reigning PBR Rookie of the Year, Dalton Kasel, finished just behind Teel at 175.75. Kasel boasted the highest-scoring ride from the competition, coming away with a 90.75 for his efforts on "Soup in a Group".

"It's nice to finally be back and see some of my friends and I'm excited that it's all kicking back off,"

said Kasel, a native of Muleshoe, Texas who reigned victorious at the Big Sky PBR last summer.

PBR amended one safety precaution for the May 9-10 competition by testing riders and staff members for COVID-19 more consistently to avoid possible infection and spread. Kasel remarked that the safety precautions haven't been an obstacle, continuing to say that he and his fellow bull riders would do whatever necessary to ensure they can continue competing.

The arena remained empty as spectators are still not able to attend the events. Kasel described that the camaraderie between the riders has reached a new high as they can hear each other's words of encouragement as they ride, without the lacking, usual crowd noise. "I can hear them yelling and know which one it is, so that's pretty neat," the 21-year-old said.

"These closed events are different, and we definitely miss the fans," said PBR Commissioner Sean Gleason. "The beauty of bull-riding is this is a very exciting, adrenaline-fueled sport whether there's a packed house or not. It did take the cowboys a bit of time to adjust to an arena without fans, but they got their motors running, and we had a great event with some spectacular rides."

Gleason's sentiment for the lack of spectators was one shared by Kasel, who said he imagines he is in the practice ring to help simulate the new environment. "It's a whole lot quieter and I really miss not having fans and being able to interact with fans, so that's been a little strange," he said. "...It kind of wakes everybody else up also, including myself, [to] just how thankful we are for the fans and how blessed we are having them at events."

With the victory, Leme extended his claim on the number one world ranking over Montana bull rider, Jess Lockwood, who is currently recovering from an injury and unable to compete. Jess's brother, Jake Lockwood, placed inside of the top 10, finishing eighth overall for the weekend.



Lucas Divino won the final PBR event in Guthrie, Oklahoma, May 16-17. He completed all three of his rides throughout the competition. PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDY WATSON, BULL STOCK MEDIA

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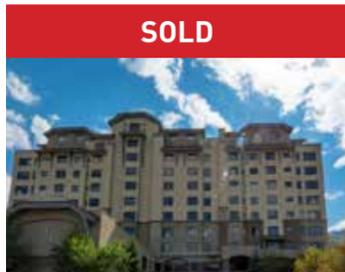


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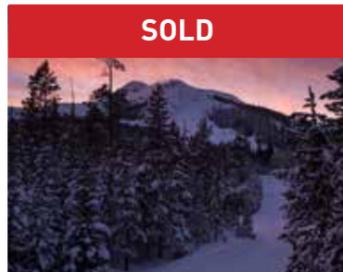
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List Price: \$595K



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1 ACRE / \$595K



Cottonwood Crossing Unit 5
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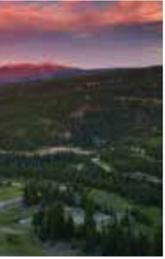


211 B Pheasant Tail
\$692K



80 Aspen Leaf Unit 4
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20 ACRES
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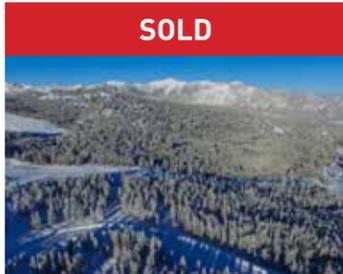


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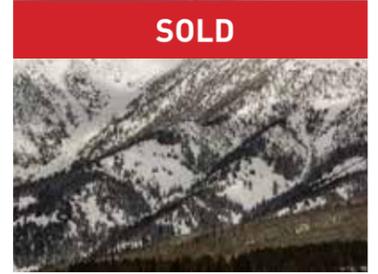
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1.25 ACRE / \$699K



SOLD

412 Enterprise Blvd., Unit 30
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3.14 Acres / \$299K



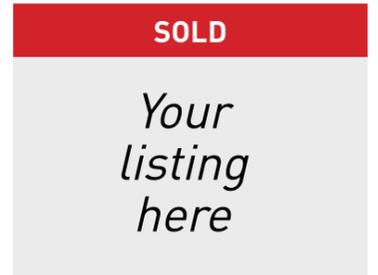
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The Absolute Best Cinnamon Rolls

BY MIRA BRODY



If you've visited the grocery store recently, or ordered groceries for delivery, you're probably aware of the war zone that is the baking aisle. Finding a bag of flour that isn't the size of a small toddler or a single packet of yeast is a pilgrimage to rival the search for the holy grail, proof that people are using their stay-at-home orders to channel their inner Betty Crocker. Baker's yeast is an ingredient that converts sugars into carbon dioxide and ethanol, making the dough light and fluffy and is used in breads and pastries.

The Absolute Best Cinnamon Rolls require baker's yeast, which is what makes them melt in your mouth (the cream cheese helps with this as well). They also require a level of patience. If you have a hankering for

delicious cinnamon and frosting smothered pastries right now, you may want to add that air-compressed roll of Pillsbury brand rolls to your cart instead. If you go the homemade route however, you will not regret it.

Dough Ingredients

- 1 cup warm milk
- 1 tablespoon instant dry yeast
- 2 tablespoons white granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons salted butter softened
- 1 large egg
- 3 cups all-purpose flour

Filling Ingredients

- 1/2 cup salted butter melted
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon

Glaze Ingredients

- 4 ounces cream cheese softened
- 1/4 cup salted butter softened
- 1 to 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 to 2 tablespoons milk

Oven temp: 325 F

Prep time: 3 hours

Cooking time: 15-20 minutes

Instructions—First, the dough.

1. Warm the milk in a small bowl for about a minute in the microwave (you want it to be warm to the touch, but not hot or it will kill the yeast before it has a chance to rise). Add the sugar to the milk, carefully sprinkle the yeast in and let sit for a few minutes. The yeast should start to bubble.
2. Into a large bowl, measure the flour, salt, butter and egg, then slowly pour the milk and yeast mixture on top. Mix on low (or in a Kitchen Aid with dough hook) until combined. Once incorporated, move the dough to a flat, flour-covered surface and knead for a few minutes. The dough should be tacky, but not stick to your hands.
3. You'll want to create a warm, but not hot, environment for your dough to rise. This is where the yeast gets to work, feeding off of the sugars in the dough. I usually preheat the oven to 200 F, then turn it back off. Place the dough into a clean, lightly greased bowl that is big enough for the dough to double in size, cover with a clean towel, and place in the warm, but turned off, oven. Leave it alone to rise for at least an hour.

Now, the filling.

1. In a medium bowl, melt a half-cup of butter, then add the brown sugar and cinnamon and stir until combined.
2. Remove the dough from the oven—it should have doubled in size—and knead a few times on a large flour-covered surface. With a rolling pin, roll out the dough into a large rectangle until it is about 1/4 inch thick (approximately 12 inches by 18 inches) and brush the cinnamon filling evenly on top.
3. Roll the dough lengthwise into a single, cinnamon-stuffed, log and cut into even cinnamon rolls—you should end up with about eight, 1.5-inch rolls.
4. Arrange the rolls in a greased, glass 8-by-8 inch pan and cover with a towel. Let the rolls rise for another half hour. Your patience will pay off soon.

Finally, baking and frosting.

1. Preheat the oven to 325 F. Remove the towel from the rolls and bake for about 15-20 minutes, until the tops are slightly browned.
2. While the cinnamon rolls are baking, make the cream cheese glaze. With a hand mixer, whip together cream cheese and butter in a bowl until light and fluffy. Whip in powdered sugar and vanilla extract. Add milk until you reach the consistency of frosting.
3. Frost and serve rolls warm.

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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.

Wear and tear never looked so good



BY SCOTT MECHURA
EBS FOOD COLUMNIST

It’s a cold and drizzly day as I make my way through the labyrinth of disjointed corridors and dining rooms at Buck’s T-4 Lodge, having been added to and improved upon numerous times over the decades. I’ve been doing this every shoulder season for years.

But this day, my walk is different.

I imagine all the stories friends and families have shared. Ski tumbles, family photos, Yellowstone sights and all those other memories created in our community that make the wall of photos in so many homes when visitors return to wherever came from.

I stop in what we call the Old Dining Room. I see worn wooden corners, foot-traffic patterns in the floor, a scuff on a wall where a chair rubbed for years, and a worn carpet path. The bar has a mountain goat on the wall that’s old enough to have watched Buck and Helen walk these halls. They all remind me of this building’s history and the life it leads.

Or should I say has led.

Though Buck’s stood strong through many ups and downs in its 76 years, this year is going to put it to the test more than any previous challenge. Buck’s is no exception to the sudden halt of commerce that has affected so many. As anxious as many of us are to reopen, it isn’t always as simple as turning on the lights and getting employees and guests in the door overnight.

It’s like a train that runs off the track. All the cars behind it don’t just stop; they crash one by one into the lead vehicle, just like a broken supply chain. And it doesn’t just right itself or sort itself out as quickly as it derailed.

The reason it feels so wrong for us in hospitality is because, rather than isolate, restaurants and bars are where people gather in times like this. Whether it’s 9/11, a Super Bowl or World Series, wars, earthquakes or tornados, we do the same thing. We gather. We talk, we comfort, we heal, and we socialize. Only now, we can’t do the very thing that makes us feel better in monumental times.

How many restaurants and bars are asking themselves if they should change their model, abandoning the very concept that originally set them apart from their competition. Or worse yet, how many are closing permanently?

This idea of allowing restaurants and bars to reopen, but only at 50 percent, is merely postponing the inevitable death many will face. I have written countless columns about the small margins on which our industry operates. To slice that in half is to essentially pound half the nails into their coffin.

There is a chance Buck’s keeps its lights on, its taps flowing and its ovens cranking this summer. And if that happens, those signs of wear and age won’t be repaired. They shouldn’t be. They are reminders of the countless conversations of people sharing together.

There is also a chance it will not.

It’s already happening: Saffron Table, Fire Artisan Pizza, Starky’s and Watanabi in Bozeman, along with 2nd Street Bistro in Livingston, are the current casualties of what some are calling a “war on commerce.” And in some places, owners are taking down tourist dollar bills from walls in nostalgic establishments to give employees who have suddenly found themselves out of work.

More and more, I hear the three most frightening words I’ve heard in a long time: “the new normal.”

Does this mean we’ve seen the end of the most comforting form of social interaction as we knew it? The end of gathering together in our restaurants and bars? If so, there’s absolutely nothing “normal” about that.

They say there’s light at the end of the tunnel. To that I have but one question: Is that light the daylight at the other side of the tunnel, or the headlight of an oncoming train?

Scott Mechura has spent a life in the hospitality industry. He is a former certified beer judge and currently the executive chef at Buck’s T-4 Lodge in Big Sky.



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American Life in Poetry:

Column 777

BY TED KOOSER
U.S. POET LAUREATE

Tolstoy said, "Nothing can make our life, or the lives of other people, more beautiful than perpetual kindness." I found this poem by Dorianne Laux in Poetry of Presence: An Anthology of Mindfulness Poems, published by Grayson Books of West Hartford, CT. The poet, whose most recent book of poetry is Only As The Day Is Long, lives in Maine.

For the Sake of Strangers

No matter what the grief, its weight,
we are obliged to carry it.
We rise and gather momentum, the dull strength
that pushes us through crowds.
And then the young boy gives me directions
so avidly. A woman holds the glass door open,
waiting patiently for my empty body to pass through.
All day it continues, each kindness
reaching toward another—a stranger
singing to no one as I pass on the path, trees
offering their blossoms, a child
who lifts his almond eyes and smiles.
Somehow they always find me, seem even
to be waiting, determined to keep me
from myself, from the thing that calls to me
as it must have once called to them—
this temptation to step off the edge
and fall weightless, away from the world.

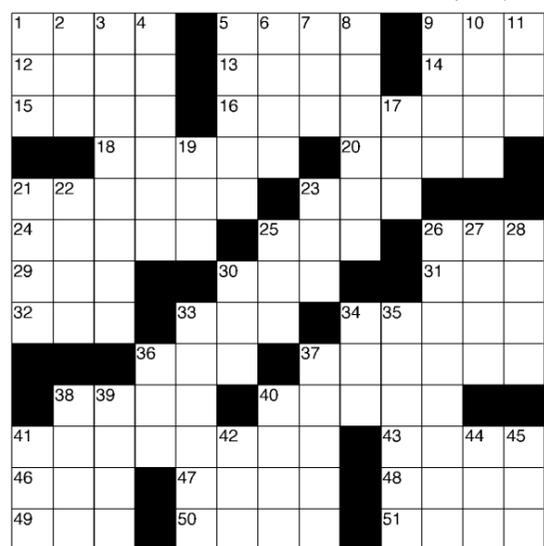
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS
1 Pueblo Indian
5 Electric catfish
9 Cents (abbr.)
12 Cover meat with bacon
13 White matter of the brain
14 Lamprey
15 Migratory worker
16 Caliber
18 Fr. revolutionary
20 Hall (Ger.)
21 Hesitate
23 Against
24 Roof edge
25 Yangtze tributary
26 Alfonso's queen
29 Botanist Gray
30 Flat fish
31 Daughters of the American Revolution (abbr.)
32 Electric reluctance unit
33 Queen of the fairies
34 Beleaguement
36 Underworld
37 Synagogue officer
38 Unruly child
40 Letter of resignation
41 Rap (2 words)
43 S. Afr. language
46 Org. of Amer. States (abbr.)
47 Fugard heroine
48 Virginia willow
49 Automatic data processing (abbr.)
50 Noble (Ger.)
51 Denomination

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE
A A R E D O P A I C C
X C I V A B E T S A I
E A R E D S E A L A B D
D E N E G A M B
T I K I S I E G E
T A V G O O N G L E N
A B E N A D A B L A C
K I N K B I N A A T L
T R E A D N O R M
R E E D G E E Z
S E A R I N G E D B O A
A C T B R E A I O L E
C U E Y E A R A N A T

DOWN
1 Home Box Office (abbr.)
2 Hardwood
3 Old
4 Form thoughts
5 Detection device
6 Dismounted
7 Amer. Basketball Assn. (abbr.)
8 Fruit
9 Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (abbr.)
10 Sesame
11 Single lens reflex (abbr.)
17 Belonging to (suf.)
19 Thing (Lat.)
21 Lacerate
22 Affluence
23 Vehicle compartment
25 Habakkuk (abbr.)
26 Toothless
27 Assam hills
28 Son of Zeus
30 Flounder
33 Speckle
34 "Casablanca" character
35 Eye inflammation
36 But (Sp.)
37 Flower part
38 Bauble
39 File
40 Eat
41 Eye-infesting worm
42 River or sea bottom
44 Atomic Energy Commission (abbr.)
45 Buddhist column



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Corner Quote

“I don’t know when it will be safe to return to singing arm in arm at the top of our lungs, hearts racing, bodies moving, souls bursting with life. But I do know that we will do it again, because we have to. It’s not a choice. We’re human. We need moments that reassure us that we are not alone. That we are understood. That we are imperfect. And, most important, that we need each other.”

—Dave Grohl, “The Day the Live Concert Returns” The Atlantic

BIG SKY BEATS

 **“No Woman, No Cry” – Bob Marley**

“No Woman, No Cry” is better known for its live version, recorded at the Lyceum Theatre in London on July 17, 1975—it was included on the greatest hits compilation, Legend and ranked No. 37 on Rolling Stone’s 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. Interestingly, the title and chorus is rendered as “No, woman, nuh cry” in Jamaican Patois, the “nuh” roughly translating to the contraction “don’t.”

The lyrics mention a “government yard in Trenchtown,” which refers to the Jamaican public-housing project where Marley lived in the fifties as well as cornmeal porridge, his favorite dish. Although he wrote the song, songwriter credits were given to Vincent Ford, a friend of Marley’s who ran a soup kitchen in Trenchtown. The royalty payments were to help keep Ford’s soup kitchen running.



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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”

A Merman's Tale

Wherein I attempt to assimilate into the culture of the Sip 'n Dip's merpeople.

BY EDNOR THERRIAULT

What do you do when you're wearing a mermaid tail and you have to pee? Well, when a bar full of people is watching, you can't just smile and whiz in the pool like you're at the Holiday Inn. You have to leave the water.

Forget about the ladder—I still have a big purple bruise on my right foot from trying to negotiate that thing while wearing the tail. My solution was to grab the lip of the pool, heave myself out of the water and flop onto the deck like a trained seal. Once I managed to struggle to my feet, I did the “mermaid shuffle,” a series of tiny steps to the bathroom.

Being a merman is harder than it looks.

I recently had the chance to wear a tail and swim with the merfolk at the infamous Sip 'n Dip Lounge at O'Haire Motor Inn in Great Falls. It was ladies' night, and they'd recently started plopping mermen into the pool to provide some eye candy for the rowdy gals at the bar. I wanted in.

We're talking about a Montana icon here. The Sip 'n Dip was named the “Top Bar on Earth Worth Flying For” by GQ Magazine in 2003, and when you stroll inside it's easy to see why. The retro, tiki-themed lounge has a real you're-on-vacation feel, with its bamboo wall coverings, seashore-print vinyl booths and lacquered rattan ceiling. Strings of lights crisscross the room and there's a piano bar near the door where “Piano” Pat Spoonheim has been playing most nights for more than 50 years. And there, behind the smiling staff making colorful drinks at the bar, is the main attraction of the Sip 'n Dip: two large windows revealing the mermaid tank.



“Piano” Pat Spoonheim entertains patrons at the Sip 'n Dip piano bar three nights a week. She's been tickling the ivories there for 50 years.

A dark-haired mermaid and two fit, tail-clad mermen perform lazy loops in the pool, frequently swimming over to the glass to smile, wave and blow air-bubble kisses to the delighted patrons.

One of the mermen, Perseus, glides past the glass as two women eyeball him from the bar, sipping from enormous tiki drinks bristling with umbrellas and straws. “I bet that one's a Marine,” says one. “I'd know a military body anywhere.” She winks and gives a little wave to Perseus, who waves back and surfaces for a gulp of air. The woman puts a conspiratorial hand next to her cheek, saying sotto voce to her companion, “I want to put him in my suitcase and take him home.”

Unlike Perseus, I do not have a military body. I have the kind of physique that elicits comments like, “I see you wintered well.” I'm covered with a layer of what I like to call relaxed muscle. When it's time for me to enter the pool, which is a comfy 89 degrees, I wriggle into my tail, fit my goggles over my eyes and swim toward the deep end. Well, “swim” isn't really the right word. It's more like doggie paddling with only the front paws, dragging around this spandex and lace contraption that pins my legs together.



The author maneuvers through plastic seaweed in the Sip 'n Dip's famous mermaid tank.

A modified breaststroke allows me to plunge to the bottom of the 8-foot-deep tank, fighting the buoyancy of my relaxed muscle, and I smile and mug at the colorful shapes moving around behind the glass in the bar. I assume they're people—I can't see squat because every time I dive my poorly fitted goggles immediately fill with chlorinated water. Within 10 minutes my eyes are burning and I look like I've just come from a Cheech and Chong movie marathon.

Perseus, his fellow merman Archer and the mermaid Venus are patient and helpful with this pudgy, middle-aged writer whose main objective is to avoid drowning. Venus, a high school senior, teaches me how to blow kisses and do barrel rolls. Archer shows me how to execute a slow back loop, sucking in air at the water's surface like a whale clearing its blowhole.

The bar begins to fill up and I pull a few stunts for the customers. At one point I come up for air after a particularly agile (I thought) set of moves through the plastic seaweed on the bottom. “Hey, Flounder,” says Venus, using my merman name. She's resting at the edge of the pool, checking her phone. “My mom says you're losing your tail.”

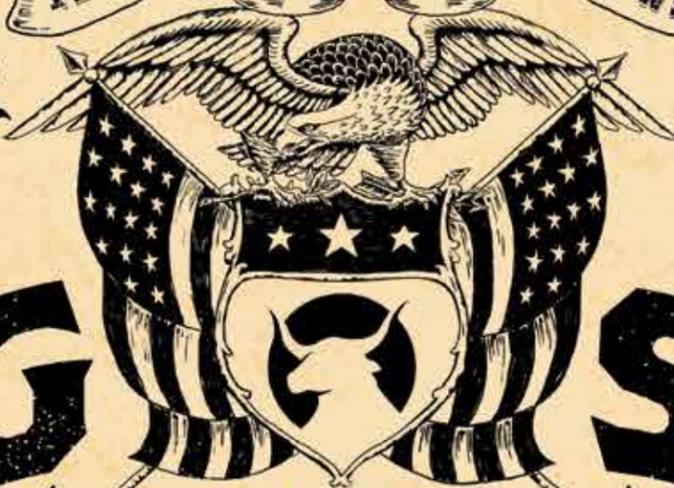
I look down and sure enough, my rig has slipped down several inches exposing the top of my black compression shorts.

My tail, like all the tails, was fabricated by Sandi Thares, the hotel's general manager and mermaid wrangler. “The more I sew, the better they get,” she said. Her family has owned the O'Haire since 1968, she told me that afternoon as we sat in her cluttered office piled high with boxes spilling wigs, leis, tails and glittery bras. An entire wall is covered with dozens of framed, autographed photos of celebrities including Keith Urban, Eric Church and Barry Manilow, who've visited the Sip 'n Dip over the years. The idea for the mermaid bar, she said, was inspired by a visit her dad made to the Playboy Club in Chicago. In 1996 they duct-taped a green tablecloth around the waist of a willing O'Haire housekeeper, and the mermaid program was born.

The tail I'm swimming in that night is much nicer than a tablecloth, and after a half hour of looking more like a cat in a bathtub than a mythical ocean creature, I finally start to feel like I'm working it. The next day I would be sore in ways I never could have dreamed of but tonight I'm having a blast. My only real mishap comes when I swim toward the window and bang my face into the glass, suctioning my right goggle so hard to my eye socket that it takes me a couple minutes to pop it free.

After a few more swoops and loops and “flexing” of “muscles,” I decide to call it a night. Flopping out of the pool, I dry off and pull on my jeans. I'm exhausted. My sinuses feel bleached, and every light I see has a rainbow around it. In the bar I order up a well-earned pint of local Black Eagle IPA and watch the experts in the pool twist and glide effortlessly through the water. Venus sinks down to the bottom of the window, finds me at the bar, smiles and blows me a bubble kiss. I move to return the gesture, but let out a gasp. I wonder how long I've been holding my breath.

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Graduation ceremony gets a socially distanced makeover

EBS STAFF

The COVID-19 pandemic has arrested virtually every semblance of societal normalcy, including school graduation ceremonies. In some instances, high schools around the nation have opted to forgo a ceremony commemorating the academic achievements of their students altogether—the risks and logistics involved proved insurmountable.

Fortunately, Lone Peak High School's Class of 2020 will avoid the particularly bitter bitter-sweetness of receiving a diploma in the mail, thanks to the diligent work of Big Sky School District staff and educators.

"We mobilized pretty quickly to make this happen," said BSSD Secondary School Principal Alex Ide. "I want to thank our great staff for making it all happen."

Ide says this year's graduation ceremony, while atypical compared to years past, boasts a relatively recognizable ceremonial format where students and their families will bask in spring sunshine to words of encouragement and achievement spoken from a central lectern.

"We're going to pull this off in a way that celebrates our seniors, just as nice, if not better," Ide said.

With the ritual pushed a week earlier than originally planned, kicking off on May 23 at 1 p.m., 24 LPHS soon-to-be-graduates will gather in person on the school's football field, where they will sit in designated areas with family pods numbering around five individuals so as to maintain social distancing.

Then, the speakers will commence.

"Student Council President Frankie Starz will lead off, followed by Valedictorian Madison Rager," Ide said. "Nick Woodman [founder and CEO of GoPro] is our keynote speaker."

Ide noted that should there be any concern for transmission of the disease, pre-recorded speeches would be streamed to devices within the respective pods.

Next, each student will be asked to stand up individually in recognition of their achievement, at which point a few words will be said commemorating their experience at LPHS and BSSD; students will find their diplomas in gift boxes placed at each designated seating area.

Finally, as a rite of passage, the entire class will stand in unison, move their tassels, and toss mortarboards into the air—as has been custom for generations, a tradition a pandemic will not shake.

Following the ceremony, students and families will drive in a parade down Highway 191 and Lone Mountain Trail toward Big Sky Town Center, honking horns and cheering, before moving on to respective parties and family gatherings.

Ide says a "smattering" of surprise items have been planned for the graduation ceremony, and that it will be live streamed for anyone unable to attend. The recording will then be posted online to view indefinitely. Should weather foul plans, the school will utilize the gym for an indoor event.

"This is very exciting, and we're confident in our ability to keep everyone safe and operate in accord with the wishes of the local board and directives from the state," Ide said.

Class of 2020, a congrats is in order.



Alberto Godoy

What does the big day mean to you?

It means that it's the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

What does your next chapter hold?

Right now, I'm not sure what the next chapter holds.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memories are the various dances.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher was Mr. Harder and my favorite class was Design Technology.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss the mountains, mostly the peak.

Austin Samuels

What does the big day mean to you?

This big day means starting the next chapter of my life, and moving on to hopefully bigger and better things.

What does your next chapter hold?

I will be attending Washington State University in the fall, majoring in broadcast journalism.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

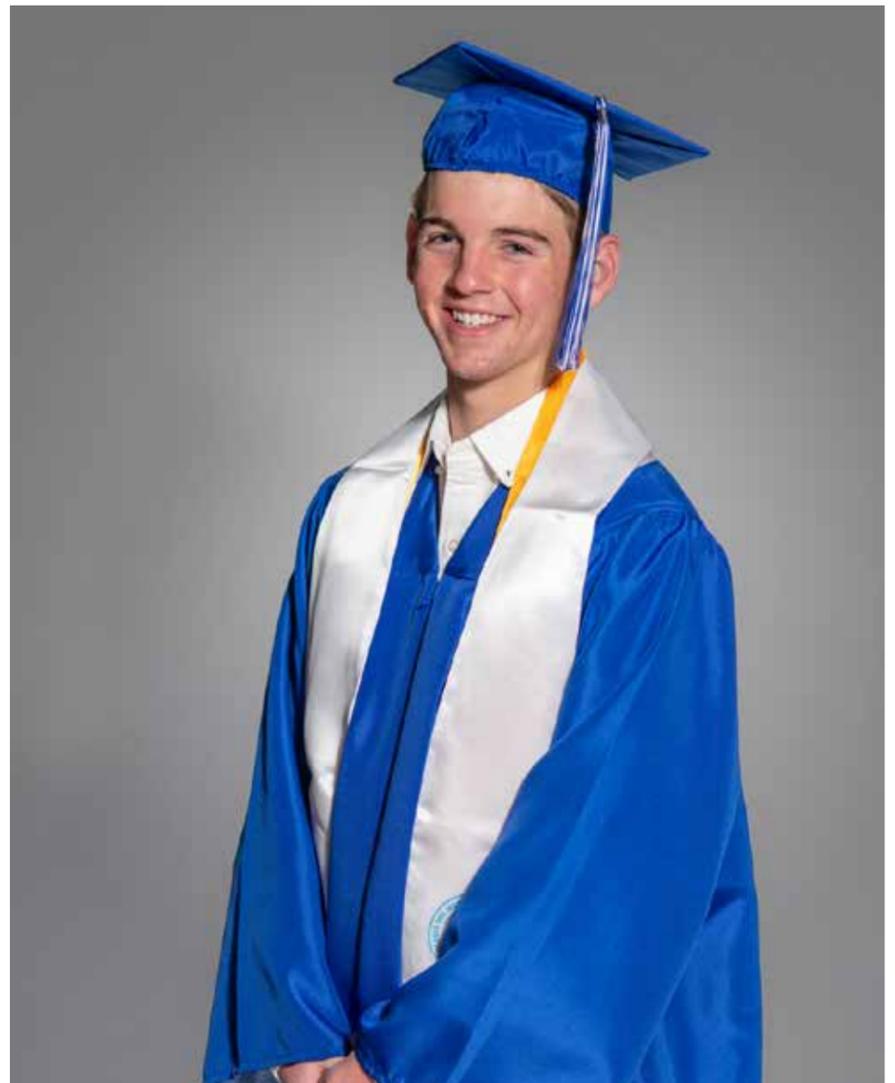
My favorite memory at LPHS is beating Twin Bridges in football on the last play of the game my senior year.

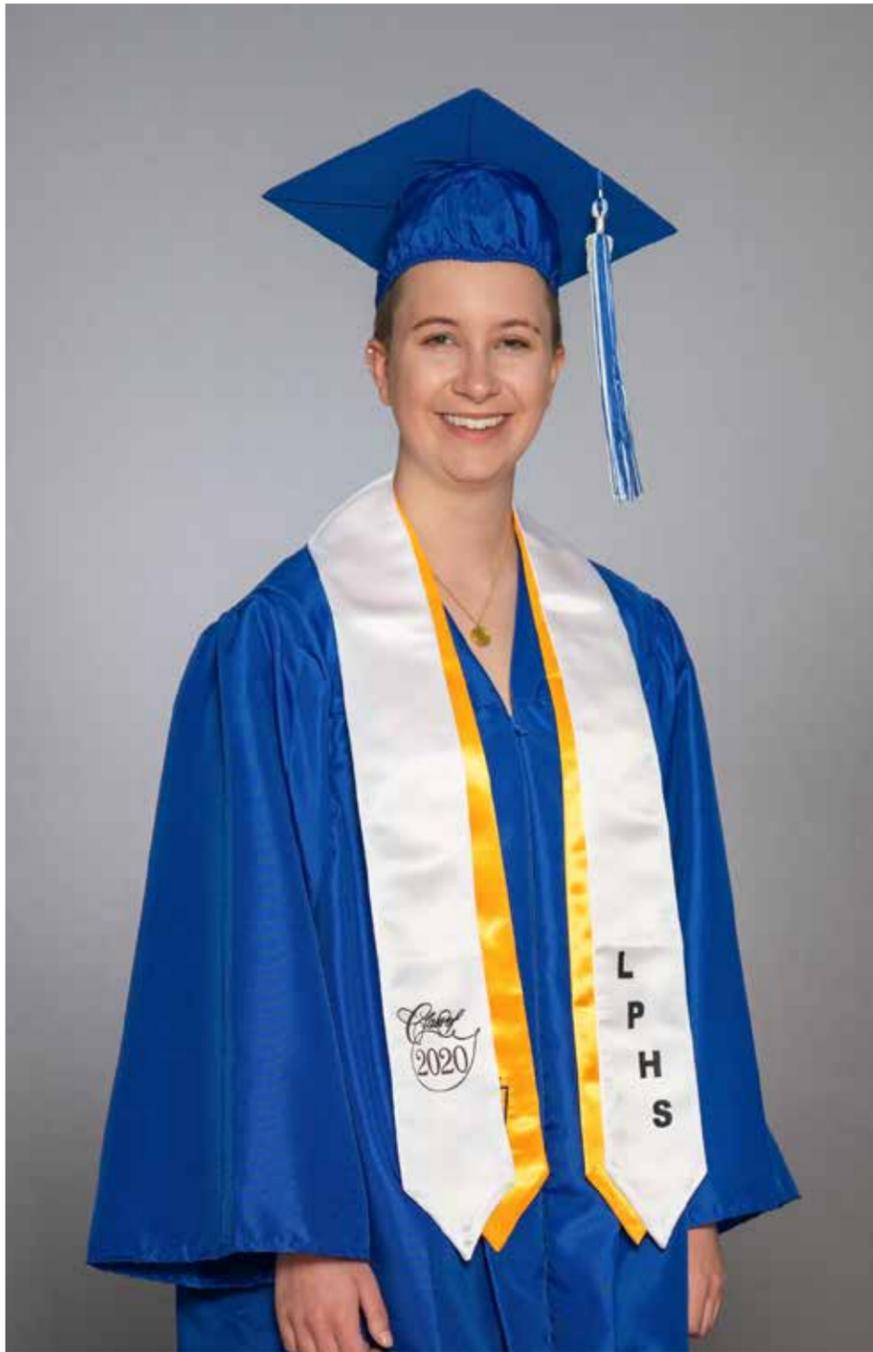
Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher was Mr. Harder, thus making my favorite class Design Technology.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

What I will miss the most about Big Sky is how close everyone is, and the freedom that I have here.





Chambers Moline

What does the big day mean to you?

I'm assuming graduation day, and to me it means celebrating the next chapters of my life. It means being able to go out on my own to create my own path.

What does your next chapter hold?

I don't know what my next chapter holds, but I wish to continue my education, so maybe school. I do know this: I'm leaving as soon as I can to go see the what's out there.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory isn't very specific—it's the atmosphere of the school. My favorite memories involve the people, teachers and students.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher is probably Ms. Hamblin. I didn't have a favorite subject, though.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I'll miss the security. Living at home and living in this town is so safe, which will be nice to leave but at the same time it meant a certain level of security

Chaz Paduano

What does the big day mean to you?

The "big day" means a lot, knowing that the past 13 years have been leading up to this moment.

What does your next chapter hold?

My next chapter holds a lot of exciting new pursuits.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

Simply being able to meet all of my new friends.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I truly can't pick a favorite teacher, as they all were amazing in very specific ways. I really did enjoy technology because there was more freedom of what you could pursue during class.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss the incredible views and being able to get out in nature within a couple of minutes.





Dounia Metje

What does the big day mean to you?

To me, the big day symbolizes finality. It's the last official day my class will be together, in high school, after growing into a family over the past thirteen years.

What does your next chapter hold?

Moving forward, I will be attending Montana State University for studio arts.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memories involve expedition, where each year before school started our classes would go camping and hiking for a few days.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I don't have a favorite teacher or class because they are all awesome!

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

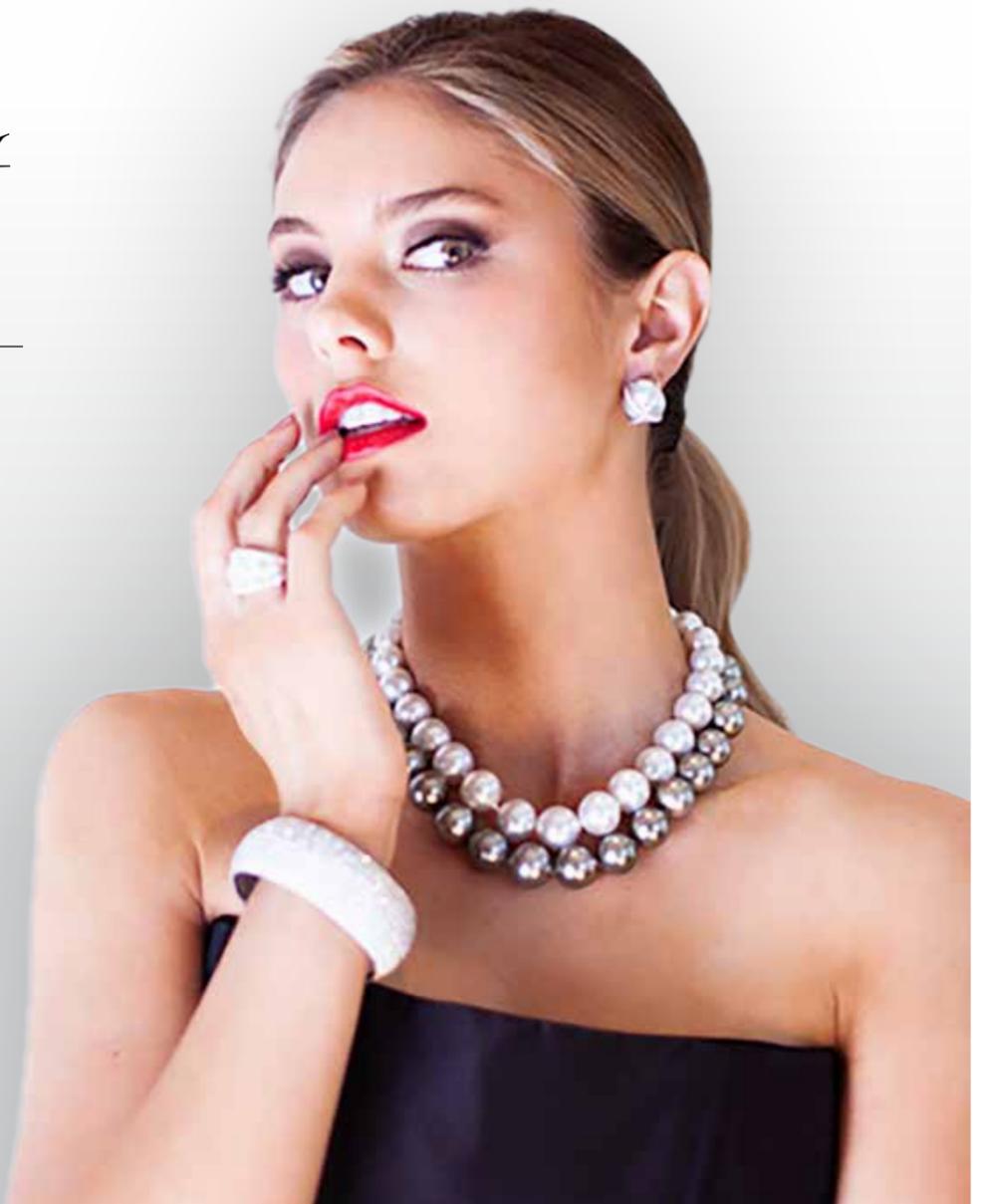
I am grateful that I will remain close to Big Sky's unique landscapes and environment, and especially skiing!


Shelly Bermont
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Emery Miller

What does the big day mean to you?

To me, graduation is not only an accomplishment of everything I have done, but also a time to transition into the next part of my life.

What does your next chapter hold?

I will be attending Cornell College in the fall. I am planning on pursuing a pre-physician's assistant track, as well as managing the volleyball team.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite LPHS memories include playing volleyball and tennis, cheerleading and participating in the school musicals "High School Musical" and "Legally Blonde."

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I loved all my teachers, but my favorite class over the years was probably biology.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss my friends and my family, of course. But I will also miss the small town atmosphere of Big Sky.



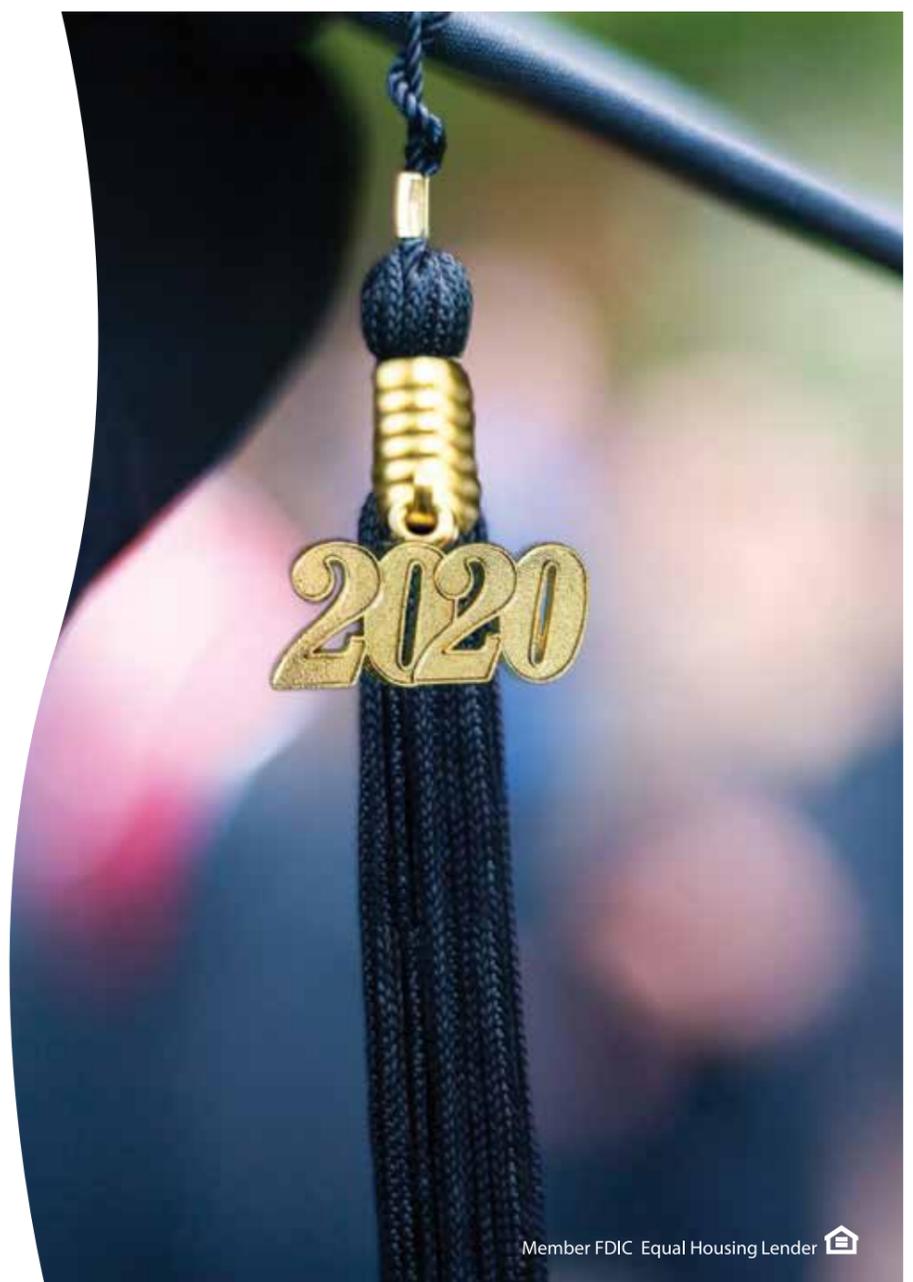
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Emma Flach

What does the big day mean to you?

To me, graduation means I get to move on to a brand new adventure. My biggest adventure yet.

What does your next chapter hold?

My next chapter holds all of my favorite things from my last chapter: lots of music, mountains and friendships.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory at LPHS is probably going to the Museum of the Rockies in middle school and taking funny pictures with all my friends and the dinosaurs.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher is John Zirkle. He's given me endless opportunities and has taught me almost everything I know about music. My favorite class was a cappella because it was first thing in the morning so I was able to start off my day on a good note—no pun intended.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

The thing I'll miss most about Big Sky are my friends that have been in school with me since preschool all the way up till now.





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Frankie Starz

What does the big day mean to you?

It means moving on to the next chapter.

What does your next chapter hold?

I plan to attend Chapman University and study some sort of business.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

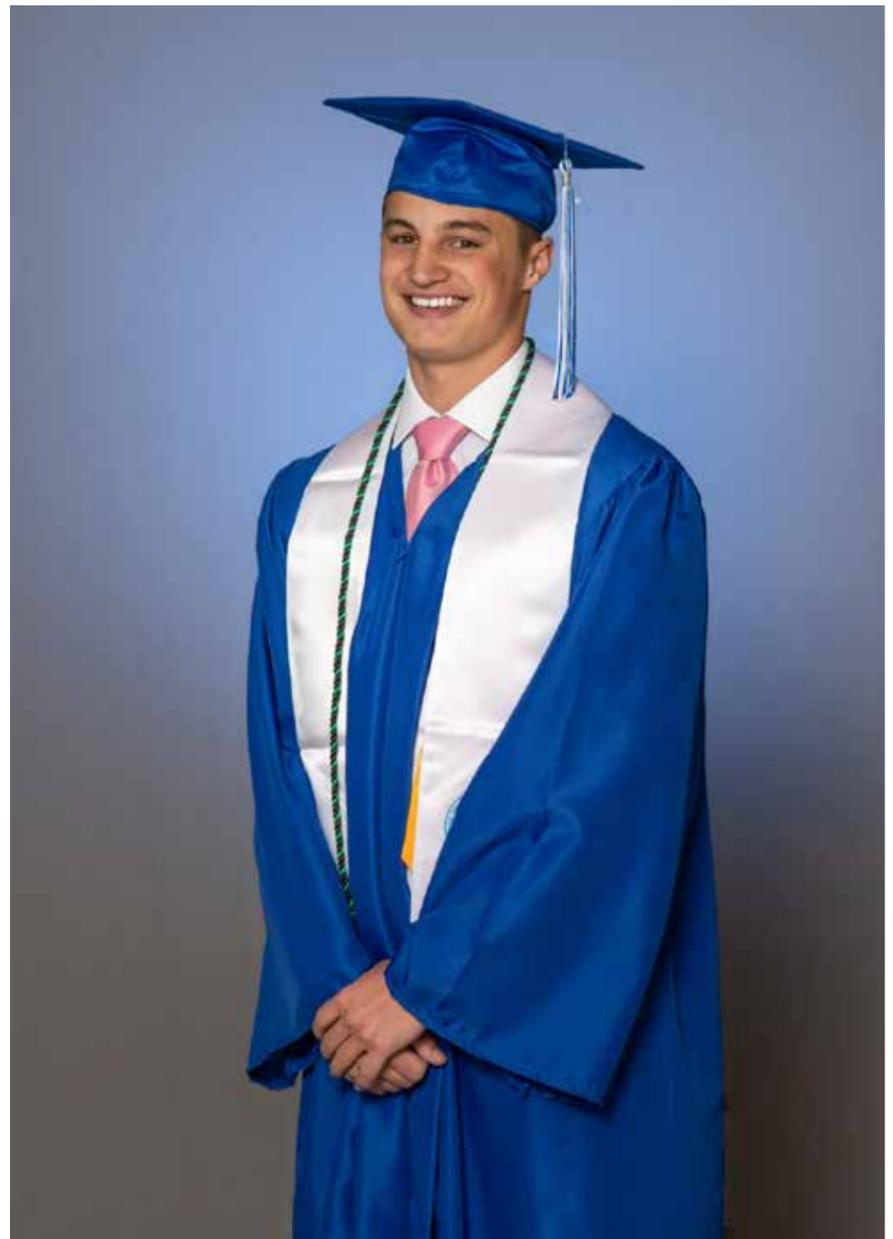
I have had so many good memories during my time at Lone Peak. These last four years have been so memorable because of all the strong relationships I have made with my friends and teachers. My favorite memory from my time at Lone Peak was during the 2019 football season when we beat the Twin Bridges Falcons in the final seconds.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher was definitely Mr. Coppola and my favorite subject was math.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I'm definitely going to miss the mountains the most but also my friends that I have been around since kindergarten.



Greg Miller

What does the big day mean to you?

The big day means a hitting big moment in my life like, finishing college or marriage.

What does your next chapter hold?

The next chapter holds four years at Montana State University.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory of LPHS was the football season and traveling to all the various towns in Montana.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

Mr. Miranda was my favorite teacher due to having him not only for math but also for freshman gym class. Mr. Miranda only speaks positively.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

Even though I am just going to be in Bozeman, I am going to miss living on the mountain. Being able to walk out the door and ski with your friends is the best thing ever.

Gus Hoffman

What does the big day mean to you?

The end to one chapter and also the start of a new one.

What does your next chapter hold?

Attending college at the University of Montana Western.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory is going on our fourth grade trip to EY.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher was Jeremy Harder, and his Design Tech class was my favorite.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

What I'll miss most is being on the ranch with my horses and family.



Isaac Gilmore

What does the big day mean to you?

The big day means a lot to me. It's the beginning of the next step of my life and I couldn't be more excited about it. I've been in Big Sky since second grade and being able to grow up with all of my classmates has just been so amazing. I've created so many friendships and memories that will last a lifetime. School went by so fast but I'm ready for the next step.

What does your next chapter hold?

I am not sure what school I will attend in the fall. However, I plan on going to school for Aerospace Engineering. I am excited for college and the next step, despite the fact that I don't know where I will go.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory from school was my entire senior basketball season. It was the end of my basketball career, but it was the most enjoyable season. Senior night is my most memorable experience of high school and I will never forget it.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

Mr. Swenson and Mr. Harder were been my favorite teachers. Both are so understanding, as well as fun teachers. They just know how to teach in a way that is entertaining and fun; they made the learning experience truly special. For that reason Physics and Design Tech have been my favorite classes throughout high school. They were always classes that I looked forward to—they were enjoyable classes because of the fact that Mr. Swenson and Mr. Harder made them fun and interesting to me.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss my best friends the most. Frankie Starz and Nick Brester have been my best friends throughout high school. They made these past for years so fun for me. They feel like the brothers that I never had. For that reason, my friendship with them will be what I miss the most about Big Sky and LPHS.

Katie Bagby

What does the big day mean to you?

This day means that now we are adults, or close to it, and we will now start our "new" lives.

What does your next chapter hold?

For me, the next chapter will be art school, discovering myself there and finding out what I exactly want to do, whether that's animation or digital design and drawing. I know I will love it.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

One of the best memories from LPHS would be either anything written in our class's quote book or the junior year expedition which was a wacky adventure where everyone, teachers included, got to know each other better.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I can't say that I have a favorite teacher, as all of the teachers at LPHS are amazing and each teacher connects with their students and binds with them—in a way it's like LPHS is one big crazy family where everyone knows each other, so it's hard to pick favorites. However, my favorite subject, hands down, is art. I mean, I'm going to art school; it'd be weird if I said something else.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I'll probably miss the scenery and snow when I move to Savannah, Georgia. I have always grown up in a cold climate, so it'll take a bit for me to adapt to the warmer weather there.



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CONGRATULATIONS *and best of luck in your future endeavors!*

Alberto Godoy
Austin Samuels
Chambers Moline
Chaz Paduano
Dounia Metje
Emery Miller
Emma Flach
Frankie Starz

Greg Miller
Gus Hoffman
Isaac Gilmore
Katie Bagby
Livvy Milner
Lupe Sotelo Calderon
Madi Rager
Mariska Smith

Maya Johnsen
Niamh Gale
Nick Brester
Nick Wade
Noelle Miller
Philip Chadwell
Ryker Potter
Tracen O'Connor



Livvy Milner

What does the big day mean to you?

Graduation is a way for my class to celebrate our accomplishments and all the hard work we have put in throughout high school.

What does your next chapter hold?

I am excited to attend TCU in the fall and major in business.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

I really enjoyed the ARTventure trip to Seattle our junior year.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I can't choose a favorite teacher because they were all so great, but my favorite subjects were probably business and English.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I am going to miss hanging out with my friends and spending time outside doing things like skiing and hiking. I can't wait to come back to visit.



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Lupe Sotelo Calderon

What does the big day mean to you?

El gran día para mi, significa uno de mis primeros logros en la vida.

What does your next chapter hold?

Seguir dando lo mejor de mi para triunfar en la vida.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

Mi recuerdo favorito es y será que fui graduada de LPHS.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

Estoy muy agradecida con todos los maestros que tuve durante ese tiempo en LPHS, sinceramente todos fueron muy buenos y me ayudaron bastante, así que no podría decidirme por solamente uno, para mi todos fueron mis favoritos. Creo que mi clase favorita fue Historia con el maestro Coppola.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

Extrañare el maravilloso equipo que son en general.

Madi Rager

What does the big day mean to you?

A time to celebrate with my friends and family about all our accomplishments, especially during this difficult time.

What does your next chapter hold?

Attending Boston University, where I will major in biology with a specialization in cellular biology, molecular biology and genetics.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

The volleyball lock-in at the beginning of the year, playing volleyball at midnight and getting to sleep in hammocks in the high school lobby.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

Biology. From kindergarten all the way to senior year I have had many amazing teachers; there are too many to list.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

The skiing.





Mariska Smith

What does the big day mean to you?

Graduation means everything to me. I have worked very hard these past few years to move my life in a positive direction. I have not always had the opportunity to get the full effects of school, and I wanted to make up for that. Graduation is a day of celebration for the ones that have moved forward in life and pushed for excellence.

What does your next chapter hold?

After I graduate I plan to attend MSU Bozeman in the department of Agricultural Education. Then, after completing my four years in college, I want to go out into the world and teach about the importance of our farmers and ranchers.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory at LPHS would have to be my senior expedition.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I have to give a huge thanks to Mr. Coppola, Mr. Harder and Ms. Hamblin for the great experience and amazing memories. Overall, in my two years at LPHS, my favorite teacher was Ms. Gretchen Goodman. She was enthusiastic, joyful and just, above all, amazing. But in my senior year I had the opportunity of meeting Mr. Jake Bushnell, the biology student teacher, and he was extraordinary! My favorite class was probably history.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss beautiful scenery I was able to see everyday in my classroom setting.

Maya Johnsen

What does the big day mean to you?

To me, graduation marks both the ending and beginning of a chapter in life. It is the celebration and resolution of over a decade of academic achievement.

What does your next chapter hold?

I will be moving to Eugene, Oregon, to attend the University of Oregon in the fall, where I study marine biology.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

It is difficult to choose, but I think the ARTventure trip in Seattle last year was so much fun and very influential for me.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I honestly can't choose just one teacher. All my teachers, even ones that I have not had classes with in years, have been so fantastic. I will definitely miss them all. Biology was my favorite class.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I know I will miss the beauty of Big Sky and all of its people. The relationships you are able to make and the exposure to the outdoors you get in Big Sky are unparalleled. I will definitely miss the skiing!



Niamh Gale

What does the big day mean to you?

The big day, to me, means that we are finally finishing this—seemingly long—part of our lives. It means that we have accomplished finishing our childhood, and that we get to move onto new challenges that might appear in the future.

What does your next chapter hold?

The next chapter for me holds traveling—fingers crossed with this one, as Covid-19 might be a roadblock!

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory that I have at BSSD would be collaborating as a class every year to make our homecoming floats and try and win in our challenges between classes for spirit week.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher would definitely be Ms. Hamblin, as she was always a very fun and interactive teacher who made class very fun and very informative at the same time. Our English class would probably have to be my favorite as well, since I love reading and we love Hammy!

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

The part that I would miss most about Big Sky would be how beautiful it is here. The wilderness surrounds us in an incredible way, and it will definitely be something that I will miss.



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Nick Brester

What does the big day mean to you?

The big day, for me, is the ending of one chapter and the beginning of the next. High School taught me all of the skills and knowledge that I'll take with me to college.

What does your next chapter hold?

After high school I'll be attending Indiana University's Kelley School of Business.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memories from high school have to be the class trips we took, like expeditions and the Seattle ARTventure trip.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I liked all of my teachers, but since this question put me on the spot I would have to say Ms. Garmer. I know we didn't have her for half of senior year, but she has been my math teacher since freshman year. My favorite class was business since that's what I want to study in college.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

The thing I'm going to miss most about Big Sky is all of the activities that can be done outside and in the mountains. Indiana is very flat.



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Nick Wade

What does the big day mean to you?

Twelve years of hard work, leading to this day, are finally paying off.

What does your next chapter hold?

I will be attending the University of Wyoming for Agricultural Business and Natural Resource Management.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory was our senior year football season, in which we won against Twin Bridges and Ennis.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

Mr. Coppola was my favorite teacher because I've known him for most of my life and we were his first Washington D.C. trip, his first sixth grade class, and he spoke at our eighth grade graduation.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss hunting, skiing and other outdoor activities the most.



Noelle Miller

What does the big day mean to you?

The big day means I have completed a goal that has set me on the path to my next goal.

What does your next chapter hold?

I am looking forward to attending Montana State University.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory of LPHS was homecoming week because of all the great spirit.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

My favorite teacher is Ms. Hamblin. She helped me through many struggles and gave me the best support I could ask for. Art class and her English class were my favorite.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I am going to miss seeing Lone Peak every morning on my way to school. I will for sure miss my supportive teachers made a huge positive impact on my life, along with all the laughs I shared with my classmates.

Philip Chadwell

What does the big day mean to you?

I am excited to have completed high school. It's a milestone.

What does your next chapter hold?

I will be going to the University of Wisconsin Madison.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

My favorite memory of LPHS is also my first one: When I visited the school a year before enrolling, I was greeted with a kindness and compassion I had never seen before.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

I enjoyed all of my classes. I feel like they were all, or could be, intertwined, which made learning from my teachers and making connections between classes so interesting.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will miss the mountains and trails in Big Sky the most. This is the most beautiful place I've ever lived in, and I will miss it.



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Ryker Potter

What does the big day mean to you?

The big day just means that I'm finished up with this chapter of my life and I am moving on.

What does your next chapter hold?

My next chapter holds a job in excavation under Brad Potter Excavation, and I will also be pursuing a career as a volunteer at the Gallatin Gateway Rural Fire Department.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

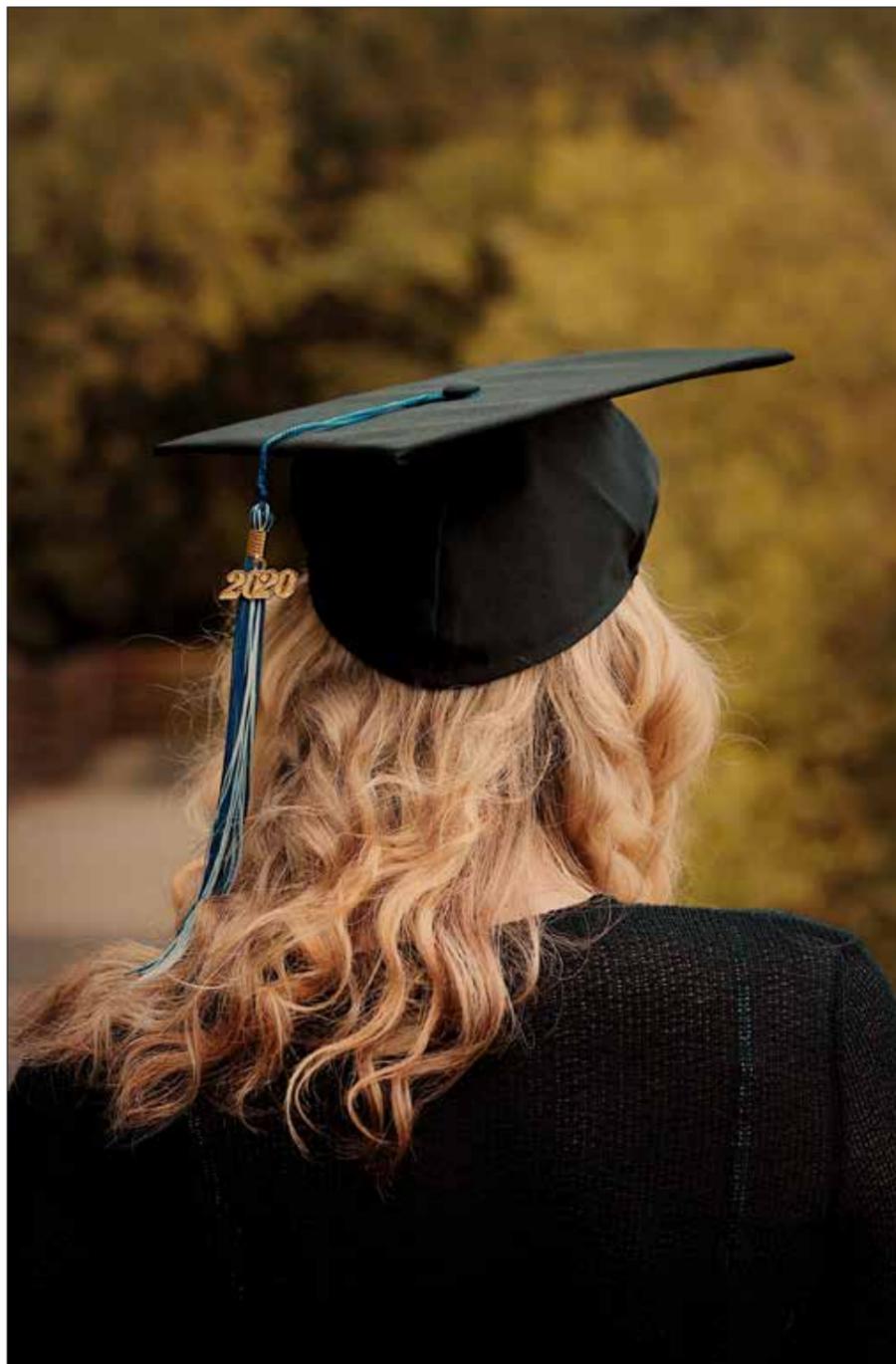
My favorite memory is the super awkward pep rally freshman year when I was the only wrestler.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

Well, I hope it's okay to have two favorite teachers because I couldn't decide. Those two are Mr. Harder and Mr. Swenson. My favorite class was probably Mr. Harder's Design Technology.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

I will probably miss the closeness of my classmates. It's nice just being friends with everyone and you know they can all help you if you need it. I am glad that my lifestyle is going to stay the same and that I will continue to live in this beauty of a place.



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Tracen O'Connor

What does the big day mean to you?

My graduation means a new chapter of my life beginning. I'm both terrified and ecstatic for what happens next.

What does your next chapter hold?

Hopefully the next part of my life will be in the U.S. Marine Corp, but if not, then I will pursue a career as a paramedic.

What is your favorite memory from Lone Peak High School, or the Big Sky School District in general?

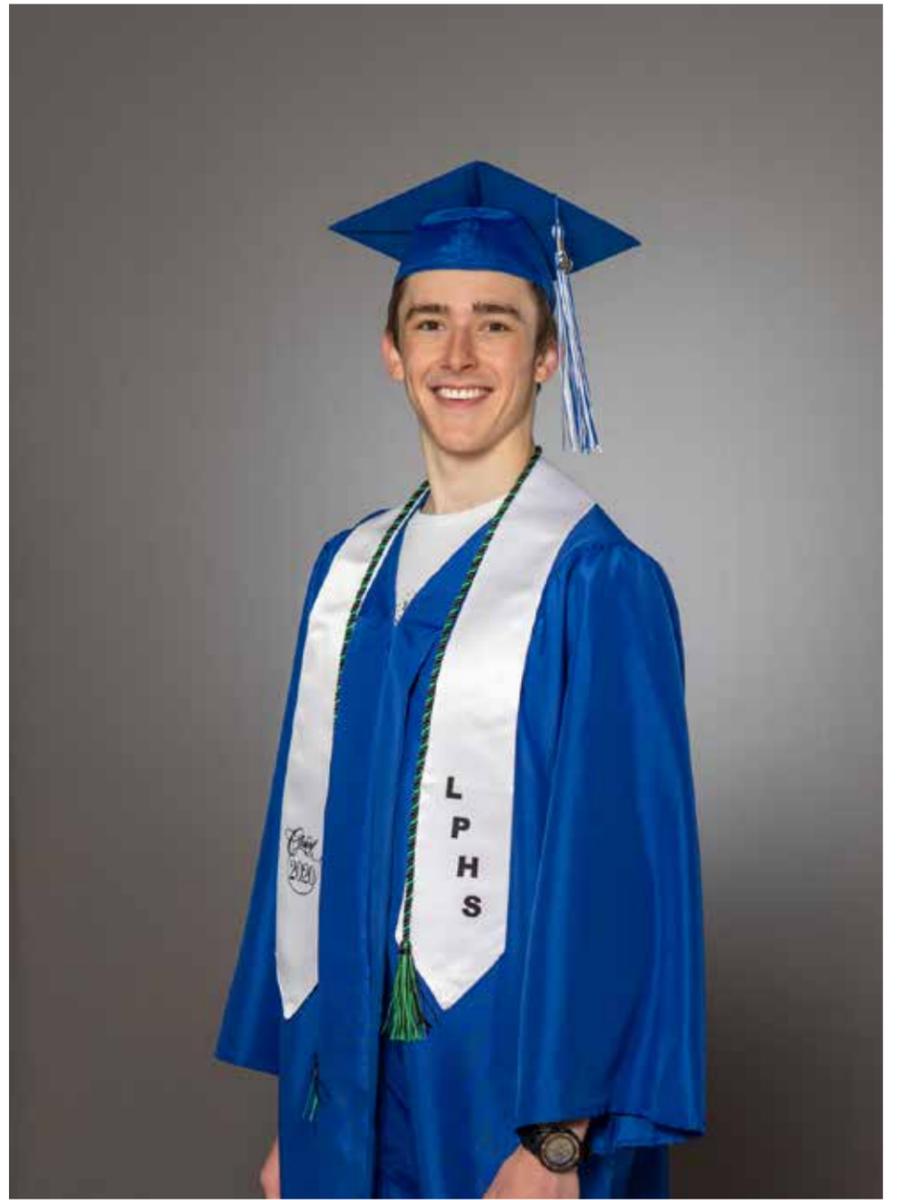
I can't say I have a favorite memory. I've spent so many years here, I can't pick out a particular memory.

Who was your favorite teacher? Which class or subject was your favorite?

History was my favorite subject and Tony Coppola my favorite teacher. While my other teachers throughout the years have been amazing, Mr. Coppola stands out as the one who has always been there for me.

What will you miss most about Big Sky? If you're staying, which piece of your life are you grateful will remain the same?

Personally, I will miss the landscape the most. I love spending time in the forest, away from everyone else and away from society for a while. Without the ability just leave my house and spend the next two days in the woods, I might just go insane.




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