



UTE COUNTRY NEWS

Putting the "unity" back in community™

FREE

January 2026

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Vol. 18, No. 1

Welcome to Ute Country

"Religion is for people who're afraid of going to hell. Spirituality is for those who've already been there."

— Vine Deloria Jr.

PEEK INSIDE...



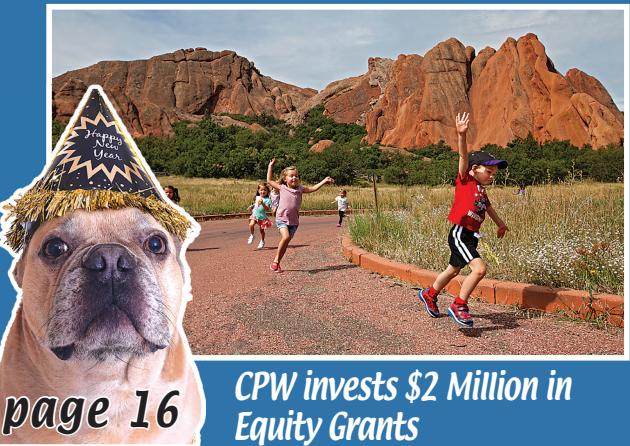
page 5

COTREX app shares trail closures



page 9

Colorado Pharmgirl: Hanging Ten



page 16

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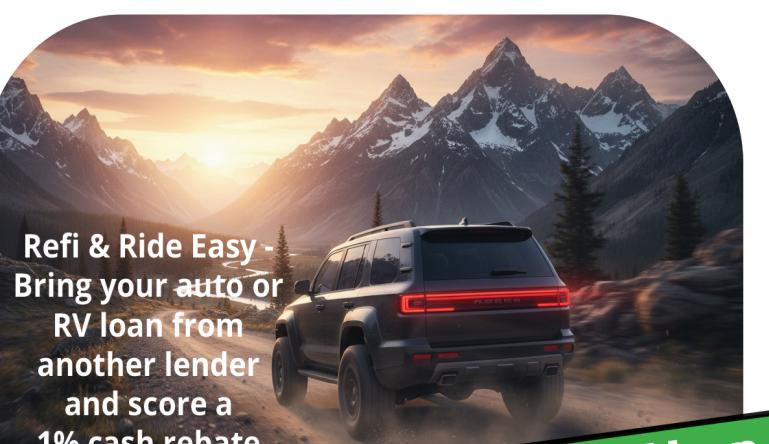



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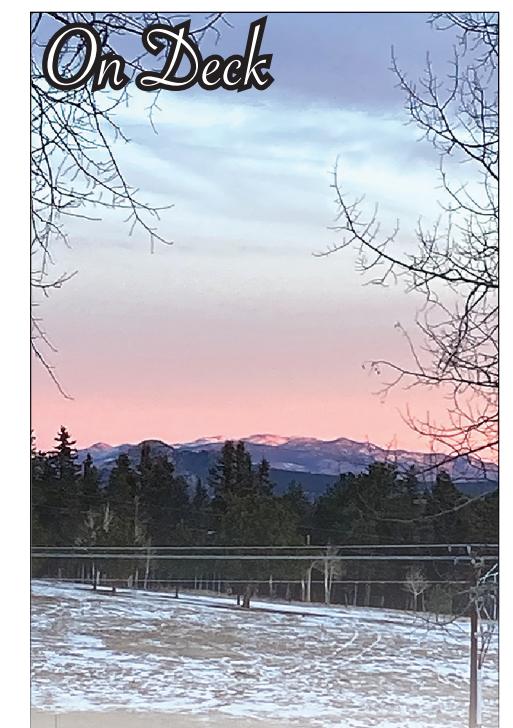
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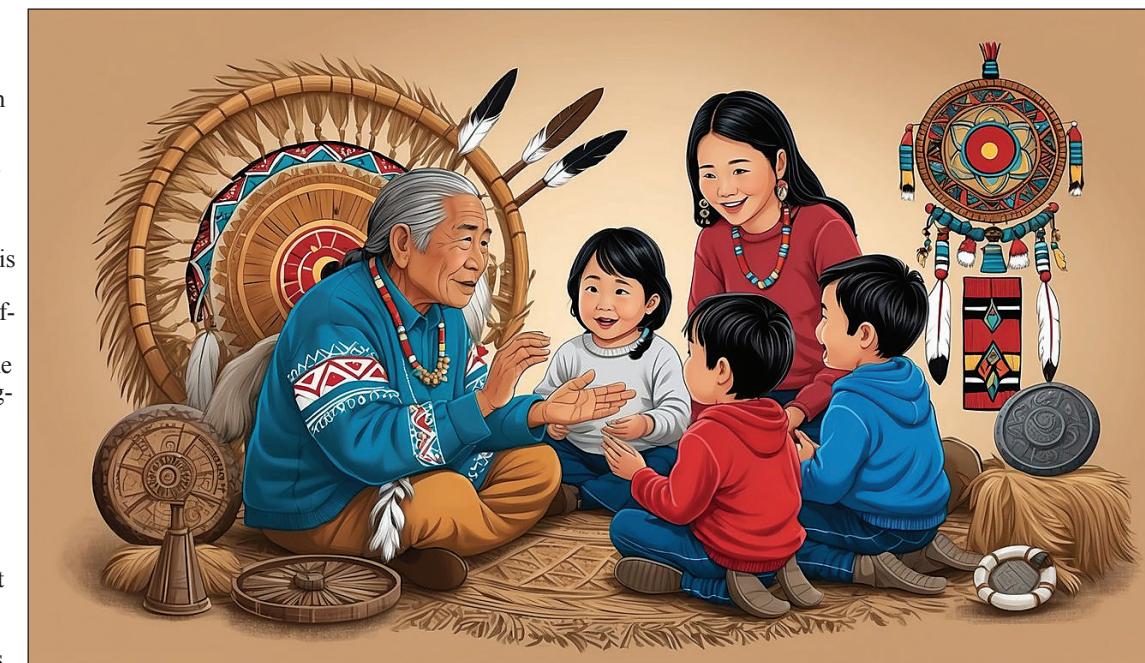
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Oyate Herbals

Lakota Traditions Helping Communities

by Tammie Lowell, Pht, CMH, founder of Oyate Herbals



Lakota traditions helping people-elder teaching

Han (Greetings!) Welcome to "Wiotehika Wi" referring to the hardships faced during the height of the winter in January. This month is also referred to as "Hard Times Moon" because historically, this time of the year made it difficult for the survival of Lakota and other indigenous tribes in the region. This was a time when it was always the coldest. Hunting was very difficult due to the snow levels and frigid temperatures, and the game was also scarce. This was a struggle for everyone. But as Lakota, we always prevailed.

January is also associated with the month of hard times in many other places and cultures, particularly in the United States. It is known for having the highest number of divorce filings, with many people waiting until after the holidays to begin proceedings, especially if children are involved.

January is often associated with the "January blues," a common emotional state marked by feelings of sadness, low energy, and lack of motivation. This phenomenon can be attributed to the emotional, physical, and financial toll of the holiday season. The holidays create a whirlwind of excitement and activity, and when this stops, it's natural to feel an emotional dip. Financial worries, shorter days, limited sunlight, and cold weather can also contribute to the January blues. Shorter days and limited sunlight can disrupt circadian rhythms and lower serotonin levels, which are crucial for regulating mood. This biological shift can amplify feelings of sluggishness and sadness.

January often arrives with ambitious resolutions, and the transition from holiday mode to something greater than ourselves. We have many articles about connections in this January issue. COTREX is a must read for anyone seeking to connect with Colorado trails. It is a fantastic resource to double check before you head out so that you don't go to trails closed to protect the animals in their mating regions and seasons. Colorado Pharmgirl shares how she connects with family, nature, and the ocean during family fun. Larissa Dragon's Maid let us know that even fictitious creatures crave connection! Oyate Herbals' "Lakota Traditions Helping Communities" shares the importance of caring for each other. Let's not forget that our four-legged friends crave connection, too. Enjoy reading *Tales from Big Sky Bed and Biscuit's The Happy Spin*."

That is why it is not surprising that January is recognized as Mental Health Wellness Month, a time dedicated to promoting mental health awareness, self-care, and strategies for improving overall well-being. You can't be there for others, if you are not taking care of yourself.

Do not let your well run dry! Keep a natural balance going in your life the best way you know how or reach out for help in some way, shape or form. Something else I want to stress is that many people will not reach out, they will not ask for help, please check in on your friends and family, especially the elderly. They may be struggling with any of the situations I have spoken about, but they are too scared, ashamed or proud to ask. This is how we Lakota always prevail and survived some of the hardest times imaginable. Community is such a huge part of who we are and where we come from. I'd like to share some of our cultural practices with everyone in hopes to inspire and cultivate a different way of thinking.

Ceremonies are another vital aspect of Lakota traditions. They mark significant life events and seasonal changes, providing a framework for community life. One of the most important ceremonies is the Sun Dance. This ritual is a time of renewal and healing, where participants seek spiritual guidance and strength. The Sun Dance involves fasting, dancing, and sometimes physical sacrifice, all aimed at connecting with the Great Spirit. The Sun Dance is not just a personal journey; it is a communal event. Families and friends come together to support the dancers, reinforcing social ties and collective identity. In addition to the Sun Dance, we celebrate various seasonal

woven into the fabric of our lives, creating a unique identity that continues to thrive today.

We have a rich oral tradition. Elders often gather children and young adults to share stories that reflect their history and beliefs. These stories are not just entertainment; they are educational tools that help shape the moral compass of the community. Storytelling also fosters community bonding. When people come together to listen to and share stories, they create a sense of belonging. This communal experience strengthens relationships and reinforces cultural values. In many Lakota communities, storytelling events are held regularly. These gatherings allow individuals to connect with their heritage and with each other, creating a supportive environment that nurtures both personal and communal growth.

Elders hold a special place in Lakota culture. They are the keepers of knowledge and tradition, guiding younger generations in their spiritual and cultural journeys. Elders are often sought for their wisdom and guidance. They share stories, teach traditional practices, and offer advice on various life challenges. Their presence is a source of stability and continuity within the community. In many Lakota communities, mentorship is a vital part of life. Young people are encouraged to spend time with elders, learning not just about traditions but also about life skills and values. This relationship fosters respect for age and experience, creating a strong intergenerational bond.

As the world changes, so do the challenges faced by the Lakota people. However, their traditions remain a source of strength and resilience. The impact of Lakota traditions on communities is profound and far-reaching. From storytelling to ceremonies, these practices shape identities and foster resilience. As we reflect on the importance of these traditions, it is essential to recognize their role in promoting unity, well-being, and cultural pride. By embracing and supporting Lakota traditions, we contribute to the preservation of a rich cultural heritage that continues to inspire and uplift communities today.

If this article has inspired, moved or resonated with you. Then I encourage you to learn more about indigenous cultures and practices. Especially in times of sorrow or trouble, it just might be a huge turning point in your life. Feel free to reach out to me if you have questions or want to learn more about my culture or traditional medicines.

*Mitákyeapi Anpéu wašté (Good day relatives)
Many Blessings and may you walk in balance on your path.*

You may reach Tammie of Oyate Herbals LLC, at 719-661-0410.

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Publishers:
High Pine Design
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POB 753, Divide, CO 80814
719-686-7587
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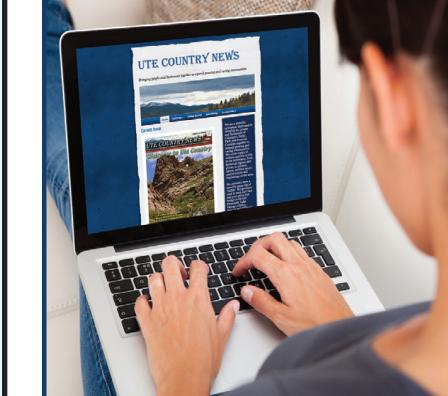
Publishers Emeritus: Carmon & Beverly Stiles
Cover Photo: Jeff Hansen

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Barbara Pickholz-Weiner



BLM Planning on Prescribed Burns

by Levi Spellman

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing to conduct pile burns in six locations managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office and four locations managed by the San Luis Valley Field Office (not included below). This process helps remove the accumulation of natural fuels, which is critical to maintaining the health of the forest ecosystem and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Pile burns could continue through April 2026, depending on weather and fuel moisture conditions. Smoke from the pile burns will be visible throughout the day of the burn, mostly during the warmest part of the day. With cooler temperatures in the evening, smoke may linger and accumulate in low-lying areas.

Royal Gorge Field Office Locations

- Frenchman Creek: Seven miles north of Buena Vista, west of US highway 24, Chaffee County Road 386. There are 85 acres, 32 machine piles of Lodgepole pine.

- Mount Shavano: Three miles northwest of Poncha Springs, west of Highway 285 and north of US Highway 50. There are 182 acres, 3000 hand piles of Ponderosa pine, piñon, and juniper.

- Turkey Gulch: 15 miles northwest of Westcliffe, at the intersection of Highway 69 and Gulch Road. There are 42 acres of 1000 hand piles of Ponderosa pine, piñon, and juniper.

- North Stoney Face: 17 miles north of Coto-

paxi, south of Fremont County Road 12 and Firebox Road. Two acres, three machine piles of Engelmann spruce.

- Soap Hill Piles: 11 miles south of Guffey, Fremont County Road 21 and 26, south of Tallahassee Road (Fremont County Road 2). West of Highway 9. There are 90 acres of five machine piles, 265 acres of 2000 hand piles of Ponderosa pine, piñon, juniper, and mixed conifer.

- Thompson Mountain: 13 miles northwest of Cañon City, two miles east of Highway 9, in the Deer Haven area near Thompson Mountain. There are 35 machine piles of Ponderosa pine, piñon, juniper, and Gambel oak.

- Turkey Gulch: 15 miles northwest of Westcliffe, at the intersection of Highway 69 and Gulch Road. There are 42 acres of 1000 hand piles of Ponderosa pine, piñon, and juniper.

Prescribed fire smoke may affect your health. For more information, please visit the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division's website.

Updates on prescribed burns will be available on the BLM Colorado Fire Facebook page.

- North Stoney Face: 17 miles north of Coto-

Opening for Artist at Blue Spruce Gallery

The Blue Spruce Gallery currently has two openings available in the long standing cooperative gallery for a two-dimensional wall artist and a three-dimensional artist. The gallery does not have space for photography at this time. Artists working in pastels, oils, watercolor, collage, pottery, wood, sculpture, etc. should consider this rare opportunity to join the gallery.

Jury for the gallery is Thursday, January 15 at 5 p.m. Representative work needs to be at the gallery one day prior to the jury meeting, labeled with artist information, and priced. The position will remain open until filled, and the next jury date will be in February on the third Thursday of the month.

If you are interested, or to find out gallery and cooperative requirements, please contact the Blue Spruce at 784-1339 during regular business hours, or contact Lynn Lemmon-Oliver at 671-3581. Gallery is located at 205 West Main Street in Florence, CO.

Call for Entries:
"Textiles, Gems, and Bangles" themed show at Blue Spruce

The Blue Spruce Gallery is hosting its' 25th annual winter theme show during January. The artist chosen theme this year is "Textiles, Gems, and Bangles." This fun and exciting event always encourages artists to be creative with the theme. All artists are encouraged to enter the show — we are looking for a wide variety of work, including both two dimensional and three dimensional. Painting, photography, jewelry, weaving... all will be featured in this show. Deadline for work to be at the gallery is January 6, 2026. The show will be open on January 8 with a reception on January 10, 4:30-7 p.m. Cash prizes will be awarded, as well as ribbons in several categories.

Entry forms can be picked up at the Blue Spruce Gallery 205 West Main Street in Florence or downloaded from our website (www.bluespruceart.com). FMI 719-784-1339.

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Laddie

This is 4-month-old Laddie. He is an Aussie mix. He is a totally affectionate sweetheart, already house trained and is great with other dogs. Laddie is neutered and current on all vaccines. He's the perfect pup, except he has to find his forever home. Check our website for our next meeting opportunity <https://www.slaws.org/>.

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COTREX app shares trail closures

by Bridget O'Rourke

At the head of the winter season, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) wants to remind the outdoor community that the Colorado Trail Explorer (COTREX) mobile app displays active trail closures, including those on trails and in areas around the state that are meant to protect wintering wildlife. COTREX provides the most comprehensive map of seasonal winter wildlife closures across the state.

"COTREX is a free, easy-to-use app that provides authoritative trail information across local, state and federal agencies, helping users feel capable and confident in planning outdoor activities."

"COTREX is the only app in Colorado that displays all of this seasonal wildlife closure information in a single place," said Joe O'Brien, State Trails Program Coordinator. "We hope this effort makes it easier for recreationists to understand where they can go, and where they should give wildlife space during the winter."

Over 36 agency partners use the COTREX app to post real-time advisories, including trail closures, safety hazards and other essential trail alerts. Users can plan routes, view allowed use types (such as snowshoeing, cross country skiing and snowmobiling, as well as summer uses), download offline maps, and see trip recommendations from participating partners around the state — all for free, providing a convenient and stress-free experience for outdoor enthusiasts.

CPW encourages recreationists to educate themselves on local winter wildlife closures for migrating wildlife as they search for food and shelter in the state's snowy regions. Winter can be hard on wildlife, and every calorie counts as deer, elk and other species try to survive until spring. Increased recreation in areas with significant wildlife movement can impact the resilience of these animals and displace them into unsuitable areas.

Seasonal Closures Feature

- Alerts will automatically appear on the website and app, providing descriptions, boundaries and links to additional resources.
- Seasonal closures shown on COTREX apply to all types of activity, both motorized and non-motorized.
- The closures shown on COTREX are



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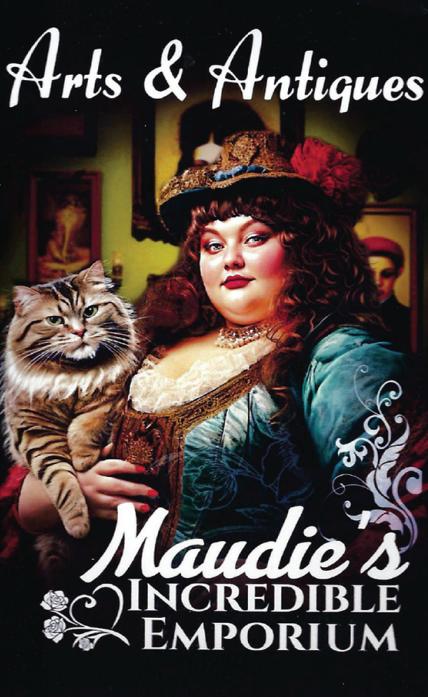
www.colorado.gov/cdhs/leap



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A Look Inside the Artist Jenni Guentcheva, Art Therapist

by Mary Shell

Art is so important to the human condition that we need art therapists to dig deep within our psyche to bring out hidden concerns. Art itself is therapy. What does creating art have to do with our psychic condition? Apparently, EVERYTHING. Art is a foundational pillar of self-care that can be utilized as a key tool for personal growth. Even at my simple painting parties I see the impact of creating art on everyone. I have always said, "Art is the language of the soul."

How long have you been an art therapist?

I have been a therapist for over 25 years and an art therapist for the last 3 years.

What made you choose that profession?

I work with many clients, both children and adults who suffer from trauma symptoms. One of their worst fears is that they will have to verbally regurgitate the details of the trauma, so art is a much more conducive method.

How do you think art therapy helps people?

Art is a way of expressing emotions, experiences and memories that many try to avoid otherwise. Art also demonstrates the creative reserves we often don't know about, expands our horizons, improves our self-esteem and provides a valuable internal resource.

What do you look for in the art your patients make?

Structural and systemic indicators of the person's psychological needs.

Do you create art yourself?

I have painted (watercolor, acrylic, pastel and gouache) since 2018.

How do you explain how important art is to us humans?

Art has always been an important part of creating a better life, but especially now when technology has overwhelmed people's minds. Art serves as an important tool to balance the dominance of automation and maintains the finest aspects of humanity alive.

How important is color to therapy?

There is a direct connection between emotions and coloristic expression, we just must attend to it and "read it" in a diagnostic way or enjoy it as spectators.

Do you believe music enhances creativity?

Of course, music is not only capable of helping us produce dopamine but also induces activation of many dormant brain activities.

Do you work with artists in analyzing their art?

I am interested in art history and often at



tend exhibits in the US and Europe. I especially appreciate impressionism, expressionism, surrealism, and cubism.

What do you see in the future for you?

I am involved in working with artists, art teachers, and art centers in bringing awareness to the importance of art. In 2026, I will be presenting lectures on the controversies in Pablo Picasso's art.

You can reach Mary Shell at www.maryshellart.com. See her ad on page 9.

You can reach Jenni at gentchev@icloud.com and on Facebook.

People See, People Do You can Kindle Kindness, too!

by Readers of Ute Country News

This is a column dedicated to acts of kindness so that we might all remember how to put positive energy into this world. It is written by our readers. No names of businesses or people are used so that the focus remains on the behavior, something we can all choose. If you witness or experience an act of kindness, please share by emailing utecountrynewspaper@gmail.com or by stopping in at Shipping Plus to tell us about it or you could leave a voice mail 719-686-7587.

• "I counted a total of 109 paintings in my basement and decided it was time to present them as gifts. I chose this one for you because I remembered that you said you liked it." Remembering what someone likes is an act of kindness!

• The day began with internet and computer issues that seemed to only get worse. An email was sent to IT for help. The Technical Support person reached out with a few suggestions after listening to the problems. What surprised me most was the unexpected emotional support. "You work hard. It is the end of the day. Maybe just take it easy until closing and when you get home treat yourself to a glass of wine or whatever helps you relax because you're a very hard worker and you are so diligent about getting data when there is an issue, and you know, you're a good person and you just need a

break. It hurts me to hear the sadness in your voice. We're here for you! If the problem persists tomorrow, I want you to give me a call back and we'll figure this out." Wow. Thank you.

• He makes treasure chests for children. It doesn't matter who the children are. He makes them, stuffs them with "treasure" kids would enjoy, then pops them in the car. When they encounter a child, in their travels, they give the child (or children when there are multiple chests in the vehicle) the treasure chest and watch their eyes fill with wonder as it sinks in the treasure chest is for them!

• The gift was unexpected and enjoyable, but what meant most were the kind words of appreciation that accompanied the gift.

• He doesn't normally reach out to help anyone, so it was a real surprise when I saw that he held the door and brought the package in for the customer using a walker. Maybe there really is something to the Christmas Spirit to move him to reach out!

• Of course I will tell you where and how to save money in this economy. I've had exactly one customer who did NOT want to save money! I'd rather be honest and gain your trust than make an extra dollar. People matter more than money to us.

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Life-Enhancing Journeys

Choosing happiness

by Barbara Pickholz-Weiner, RN, BSN, CACII, MAC, EMDRII

Many of us have grown up believing that happiness comes from what we achieve. We often find ourselves thinking, "If only... I get that perfect job... I find the ideal partner... I get a promotion at work... then I'll be truly happy." It is worth noticing that the "If Only..." mindset can actually hold us back from experiencing happiness. It tends to bring about feelings of regret and overthinking because it focuses on what is missing or what could have been. By constantly dwelling on what is lacking, we might forget to appreciate the achievements and relationships we already have, missing out on the joy in the present.

Additionally, the "If only..." attitude creates unrealistic expectations by comparing yourself to others. These thoughts can create a false sense of how life should be, leading to disappointment when reality falls short of those expectations. The "If only..." mindset can also lead to perfectionism by setting unrealistic standards, hindering the enjoyment of life's imperfect aspects. Recognize that life is inherently imperfect and that challenges are a natural part of being human.

Trying to be perfect can make us focus too much on past mistakes or missed opportunities, leaving us even more unhappy. It can also interfere with making decisions, leading to hesitation and missed opportunities. Worrying about the past can prevent us from taking action, while believing that the future has better possibilities.

Understanding how thoughts starting with "If only..." influence emotional well-being can help us redirect our attention toward more positive thoughts that promote happiness and acceptance. Staying present, practicing gratitude, and recognizing personal limits can contribute to a more satisfying, fulfilling life.

What if you could experience joy right now, regardless of your situation? Would you then want to learn how? Imagine delighting in the idea of experiencing "happiness for no reason" and letting it brighten your day. This simple idea encourages us to find joy in small things without needing a special reason.

Have you ever taken a moment to wonder: How much happiness do I truly feel in my life? When I ask this, most people will say, "Not much." It seems like joy is a fleeting feeling, something that is rare and temporary for many of us. Imagine what it could be like if you believed that something good might happen instead of something bad. Would that

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feel strange or unfamiliar to you? Or might it even spark a little excitement?

From an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense that we feel uneasy when we imagine positive events happening to us. Our survival instinct is wired to detect threats and focus on potential dangers, a tendency known as the negativity bias, which is rooted in primitive brain functions (see UCN "Limbic System" article, March 2018). While recognizing danger helps us avoid real threats, mistaking imagined threats, shaped by past experiences, for actual dangers can limit our ability to enjoy life and celebrate successes. When the negativity bias takes over, it often leads to increased anxiety, depression, insecurity, and suspicion, preventing us from fully appreciating the joy and potential of our lives if we let go of these fears.

Our daily lives naturally include both moments of happiness and challenges. While I believe embracing both can enhance our joy, I find comfort more often in happiness than in difficulties. Sometimes, our survival instinct may prevent us from experiencing total happiness, making us think, "It's risky to be happy; I need to prepare for the worst." This tendency can lead us to unconsciously diminish our joy, settling for a more familiar, comfortable emotional state. Instead of thoroughly enjoying the present, we might try to deny it or redirect our attention to something we perceive as better or different.

Negative inner dialogue can also block our ability to enjoy pleasure. Take a moment to reflect on the silent messages you send yourself: Are they supportive and kind, or hurtful and shaming? We often get caught up in habitual thoughts, so exploring our beliefs about our own worth and goodness can be incredibly helpful. This can increase our awareness and mindfulness, allowing us to challenge distorted thoughts and judgments.

As I mentioned in earlier articles, recognizing and changing negative self-talk can bring huge benefits. I have replaced my negative self-talk with a more peaceful dialogue. Now, when I catch myself saying hurtful things quietly inside my head, I give myself a compliment with phrases like "Good for you for noticing," "Way to go, girlfriend," or "Good catch." These phrases have become part of my routine. Acknowledging myself with a positive message simply for noticing, surprised me at how often I used to speak unkindly to myself. Through awareness, I was able to

change my internal negative dialogue, and now I seldom put myself down. What a relief!

Further exploring the brain, science acknowledges neuroplasticity, the brain's capacity to reorganize, change connections, or rewire based on experiences. It is now understood that focusing our attention can alter the brain's structure and functions. Dan Siegel, MD, notes, "Where attention goes, energy flows... what fires together, wires together..." By intentionally cultivating joy, we can reduce our negativity bias, creating a sense of inner peace that promotes true happiness.

A key idea is that our thoughts cause biochemical changes in the body, which then reinforce similar thoughts. Therefore, focusing on positive, joyful ideas is helpful because what we practice tends to strengthen. If we dwell on judgment, blame, and anxiety, those thoughts become more dominant. On the other hand, practicing gratitude, respect, and compassion encourages those pathways to grow and develop.

In happiness research, a key trait of happy people is their belief that joy is actively chosen and achievable, and they are willing to embrace it. The Catholic mystic and writer Henri Nouwen writes, "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and then keep choosing it every day."

True contentment comes from accepting ourselves and our current situation. Life often becomes hectic, causing us to forget to pause and reflect. When we do stop, we might notice our thoughts are centered on past events or future plans, rather than appreciating the present. The key idea is that our focus frequently shifts to the past or future, neglecting the here and now. Many people are unaware that they may be responding to past experiences instead of fully embracing the present moment.

Before feeling satisfied with our current state, we must first acknowledge where we are. Here is a quick exercise to help you stay present. It takes less than two minutes.

Look around your environment without judging. Notice details like the carpet's texture and color, the artwork, and how the furniture is arranged, rather than calling the room cozy or dull. Being aware without judgment helps us stay present.

Happiness comes from intentional choices. Here are some ways to find joy.

1. Pause. Slowing down can be beneficial. Emotions arise from bodily sensations, so take a moment to notice what you feel when you experience small joys. This helps you understand the source of those feelings. When you are upset, pause, take a deep breath, and focus on positivity and on accepting people as they are (unless they are abusive). Remember, everyone faces struggles; taking a pause shows kindness and respect.

2. Stop buying stuff that is unnecessary. When you feel the urge to buy something, consider whether it is a "need" or a "want." If it is a "want," reflect on what is motivating you to purchase it now. Ask yourself: Do I truly need this right now? Wait a few days to see if the desire to buy it fades. Research shows that happiness from material possessions is only temporary.

3. Show people you appreciate them. Stay attentive and maintain eye contact. Avoid checking electronic devices while listening or speaking during conversations.

Demonstrate kindness with your words and actions. Approach others with curiosity, not criticism. Highlight people's strengths rather than their shortcomings. The more kindness you show, the more you will receive in return.

4. Practice gratitude. Start each day by acknowledging what you are grateful for. Identify at least one person, pet, or thing that adds value to your life. If you choose, jot down your thoughts in a journal. Throughout the week, spend some time reviewing your journal entries and reflecting on the positive aspects of your life. (See UCN article on Gratitude, Sept 2020)

5. Discover how to find joy in living without spending money. Connect with trusted friends through heartfelt conversations, take peaceful nature walks, or get lost in a good book, whether reading or listening. Indulge in a relaxing bath or warm shower to help you unwind. Many of these simple, joyful moments are free and can bring greater happiness than expensive pursuits.

6. Live in the moment. Avoid delaying happiness while waiting for a perfect day. Appreciate small daily pleasures now. Focus on the positives today rather than dwelling on the past or stressing about the future. Practicing mindfulness, such as meditation, deep breathing, and mindful walking, helps stay grounded in the present.

7. Incorporate humor. Laugh often and genuinely. Recognize the humor in everyday life and share your happiness with others.

8. Be generous. Giving to others not only makes them happy but also often boosts the happiness of the person giving.

9. Reframe negative thoughts. Challenge "If Only..." Scenarios: Ask yourself what is realistic and beneficial about the situation. Can you identify any positives or lessons learned? Replace "If only..." with "Next time, I will..." or "I can choose to..." This helps you by emphasizing clear steps you can take.

10. Set realistic goals. Break down larger goals into achievable tasks. This creates a sense of purpose and direction, reducing feelings of helplessness and boosting happiness.

11. Celebrate progress. Instead of focusing only on outcomes, recognize achievements, no matter how small, to build a more positive self-image.

By applying these strategies, you can overcome limiting thoughts and unlock greater happiness, strength, and emotional well-being.

Finding joy and happiness simply because something exists is an excellent source of fulfillment. Embracing contentment means feeling grateful, appreciating what you have, and accepting things as they are right now, instead of resisting reality. Taking that initial step toward happiness can open the door to this positive mindset. Keeping an optimistic outlook will bring continuous gifts and benefits throughout your life.

Barbara Pickholz-Weiner, RN, BSN, CACII, MAC, EMDRII is the program director of Journeys Counseling Center, Inc. At Journeys, we teach you tools, skills and help you discover resources to live the most effective life possible. We guide, support and coach you along the path you desire, to become the best version of yourself. To contact Barbara, call 719-510-1268 (cell) or email Journeyscounselingtr@gmail.com.



Colorado Pharmgirl

Hanging Ten
by Peggy Badgett

The seagulls cried as they skimmed frothy breakers, and long-legged willets scampered about in the surf. High above me, turkey vultures circled on the thermals. Did they know something I didn't? Shaking the water from my hair, I took a deep breath. Score on my surfing efforts: ocean 6, me 0. I grabbed my surfboard and headed back out. At least my sinuses were thoroughly cleaned from snorting massive quantities of salt water after being dumped to the ocean floor time after time.

It was one of those rare occasions where my three kids and I were all together on a Florida vacation. The weather was sunny and temperate. After a few days visiting my father in Orlando, we drove to an AirBnB in Cocoa Beach for a five day stay. The cute little house was a two minute walk to pristine sandy beaches. My son Alex had arranged surfing lessons for himself and me as a fun activity; he had recently learned how in California.

Our instructor was the epitome of "surfer dude." Tanned, muscle-bound, young with bleached blonde hair. After introductions, he drilled us on technique in the shade beneath a boardwalk. Alex popped up from his stomach to standing fluidly. Me, not so much. After my fifth effort, our teacher pronounced me ready. I think he just wanted to get into the water; we were all sweating. My heart thudded wildly as we dragged our boards into the ocean and guided them through incoming small waves. I was hopeful. Maybe I wouldn't break any bones. Once we passed the breakers, we stood gripping our gently bucking nine-foot surf boards.

Alex volunteered to be first. Our instructor held his board while he climbed on. We waited. When the first promising swell arrived, our surf dude gave Alex a push and yelled instructions. My son popped up shakily and rode the crest. As he hopped off triumphantly in the shallows, our instructor cheered and waved the surfer salute. Then it was my turn. I clumsily climbed onto the board and scooted back until my feet were in position. We waited. I went over the steps in my head, but everything blurred together in a swirling mass of fear. Surfer dude spotted a promising wave, and shoved me before it, yelling "Paddle, paddle, paddle." Terror turned my arms into noodles. I feebly dipped my hands in the water as the wave overtook me and tossed me effortlessly under water.

After surfacing and spouting water like a whale, I reined in my board and headed back to our starting point. Alex zoomed by me, surfing like he had been doing it for years. Ah, youth. Our instructor grinned at me and held the surfboard while I climbed back up. Watched the swells. Waited. This sport seemed to require a lot of that. Patience was not one of my strong attributes, but pure mulish stubbornness was. By the seventh try and resulting crash, I was disheartened. Maybe some sports were just not beginner-friendly for seniors. Then the magic happened.

The dude gave me a mighty push before another incoming swell. My arms found a rhythm. I felt the pull of the water dip the board down slightly, shifted my weight, got up on all fours, and rode the wave into the shallows! It wasn't glamorous, but it was progress. Our "dude" cheered. On my ninth effort, I actually made it into a crouch. Our time was almost up for the lesson. One last wave. Alex joined me. We both paddled like crazy before a promising swell, then stood and rode to the shallows together! I was elated.

Our instructor left us with the boards and walked back to the boardwalk to meet his next class. Amie and Hannah joined Alex and me. They lounged on beach chairs as my son and I practiced. I diligently went through the motions. My son tried to help, but my timing was terrible. After the surfboard smacked me smartly on the head during one tumble, I called it quits, dragged my sodden self to a towel by the girls and plopped down with a sigh.

"I'm dead," I told the girls. "Let the vultures take me."

They laughed and complimented me on my varied falling techniques. I smiled and popped open the beer they offered. It tasted good, even with sand mixed in. Waterlogged and happy, Alex joined us soon after. We sipped our beverages and soaked up the last rays of warm sun before heading back to our AirBnB. That night, I vowed to not get disheartened by my failure. It had taken me a while to become proficient at snowboarding and mountain biking as well. I shoved the little voice who whispered "you're too old to try this" in a dark corner and enjoyed dinner and a movie



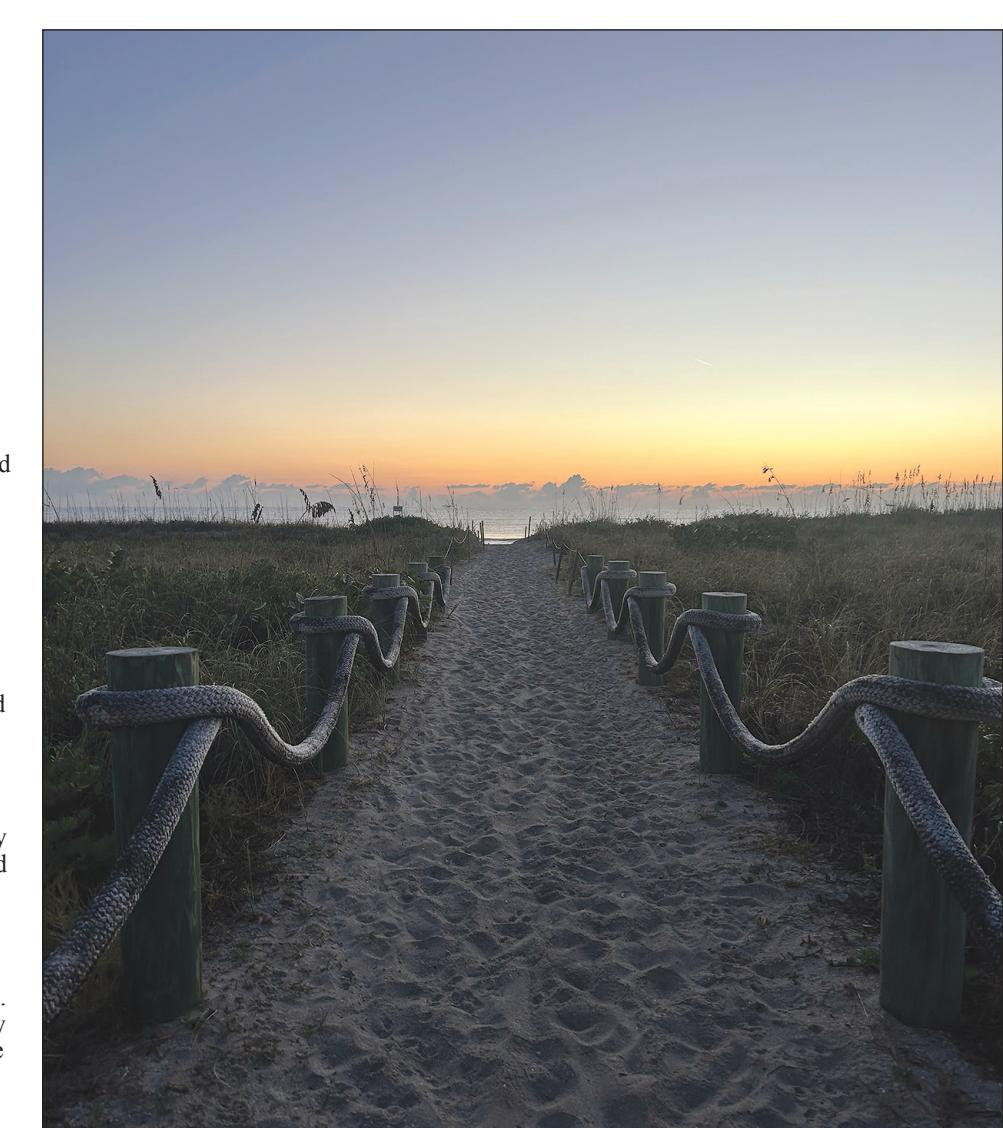
Alex surfing - Hannah and Amie wait for their wave.

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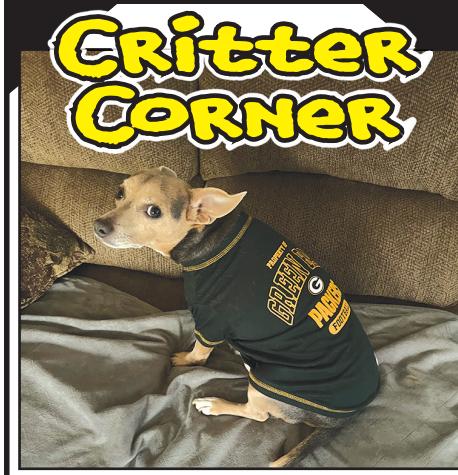
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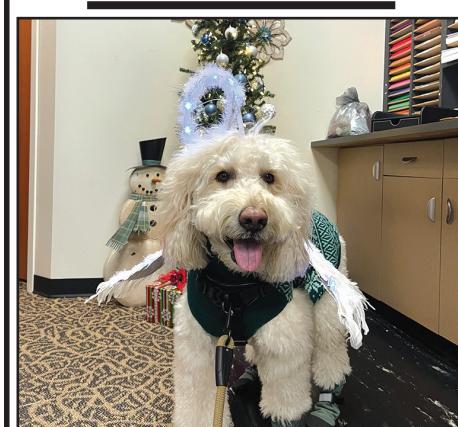
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Larissa, Dragon's Maid

by Gilrund the Historian

Larissa was the daughter of a hard-working wood cutter named Simon, who lived and worked in the forests on the outskirts of the Kingdom of Zorr, in a time long ago. Her father worked hard to support his small family and supply firewood for the nearby village, until the day that the wind caught a tree he had just cut, and the tree fell on him and broke his leg.

He could not work until his leg healed, so Larissa started working for a rich family in a neighboring city on the other side of the mountains.

Larissa was just 16 at the time, but she was strong and healthy and very pretty, with long black hair and a beautiful face. She was to marry Randle, the Baker's son, but now she had to go to work as a house maid to make some money for her family.

It was her first day and she was riding her father's old horse over the mountain when a dark shadow suddenly passed over them. The old horse was terrified and turned and bolted back toward their home, throwing Larissa onto the hard ground.

Larissa lay on the rocky trail stunned as the shadow returned and circled over her until the air around her swirled up and blocked her vision. Then the dust stopped blowing and settled and she could see once again.

What Larissa saw was a large black and red dragon standing before her on the trail. She was frozen in fear as the dragon stood blocking the trail and looking at her with his deep grey eyes.

She scrambled to her feet and backed to the rock wall on one side of the trail; her horse was gone, and she could see no way of escape. Then the dragon spoke, "I am called Redwing, for obvious reasons."

Redwing smiled a toothy dragon smile and replied,

The dragon flared his great wings, and the sun danced off the deep red of his wonderful wings. His body was as black as the night sky during a new moon as his scales twinkled in the sun as stars would do on such a night.

His talons and horns were cracked and worn, and his eyes looked tired. The scales around his terrible mouth were nearly as white as the teeth and fangs that showed when he spoke.

"I am very old and have fought well for the Kingdom of Zorr. My time is short, and my Rider has gone to the Crystal Dragon, now I have no one to care for me to the end of my days.

"I have watched you from the skies for many days. You are a good worker, so, I have chosen you to be my Dragon Maiden; you will care for me until I go to the Crystal Dragon. You will be well paid and fed; my treasure hoard will be yours when I am gone.

"The work is not that difficult; you have only to clean my scales, polish my talons and, if you will, read books and sing for me soft and gentle songs."

Larissa listened, amazed at what the old dragon was saying and waited for him to finish. Then she explained that if she didn't go on to work, her family would starve and be thrown out of their humble home. She told the dragon what had happened to her father and how important it was that she go on over the mountain and get to work.

Redwing smiled a toothy dragon smile and replied,

"Your family shall want for nothing. I shall provide for them as long as you serve me. Come, climb upon the saddle on my back, it is but a short flight to my lair."

Larissa climbed onto the saddle on the dragon's back, for what else could she do? One does not tell a dragon "No."

They flew for only half an hour, and Larissa enjoyed the flight as she looked down on the tree-covered mountains. She had never seen the lakes and rivers and ponds from above. They were beautiful.

She had never flown on a dragon before and with the dragon magic protecting her from the cold wind and other flying creatures, she had a wonderful time.

They landed much farther into the mountains and at the entrance to a large tunnel. Redwing walked into the tunnel with Larissa at his side, and they followed it to a large cavern. There were cracks and holes in the roof of the cavern that let the sunlight in to shine on the gold and jewels that covered the floor. There were chests and piles of gold and jewels stacked against the walls that sparkled in the sun and there were books everywhere.

Redwing stopped for a moment as though to rest. Then he walked slowly to a large platform made of gold coins and laid down. Just before he closed his eyes to go to sleep, he said, "This is my home; and this is where you will stay until I go to the Crystal Dragon."

Larissa watched as the old dragon slept and then walked around the cavern that was to be her home for, how long?

She found a wonderful four poster bed with all the associated furniture in a small alcove near the golden bed of the dragon. She assumed it was meant for her for as long as she stayed. Then she walked on around the cavern touching the treasure that was everywhere.

"This will all be mine when he goes to the Crystal Dragon, but when will that be?" she thought, "I may be here until I die, for dragons live for a very long time, some hundreds of years. But he did say that he was very old, perhaps it won't be too long."

It was several hours before the dragon awoke, and he quickly left the cavern. He didn't return for nearly three hours and when he did, he had food for Larissa in the form of fresh venison and the limbs of several fruit trees that were loaded with fresh fruit.

"I have eaten," he explained, "I have brought this for your pleasure and enjoyment." The

dragon put some small pieces of wood in a fire ring and lit a small fire, with his dragon breath. Larissa cooked the meat and ate some fruit while the dragon watched.

"Just who is this Crystal Dragon that you speak of going to soon?" Larissa asked as she ate an apple.

Redwing closed his eyes for a moment and then answered, "We dragons don't really know, but we do know that when a dragon dies it goes to him. We know this to be true, for a few of us have come back from him, at his bidding, to help us in some way, and they have told us of being with him."

"There is a song," he continued, "that is taught to all of dragon kind that tries to explain who the Crystal Dragon is. Let me sing to you the Song of the Crystal Dragon, perhaps then you will understand a little."

Then in a voice that was soft and gentle as it could be from an old dragon, Redwing started singing this song,

*I am from before the old times
I am from the Land of Three,
I am called the Crystal Dragon
And all the dragons come to me.*

*From the first and best of dragons
To the least crawled from the sea
I collect all of the dragons,
For all the dragons come to me.*

*Matters not the way of passing
Fall in battle or aged be.
I will be there at the crossing,
For all the dragons come to me.*

*When we appear before the Maker
And list unto His just decree,
Fair of foul it does not matter,
For all the dragons come to me.*

Redwing took a deep breath and was about to continue singing, for there was more of the song, when there was a bright flash of light.

Larissa covered her eyes quickly, but when she uncovered them again, the old dragon was gone!

Larissa ran from one part of the cavern to another searching and calling out for the dragon, but she couldn't find him. She sat on his golden bed trying to understand what had just happened.

The dragon walked on into the cavern looking with wide eyes at the treasure until he stumbled over a large treasure trunk and fell to the rocky floor.

His cry of pain was ear shattering as he lay on the floor holding his claw with the other.

Larissa ran over to him and pulled the injured claw away and gently rubbed the twisted talon with a bright green cream.

Troubled Talon looked at the human girl in amazement.

"The pain is gone!" he said as she rubbed the talon with the cream, "I have never felt that claw without pain. You are wonderful!"

"Now, you must stay off of that claw for a few days and allow the cream to do its job completely," Larissa said as she rubbed the talon gently, soaking in the green cream.

"Yes, I will do as you say," replied the dragon as Larissa led him to Redwing's bed made of thousands of gold coins. Troubled

dragons were asleep in moments for he had never slept on such a fine bed in his life.

Larissa waited for a few minutes and then called the dragon's name. She got no response, so she called him again, louder; no response, he slept on in great comfort.

"Good!" she said to herself, "Now to look at that talon."

Larissa moved to where the talon was and looked carefully at it. She could see that it was badly twisted and needed to be removed.

She looked around the cavern for something that she could use to cut the talon and soon found a sword that had what looked like saw teeth on the edges of the blade. They were large and meant to cause a horrible death, but for a dragon sized talon, they would do just fine as a saw.

Larissa touched the talon with her hand as she watched the dragon sleep. Then she moved the talon up and down a little, the dragon slept on.

Larissa took the sword and carefully placed it on the top of the side of the twisted talon and slowly started to cut with the dreadful teeth.

The dragon kept on sleeping as though nothing was happening.

Faster and faster, Larissa cut with the terrible blade and was almost through the whole talon. Then she cut gently until the talon fell to the floor. She quickly rubbed more of the green cream on the end of the stump after she rubbed the corners of the talon with a big rock to make the edges smooth.

The dragon continued to sleep.

Larissa walked to her chamber in the cavern and ate some of the fruit that Redwing had brought her hours ago, then went to sleep in her own bed.

It was early the next morning that she was awakened by the gentle voice of the dragon as it sang a song of happiness.

Troubled Talon was walking around the cavern singing, he was a very happy dragon.

He saw Larissa looking out of her chamber and ran to her and said, "You are a wonder worker, for you have taken away years of pain for me. Now you shall be my Dragon's Maid, and I will care for you for the rest of your days."

"I shall no longer be called Troubled Talon; I shall be called Tranquil Talon! You, Larissa, have given me peace and comfort and, if you wish, you shall ride on my back as a Dragon Rider. I shall use my dragon magic to protect you as you ride and my dragon power to give you whatever I can. May the Crystal Dragon bless you for what you have done for me."

Larissa was as happy as the dragon, and they spent the rest of her life having wonderful adventures together.

The End ~

Chuck Atkinson of Como, CO enjoys writing fiction stories and treasure hunts for the children at his church. We are pleased to have him contribute to the only fiction in our Ute Country News.



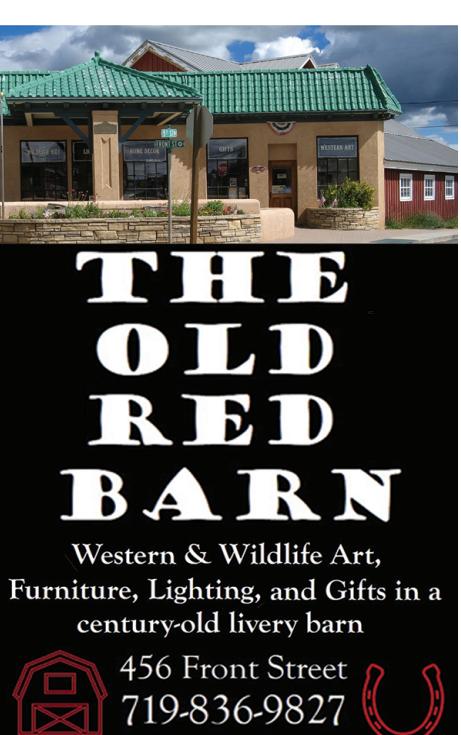
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Guffey at 130 years - part II

by Flip Boettcher

We continue this brief history of Guffey and the surrounding area. Guffey and the Freshwater Mining District sit in a scenic area at the base of three ancient volcanoes that have deeply eroded, which erupted 34 million years ago. The Guffey volcanic center is the largest part of the Thirty-Nine-Mile Volcanic area, which is the largest remnant of the Central Colorado Volcanic Field, according to *From Mineral Strike to Meteor Strike*, a paper published by Steven Wade Veatch and his Guffey Exploration Team which included members of the Lake George Gem and Mineral club and the Guffey Cloudbait Observatory.

Guffey sits in that volcanic basin, a caldera, that resulted from those eruptions. Guffey is surrounded by those eroded mountains: Thirty-Nine-Mile, Saddle, Castle, McIntyre, Witcher, Cover, Thirty-One-Mile, Baldy, Waugh and Black. Many are named for the Guffey pioneers.

The first peoples in the Guffey area were thought to be early Paleoindians (before 5000 BC), based on lithics they left behind. Spear and arrow points from the Archaic Period (5000 BC to 500 AD) and the early part of the Late Prehistoric Period (500 AD to 1500 AD) have been found in the Guffey area.

There have also been found flaked stone debris in various places in the Guffey area representing Ute Indian camping areas, as well as culturally peeled trees representing Ute Indian harvesting of pine bark in the spring. There are also culturally modified trees, per *From Mineral Strike to Meteor Strike*.

John C. Fremont explored the area on his way back from California in 1844. By the late 1870s early settlers started arriving in the area, lured by the discovery of gold in 1859 and the 1862 Homestead Act.

Some of the early homesteaders on Currant Creek were the Benders, Hammonds, Dells, Rowes. Some of the early homesteaders on West Fourmile Creek were the Witchers, Tremaynes, Grosses, Nashs, Bumgarners, Witherspoons and many more.

In 1895 Guffey was a bustling mining, lumber and ranching town. Gustave (Gus) Cohen, who purchased the 110 acre Townsite of Guffey for \$137.50 in 1896, owned the first mercantile store in Guffey. Presumably the store was located on the northwest corner of Fourth and Main Streets and probably housed the post office. Cohen was postmaster off-and-on between 1896 and 1922. A March 19, 1899 *Park County Bulletin* article in the Freshwater Section, stated that "The post office/store is the place to buy your tobacco, cigars and stationery." According to John W. Tremayne in the *Guffey 100 Years of Memories* book, "Mr. Cohen had a mercantile store, and believe me, he sold everything. A great store for a little town." (For more on the Guffey general store see the "Evolution of the Guffey General Store" in the February 4, 2019 *Flume*.)

Production numbers in the area were not recorded until the 1945 Mineral Yearbook, which reported production of 64 tons from two mines that yielded one ounce of gold, 83 ounces of silver, 5,600 pounds of copper, 100 pounds of lead and 2,600 pounds of zinc, *From Mineral Strike to Meteor Strike*.

With not much of great value found in the Guffey area, the mining waned. The town was supported by the surrounding ranching and lumbering industries.

The 1901 *Business Directory* listed a population of 150 with 10 businesses. The 1910 *Business Directory* listed a population of 150 with three businesses — Gus Cohen's general store, the Townsend Hotel and the Frederic Hotel. After WWI, longtime local Guffey resident Charlie Dell said there were only 12 people in town plus one store, a livery stable and the town hall.

The town hall, which was built in 1896, was the center of civic and social life for the surrounding area holding meetings, including the Park County Cattle Growers annual meetings, it was a voting place and held very popular dances year-round. To attend one of the dances, everyone had to check-in their spurs and six-shooters before entering the hall.

There were also very popular, legendary rodeos held on 4th of July in the field where the bakery is now. According to longtime area resident Harry Epperson. In his 1944 book *Colorado as I Saw It*, "If you wanted to celebrate the Fourth of July, there was no doubt of it, you went to Guffey."

In 1907, JT Witcher, a local rancher, and Robert L. Pope of Cañon City, were running cattle in the hills around Guffey, when they came upon what they thought was a huge silver nugget. In fact, what they found was a 682

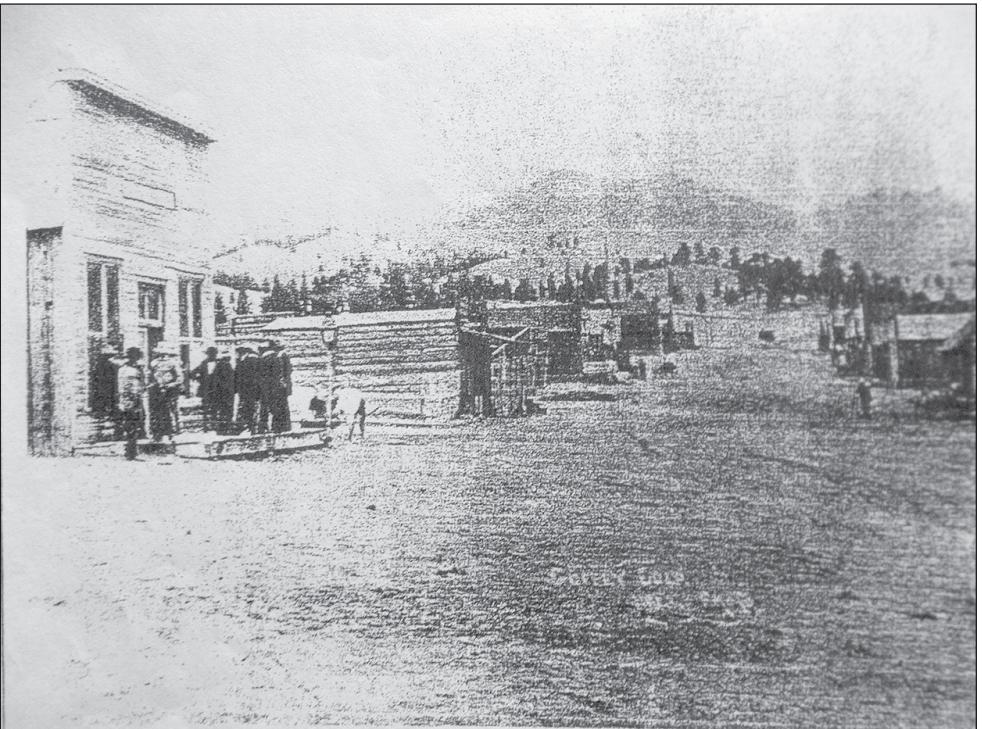
pound iron meteorite, per *From Mineral Strike to Meteor Strike*. Today the Guffey meteor is classified as an ungrouped iron, meaning it doesn't fit well in any category, somewhat like Guffey residents.

The meteorite is 36.5 inches long, 15 inches in height and 8 inches wide and weighs 682 pounds. It is the largest meteor that has been found in Colorado.

The meteorite was purchased by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in 1909 at a price of \$1,500. Today this meteorite would be worth several hundred thousand dollars. A front page January 22, 1908 *Flume* article, states that the meteorite was on display in front of Tanner's Grocery in Fairplay. It was then shipped for \$60 to the AMNH. The meteorite is still on display in the AMNH Meteorite Hall.

The actual location where the cowboys found the meteorite is unknown, any pieces of it left would be worth quite a bit. Happy hunting!

As mentioned in part one, the first burials in the Guffey cemetery were Baby Buford Swope and Thomas H. Burge, who died within days of each other in August 1897.

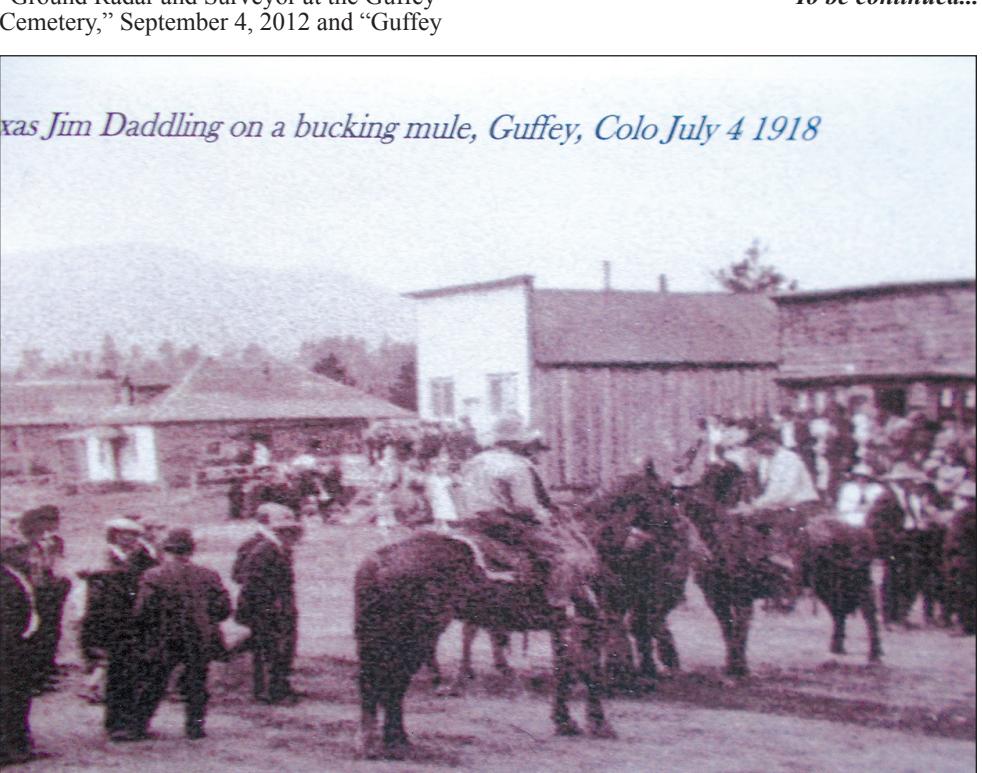


The town hall on the far left side with the men in front, looking north on Main Street, unknown date but probably around 1896.



The town hall today. photo by Flip Boettcher Cemetery, February 24, 2013.

To be continued...



The 4th of July rodeo, 1918.

Ways Chaotic

by Steven Wade Veatch

Species – familiar, strange, exotic –
slip away in unruly currents,
lost to firestorms, floods,
and the hunger of the sea,
on this turning blue marble
adrift in darkness.

Climate tilts,
the air heats,
seasons slip their patterns,
and life's choices are few:
move
adapt
or
vanish.

Life, stubborn and luminous,
leaves traces in drowned sediments,
whispers pressed into mud, silt, and sand –
echoes that wait beneath the tides of time.

Beneath our feet are fossils in stone,
giant skeletons keeping their watch
leaf veins tracing delicate memory into shale.
A single claw curled in sleep,
a forest frozen mid-breath
all relic whispering the same law.

The present things like a morning mist,
but these folli-bound tablets,
holding stories of the past
will outlast our shadows,
and speak to whoever listens:

This is what lived here.
This is what was lost.
This is what happened.



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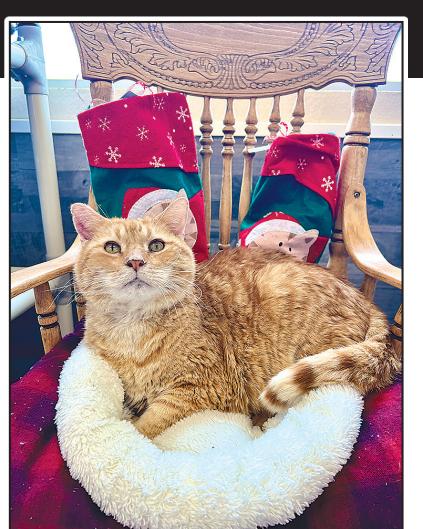


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Adopt Me by Ark Valley
Humane Society

Hobby

Sweet, 11 year-old senior cat Hobby is searching for a warm home to live out his Golden Years. Hobby arrived at Ark-Valley Humane Society after his owner sadly passed away. Hobby received a health evaluation from staff and routine medical care items to help him become ready for adoption including vaccinations and blood work. The results concluded that Hobby was positive for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV+). Feline Immunodeficiency Virus is transmitted between cats through blood, bite, or birth and causes a weakening of the immune system. It can only be spread to other cats. It cannot be spread to people or dogs. However, many FIV+ cats can live very long, normal, and healthy lives! He will need to be an indoor-only cat. Hobby is such an easy-going sweetheart. He doesn't mind dressing up in silly costumes or chilling in the manager's office along with a staff member's dog. As long as he gets pets and a nice bed to snuggle in, he is happy! Hobby deserves all the love and will hopefully soon find his happily-ever-after. Contact Ark Valley Humane Society to meet Hobby at 719-395-2737.



This space donated by the Ute Country News to promote shelter animal adoption.

Governor Polis, CPW and Great Outdoors Colorado Award \$9.99 million

by Travis Duncan

December 15, 2025, Governor Polis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) announced 19 grant awards totaling \$9,990,240 through the Regional Partnerships Initiative (RPI). These investments support regional coalitions working together to advance outdoor recreation, conservation, and climate resilience goals aligned with Colorado's Outdoors Strategy.

In April 2025, CPW and GOCO committed \$50 million to the RPI grant program over the next five years to support the Strategy's on-the-ground implementation. These grant awards are the first of five annual implementation-focused award cycles to come.

Regional partnerships supported this round are leading significant efforts for Colorado's diverse recreation opportunities, wildlife, natural resources, and agriculture, such as:

- Trail upgrades and restoration of sensitive habitat on iconic 'fourteeners' (mountains over 14,000 feet), led by Outside 285
- New and improved trail segments on the envisioned 63-mile trail around Pikes Peak, and care for critical bighorn sheep habitat, led by Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance
- A major land conservation effort to protect 18,000 acres of productive ranchland, wildlife habitat, and water resources in the Colorado River watershed, led by Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust
- Implementing solutions (like highway crossings and gates) in the Gunnison Valley and on the Western Slope that support wildlife movement, agricultural production, and safe and enjoyable recreation, led by the Gunnison Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee and West Slope Outdoors Alliance, and much more.

"Colorado's Outdoors Strategy and the Regional Partnerships Initiative demonstrate what is possible when conservation, recreation, and agricultural interests join with local governments and land managers to serve Colorado's outdoors," said Governor Jared Polis. "With strategic investments into Colorado's outdoor economy and land conservation efforts, signature projects like Pikes Peak Exceptionalism, large-scale land protection conserving some of the State's best wildlife habitat, and the Indian Creek Trail are getting the resources needed to be successful."

"The Department of Natural Resources is proud to be part of the Regional Partnerships Initiative," said DNR Executive Director Dan Gibbs. "Balancing outdoor recreation and our wildlife, water and lands is critically important as we face population growth and impacts from climate change. Our Colorado's Outdoor Strategy and these grants go hand in hand in our comprehensive and collaborative efforts to advance the on-the-ground actions needed to realize our goals for exceptional outdoor recreation, climate-resilient conservation, and coordinated planning and funding."

"This grant round reflects an evolution in Colorado's Outdoors Regional Partnerships Initiative," said CPW Acting Director Laura Clellan. "We are moving from planning to implementation, investing in projects that deliver meaningful conservation, responsible recreation management, and climate resilience across Colorado. These experiences represent what Coloradans value most about their outdoors."

"This is a big moment for Colorado's outdoors and for the communities that have poured so much time and effort into this work," said GOCO Executive Director Jackie Miller. "Colorado's Outdoors Strategy gave us a shared vision; these RPI grants turn that vision into action by conserving working lands, restoring trails and habitat, and building the local capacity needed to deliver. When community coalitions join together like this, doors open for landscape-scale conservation and high-quality outdoor recreation."

To learn more about the Regional Partnerships and see a map of their locations, visit CPW's RPI webpage.

2025 Regional Partnerships Initiative Funding Recipients

\$2,500,000 to Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust & Eagle County Regional Partnership

Funding will support a rare, high-impact land conservation opportunity, through a proposed conservation easement that could protect nearly 18,000 acres of intact working



GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO

mountain ranchland in the Colorado River watershed. The property includes significant wildlife habitat, important water rights, and high climate resilience value. The transaction is anticipated to close in June 2026, and CPW and GOCO will continue working closely with the Regional Partnership and land trust partner.

\$182,900 to Eastern Colorado Grassland Coalition (ECGC)

The ECGC, launched in 2024, is dedicated to conserving and enhancing the native grasslands, croplands, and communities of eastern Colorado through collaborative community-driven conservation, sustainable land management, and responsible recreation. ECGC is continuing to build its regional recreation and conservation plan. With this funding, they will conduct outreach and engage community members through workshops and a community survey, refine the coalition's website, and develop social media profiles. Funding will also support a wildlife habitat enhancement project with community partners.

\$175,000 to Grand Places 2050

The Grand Places 2050 coalition is taking a phased approach to developing a strategic action plan for Grand County, starting with a review of existing plans and stakeholder outreach to define the coalition's vision, goals, and strategies, then refining objectives and creating mapping tools to support decision-making. Funding will also support the Stewardship Ambassador program, which staffs busy trailheads in the region to educate visitors about wildlife safety, Leave No Trace principles, and related topics. Headwaters Trails Alliance manages the Stewardship Ambassador program in partnership with the Forest Service and the local chamber of commerce, and it has reached more than 100,000 visitors to date.

\$225,000 to Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee (Gunnison STOR)

Funding will help Gunnison STOR Committee complete a regional conservation and recreation plan. The planning process will emphasize coordinating and consolidating existing efforts that have gone through community planning processes while also engaging additional key stakeholders. Partners will conduct wildlife crossing planning in coordination with the Colorado Department of Transportation to improve landscape connectivity and reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. Funding will also support seasonal public lands stewardship and ranger capacity, and help install agricultural gates to reduce conflicts between recreation and ranching.

\$150,000 to Northeast Colorado Regional Partnership (NECORP)

NECORP is a new regional partnership convened to help connect rural communities in Weld, Morgan, Washington, Logan, Yuma, Phillips, and Sedgwick counties, fostering collaboration across this broad geographic area. This region is known for its agricultural heritage, vast grasslands, and key role in Colorado's economy. Funding will support formalizing the coalition by providing resources for facilitation, cross-county outreach and engagement, and the development of a

governance structure and charter.

\$130,000 to Northwest Colorado Outdoors (NWCO)

NWCO works to strengthen regional collaboration, finalize a shared vision for outdoor planning, and increase capacity and visibility in Moffat and Rio Blanco counties. Funding will support facilitation, outreach, and technical experts to create a regional plan that benefits communities, honors local cultural heritage, and promotes sustainable wildlife and recreation management. The grant will also support the development of an Outdoor Asset Map. This public GIS-based tool will combine ecological, recreation, and working lands data to guide transparent decisions about planning and project selection.

\$1,610,825 to Outside 285

Outside 285 encompasses the foothills region southwest of Denver within portions of several counties that serve as the beloved rural "backyard" for the metro area. Funds will restore sensitive wildlife habitat and improve visitor experience in the Indian Creek trail system by eliminating social trails, constructing new routes, and developing signage and wayfinding in the area. Awarded funds will also advance work near several 14ers in the Mosquito Range west of Fairplay, protecting critical wildlife habitat and water resources while improving trails and recreational access. A project centered at Mount Silverheels will protect bighorn sheep habitat by closing social trails, rehabilitating sensitive habitat, and establishing a sustainable summit trail on this popular 13er.

\$86,055 to Pagosa Area Recreation Coalition (PARC)

PARC, spanning Archuleta and parts of Hinsdale and Mineral counties, is developing a community-driven outdoor recreation plan that will enhance recreation experiences while protecting natural resources and wildlife. Funding will support ongoing coordination and facilitation, including stakeholder engagement and a communications strategy using a new website, social media, community presentations, and public events to share the coalition's work. In addition, the partnership will protect sensitive landscapes, encourage responsible recreation, and improve visitor experience by placing seasonal porta-potties and trash cans at high-use trailheads and implementing a wayfinding and signage plan.

\$2,500,000 to Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance (PPORA)

As part of its Peak Exceptionalism Project, the Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance (PPORA) will lead several efforts alongside project partners advancing conservation and sustainable recreation across the Pikes Peak Region, which includes El Paso, Fremont, and Teller counties and welcomes over 25 million visitors each year. The partnership will construct, realign, and authorize segments of the currently 63-mile Ring the Peak (RTP) Trail encircling Pikes Peak. Partners will also restore 300 acres within Dome Rock State Wildlife Area to improve bighorn sheep habitat, lower wildfire risk, and foster a more resilient ecosystem. Camping opportunities will be enhanced along the RTP corridor and the Gold Belt Scenic Byway, with new campsites and access points added at Red Canyon Park. A three-year ambassador program will deploy trained staff to educate visitors, maintain trails, and collect recreation-use data. These initiatives build on a four-year planning effort that engaged more than 1,400 community members in shaping a shared vision for the region's outdoor spaces.



habitat from overgrazing.

\$124,575 to Spanish Peaks Outdoor Coalition (SPOC)

SPOC focuses on recreation, conservation, and economic development in southern Colorado. After its first year, the coalition established a governance structure, guiding pillars, and a consensus-based decision-making process. It's now developing a regional plan to guide future conservation, outdoor recreation, and sustainable economic development. This grant will support coordination, facilitation, and community engagement. It will also help the coalition produce an outdoor guide showcasing the Spanish Peaks region, highlighting local destinations, public land access, cultural sites, conservation areas, wildlife habitat, and outdoor businesses in Huerfano and Las Animas counties.

\$87,000 to the Roaring Fork Outdoor Coalition

The Roaring Fork Outdoor Coalition builds partnerships, anticipates future recreation needs, and promotes inclusive recreation while upholding conservation goals. In advance of completing a regional plan in 2026, this funding will support a pilot Decision Support Tool to help select stewardship and education projects in the Roaring Fork Valley. Anticipated projects include habitat restoration, trail stewardship and maintenance, and volunteer events. The coalition will also continue working across county lines with neighboring regional partnerships in Eagle, Grand, and Summit counties through the Mountain Communities Outdoor Collective.

\$388,856 to Routt Recreation & Conservation Roundtable (RRCR)

RRCR spent two years developing a comprehensive Conservation and Recreation Strategy, working with a wide range of members and partners across the county to identify and prioritize projects. Funding will support continued facilitation of the Roundtable, collaboration across sectors and interest areas, and a summer stewardship crew. The crew will carry out on-the-ground trail and resource stewardship across the broader Hahns Peak - Bears Ears Ranger District, focusing on high-use recreation areas and dispersed camping corridors.

\$394,000 to San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)

SLV GO! works to ensure outdoor recreation in the San Luis Valley is developed and maintained sustainably, protecting the region's natural resources through strategic planning, adaptive management, and advocacy. Following a multi-year planning process, SLV GO! completed an SLV Great Outdoors Strategy informed by community surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, data analysis, and local knowledge. Funding will support continued capacity for the coalition and a wildlife fencing project. The project will convert 12 miles of fence along the Colorado - New Mexico border to wildlife-friendly fencing, helping big game move through critical winter habitat, and construct fencing in the Rio Grande Natural Area to protect riparian

\$75,000 to Wet Mountain Valley Outdoors (WMVO)

Starting in 2025, WMVO began doing community outreach to create a long-term vision and action plan for outdoor recreation, conservation, reclamation, and land preservation on public and private lands in Custer County.

This funding will support continued outreach and engagement to build a shared vision, identify strategies, and form action teams that will guide the partnership's work.

\$200,000 to Colorado Parks and Wildlife

In addition, a \$200,000 direct grant to Colorado Parks and Wildlife will help the agency support regional partnerships with facilitation and other services as they grow and evolve.

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CPW invests \$2 Million in Equity Grants

by Travis Duncan

Today, the Outdoor Equity Grant Board and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) announced the recipients of \$2 million in Outdoor Equity Grants. These grants, funded through the Colorado Lottery, support organizations that break down barriers to Colorado's outdoors and create inclusive opportunities for youth and families to take part in education, conservation and job training opportunities in the outdoors. Today's announcement brings total investment in outdoor equity projects to \$10.5 million since 2022.

"Every Coloradan should have access to our breathtaking outdoors. Outdoor Equity Grants help Coloradans get outside and experience the deep connection of hiking our world-class trails and exploring our wild spaces. Beyond recreation, this inspires young Coloradans to explore careers in outdoor recreation, conservation, and similar fields. By fostering passion today, we're building the workforce — the scientists, guides, and innovators — who will drive our \$28 billion outdoor economy and lead the charge on environmental stewardship," said Governor Polis.

The Outdoor Equity Grant Program (OEGP), created in 2021 by the passage of House Bill 21-1318, funds community, educational and governmental organizations and tribes that increase access for youth to Colorado's outdoors. Grants support youth who have traditionally been excluded from conservation careers and the outdoors, allowing them to experience Colorado's iconic landscapes. Through Outdoor Equity Grants, organizations across the state provide outdoor opportunities for youth who are: racially and ethnically diverse, low-income, disabled, LGBTQ+ or American Indian.

During the 2025 legislative session, the Colorado Legislature passed HB25-1215, which strengthens the program's future by increasing the amount deposited into the OEGP fund up to \$4 million of Lottery spillover funds to support outdoor equity needs in the years ahead. However, lottery revenues did not exceed the minimum needed to fund the Outdoor Equity Grant Program in the 2025 fiscal year.

CPW remained committed to supporting outdoor access for all young people and their families in the face of this funding shortfall. CPW and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) partnered to secure \$2 million in combined funding — \$1 million from CPW's Parks and Outdoor Recreation Cash and Wildlife Cash Funds, and \$1 million from the GOCO board as a one-time investment due to alignment with the organization's values of equitable access and youth connections to nature.

"As someone who grew up in western Colorado with deep roots in this land, I've witnessed firsthand the profound impact that outdoor experiences have on young people. These Outdoor Equity Grants are essential — they ensure that every Colorado youth, regardless of their background or circumstances, has the opportunity to discover the same connection to nature that shaped my life and career. Investing in equitable access to our outdoors is investing in the next generation of conservationists and stewards of Colorado's wild places. I'm proud that GOCO was able to



ensure that support for this program continues," said Parks and Wildlife Commissioner Gabriel Otero, who also serves as CPW's representative to the GOCO Board.

With the addition of the 2025 awards, the Board has awarded funding to support 166 outdoor, conservation and educational grant projects across Colorado over five grant rounds. Grants have supported everything from outdoor mentoring programs to Queer Scouts programs and summer camps to in-school programming.

While the program has awarded \$10.5 million to date, requests for funding far exceed the amount of available funding each year, and applicants undergo a competitive process to gain awards. In 2025, the board received over \$20 million in requests for the available \$2 million. Ultimately, one tenth of 2025 requests were funded.

"Young Coloradans deserve access to the outdoors, and we need to continue building pathways for them to experience the benefits of being outside. I'm grateful to the CPW staff who worked to ensure that funding for this program wouldn't falter, and to our partners at GOCO who helped make sure the program could continue despite funding challenges. Every year, we receive far more funding requests than we have dollars available, and that tells us something important: communities across our state are doing incredible work to break down barriers to the outdoors for young people. Thank you to all of this year's incredibly qualified applicants, and congratulations to the funded applicants," said Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources Dan Gibbs.

The Outdoor Equity Grant Board accepted letters of interest from April to June, and after reviewing the letters over the summer, invited

54 applicants to complete full applications in the fall. The board approved the 24 organizations to receive grants in November.

This year, the Board underscored the need for geographic diversity when selecting grant recipients, and funded projects reflect Colorado's varied landscapes and communities. Outdoor Equity Grants distributed last December will reach youth across the state, from La Junta to Nucla. La Junta Jr/Sr High School will launch a summer and after-school fishing program, while Beast Fingers Kids will purchase a van, outdoor gear, and provide climbing coaching to youth from Aurora. Southwest Conservation Corps will offer youth training and paid opportunities in conservation careers, and Stepping Stones of the Roaring Fork Valley will provide experiential outdoor programming to marginalized Western Slope youth, connecting them to nature and environmental stewardship.

CPW is currently recruiting new members to the Outdoor Equity Grant Board to help guide the program and decide on grant awards. The board is seeking individuals with outdoor education experience, expertise in disability-accessible programming, and young people (age 25 and younger) from communities served by the program. Applications are due by December 21, 2025. To apply and learn more, visit the CPW website: <https://cpw.state.co.us/committees/outdoor-equity-grant-board>

Outdoor Equity Grant recipients for 2025 include:

- Adaptive Sports Center - Crested Butte - \$42,000
- Beast Fingers Kids, Inc. - Lakewood - \$100,000
- Bits of Freedom - Beulah - \$100,000
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Pueblo County - Pueblo - \$100,000
- Camping to Connect - Aurora - \$100,000
- Colorado Asian Culture And Education Network - Englewood - \$100,000
- Colorado Circles for Change - Denver - \$100,000
- Colorado Outward Bound School - Leadville - \$48,580
- Connections for Independent Living - Greeley - \$43,093
- Costilla County Conservancy District - San Luis - \$83,500
- elevateHER - Buena Vista - \$100,000
- Friends of Youth and Nature - Hotchkiss - \$75,000
- Groundwork Denver - Denver - \$100,000
- Inside Out Youth Services - Colorado Springs - \$100,000
- La Junta Jr/Sr High School - La Junta - \$12,730
- The Matthews House - Fort Collins - \$81,988
- Montrose West Recreation Inc. - Nucla - \$80,000
- Mountain Dreamers - Frisco - \$75,000
- The Nature Connection - Delta - \$98,654
- Rocky Mountain Equality - Boulder - \$80,000
- Rocky Mountain Welcome Center - Aurora - \$100,000
- Southwest Conservation Corps - Durango - \$99,804
- Stepping Stones of the Roaring Fork Valley - Carbondale - \$78,000
- Yampa Valley Autism Program - Steamboat Springs - \$100,000

OEGP is funded with Colorado Lottery proceeds and allocates funding through grants for initiatives that focus on increasing access to the outdoors for youth and families from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in outdoor recreation and conservation. For more information, visit <https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/Outdoor-Equity-Fund.aspx>.



The Outdoor Equity Grant application

Tales from Big Sky Ranch Bed and Biscuit

The Happy Spin

by Kendra Lee Hall

At Big Sky Ranch Bed and Biscuit, joy came in many forms — wagging tails, excited barks, and most of all, the famous happy spin. Every day, dogs of all shapes and sizes twirled in anticipation, their spinning bodies a dance of pure delight.

Mornings at the ranch began with a quick trip outside and then breakfast, a moment that sent the dogs into a whirlwind of excitement. As soon as the kibble rattled in the stainless-steel bowls, Charlie and Buttercup, the litter mate Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, began their synchronized spinning routine. Their tails swirled behind them in perfect harmony, their excitement contagious.

Beside them, Winston, the golden retriever, twirled with an open-mouthed grin, his long tail swishing with every turn. Meanwhile, Pepper, the tiny but mighty Jack Russell, spun so fast that it seemed her feet barely touched the ground.

Then, with breakfast finished, came the greatest thrill of all — going outside. As soon as the back door creaked open, the dogs erupted in excitement.

Maggie, the bouncy Australian shepherd, turned in tight, enthusiastic circles, while Fluffy the Great Pyrenees, spun in one, slow but purposeful spin. Even old Bentley, the wise and gentle basset hound, gave a half-hearted spin before trotting out, his long ears flopping with every step.

Outside, the ranch burst into life. Winston chased the wind, his long golden fur flopping with each gallop, while Pepper zoomed in zigzags across the yard, occasionally stopping to sniff an interesting scent. Fluffy flopped onto her back, legs kicking playfully in the air, inviting belly rubs. Ruby, the energetic border collie mix, played referee during a game of chase between Charlie and Buttercup, barking excitedly.

But it wasn't just food and fun outdoors that inspired the spin. Some dogs spun for attention, their way of saying, "Look at me!" Ruby always spun for a smile and a pet. But some had other strategies for attention — Fluffy gently leaned her big body against Lee's leg and looked up with soulful eyes, while Bentley preferred a quiet sit-by-your-side, offering his presence as the dear friend he had become to Lee and all the dog caretakers at the ranch.

Nap time at the Bed and Biscuit had its own set of spins. Dogs settled into cozy beds and sunlit corners or found a spot on the couch.

Before settling in, Winston turned in three circles, fluffing the blanket on his dog bed before plopping down with a contented grunt. Pepper performed an elegant pre-nap twirl before curling into a tiny donut, tucking her nose under her tail. Fluffy liked to stretch out long and flat on her stomach,

paws forward, nose down. Usually, she was snoring before some of the other dogs had even found their spots.

Rest time over, it was time for more fun outdoors. Afternoons were a quieter part of the day, the dogs having exerted a lot of energy in play earlier. Lee sat in the Adirondack chair in the corner of the yard, and the dogs gathered around. Winston lay at her feet, Ruby curled at her side, and Bentley positioned himself just close enough to reach with a slow lean. Lee scratched ears, petted heads, and occasionally chuckled as a squirrel chattered in a tree, often triggering an impromptu sprint across the yard.

It was a peaceful time — tails wagging slowly, a soft breeze rustling the aspen leaves, the occasional chirp of a bird or the caw of a



Dogs of all shapes and sizes enjoy doing the happy spin!

crow soaring overhead.

As the sun dipped below the horizon and dinner was served, the happy spins began again. Bowls clanked, tails wagged, and once again, the ranch pulsed with excitement and routine.

As the moon got higher in the sky over the ranch, the last spin of the day came when Lee called out, "Time for bed, pups!" The dogs, eager for their cozy spots, jumped up and headed for their designated pen where they would spend the night. Some gave one final twirl — one last joyful expression of their happiness at the Bed and Biscuit.

The happy spin wasn't just about excitement, it was a language of joy, of belonging, and of knowing the dogs were loved. As the moon shone brightly and the dogs settled into dreams, Lee could still feel the energy of all those joyful spins.



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• Cribbage Club Fridays 10-noon.

• Duleimer Club for kids 2nd and 4th Wednesdays 3:30-4:30 p.m.

• Mahjong Club Tuesdays 1-4 p.m.

• Metaphysical Group Second Saturdays 10-30 a.m.

• Rummikub Club meets 3rd Monday of each month 1 p.m.

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• All at 516 Macon Ave unless otherwise specified. FMI 719-269-9020 www.cpt.lib.co.us

CASCADE

UTE PASS LIBRARY 9, 23, 30 Storytime 10:30 a.m. Stories and more for children ages 3-7 and their parents or caregivers.

9 LEGO Club 3:30-4:40 p.m. Engineering your best LEGO creation and completing LEGO challenges are only some of the possibilities at this open-ended LEGO program using the Library's LEGO resources. Join us for creative fun! All ages welcome.

15 Device Drop-in 3-4 p.m. Need help with your laptop, smartphone, tablet or the Library's new online catalog? Stop by our Device Drop-in Hour and our staff can assist you. No registration is required. Please bring your power cords and devices. We cannot help with installing software, removing viruses, setting up computers.

FAIRPLAY

4 Artgard Arts & Science Day 12 p.m. FREE at South Park Rec Center

• Catan Group 2 p.m.

11 Chess Group 2 p.m.

18 Artgard Park Days 12-1:30 p.m. FREE at South Park Rec Center

18 Word Game 2 p.m.

25 Artgard Arts & Science Day 12 p.m.

• Mondays Cribbage Group 6 p.m.

• Mondays Boozy Books Game bi-weekly 6 p.m. at Snitching Lady Distillery

• Wednesdays Trivia Night bi-weekly 6 p.m. FREE at Snitching Lady Distillery

• Thursdays Stranger Things D&D 4:39 p.m. at South Park Rec Center

• Thursdays Learn to Play 6 p.m. featured game "Wyrmspan"

• Fridays Night Magic 7 p.m.

• Saturdays Adult RPGs 7/8 p.m. Different RPG each week.

COLORADO SPRINGS

30 Older Driver Empowerment Class deadline for Blue Spruce Gallery submissions, show Jan 10, 4:30-7 p.m. See page 4.

• The Florence Pioneer Museum and Research Center is open for business during this cold January. We are having some work done upstairs so please excuse our dust. Come by and check out the history of Florence 100 E. Front Street. FMI www. florencepioneermuseum.org.

24 Accordion Photo Albums 10:30-12 p.m. Create a personalized item to display your favorite memories with an accordion-style photo album! Feel free to bring photos from home to populate your albums. All supplies provided. Registration required at <https://pld.librarymarket.com/event/accordion-photo-albums-524249>.

FLORENCE

6 deadline for Blue Spruce Gallery submissions, show Jan 10, 4:30-7 p.m. See page 4.

• The Florence Pioneer Museum and Research Center is open for business during this cold January. We are having some work done upstairs so please excuse our dust. Come by and check out the history of Florence 100 E. Front Street. FMI www. florencepioneermuseum.org.

• The Aging with Altitude podcast hosted by the Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging can be listened to wherever readers get their podcasts or PPACG.studio09podcasts.com. Episodes in January on volunteering and also the Colorado Senior Games.

CRIPPLE CREEK

15 Third Thursday of the month is the Two Mile High Club monthly meeting at 5:30 p.m. in the lower level of the Double Eagle Casino complex 442 East Bennett Ave.

AMERICAN LEGION

8 American Legion Post 171 meets the first Thursday (the second Thursday) to accommodate the New Year of every month at 6 p.m. at 400 Carr St. Food and refreshments at 5 p.m.

27 Adults only BINGO 2 p.m. Play three games and the winner of each game gets a prize.

• New Chapter of Silent Book Club!

Anyone who would like to participate does not need to have a specific book. A participant only needs to arrive at the library at the designated time with a book. Once at the library, participants can chat for a period of time, then read silently for an hour. Once the hour of silent reading is over, participants may choose to stay and chat with other participants or they may choose to leave. The Silent Book Club runs for two hours once per month. Participants can attend any of the Silent Book Clubs, attending every Silent Book Club is not required. If you have question please contact Abby.fowler@florencecolorado.org.

• Tuesdays Tai Chi 10-11 a.m. Come relax with us!

• Storytime every Friday 10 a.m.

• Through Feb 28 all three Rampart Library District locations offers Blankets, Blizzards and Books: Adult Winter Reading. Get a head start on your resolutions and read!

• Earn up to 5 chances for one of several themed grand prize gift baskets! Register online or in person.

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Happy New Year

2026



*Wishing you and
yours a healthy
and prosperous
New Year!*