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2025 Reflections

(Written a Little Late)

Today I learned something that completely made my day: **Elephant Nature Park in Thailand is using my oatmeal pet shampoo.** A client of ours volunteers there and took some shampoo with her on her last trip. They liked it so much that they asked for more. That feels incredibly special—especially right now, when I still feel like I'm starting this year already behind.

Have you ever felt so behind it almost feels like you're back at the beginning? That's how I feel writing my 2025 end-of-year wrap-up in February of 2026. Better late than never.

Last year came with plenty of challenges. One of the biggest was purchasing a new x-ray machine. It wasn't easy, but we're finally on the other side and truly enjoying the improved capabilities it's brought to our practice.

I also traveled to Las Vegas for a week-long business meeting and spent much of the following months implementing what I learned. I attended the Littleton Equine annual education event for veterinarians and stayed actively involved with the Evergreen Chamber of Commerce after joining the board. It's been a great opportunity to connect with so many talented business owners in our community.

We hosted a very successful Kentucky Derby fundraising party, and my older daughter graduated from high school—a milestone that still feels surreal. We hired an Executive Director for the ResqRanch, had a booth at the Evergreen Rodeo (always a highlight), and the following weekend hosted a Solstice ceremony at the ranch led by a sound bath healer.

Summer was full. In July, I held several horse training clinics, refinanced the ranch to a lower interest rate, and yes, finally bought a new refrigerator. August brought more clinics, followed by sending my daughter off to college. In September, we hired a professional videographer to help elevate our YouTube channel, and we again attended Riley's Pet Store's annual event, which we always love being part of.



October took me to New York for the American Association of Fish Veterinarians conference, followed by some cherished family time in the city. November included a fundraiser at the Aurora horse racetrack and volunteering for the local high school play. December wrapped up with Pet Pictures with Santa—and this year we were thrilled to host CSU's Sci on the Fly van, all the way from Fort Collins.

On the ranch side, we were incredibly grateful to receive donations including an automatic front gate opener, roofing materials for additional animal shelter, and a John Deere Gator. Training with the young fillies progressed beautifully, and overall the animals remained healthy. I continued caring for Oliver, including catheterization for ongoing urinary issues that are now

“2026 is the Year of the Horse, and I'm choosing to take that as a sign: a sign that this is the year we break free and reach new heights together, creating a kinder, more compassionate world for animals.”

being managed successfully with Chinese herbs after traditional treatments failed.

Unfortunately, our new Executive Director didn't work out, so for now we're holding off on filling that role. Instead, we've focused on strengthening the team at Aspen Park Vet Hospital. We lost some staff members but gained some truly wonderful new ones, and for the first time in a while, I can say we have a full team that's working well together.

Last year I read *The Science of Scaling*, which helped me gain laser focus on my mission: to educate 100 million people in the power of positive reinforcement animal training (R+) within the next three years. Our growing YouTube channel is a major part of how we'll reach that goal, and I'd be so grateful if you'd

check it out. Once we reach a certain threshold, we qualify for Google grants, which will go a long way toward feeding the animals.

Why do I care so deeply about R+? Because as a veterinarian, I know that **training keeps animals healthier and out of the vet's office.** If you can brush their teeth, trim their nails, clean their ears, and perform basic care cooperatively, you strengthen the bond you share, help both of you live longer, and save money in the process. The more people I can help learn these skills, the more good we can do for animals and the people who love them.

And because this is the year I am fully committed to achieving that audacious goal, I've made a big decision. After months of soul-searching, **I've decided to give away my Horse Training Masterclass for free.**

Yes — free.

This program contains over 150 hours of college-level animal behavior and training courses, distilled into about three hours. Whether you train horses or not, the principles are the same. Let 2026 be the year you transform your relationship with your animals. Learning about R+ changed my life forever, and I truly believe it can do the same for you. You can now access the entire course for free at ResqRanch.org.

Once we have this running smoothly, my next goal is to do it again—this time focused on pets.

2026 is the Year of the Horse, and I'm choosing to take that as a sign: a sign that this is the year we break free and reach new heights together, creating a kinder, more compassionate world for animals.

As always, thank you. Dr. Q and the crew of Aspen Park Vet Hospital & the ResqRanch.

Aspen Park Veterinary Hospital is located at 25871 Duran Ave. Conifer, CO 80433. You can call the hospital at (303) 838-3771 (838-DrQ1) or visit them at www.DrQandU.org.

— KELLER WILLIAMS FOOTHILLS REALTY —

Loving Life

BY LISA PLUMMER SMITH

“We are fortunate to live in our small mountain towns, surrounded by nature and community with many amenities and opportunities available to us.”

“An awake heart is like a sky that pours light.”

—Hafiz

It is the season to celebrate love of all kinds — love of self, love of neighbor, romantic love, and especially love for life.

Is it just me, or does time seem to be passing faster somehow? We had best live in the moment and enjoy the now. I recently came across a powerful quote: “When we understand that each day isn’t one more day, but one less, we’ll start giving more value to the things that truly matter” —unknown. I find myself amazed at how quickly the hours, days and weeks pass. I try to savor the moments and pause to enjoy the simple things in life rather than rushing through my days.

My daily walks in nature are essential to my well-being, the way all my senses engage with the wonders that surround me. The wind, the

sun, and the resting forest nurture me, grounding me with every step. Fortified from moments spent peacefully roaming my woods, I can focus on the tasks ahead of me and face the day refreshed and engaged.

We are fortunate to live in our small mountain towns, surrounded by nature and community with many amenities and opportunities available to us. We are somewhat insulated from the haste of everyday life and can perhaps more easily stretch our eyes and our minds to explore different ideologies that may shape us, guide us and help us to understand the world better.

This winter has been unusual so far with little

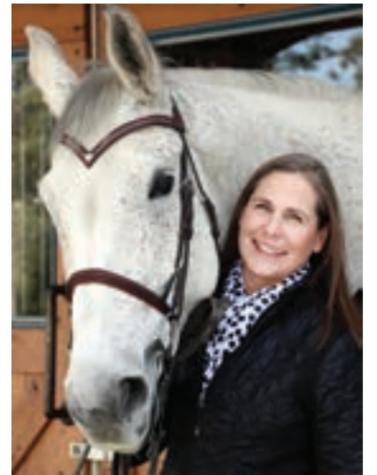
snow and unseasonably warm temperatures. While I am hoping for snow, I have been making the best of it and enjoying the sunny days and an extended season. The only constant in life is change, and adapting to change and employing positive coping skills are two of many ways we care for ourselves.

I am thankful for my strong, healthy body that holds me up and propels me forward towards my goals. I am grateful for my clear head and sharp mind that help me navigate my life. I value my mindset and voice and try to be conscious of all the messages I receive and how I process them while working towards the greater good for all.

Living at this point in time in our world and enjoying the freedoms we may take for granted, the simple life-sustaining comforts such as clean

water, heat, shelter, communication, transportation and the ability to sustain ourselves and treat our bodies as sacred—we are truly blessed.

The world around us is changing swiftly, and it is difficult to process all that has happened in a short amount of time. I urge you to keep seeking the good in the world, being grateful for all the blessings you enjoy, and being kind to yourself and others. When you practice self care and open your heart with gratitude for all that you enjoy, you are better equipped to face life’s challenges.



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connection to the past



SILVER CRAGS

Celebrating Preservation

ELAINE HAYDEN | HISTORY EVERGREEN

The appeal of the popular and grand summer retreats along Bear Creek Canyon was widely broadcast. Those in search of a more rustic experience were drawn to smaller resorts in the Bear Creek and Turkey Creek Canyon areas, not least of which was the Silver Crag Chalets, located near Highway 285 on North Turkey Creek Road. The chalet and guest cabins remain today as evidence of an era of mobility and a leisure-seeking population during the 1930–1950 era.

Long before Silver Crag came into existence, Highway 285 was known as the Turkey Creek Wagon Road, established in 1899 as a major artery connecting the Front Range with points west. The side roads along this route held ranches and logging properties that had been established in the years prior to 1900. As some of the properties along this Turkey Creek Canyon route were beginning to be divided, the proximity of the Turkey Creek area to Denver helped to lure city folk who were seeking property for a quiet mountain respite. One such city dweller was Edwin Fishburn. He and his wife, Ethel, were seeking property on which to build a getaway. In 1932, the Fishburns passed by Olinger's Indian Hills property offerings and veered off Highway 285 onto North Turkey Creek Road, where they were successful in purchasing 40 acres of land less than a mile from the main highway in an ideal setting of meadowland, streams, and forest. The accessibility to the property from Denver was a key factor in the Fishburn family decision to build a chalet that would mirror and remind Ethel of a beloved ancestral home in Scotland. The new cabin was named Silver Crag in honor of Ethel's Scottish connection.

Ethel was the driver behind the design of the log cabin. She had a vision, and Edwin welcomed her expression of her wishes for the cabin. In a narrative from a 1983 meeting when Ethel was aged 93, she recounts that her husband mentioned that she hadn't voiced her choice of room arrangement, to which she replied, "I would like the sun to shine in every room sometime during the day—or as the old timers would say, 'two faces east and two faces west'."

The Fishburns felt fortunate to contract with local builder, Al Rugg, Jr. Rugg was well known

for his exceptional craftsmanship skills, as evident in his construction of the Echo Lake Lodge (1926), the Club House at Evergreen Golf Course (Keys on the Green, 1925), and HoChaNeeSted (1925), most recently the site of a gallery and trading post in Indian Hills, and several log residences in the area. Rugg was able to procure prime round logs that were harvested in the Squaw Pass Road (Mestaa'ehehe) area and were originally cut for use as utility poles. The surplus supply of these prime native logs was used in the construction of many of the well-known log structures carrying the Rugg name. According to a description of Silver Crag, likely written by Ed Fishburn, "Every log was carefully cut, peeled and seasoned. All were of identical size, sixteen inches...and up to forty-five feet in length."

Rugg utilized the round-log style construction with saddle notching joinery at the corners. The space between the logs was sealed with oakum, a tar-infused fiber, then covered with a quarter round lodgepole chinking strip rather than conventional chinking compound. Diligence in preservation has allowed for sustainability and integrity of this log building, holding fast to the original construction methods.

The interior of the main cabin has been preserved to reflect the original log finish, timber and wainscoting ceiling, and the original native stone fireplace. A unique wall hanging is an original piece of decorative art, installed by Ethel Fishburn in homage to her Scottish ancestry, and overlooks the vast meadowland from the dining room. The saying reflects a blessing from Scottish poet Robert Burns, who is best known for his writing the song, "Auld Lang Syne." The blessing reads, "But we have meat. And we can eat. So let the Lord be Thankit."

In 1935, Edwin and son, Howard, built a series of three cabins on the property with the intent of renting the cabins to summer tourists. Let on a weekly basis, the cabins were in a rustic setting but offered modernity with running water, a kitchenette, and sleeping accommodations for 8 people each. The main lodge was the Fishburn residence and served as a community center and gathering spot for summer guests. A popular feature made available at the main lodge was the screening of a motion picture on Saturday nights. A roll-down screen was attached to a wall in the living room, a fire was laid in the fireplace and all enjoyed the simple pleasure of gathering. Another structure was erected in the meadow below the cabins that was dubbed the "Chuck Wagon," featuring a basic building where cook-outs were held, square dances were called, and the Western experience was at its peak. Other amenities at the summer resort included a mini-golf course, on-site horseback riding, and stream fishing. Excursions to nearby Evergreen were encouraged and popular, with tours of the grand Troutdale-in-the-Pines Resort, family fun at nearby Tiny Town, and side trips to Mt. Morrison. Many guests were content to remain at Silver Crag, immersed in the fresh mountain air and quiet solitude that was the original incentive for the getaway.

Mrs. Fishburn recalled in her history that two teachers from the Horticulture (sic) College in New York City were sent to this region of the Rockies to study Colorado wildflowers. The teachers brought flower presses with them to document and preserve the many species found at the Silver Crag property. It was this visit from the teachers that likely inspired Ethel to create a lovely pressed wildflower frame that remains an original artifact on display in the cabin.

Silver Crag has traveled through many phases from the original intent of a private family retreat to a destination resort offering the mountain experience to tourists to its current private residence. The Fishburns served the tourist industry well for the years between 1935 and 1950, at which time the Fishburns sold their beloved property with main lodge, three guest cabins, garage, chuck wagon, and horse corrals

to a Mr. Graves, who spent his summers at the property. Graves eventually sold the property to a Mr. Wilson, who lived on the property full-time and rented the cabins on a long-term basis.

In 1999, hope for resurrection and a new life for the main cabin was realized when the potential and charm of the property motivated a young family to purchase Silver Crag. The basic integrity of the structure was intact, but the first improvement to be made by the new owners was the removal of the green shag carpet tiles that had been installed and were hiding the hardwood flooring. The charming paned windows under the Burns blessing quote had been removed years earlier and replaced with a picture window. The original window style was restored shortly after the removal of the green carpet, and the wall art blessing was discovered in the attic and reinstalled.

Years of tireless restoration and loving attention has been paid to the Silver Crag lodge that is reflected in the pristine interior and exterior preservation. The guest cabins are restored and remain a vital part of the historically significant property. Appreciation is extended to the granddaughter of Ed and Ethel Fishburn, whose cooperation and involvement has provided facts and historic photos to the current owners of Silver Crag. The lodge and guest cabins are all private residences, located on private property with no public access at this time.

Thanks are due to folks who recognize the importance of restoration of historic buildings and to those who strive to champion the preservation of grand public historic structures such as Echo Lake Lodge and the Club House building (Keys on the Green). I imagine the builder, Al Rugg, Jr., would delight in knowing that the attention he paid to his craft all those years ago is appreciated in several grand structures he built, as well as the private residences that are not available for public appreciation at this time.

Sources

Fishburn, Edwin. *Property description*.

No date, unsigned.

Fishburn, Ethel. *Personal written history 1983*.

Private archives.

History Evergreen is a newly formed non-profit organization whose mission is to acknowledge the rich history of our community and to foster an appreciation of historic preservation. Through publication of books, articles, social media and pamphlets we endeavor to maintain the historic record in a sustainable and inclusive manner for all to enjoy.



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I'm Just Sayin'...

February – Valentines

“Shop local! Many local retail stores and restaurants lost a few days’ business before Christmas due to the windstorm.”

Jeff Smith owner/publisher

This is one day that we should show the ones we love how much we appreciate them. We should do this every day, but no excuses on February 14th. Celebrate and enjoy!

It's hard to find out what is going on with the Keys On The Green restaurant at the Evergreen golf course. Scott Rethlake, who is in charge of the course and the restaurant and finding a new operator, won't talk. It's been closed for almost two years now, and it looks like it will be for some time to come. A real shame. It was one of the best restaurants in the area. I doubt that a new operator will run as good a fine dining restaurant as the Bards and the Caldwells did.

Many local retail stores and restaurants lost a few days' business right before Christmas due to the windstorm in December. They can't make up that revenue. Many of them are in trouble now, as they do a large part of their annual business in the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas. All the more reason now to shop local and help them out when we can.

We'll be watching the Superbowl with our friends. We were hoping it would include the

Broncos, but no such luck. This weekend's game was huge! The weather conditions and a coaching mistake cost the game, too bad. They had a great season.

College Football – The Iowa Hawkeyes beat Vanderbilt in the ReliaQuest Bowl. A great finish to a good season.

Broncos – What a season! I will not have the results of the Patriots game before this writing. The season could end there without Bo Nix playing; but Stidham is a good quarterback with years of experience, and I have confidence that he will give it his all. The weather could play a factor. GO BRONCOS!

Avalanche – The Avalanche is still leading the NHL. I see no reason they won't keep it up. They need to stay healthy. GO AVS!

Nuggets – They are holding their position and need Jokic to get back. GO NUGGETS!

Quackadilly says:
“Who, being loved, is poor?”
—Oscar Wilde

NEWS ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

your MOUNTAIN CONNECTION

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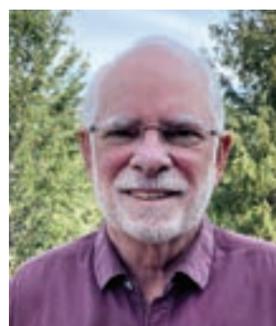
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from the experts

— EVERGREEN HEALTH INSURANCE —

New To Medicare?

BY ED REGALADO

I dedicate this month's article to those of you who will be newly eligible for Medicare in 2026. I hope you find it helpful!

If you've been anticipating your own transition to the Medicare program, you may have already noticed that there are a lot of moving parts, and figuring out what to do can be confusing. So let's break it down.

First of all, you want to know about your initial enrollment period. Assuming you are not intending to remain on your employer's group plan and you're not already collecting Social Security benefits, beginning 3 months prior to your birth month when you turn 65, you can enroll for Medicare Parts A & B through the Social Security Administration. These days, this is best accomplished online at ssa.gov. Technically, you can wait as long as 3 months past your 65th birthday to enroll without penalty, but get it done early.

If you've worked at least 10 quarters in your lifetime, you're automatically provided Medicare Part A, which covers 80% of hospital-related fees. Medicare Part B covers physicians and other outpatient fees, and it is offered with a monthly premium. For most people, in 2026 the Part B premium is \$202.90, which will be automatically deducted from SSA benefits if you collect them, or paid directly by you if you are not. For those with higher incomes based on a two-year look back, a Part B premium can be as high as \$689.90 (and \$91.00 for Part D prescription coverage) per month. This is known as the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount, or IRMAA.

Step two, you're going to decide whether you'd prefer to stick with Traditional Medicare (Parts



A & B), which will cover roughly 80% of your medical costs, and then add a Medicare Supplement Plan and a Prescription Drug Plan (Part D) to help offset the rest, or switch to a Medicare Advantage Plan, which is a commercial health plan designed specifically for Medicare beneficiaries.

If you choose an Advantage Plan, the government essentially pays your Medicare benefit to the insurance company to manage your health care, and in turn, the Advantage Plan is required to offer benefits that meet a minimum standard; and, historically, many have offered extra perks as well. In the Denver area, we are fortunate to have many doctors and hospitals as well as multiple insurance companies offering \$0 premium Advantage Plans. Most Advantage Plans also include prescription drugs, offsetting the need to enroll in a Part D plan.

What most influences people when it comes to choosing which Supplement and PDP plan or Advantage plan will work best is typically a combination of one's anticipated health care needs, doctor network flexibility or preferences, and budget. Talk to your local broker to get more details and see which plan may work best for you.

Everyone is different and has individualized needs, so getting a free consultation from a certified Medicare broker is valuable. Give us a call!

Ed Regalado is a certified broker. The office is located at the Stone House at 1524 Belford Court in Evergreen. Ed can be reached at 303-674-1945 or send an email to: edregalado46@gmail.com.

— PEOPLE PROBLEMS — Romancing the Workplace

BY JENNIFER MAY ELLIS

Thank you to all of those people who have reached out regarding their workplace woes. I hope my thoughts were supportive. Even though nobody reached out to me regarding romance in the workplace, I decided to appropriately focus February's article on that subject. I have most certainly encountered this topic more times than I can remember.

Once upon a time, I used to guest lecture at a medical university to a bunch of soon-to-be doctors about business risk mitigation. At one point during the lecture, I would say, "Do not date your employees." It was often met with laughter. I would then repeat myself, "I mean it. Do not date your employees. If you do, you might as well just write them a check." The check part usually got their attention.

In the land of the employer/employee relationship, the law assumes that the employer has a degree of influence and control over the employee and essentially is in a position of power. This means that when a workplace romantic relationship ends (and most do), the employer is the one who could experience legal repercussions. This is the case even if the relationship was consensual. The assumption of a power imbalance also extends to a manager and their direct report. The implication is, the employer is at risk if their manager dates one of the people they are responsible for managing. As a result, many organizations implement policies banning or restricting workplace dating, especially involving supervisors. However, in



"I understand the power of attraction, but romance in the workplace is generally not worth the risk."

the state of Colorado, these policies must align with Colorado's lawful activities statute for off-duty conduct, meaning they're more about preventing on-the-job issues like power imbalances or conflicts of interest.

So what are the potential risks for business owners when it comes to romance in the workplace? Here are some examples of potential risks for businesses: (1) risk of sexual harassment lawsuits; (2) perceived favoritism issues; (3) distractions that result in productivity loss; (4) conflict of interest (personal feelings interfere with professional judgment); and (5) potential reputational harm.

I understand that some of us work very long hours and end up spending more time with our coworkers than we do with our loved ones. I understand human nature and the power of attraction, but romance in the workplace is generally not worth the risk.

If you need any help drafting a policy, I'm here to help.

P.S. I am experimenting with offering a "Dear Abby" type column, focused on the workplace. I will be very careful with privacy considerations. Sometimes, it's helpful to know that you are not alone in the workplace world. Any advice would not be legal and instead from the realm of HR Consulting. If you have a situation that you would like some thoughts on that could also be referenced in a future column, please contact me at www.jennifer-may.com.

Jennifer May Ellis is a human resources consultant and former employment law attorney. She is an Evergreen resident and supporter of small businesses. She is the founder of Jennifer May Consulting and can be reached at jennifer@jennifer-may.com or <https://www.jennifer-may.com/>

— LOAN ZONE MORTGAGE —

Share The Love – Mortgage Options

BY WANDA NORGE, MORTGAGE CONSULTANT

In this article, let me share some love about several current mortgage options.

Reverse Mortgages

I just got back from a month in Wisconsin helping my dad get into assisted living. For seniors who would like to stay in their home, a reverse loan can help. These loans can come with a line of credit that can be used to make renovations for rehabbing a bathroom; modifying access points to the house, bedrooms or other living areas; or paying for medical expenses. Eliminate the current mortgage payment and possibly get monthly cash disbursements, depending on borrower age and equity available. You own the home with full title and control. The bank does NOT own your home. If you need to downsize or are going through a "gray divorce," a reverse could be used to complete an equity buy-out for one spouse to use as down-payment funds toward a new purchase.

Wealth Builder Loan

A perfect loan for the savvy investor, self-employed, or anyone who gets large bonuses or commissions, has great W2 income, and manages their debts. Any large deposits reduce the mortgage balance daily. Any bills paid out will increase the balance daily. There is no monthly mortgage payment. It can result in paying off a 30-year fixed loan in record time. It leaves a line of credit to re-access without having to requalify. Comparisons to a current loan available.

Purchase With Temporary Rate Buydowns

These "temporary rate buydowns" can be in the form of a 3-2-1, 2-1, or 1-0 buydown.

Typically, the seller pays for the buydown



"Let's discuss your goals."

with concessions. With homes on the market a lot longer now, a seller could be willing to participate to get their home sold quicker and not reduce the price. If the market rate is 6.0% as an example, on the 2-1 buydown, the 1st year payment is calculated at 4.0%, the second year 5.0%, before it goes to the final note rate for years 3-30. You can refinance it later.

Buy Before You Sell

Buy that dream home with cash without selling the current home first. Eliminate contingent offers.

If you are struggling to qualify due to tight debt ratios while carrying two mortgage payments, this can eliminate that issue too. We work with your realtor!

Delayed Financing

Utilize your own retirement or asset funds to purchase with cash. Use delayed financing within the first couple months to take out a loan to replenish the account.

Self-Employed

Use deposits on bank statements or qualify with asset conversion loans instead of providing tax returns.

Investment Property

Qualify with no income docs—use cash flow on the property instead.

Second Mortgages To Clean Up Debt or do Home Improvements

Get a fixed-rate second loan or interest-only Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC) to consolidate credit cards, pay for home improvements, health care bills, or divorce buy-out situations.

Let's discuss your goals.

Wanda Norge, Certified Mortgage Advisor (CMA), Certified Divorce Lending Professional (CDLP), Loan Zone Mortgage, LLC (NMLS: 1870102), 22 yrs exp, 28 yr Evergreen Resident, Phone: 303-419-6568, loans@wandanorge.com, www.wandanorge.com (NMLS: 280102).

— CORE HABITS COACHING —

Habits: Why We Do What We Do

And How to Change It

BY ISABELLE DE FAYS COMINA | WWW.COREHABITSCOACHING.COM

Why is it so easy to scroll on your phone for 30 minutes...but so hard to go for a 10-minute walk? Why do we keep doing things we know aren't good for us—and struggle to stick with the ones that are? The answer is habits.

A habit is simply a behavior your brain has put on autopilot. Once a pattern is repeated enough times, your brain stores it as a shortcut—a fast, low-energy way to respond to a familiar situation. This is incredibly useful. It's how you brush your teeth, drive a car, or tie your shoes without thinking.

In fact, research suggests that about 40-50% of what we do each day is habitual. Habits free up mental energy so we don't have to consciously decide every little thing. But here's the catch: the brain doesn't care whether a habit is good or bad—only whether it's familiar and efficient.

That's why during times of stress, fatigue, or emotional overload, we fall back on old patterns. Some habits, however, become maladaptive or destructive—they provide short-term relief while creating long-term harm to physical and emotional well-being. Scrolling, snacking, skipping movement, staying up too late, or over-caffeinating can feel comforting in the moment—even if they leave us feeling worse later.

So how do we change a habit? Not with more willpower—but with smarter design.

Every habit follows a loop: cue > routine >



"Change is about consistency."

reward. To change a habit, we don't erase the loop—we replace the routine while keeping the cue and reward in mind. That's how change becomes sustainable instead of exhausting.

And it takes time. Research shows that forming a new habit can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days, with an average of about 66 days. That means change isn't about intensity—it's about consistency.

This is where coaching helps—especially human coaching.

Apps are great at tracking behavior, but humans are better

at understanding it. A coach helps you explore why a habit exists, what emotional need it's meeting, and how to replace it in a way that actually fits your life. A human coach can adapt when your schedule changes, when motivation dips, or when something deeper gets in the way—something an algorithm simply can't do.

Coaching also adds something powerful: relational accountability. It's much harder to ignore a real person than a notification. And when you stumble (because you will—that's human), a coach helps you adjust instead of quit.

Because real change isn't about being perfect. It's about building habits that support the life you want—one small, intentional step at a time.

Ready to build habits that work for you? **Schedule your free discovery session at www.corehabitscoaching.com.**

With over 30 years as a physical therapist, 10 years as a yoga instructor, and extensive healthcare executive leadership experience, I guide clients on a journey of transformation, helping them create lasting habits, nurture their well-being, and reconnect with their natural energy and confidence. www.CoreHabitsCoaching.com • corehabitscoaching@gmail.com



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YES! Our March issue will focus on one of our favorite subjects...Our Pets! We'd love to include our reader's fur babies, as well as our own. Email your pics to: *Your Mountain Connection* via Marty Hallberg (news@yourmtnconnection.com). We'll print as many as space permits in order as received.

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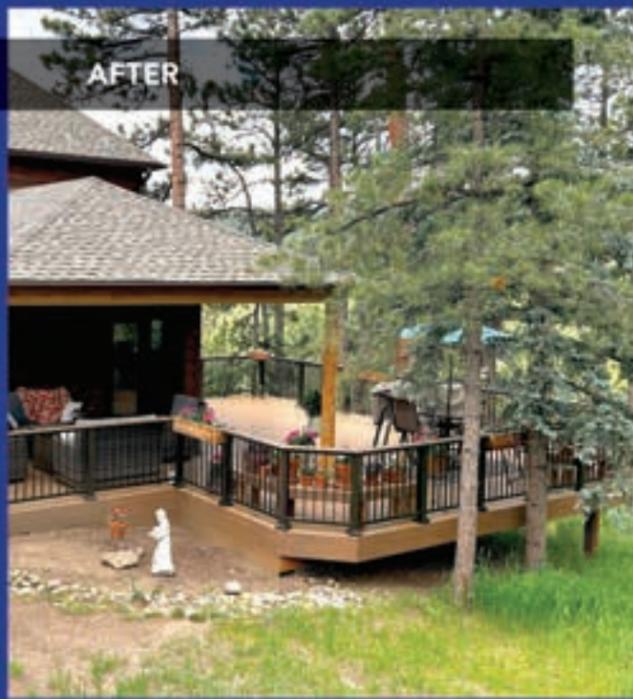
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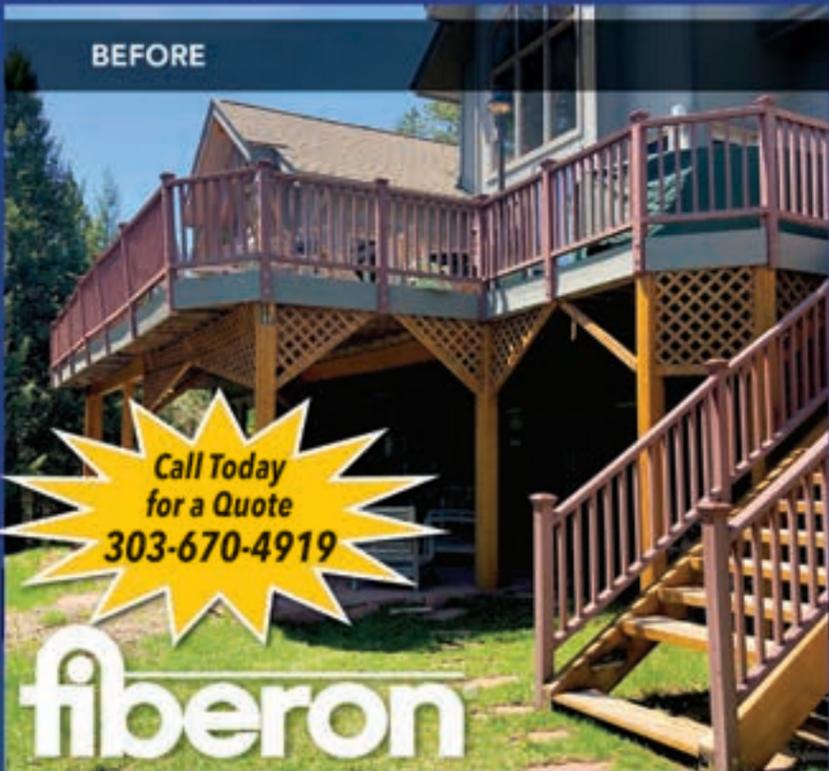




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“The giraffe’s enormous size, eyesight, and kicking ability keep them safe.”

Juba Enjoys the Easygoing Giraffe

BY PENNY RANDELL

After much consideration, I sought out a hoofed mammal that is the absolute tallest and largest ruminant ever found.



Giraffe camelopardalis, the giraffe, is just one of the nine subspecies in this genus. Their range includes the countries of Chad, South Africa, Niger, and Somalia, where they typically inhabit savannas and woodlands. As for diet, they ingest leaves, fruits and flowers of woody plants. They are capable of reaching heights no other animal can reach. They are known prey for lions, leopards, spotted hyenas and African wild dogs and live in herds of related females, offspring and unrelated bachelors. They are gregarious and often gather in large groups. To gain dominance they tussle with each other by what is known as “necking,” where the neck is used as a weapon. Females maintain responsibility for the young. They were classified as one species in 1758 by Carl Linnaeus.

Males are often taller than females, standing 14–19 feet tall, and the average weight of an adult male is 2,628 pounds. The coat is spotted and used as camouflage. This animal is hard to see when among trees and bushes. Each one has a unique coat pattern, while the offspring takes after only the mother. These blotches may regulate body temperature, as they are

sites for complex blood vessels and huge sweat glands. Spotless and solid-color giraffes are rare, but they do exist. Chemical defense is likened to a parasite defense and gives off a characteristic scent. Because males have a stronger scent than females, it is believed this may have a sexual function.

The giraffes have noticeable structures that are horn-like and called ossicones, which can be over five inches long. They are formed from ossified cartilage and covered with skin and fused to the parietal bone. It is believed that the structures may have a role in thermoregulation, but can also be used in combat. This is a reliable guide to sex and age, for ossicones of a female and young are thinner and bare with tufts of hair on top, whereas a male’s tend to be hairless with a knob on top. Bumps on the skull reflect the age of the male and are made of calcium. As the males develop they grow more bumps, and all have increased skull weight, and the club-like appearance of the ossicones aids in combat. Eyes are located on the sides of the head, which gives them binocular vision; and with their height, they can see much farther out than shorter animals can. Senses of hearing and smell are sharp. The tongue can be as long as 18 inches. Front upper teeth are replaced with a hard palate.



Their neck can reach almost eight feet in length and rests at 50 to 60 degrees, while the young’s neck rests at 70 degrees. It is their disproportionate lengthening of the cervical vertebrae that creates length, not additional

vertebrae. Each vertebra is over 11 inches long, but the growth does not begin until after birth. The head and neck are held up by large muscles and what is called a nuchal ligament, anchored by thoracic vertebrae spines, which gives them a hump. These structures are composed of ball-and-socket joints. It was discovered just two years ago that males have thicker necks and females often have longer necks, suggesting this additional length enables the females to fetch more food.

This critter has noticeably longer front legs than rear legs, giving them greater support. A large giraffe’s hooves can reach up to nine inches in diameter, and the fetlock of the leg is lower to the ground, allowing even more leg support. They do not have dewclaws, and the pelvis is quite short. There are only two gaits, walking and galloping. When galloping, the hind legs move around the front legs before it can move forward, and the tail will curl up. The head and neck provide balance and control momentum when galloping. As for speed, they can reach up to 37 miles per hour and can sustain a somewhat lower speed for a few miles. They can float in water but cannot swim. Rest is achieved by lying down, with the head turned back and resting upon the hip or thighs. Drinking water can be accomplished by spreading the front legs or bending at the knee.

These guys can be found in the savanna and open woodlands with dense foliage. When stressed they may chew on branches and bones. They tend to spread out during the wet season, while during the dry time they gather together. Mothers tend to feed in more open areas. As a ruminant, the giraffe first chews its food and then swallows it for processing; later, it visibly passes the half-digested cud up the neck and back to the mouth to chew again. They require less food than many other ungulates because their preferred plants have more concentrated nutrients and are more efficiently digested. Feeding is increased during morning and evening hours.

A group is usually gathered according to ecological, anthropogenic, temporal and social factors. These groups are open and forever changing. They are comprised of individuals that are

less than a half mile apart and are moving in the same direction. Human activity can definitely disturb these groups and often split apart or disrupt social arrangements. Dispersal is male-based. Groups of female adults are formed by the male and then into subpopulations.

Females can reproduce throughout the year and enter estrus cycling every 15 days. Fertility is determined by the male tasting a female’s urine. Once an estrus female is detected, the male will begin to court her, keeping all other males at bay. A courting male may lick the tail of the female, lay his head on her body, or even push her with his ossicones. If they do mate, gestation lasts 400 to 460 days.

A giraffe has a long lifespan compared to other ruminants, living up to 38 years. Social interactions have a huge bearing on survival. This animal is mainly hunted by lions, but their enormous size, eyesight, and kicking ability help to keep them safe. A quarter to half of the babies make it to adulthood, the survival rate varying according to the time of year they are born, with the dry season being the most successful time of the year. Other ungulates are safe when spending time with a giraffe herd, for the giraffes are first to spot predators and have time to get away. Zebras were found to assess predation risks by watching giraffes and spending less time looking around.

The primary cause for giraffe populations to dwindle is habitat loss and hunting by humans. Many end up in zoos where they are protected; however, they tend not to live as long in captivity as when running free because of poor husbandry, nutrition, and management. When living in a zoo they often display stereotypical behavior such as licking inanimate objects and pacing.

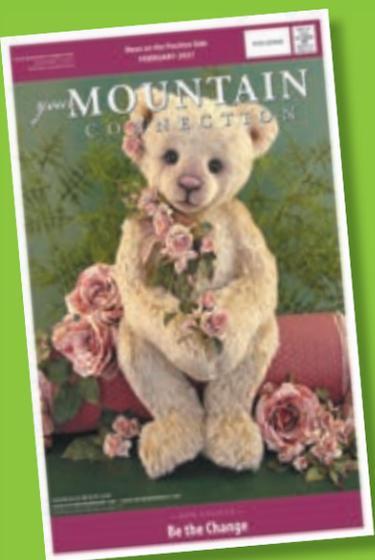
As we all are familiar with the giraffe, we can use this information to observe this successful animal. They are protected by national parks and just don’t have too many foes. When at a zoo, pay attention and watch their fascinating displays. Hopefully you have enjoyed this account. I will be back next month with a critter that expands knowledge and is hopefully a joy to read about.

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Choose Love

BY KAARSTEN TURNER

“Valentine’s Day is an invitation: to choose love, again and again, in ordinary and enduring ways.”



“Valentine’s Day can remind us to pause and choose gentler ways of being.”

Hello, readers. As I type, we are already half way through January, knee deep in our New Year’s resolutions for change and betterment. It’s been a good two weeks for me, and I am looking forward to another opportunity for renewal which has nothing to do with calendar years. It does, however, have something to do with a different kind of resolve: Valentine’s Day.

February is often framed as a celebration of romance—cards, flowers, dinner and grand gestures between romantic couples. However, beneath the commercial gloss is an opportunity with far greater reach. I will meet you there. Valentine’s Day can serve as a recommitment to kindness and generosity, not just toward romantic partners, but toward everyone in our

lives. Kindness is a practice, not a performance. Valentine’s Day can remind us to pause and choose gentler ways of being. A sincere “thank you,” a moment of patience, or an act of listening can carry more weight than any gift. When kindness is intentional, it becomes a daily discipline rather than a seasonal sentiment.

Generosity, too, extends beyond material giving. It includes generosity of spirit: assuming good intent, offering forgiveness, and making room for others’ needs alongside our own. Valentine’s Day can prompt us to ask not only “Who do I love?” but “How do I show my love to those who mean the most?” This might mean staying quiet when you have a vicious response crafted in your head; sharing time

with someone who just needs to be seen, exactly where they are; easing suffering with money or time; or offering encouragement where it is most needed.

Valentine’s Day is not exclusive or sentimental. It is expansive and practical. February can become a collective reset, an annual reminder that love is sustained by everyday choices. By recommitting to kindness and generosity, we honor the deeper meaning of the day and carry its spirit forward long after the cards are recycled and the flowers have faded.

This broader interpretation also invites us to turn inward. Kindness includes how we speak to ourselves: allowing rest, releasing unrealistic expectations, and acknowledging effort as well as outcome. Generosity can mean granting ourselves the same grace we offer others, recognizing that compassion is most sustainable when it flows in multiple directions. In a world marked by division, haste, and distraction, even small acts of care can feel quietly radical. Valentine’s Day offers a culturally sanctioned pause to remember that love is not scarce, nor confined to a single relationship. When practiced consistently, kindness and generosity ripple outward, shaping communities, workplaces, and families. Seen this way, Valentine’s Day is less a moment on the calendar and more an invitation: to choose love, again and again, in ordinary and enduring ways. I will be there. Join me.

Kaarsten is a forester, a mama to two boys, a sunchaser, a writer, and a lover of chocolate. She’s lived in Conifer for a while now.

poet’s corner

Crazy Blue

UNFINISHED SONG BY MARTY HALLBERG

*She colors inside the lines
 such a sweet child
 Mamma’s Joy and Daddy’s Pride
 Her cursive is perfect
 Her As are all straight
 But in dreams she is reckless, barefoot,
 hellbent*

*And she’s feelin’ Crazy Blue
 Just like those Colorado skies
 A shade closer to freedom than she’s known
 And she’s feelin’ Crazy Blue
 Kissin’ it goodbye
 Cracked but not broken, just learnin’ to fly*

*She’s still toeing that line
 All polish and shine
 It’s a nightmare chasing this dream
 She’s loosing her grip
 but finding her wings
 halfway to long gone, in free fall,
 Godspeed*

*And she’s feelin’ Crazy Blue
 Just like those Colorado skies...*

*There will be goodbyes, long cries,
 and well-intentioned lies
 To find this fresh start, and a quiet heart
 she’ll need to come apart*

*Now her face bears the lines
 earned on this ride
 but her eyes still as blue as the sky
 Dancin’ in bare feet
 Sunlight kissing her gray hair
 The broken made fine...finding wings
 to fly*

*And she’s feelin’ Crazy Blue
 Just like those Colorado skies
 A shade closer to freedom than she’s known
 And she’s feelin’ Crazy Blue
 Kissin’ it goodbye
 Cracked but not broken just learnin’ to fly*

Inside Love

BY JEFF SMITH

*I think of you on Sunday nights
 When I’m alone and things aren’t right
 In fantasies I hold you tight,
 You’re on my mind*

*I dream of you
 when the rain comes down
 When thunder covers up the sound
 Of my heart wanting you around
 You pass the time*

*And in a crowd each face is you
 You’re there no matter what I do
 But fate plays cruel games it seems
 I’ll never have what’s in my dreams*

*So in my mind I play a game
 That some day you will feel the same
 As I do and you’ll run to me
 And let this love inside me free,
 This love inside*

Your Mountain Connection recognizes the talent and creativity of our mountain neighbors. Each month we invite local artists, photographers, poets, and writers to submit their work for consideration in *Your Mountain Connection*. We will choose submissions that best fit our monthly theme to be featured on our cover or here in Poet’s Corner. We look forward to each and every submission...thank you!

Submit your stories, poems, or pictures to *Your Mountain Connection* via Marty Hallberg (news@yourmtnconnection.com). We will published as space allows. Information must be received by the 10th of each month prior to the actual date of the event.



Dogs, Dogs, Dogs

BY CATHY KOWALSKI

In previous articles, I've talked about dogs with jobs, and this job is one of the most unusual I've found!

Dogs are paired in zoos with cheetahs to lower their stress levels. Just like service dogs, the dogs help the cheetahs to feel secure, reduce anxiety, and overall improve their health. In 2019 a Labrador retriever named Bowie and a cheetah named Nandi were raised together at the Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange, New Jersey. They not only play together but can also be found cuddling. Cheetahs are known to be nervous animals; Bowie's presence helps keep Nandi calm when she is participating in an educational event.

The Columbus Zoo has incorporated emotional support dogs to partner with their cheetahs. Coby the lab, Emmett, and Cullen all helped the cheetahs through mimicry. Because a cheetah's nature is to be solitary, their zoo environment can be stressful.

Having a dog paired with a cheetah has also shown to make their environment calm and made breeding successful.

Some zoos refer to the dogs as animal ambassadors or ambassador companions.

When accompanied by a dog, the cheetah is more comfortable encountering new places, and this also enhances socialization with the humans who work with them.

Zoos that have ambassadors include the Cincinnati Zoo, Busch Gardens in Tampa, San

Diego Zoo, and Brevard Zoo in Florida. Columbus Zoo has sixteen cheetahs and four dog ambassadors. In some zoos the dogs are with the cheetahs almost all the time, while other zoos have the dogs scheduled to work with the cheetahs at certain times of day.

In 1976, Laurie Marker, curator of the cheetah-breeding program at Wildlife Safari, found that pairing a cheetah cub named Khayam with a lab-mix named Shesho was just what Khayam needed. Shesho became a surrogate for the siblings that Khayam did not have, providing companionship and bonding, and resulting in Khayam developing into a confident cheetah. Khayam even has a statue in downtown Winston, the state legislature named her a "Notable Oregonian."

Dogs are chosen that will grow to be the same size as their cheetah buddy, and they need to be confident and calm. These wonderful ambassadors have been called "the dog of the cat family."

In 2022 the Texas Zoo used Sarge and Jazz, two great Pyrenees siblings, as night security guards keeping the zoo animals safe from predators such as raccoons, snakes, bobcats, and coyotes. These beauties would sleep all day and then resume their guard duties at night. These two guards were adopted from the Texas Great Pyrenees Rescue. Guinea hens, peacocks, lemurs,

and tamarins can be vulnerable, but with 100-lb. great Pyrenees to watch over them—life is good!

The Idaho Falls Zoo was the home of rescue Justice, a great Pyrenees who not only was an animal ambassador but also taught lion cubs social skills. In 2017 she was a surrogate mother to a lion cub. She has also been a companion to Sid, a baby gibbon, and a baby rhea. Justice enjoyed walking around the zoo as she visited with people and was part of a program to teach children how to be responsible pet owners.

Yoga classes at North Georgia Zoo incorporate great Pyrenees puppies. This program is called "GOGA in the Wild." They also stand in as babysitters for the newest members of the farm exhibit.

Max, a rescued terrier mix, was a companion to the elephants in the Houston Zoo. The bond between Max and one elephant, named Methai, was obvious. Mathai would flap her ears, vocally greet Max, and lower her head to be at eye level. He also worked with the baby elephants.

Amazing dogs with incredible jobs!

Cathy is the Executive Director and trainer at Faithfully K9 Service Dogs and Dog Training. Call 720-934-7378 or visit the website www.faithfullyk9.com.



CELEBRATE LOVE

BY ANNE VICKSTROM

"A simple shared meal, a good movie, and knowing that we'll celebrate together next year is the only gift I want."



"Many Welsh, in addition to Valentine's Day, celebrate St. Dwynwen's Day on January 25, with a unique custom of exchanging handcrafted wooden love spoons that are intricately carved with symbols like hearts (love) or keys (unlocking the heart)."

Preparing for this article, I turned to AI and asked, "Do other countries celebrate Valentine's Day?" The reply: "Yes, but traditions vary widely." My first thought was how great it is that love is celebrated across our big blue planet, and my second thought was that it's fabulous that there are unique ways to celebrate within the world's many cultures. Then, I was off to the races, learning about how those on the other side of our world celebrate.

Countries that recognize February 14 as Valentine's Day, along with us, include the UK, which, like America, celebrates with romantic dinners, cards, and chocolates. However, over recent years, the Brits have upped the game with mini vacations, spa days, and personalized gifts. Many Welsh, in addition to Valentine's Day, celebrate St. Dwynwen's Day on January 25, with a unique custom of exchanging handcrafted wooden love spoons that are intricately carved with symbols like hearts (love) or keys (unlocking the heart). Glasgow, called the "City of Love" because the Church of Blessed St.

John Duns Scotus reportedly houses a relic (a forearm bone—ouch!) of St. Valentine, is a popular spot for marriage proposals on Valentine's Day.

In Japan and South Korea, women give men chocolates, while in the Philippines, they often hold mass weddings. The 14th is "famous for large, government-sponsored mass weddings where hundreds of couples, especially those who can't afford traditional ceremonies, tie the knot simultaneously in public venues, often receiving free rings, outfits, and receptions as a public service to celebrate love and provide legal marriage for many."



"A popular tradition is the 'gaekkebreve'—an anonymous 'joke letter' with a humorous poem. The sender signs with dots instead of their name; if the recipient guesses the sender correctly, they win an Easter egg later in the year."

Finns and Estonians focus on friendship rather than romantic partners. And then in Norway and Denmark, they make it all a bit more complicated. "A popular tradition is the 'gaekkebreve'—an anonymous 'joke letter' with a humorous poem. The sender signs with dots instead of their name; if the recipient guesses the sender correctly, they win an Easter egg later in the year." I personally like to wrap things up in one day; waiting until Easter seems risky.

Ghana calls this day of love National Chocolate Day. I don't know if the chocolate industry is behind this, but I won't complain as long as chocolate is involved. In South Africa, women literally pin the name of the one they love on their sleeves. Wouldn't dating be so much easier if they did this year-round!

Brazil, Wales, China, Colombia, Romania, and the Czech Republic each celebrate on different days, but they all share that loving feeling. For romantics, avoid Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Malaysia, and parts of Indonesia that ban

any celebration where authorities don't like "incompatible Western influence." I'd encourage those governments to celebrate Valentine's Day. Practice makes perfect, after all.

We can be inspired to copy others' traditions. As for my husband and me, after 39 years of marriage, I'm lucky to say we're pretty confident our love is locked up tight. A simple shared meal, a good movie, and knowing that we'll celebrate together next year is the only gift I want.

Happy Valentine's Day – may you have many love-ly days in the coming year.

Anne Vickstrom's first writing gig was right here at *Your Mountain Connection*. She has written for national and regional publications and has published books. She loves living in Evergreen where she and her husband raised three children and six dogs.

COOKING CLASSES WITH...



It's About Time

BY FRANCESCA ARNIOTES

“It’s about choosing to make time to nourish yourself and those you love... time for cooking, eating, talking, and sharing.”

The title is *It's About Time*. It's about food, actually. And the time we might choose to spend with food—making it, enjoying it, sharing it. Over many years selling, cooking, and teaching food, we have met people who hate to cook and even one who hates to eat. Most of the time, their reasons involve time. They don't have the time to spend in the kitchen. In the event that some of our readers lean toward that persuasion, we'd like to make an argument for why time in the kitchen and around the table is quality time, and how spending it as such can make us happier and healthier.

You have heard of blue zones? These are places where large numbers of the population live into their hundreds, healthy and happy, and where dementia and chronic disease are almost never seen. There are five original blue zones: Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Ikaria, Greece; Loma Linda, California; and Nicoya, Costa Rica. The common denominators in these high-quality longevity areas are activity, purpose, social connections, and food.

In my husband's Greek family and in my Italian one, we both have grandparents and aunts who lived past 100 years old and a mom who is on her way. We have long appreciated how our immigrant parents and grandparents embraced being Americans while preserving their culture and identity at the same time. Of course, that has been the unique purview of America as “the melting pot.” Culture and connection to our roots happens primarily through our food, but also by valuing quality time with family and friends in the kitchen and around the table. Cooking is a social, multi-generational event, lively and loud, a celebration of personalities.

The Greeks gave the world civilization, and they still have things to teach us. Life in the EU these days and life in the US since forever is all about time—optimizing every moment to be productive. Most of us are constantly in a state of fight or flight. In our idyllic village of Gaiole in Chianti, as in many of the small towns in Italy, the modern world hasn't quite caught up with them, and life still proceeds at a much slower pace. That fact and their diet, rich in olive oil and unprocessed food, affords the people good health and long life. Greece is also offering the recipe for a reset. Greece's “siga siga” culture can

help the western world appreciate the quality of the moment. “Siga” means “slowly” in Greek, and the idea is “rest and digest” in place of “fight or flight.” Instead of constant urgency, how about intentional presence? This is part of the secret of the blue zones, and it is accessible to any of us, if we wish it. So taking time to assemble the ingredients for a meal and create a gathering at the table can be viewed as a prescription for health and happiness instead of a chore.

In our home in Chianti we welcome guests who love food and wine. Some look forward to cooking with us each day. Starting around 5:00, wine is poured and we gather around our small worktable in the kitchen to make pasta, prepare vegetables, light the grill, set the table, and get everything ready for the evening activity beginning at about 7:30: that is, sit down at the table. And there we stay, eating, talking, laughing, and sharing stories until bedtime. The “siga siga” culture is alive and well at our house, and it may make the biggest impression of all on our guests. It's the thing that they try to maintain once they go home. It feels good, and it seems right.

So it's about time. It's about choosing to make time to nourish yourself and those you love... time for cooking, eating, talking and sharing. For extra fun, try a weekly small plates dinner. It doesn't have to be fancy; in fact, you might not even need forks. Pre-prep; when you cook rice, meat or vegetables, make a little extra and repurpose it as a small plate or part of a small plate. Serve a variety of four, six or more with an eye toward food groups, colors and textures. Some ideas:

- Cucumber slices with vinegar and dill or olive oil and salt.
- Radishes, cut in quarters, ditto.
- Salami, ham, sliced leftover meats, cheeses.
- Slice bread, toast, sprinkle with salt, rub with a clove of garlic and drizzle with olive oil.
- Tomato slices alternating with slices of fresh mozzarella on a plate, fresh basil leaves or dried basil, black pepper and salt, dressed with extra virgin olive oil.
- Flank steak, grilled and sliced on the bias, topped with minced parsley, garlic, lemon rind, vinegar, extra virgin olive oil and a pinch of crushed red pepper.



“Instead of constant urgency, how about intentional presence?”

- Shredded lettuce, shredded radicchio and arugula dressed with extra virgin olive oil, red wine vinegar and salt. Or quickly saute some small shrimp in oil, add white wine and balsamic vinegar to the pan. Top the salad with the shrimp and warm juices.
- Make vegetable soup out of whatever needs to be used up. Just cut up veg and put in water, add salt and a bay leaf. Cook until you're ready to eat. Serve with a generous drizzle of extra virgin oil and grated cheese.
- Pasta
- Kabobs
- Stuff mushrooms or peppers or tomatoes with cheeses, rice, ground meat or herbs with breadcrumbs and an egg.
- Hard boil eggs and get creative.

Cooking Classes with
CASTLES & KITCHENS
 Join us! We offer hands-on cooking classes in our Conifer kitchen. Browse classes on our website www.castlesandkitchens.com or contact Francesca or Tom at castlesandkitchens@gmail.com.



Happy Valentine's Day! FROM
 your **MOUNTAIN CONNECTION**

Photo by Mira Paul • miraclestar05@hotmail.com • mirapaul.weebly.com

FOMELC Supports the USFS in Keeping Wildernesses Enjoyable

The Mount Evans and Lost Creek wildernesses encompass 194,400 acres with over 170 miles of trails in Colorado's Pike and Arapaho National Forests. The Friends of Mount Evans & Lost Creek Wilderness (FOMELC) works in partnership with the US Forest Service, engaging in education, outreach and stewardship activities to preserve the wilderness character of these lands for current and future generations.

In 2025, FOMELC registered 4,788.40 volunteer hours, principally in the Arapaho and Pike National Forests including Mount Evans and Lost Creek wildernesses. The US Forest Service measurement of validation is \$34.79/hour, resulting in a total of \$166,588.44 of FOMELC volunteer contribution. Volunteer hours consisted of:

- Patrols: hiking and logging trail conditions, such as erosion or down trees.
- Trail maintenance projects like cutting out trees that have blown down, repairing and mitigating erosion, rebuilding bridges, and refurbishing trailhead kiosks.

- Invasive weed eradication projects.
- Education/Outreach projects like home and garden shows and leave-no-trace education.

During the winter months, FOMELC offers a Winter Speaker Series. Speakers present on a variety of wilderness-related topics. All are welcome to attend. Visit our website at fomelc.org for more information.

Mount Evans and Lost Creek are the two closest wilderness areas to the Denver metropolitan area and are tremendous assets to our community. But we must give back. Remember, wilderness is borrowed from future generations. Each year we strive to do more, but it is hard to keep pace with the increasing user demand from a growing population. Every effort, no matter how small, is beneficial.

Volunteering is easy, fun, and fulfilling. Whether you have a few hours a month or a week, want to occasionally participate in a project, or just want to stay in the loop on what's happening, we welcome you to become a *Friend!*

The Friends of Mount Evans & Lost Creek Wilderness (FOMELC) is a 501(c) 3 charitable organization. Founded in November 2005, FOMELC provides cooperative stewardship support to the United States Forest Service. FOMELC offers volunteer opportunities for all ages, physical abilities, interests and schedules. You can help by becoming a member and contributing. Visit our website at fomelc.org for more information about our organization.

Evergreen Chamber Ribbon Cuttings and News

Evergreen's Coolest Day of the Year!

EVERGREEN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

If you don't want to sit in traffic on a Saturday, then stay local for a day of winter fun at Chill Out on Saturday, February 7. Come join us for the Mushie Cup races; the Evergreen Amazing Race, providing two options: one for families and the other for the over-21 crowd; and the "Rad as Ice" bike race. Look for all the details and registrations at evergreenchamber.org

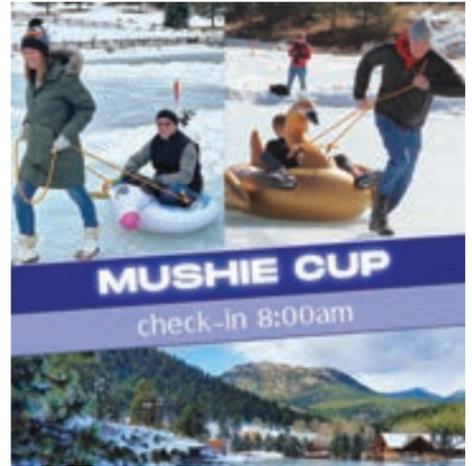
Follow us on Facebook. Visit our website EvergreenChamber.org. Call us anytime 303-674-3412.



Gillmore Consulting
Based in Evergreen, CO, we provide SPHR-certified HR consulting services. We help businesses streamline HR processes, develop talent, and build scalable people systems at a fraction of an employee cost

Brecken Gillmore – Founder
303-960-9547
brecken@gillmoreconsulting.com
gillmoreconsulting.com

EVENT LINEUP	
8:00 AM	"Rad as Ice" Bike Race Bikers will race on a trail on Evergreen Lake. Check in at the Lake House at 7am.
8:30 AM	Mushies Cup Teams of 2 or 4 will pull each other around on floats on the ice. Check in at the Lake House at 8am.
10:30 AM	Downtown Family Amazing Race Race through downtown completing challenges at local businesses! Check in at the Little Bear at 10:30am.
11:00 AM	Downtown 21+ Amazing Race Race through downtown completing challenges at local businesses! Games include alcohol. Check in at the Little Bear at 11:00am.



WE SUPPORT LIVING LOCALLY



Rotary Youth Leadership Awards

The Rotary Club of Evergreen promotes positive changes for our local young adults through leadership development activities.

RYLA: A LIFE-CHANGING YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Awards) is a free, life-changing leadership training program where young people learn, develop, and enhance leadership skills and principles in an atmosphere of trust and respect. RYLA encourages and assists current and potential youth leaders in methods of responsible and effective leadership. Many past RYLarians claim, "It was the best week of my life!"

YOUNG RYLA: YOUNG RYLA IS A VERSION OF RYLA GEARED TO 7TH GRADERS.

The RYLA Conferences are held in the summer at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park. The Rotary Club of Evergreen sponsors students to attend the all-expenses-paid six-day camps at a cost to the club of \$800 per student. 40 experienced volunteers are in attendance to manage the program.

Starting February 15th through April 15th, any high school sophomore or junior may apply to attend RYLA, and 7th graders for Young RYLA. To apply, and for more information, log on to rockymountainryla.org

Young Rotary/Interact: Is a club for local youngsters who want to connect with others in their community or school. Interact club members learn leadership skills while carrying out service projects in a fun environment. The Interact club organizes at least two service projects a year: one that benefits the community and one that encourages international understanding. To learn more about the Evergreen High School Interact Club, visit our Instagram page: www.instagram.com/ehs.youngrotary

Youth Exchange: Is a study-abroad opportunity for young people who spend anywhere from a few weeks to a full year as an international student hosted by local Rotary clubs. Exchanges are for youths ages 15–19 who have demonstrated leadership in their school and community, are flexible and willing to try new things, are open to cultural differences, and can serve as an ambassador for their own country. **More info at www.rmrye.org**

More at www.evergreenrotary.org. Click on "Avenues of Service" from the horizontal menu, then "Youth Services."



Examples of vintage Valentine cards found in the Evergreen Mountain Area Historical Society's archives and dated c. 1916–19

VALENTINE'S DAY

Saints, Cards, and Candy

BY ELAINE HAYDEN

The tradition of showing affection on February 14th has grown from a humbling exchange of sentiments to a multi-billion-dollar industry. Memories from elementary school of creating a Valentine bag or box as a receptacle for Valentine cards from classmates is familiar to many. Choosing the appropriate card for the classroom sweetheart involved a thoughtful process!

Theories of the origins of Valentine's Day vary with references to pagan observances that coincidentally happened to occur during the month of February. Some have tied ancient customs of Lupercalia, as celebrated by the early Romans on February 15th, to current Valentine observances on February 14th. While Lupercalia does not evoke signs of affection, the festival honored shepherds, featuring priests of Lupercus roaming the streets while symbolically and randomly striking those who gathered with a strap. Women in attendance believed that their fertility was enhanced if they were struck by the priests on this festival day.

According to the *Lincoln Library of Essential Information*, as customary in medieval England and France, young people would gather on February 13th, when "Names were drawn by chance from a receptacle, the person whose name was on a slip [of paper] becoming the sweetheart for the holder for the ensuing year." Other scholars accept the theory that dating back to the 3rd century, St. Valentine, a Roman priest as identified in the book, *Lives of the Saints*, defied Emperor Claudius II by performing nuptials in clandestine settings. Claudius forbade his soldiers to marry, as he believed that caring for a wife would distract a soldier from his military duties. St. Valentine was arrested, sentenced to death, beaten and beheaded on February 14, 270 A.D. So much for a fanciful and loving day of acknowledgment! Over two hundred years later, in 496 A.D., according to Elle Andra-Warner, the Feast Day of Saint Valentine was established on February 14th by Pope Gelasius I in honor of the beheaded Saint Valentine and his pursuits. Many years later, in the 19th century, February 14th had become an accepted date to commemorate love.

Over time, the significance of the Valentine's Day observance has taken on a different quality. Poems became the accepted recognition of affection. Whether originally penned or borrowed from noted poets, the recipient of a poem felt adored and appreciated. So popular were written sentiments that by 1800 cards were being mass produced, with Esther Howland of Boston, Massachusetts, holding the honor of producing the first commercial Valentine cards. The daughter of an established bookshop owner, Esther established the New England Valentine Company in 1850 and is considered by Valentine aficionados as being the "Mother of American Valentines," as reported by Andra-Warner. Others caught the love bug and began producing greeting cards for a willing public market. According to the website corporate.hallmark.com, the Hallmark Card Company, established by Joyce Clyde Hall and his brother, Rollie, experienced humble beginnings in Nebraska in the early 1900s. By 1928, the Hall brothers named their greeting card company Hallmark. Descendants of the original Hall family continue to serve on the Board of Directors and have elevated the company onto a tier of marketing that generates an estimated multi-billion-dollar revenue on Valentine cards alone.

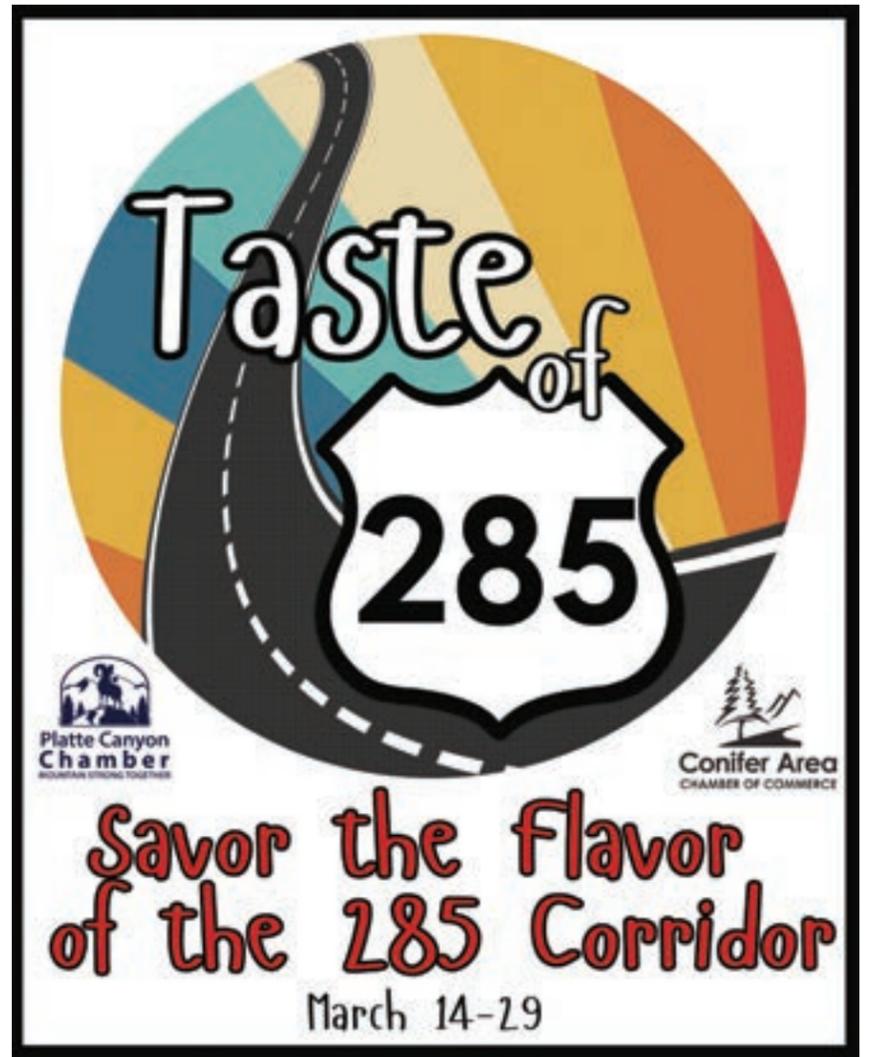
According to Kae Lani Palmisano, the tradition of boxed chocolates was introduced by Richard and George Cadbury in 1861 when they brainstormed a marketing concept that led to the production of heart-shaped boxes, filled with chocolate morsels as a symbol of affection. Cadbury chocolate, reportedly Queen Victoria's chocolate of choice, continues to enjoy global popularity, not only with Valentine chocolates but with the iconic chocolate Easter eggs and bunnies as well. The tradition of gifting candy at Valentine's Day is not limited to chocolates. As reported by Erin Blakemore, the tiny, heart-shaped candies, now known as "conversation hearts," were the creative invention of the New England Confectionery Company (NECCO) in 1902. The company fabricated a process of printing simple sentiments on candies that conveyed loving words. Over time, the candies became smaller and the sentiments became shorter, as recognized today with words such as "Kiss Me" or "Be Mine." Since the original NECCO candies began production, this type of candy has been copied many times over with more modern sentiments than the original versions offered; however, these candies remain a tradition and mainstay as an iconic Valentine gift, especially among children.

The Valentine's Day offering of personally composed poems and simple handcrafted cards has taken a back seat to chocolate, red roses, diamond bracelets, and lingerie as tokens of love. It is estimated that revenues from all forms of traditional Valentine gifts have reached the 20B dollar mark, a far cry from the days of an exchange of hand-written poems and simple cards.

The examples of vintage Valentine cards found in the EMAHS archives and dated c. 1916–19 reveal an overwhelming number of cards represented in the collection that were exchanged between girl friends and between girls and their mothers. This may be owing to the fact that women were more apt to save cards as mementos than were male recipients of Valentine cards. Regardless, images of hearts, cupids, and lace were, and continue to be, symbols associated with love and affection on the Valentine's Day observances to which we have become accustomed in modern time.

Sources:
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Conifer Chamber News



Taste of 285

BY BETH SCHNEIDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As we settle into the snowy months of winter (we hope), there is a new reason to get out of the house, gather with friends, and support the places that bring warmth and flavor to our community. This March, the 285 corridor will host a brand-new event, **Taste of 285: Savor the Flavor of 285**, running from **March 14 through March 29**.

Taste of 285 is a celebration of the local businesses that keep our mountain community thriving, especially during one of the slowest times of year. March is not only the time we are deep into hibernation in the foothills, it also coincides with spring break for Jefferson County and Platte Canyon schools. While families may be traveling or staying home, many local restaurants and food and beverage businesses experience a significant slowdown. Taste of 285 is designed to encourage our community to show up, dine local, and offer support when it matters most.

This event is a collaborative effort with the Platte Canyon Chamber of Commerce, bringing together businesses and communities along the 285 corridor with a shared goal of supporting local and celebrating what makes this region special. By working together, the Chambers are expanding the reach of Taste of 285 and inviting residents and visitors alike to explore more of the corridor and the incredible variety of flavors it offers.

Throughout the two-week event, participating businesses will showcase the tastes that make our area unique. Restaurants, food trucks, coffee shops, bakeries, cocktail spots, breweries, and more will highlight special menu items, seasonal offerings, or customer favorites. From a comforting cup of coffee on a snowy morning to a hearty meal, a fresh baked treat, or a locally crafted beer, Taste of 285 offers countless ways to enjoy what our local businesses do best.

Taste of 285 is about more than food and drinks. It is about connection and community.

Local eateries are gathering places where neighbors meet, celebrations happen, and everyday moments become meaningful. By participating in Taste of 285, community members are helping sustain these businesses through a challenging season and reinforcing the strong sense of connection that defines the 285 corridor.

The event also offers a perfect excuse to come out of winter hibernation. Cabin fever can settle in quickly this time of year, and even a simple night out can lift spirits. Trying a new restaurant, revisiting a favorite spot, or sharing a warm drink with friends can turn an ordinary winter day into something memorable.

Whether you are a longtime local or just passing through, Taste of 285 invites you to explore the corridor, discover new flavors, and support the businesses that bring life to our community year round. Every meal ordered, every coffee purchased, and every toast raised makes a difference.

Mark your calendars for March 14 through March 29 and make a plan to eat, drink, and support local. Winter may still be holding on, but the warmth of good food, good drinks, and a strong community is always in season along the 285 corridor.

Beth Schneider
 Executive Director
 Conifer Area Chamber of Commerce

If you have any membership questions, please contact the chamber office: director@GoConifer.com, 303-838-5711. Thank you for your continued support and thank you for shopping local!

WE SUPPORT LOCAL!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 1–7

Center For the Arts Evergreen (CAE) is featuring thirty artists from the Colorado South Asian Artists Group (C-SAAG) entitled "Grounded." The show will feature around seventy works exploring culture, storytelling, heritage, identity, and contemporary artistic practice. On the final day of the exhibition, Saturday, February 7, visitors will be invited to return for an afternoon artist talk in the gallery. evergreenarts.org

February 3

Evergreen Newcomers and Neighbors sponsors Evergreen Speaks: 5:30–6:30pm at Evergreen Christian Church, 27772 Iris Drive, Evergreen. Free. Featuring Lynn Caligiuri, Executive Director of the Mountain Area Land Trust. For more information evergreennewcomers.com

February 4

Colorado Pollinators. Mountain Area Land Trust hosts expert educators from the Butterfly Pavilion to explore the roles of bees, butterflies, beetles, moths, and other crucial insects in our local ecosystem. Learn why these pollinators are the superheroes behind Colorado's natural beauty and how you can help protect them. Plus, see the Butterfly Pavilion's diverse collection of pollinator specimens! Wednesday, February 4, 3:30pm–5pm, at Mountain Area Land Trust, 908 Nob Hill Road, Suite 200, Evergreen. Free public event. Registration requested. Register at <https://savetheland.org/events/>

February 4

Wine, Women, and Wealth (WWW), 6:30–8pm at Willow Creek Restaurant, 29029 Upper Bear Creek Rd., Evergreen. Amazing things happen when women get together in community. Relax, enjoy a glass of wine and light appetizers, meet other amazing women, and learn about money! It's FREE. There's time for networking and sharing about yourself, so bring business cards if you have them! RSVP is required. Text or call Amelia at 720-722-0094 or use the Meetup or Eventbrite link to register: <https://www.meetup.com/wine-women-wealth-evergreen-co/>

February 5–March 1



This February StageDoor Theatre's Adult Company performs "THE GAME'S AFOOT!" running February 5 to March 1. Performances Friday and Saturday at 7pm, Sunday at 2pm. Tickets \$27, \$5 discount for seniors, students, and educators. A select Valentine Performance on February 14 for \$30 includes a special treat at intermission. This farcical "whodunit?" mystery is written by Ken Ludwig, and directed by Jill Manser. For tickets and information contact <https://www.stagedoortheatre.org/> Stagedoor Theatre is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit community-based theatre, open to everyone.

February 5, 12, 19, and 26

Join us for Thirsty Thursdays at the Blackbird Cafe, from 4–7:45pm, for local live music, appetizers, and drinks. 25940 Highway 74 in Kittredge.

February 5, 12, 19, and 26

For horse lovers of all ages, TrailBlazers Class at the ResqRanch will be held every Thursday from 4:30–6pm. This isn't just another riding lesson. This is a movement. The Trailblazers is a weekly community gathering for compassionate horse lovers of all ages, dedicated to creating a better future for equines. Together, we are embarking on a mission to dramatically increase the number of people skilled in the art and science of Positive Reinforcement (R+) training. By joining, you become a vital part of the solution, helping to prepare the world to welcome and care for every horse in need. Trailblazer Single 90-minute Session: \$52 or Trailblazer 10-Session Pass: \$430. <https://www.resqranch.org/trailblazers-a>

February 5, 12, 19, and 26

Preschool Adventures at Evergreen Nature Center, weekly on Thursdays, 9–10am. Bring your little one to the Nature Center each week to develop their early childhood readiness skills through nature exploration. Practice fine motor skills, literacy comprehension, and more at the Evergreen Nature Center. These programs are designed for children ages 2–5 years old. All children must have an adult in attendance. Come dressed to explore the outdoors. This program is completely FREE and no registration is needed. Approximately 45–60 minutes. <https://evergreenaudubon.org/events/preschool-adventures-at-evergreen-nature-center/>

February 7

Evergreen's Chill Out Winterfest, 8am Saturday, February 7, at the Evergreen Lakehouse. Join the Evergreen Chamber and Evergreen Parks and Rec at our 4th Annual winter community event. It is time to accept our reality, foothills community... it is cold here in the winter. And in the dead of winter, it can be downright frigid! In the spirit of embracing and not complaining, your Evergreen Chamber and Evergreen Parks and Rec is rolling out a day of fun for all! evergreenchamber.org

February 7

Evergreen's Amazing Race, will be a walking race for teams of 4 starting at the Little Bear at 28075 Hwy 74, Evergreen. Family-friendly check-in is at 10:30am and the 21-and-over check-in is at 11am. Each stop will include a challenge. Complete the challenges to obtain your next clue. evergreenchamber.org

February 12

Mountain Mixer @5, Elevate Your Networking, 5–7pm at Suz Cookie Jar Rescue Bakery & Bites, 6921 Hwy 73, Evergreen. \$5 members, \$10 not yet members. For info email Admin@evergreenchamber.org

February 13

Join Center For the Arts Evergreen for our monthly Creativity, Coffee & Conversation

(CCC) for mountain area seniors! Each month from 1:30–3:30pm, we offer the opportunity for artists, writers, and arts appreciators (aged 55 and better) to gather and find connection through art. CCC is an opportunity to come together, make new friends, and learn something new. Social interaction and community engagement keep us all a little healthier.

February 13 and 14

Evergreen Players Improv Comedy (EPiC) is a community favorite performance of spontaneous, unscripted comedy performed by our Master Company. Friday and Saturday at 7:30pm at Center Stage Theater, 27608 Fireweed Drive, Evergreen. SPECIAL VALENTINE'S DAY PRICING: \$25. For info 720-515-1528 or online at www.evergreenplayers.org.

February 19

Wild Aware, local Evergreen nonprofit, invites you to join us for a wild evening of celebration and connection at the Open Aware Meet & Greet on the third Thursday of each month at 6pm at the Evergreen Brewery, 2962 Evergreen Parkway, Suite 201, Evergreen.

February 25

Connections & Cocktails, 4:30–5:30pm at The Muddy Buck Coffee House, 28065 Hwy 74, Ste 101, Evergreen. Join new Members, ambassadors, and seasoned members alike to network in a casual setting. evergreenchamber.org

February 27

Morning Birds and Brews with Evergreen Audubon and Nature Center, weekly on the last Friday of the month, 8:30–10am at the Evergreen Nature Center, 27640 CO-74. We will spend some time chatting indoors at the Evergreen Nature Center before heading out to the meadow and seeing what birds we can find. Evergreen Audubon will provide hot drinks. Bring your own coffee mug or thermos, binoculars, and

February 2026



February 4

Women's Circle 5:30–6:30pm. Expand your circle and connect with others in a safe space. Activate your creative power to align with your feminine presence that attracts the situations and relationships that you desire. Brenda will share powerful practices to embolden you to show up in life to be seen and heard.

February 8

Mindfulness Walk 10am. Join Kathy at Pine Valley Ranch (30400 Crystal Lake Road, Pine) for gentle walking, grounding, and reflection. Whether you are feeling called to reconnect, reflect, or simply enjoy a calm morning, all are warmly welcomed. Bring layers for the weather, water, and an open heart.

February 10

Men's Group, 7–8pm, at PeaceWorks' admin office 25997 Conifer Rd, Ste D-6 upstairs conference room. Are you a victim or a survivor? Learn more with Dean at our monthly men's group to foster genuine connections, learn healthy relationship skills, and uplift each other. Through open discussions, activities, and support, we aim to build a community where every man feels valued and understood. Embrace your strengths, confront your challenges, and grow alongside like-minded individuals committed to personal and collective growth. Together, we redefine masculinity with empathy, resilience, and mutual respect.

weather-appropriate clothes. We have binoculars to lend out, so don't worry if you don't have your own! This event is geared toward adults, but all ages and birding abilities are welcome.

February 27

Wild Aware, an Evergreen non-profit organization, is actively recruiting volunteers, new and old, for their Last Friday Coffee, a monthly event on the last Friday morning of every month. Our gatherings begin at 9am in the Evergreen Bread and Cocktail Lounge, 1260 Bergen Pkwy, Evergreen.

February 27

Owl Prowl. Whooooo's calling out at night? Join Evergreen Audubon and Mountain Area Land Trust (MALT) for an exciting new program to learn all about our local nocturnal predators. Taking place at MALT's 71-acre Sacramento Creek Ranch in Fairplay. The evening will start with dissecting owl pellets and learning some fun facts about these incredible birds of prey, before heading out for a short walk to try and find one. This is an event for the whole family that you won't want to miss! Friday, February 27, 6–8pm, at the Sacramento Creek Ranch, 2234 Busch Run, Fairplay. Notes: Free public event. Registration requested at <https://savetheland.org/events/>

March 4

Conservation Trends in the West. Lori Weigel, Principal of New Bridge Strategy, will share an inside look at the findings from the annual bipartisan Conservation in the West poll, which digs into Westerners' views on climate change, public lands, water, wildlife, and other important conservation issues. Wed., March 4, 9–10:30am, at the Mountain Area Land Trust, 908 Nob Hill Road, Suite 200, Evergreen. Free public event. Register at <https://savetheland.org/events/>

PeaceWorks, Inc. offers a complimentary Community Wellness Program as part of our advocacy for personal wellbeing, healthy relationships, and safe homes. All are welcome. Attend in person at Taspens' Dragonfly Studio, unless otherwise noted. Register www.taspenshealingcenter.com under Events, or online (Zoom details on website) peaceworksinco.com/events

February 11

Dru Yoga 5:30–6:30pm. Dru has a focus upon maintaining a healthy spine, through activation movements in the beginning of class and throughout a Dru session. A typical Dru Yoga class includes energy block release sequences, classical asanas (yoga postures), pranayama (breath work), mudras (gestures), positive affirmations, and also empowering visualizations. Dru classes are tailored to the student and their individual level, which makes it great for everyone.

February 18

Meditative Sound Bath 5:30–6:30pm. Join Brenda for a transformative vibrational meditation to harmonize emotions and thought patterns while soothing tensions in the body. Sensation is integrated with mindful intention to enliven energy centers and internal wisdom. Wear comfortable clothes, bring a water bottle, head pillow, and yoga mat (if you have one).

February 25

Block Therapy™ Trauma Release 5:30–6:30pm. Trauma (physical and emotional) becomes trapped in your body and leads to pain, aging, and disease. This powerful self-healing practice unlocks the restrictions and adhesions that block blood and oxygen flow and releases trauma at a cellular level. All levels. Wear comfortable clothes. Bring a yoga mat if you have one and a water bottle.

Evergreen Players presents

EPiC – Improv Comedy

ONE WEEKEND ONLY – FEBRUARY 13 & 14 | DIRECTED BY SCOTT OGLE



Theatre comes alive with laughter as a talented group of improvisers takes the stage, creating spontaneous and hilarious scenes. The show's charm lies in its interactive nature, with the audience actively participating by suggesting themes, characters, and even joining in on the fun. The performers, the Evergreen Players' Master Company, seasoned in the art of on-the-spot humor, effortlessly weave these suggestions into side-splitting sketches, leaving everyone in stitches. This local gem has become a go-to spot for those seeking an evening filled with laughter, camaraderie, and the unpredictable magic of improvisational comedy.

Director Scott Ogle, a founding member of EPiC, is directing the show at Center Stage Theatre, 27608 Fireweed Drive, in Evergreen. Performances are Fri. and Sat. at 7:30pm.

The Evergreen Players is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Established in 1950, the Players' mission is to create professional quality theater to inspire, engage and entertain. The Players' mailing address is P.O. Box 1271, Evergreen, CO 80437.

In the heart of our community, there's a beloved improv comedy show named EPiC, that has become a local sensation. EPiC is an acronym for Evergreen Players Improv Comedy. Once each winter, the historic Center Stage

Submit your calendar events to *Your Mountain Connection* via Marty Hallberg (news@yourmtnconnection.com).

Calendar Events are published as space allows.

Information must be received by the 10th of each month prior to the actual date of the event.

If your group is no longer meeting, please let

Your Mountain Connection know via Marty Hallberg

(news@yourmtnconnection.com).



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The advertisement features a collage of images: a gift certificate for Colorado Furniture, a scenic forest with a stream, a wooden table with a painted house, a close-up of a bison's face, and a rustic wooden door. The text is set against a dark green background.

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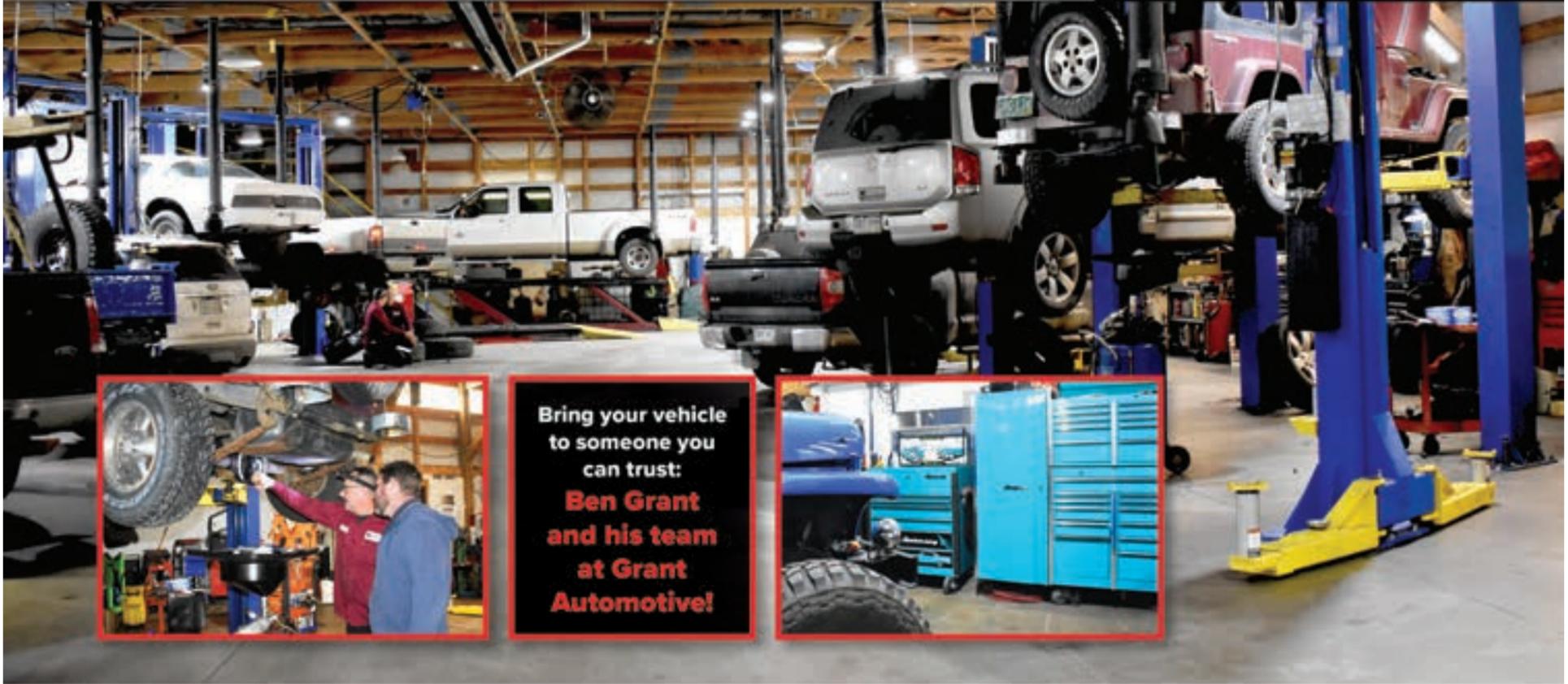
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Ben Grant, the owner of Grant Automotive, grew up in Pine Junction and has always been involved in the mountain community. At the age of 15, Ben knew that his strong interest in automotive repair would determine his professional direction and after 12 years of working for Kevin's Subaru he opened Grant Auto in July of 2000.

Ben has steadily built a loyal following and currently has ten employees. He estimates that he and his techs combine to reflect about 100 years of experience, and it is important to note that 30 of those years are his.

Ben prides himself in the volume of repeat service in American and Japanese-made vehicles. They have the latest computerized diagnostic equipment including two alignment racks that utilize digital cameras to align all four wheels accurately.

In addition to having the latest equipment, they can take care of all recommended mileage services for vehicle warranty, specializing in late-model fuel-injected cars and trucks. Diesel repair and Emissions testing are also offered.

If you need your car or truck repaired, need mileage services, basic services, or even new tires, **Grant Automotive is the place to go. It is located at 19356 Goddard Ranch Court on Highway 285**, ½ mile south of North Turkey Creek, just 6.5 miles from C-470 and Highway 285 and just down from Aspen Park.

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