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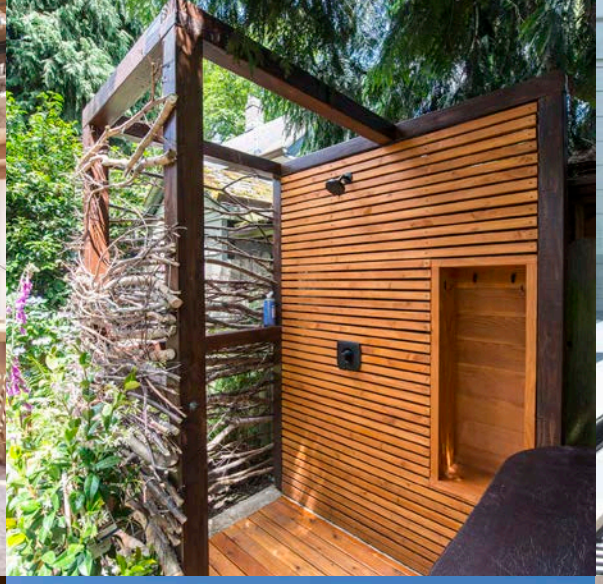


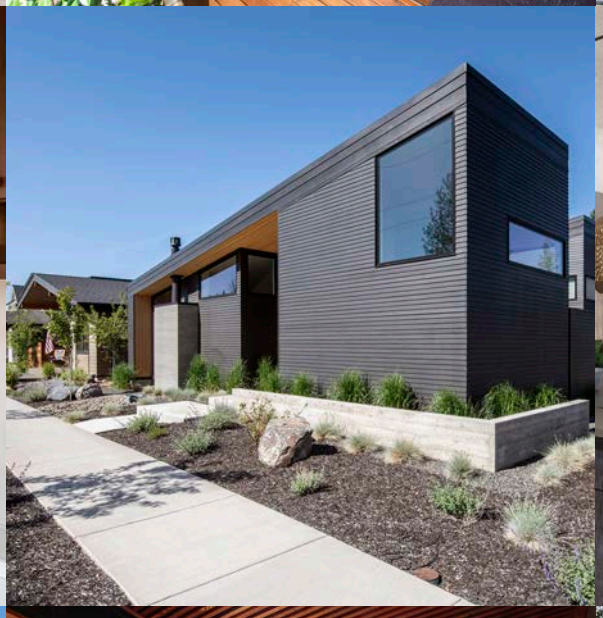

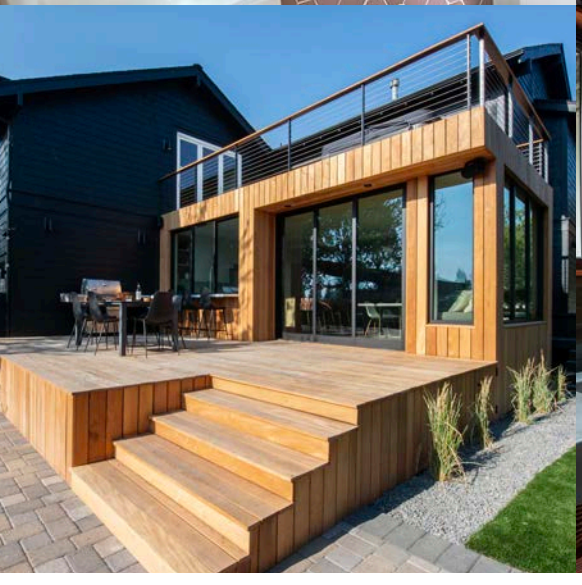
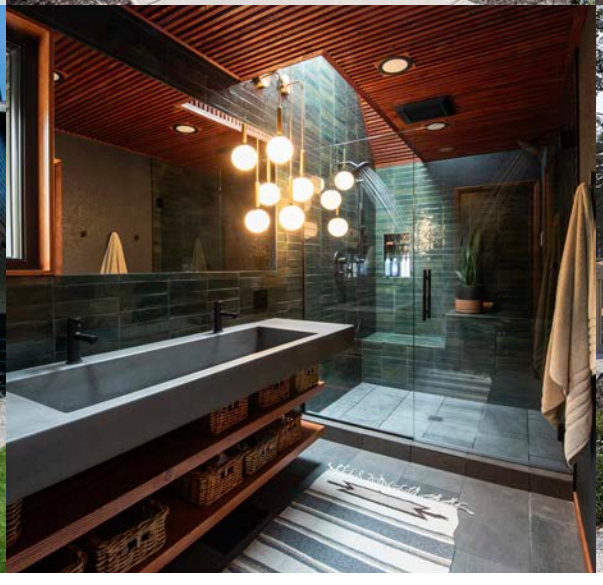


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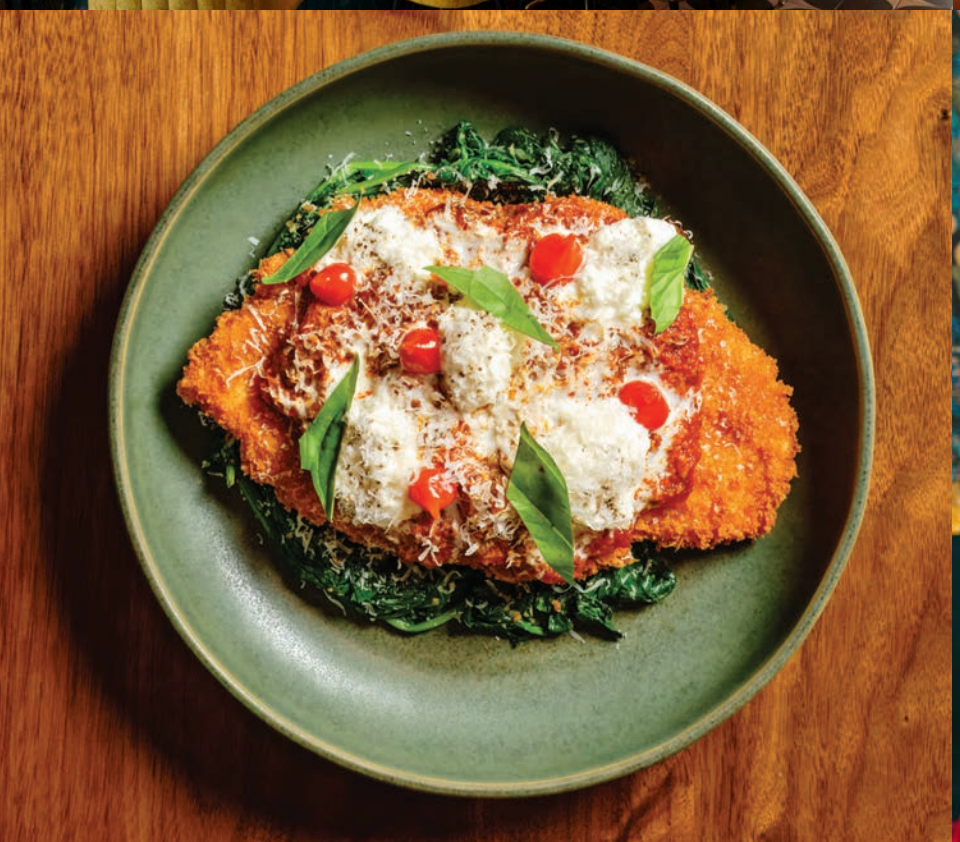
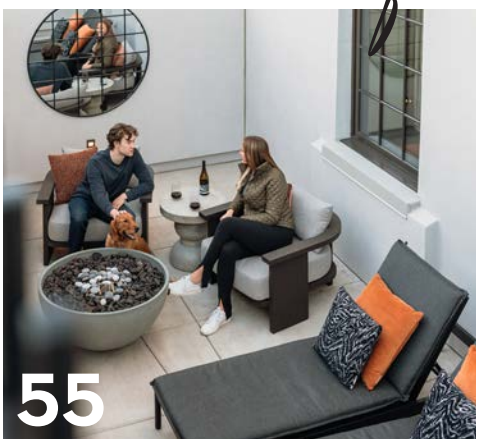


TABLE of CONTENTS



DIGITAL EXTRAS

Looking for your next favorite restaurant? Search our dining guide to learn more about the top spots at *bendmagazine.com/dining-guide.*

Learn about what's happening in Central Oregon or upload your upcoming events at *bendmagazine.com/calendar.*

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PHOTO OF GABRIELLE NELSON AND PUP CASH BY TAYLOR BAYLY

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OUR *Contributors*

TOMMY COREY
PHOTOGRAPHER

An outdoor portrait photographer based in Central Oregon, Tommy Corey brings a blend of artistry and adventure to his work with leading outdoor brands. His love for photography began at age 12, when his father handed him a 35mm Olympus camera, sparking a lifelong fascination with portraiture. After years capturing weddings and conceptual art, he set out to hike the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail in 2018. The exploration led to a project interviewing 120 subjects for his book, published in 2024 called *All Humans Outside: Stories of Belonging in Nature.* On page 78, find his portraits and stories from the project.

BENJAMIN EDWARDS
PHOTOGRAPHER

Award-winning multimedia artist Benjamin Edwards specializes in wedding, commercial and ethical storytelling. A devoted husband and father of five, Edwards was featured in *Photo District News* magazine as a "Photographer Making A Difference." He won a Hollywood Film Festival award for a short film he directed to raise awareness on the impact of mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From nonprofits to the music world, Edwards works to tell a story through his images. In this issue, he documented a winter day at Elk Lake Resort (page 72) and the elegance of The Westman (page 55).

DAVID HILL
WRITER

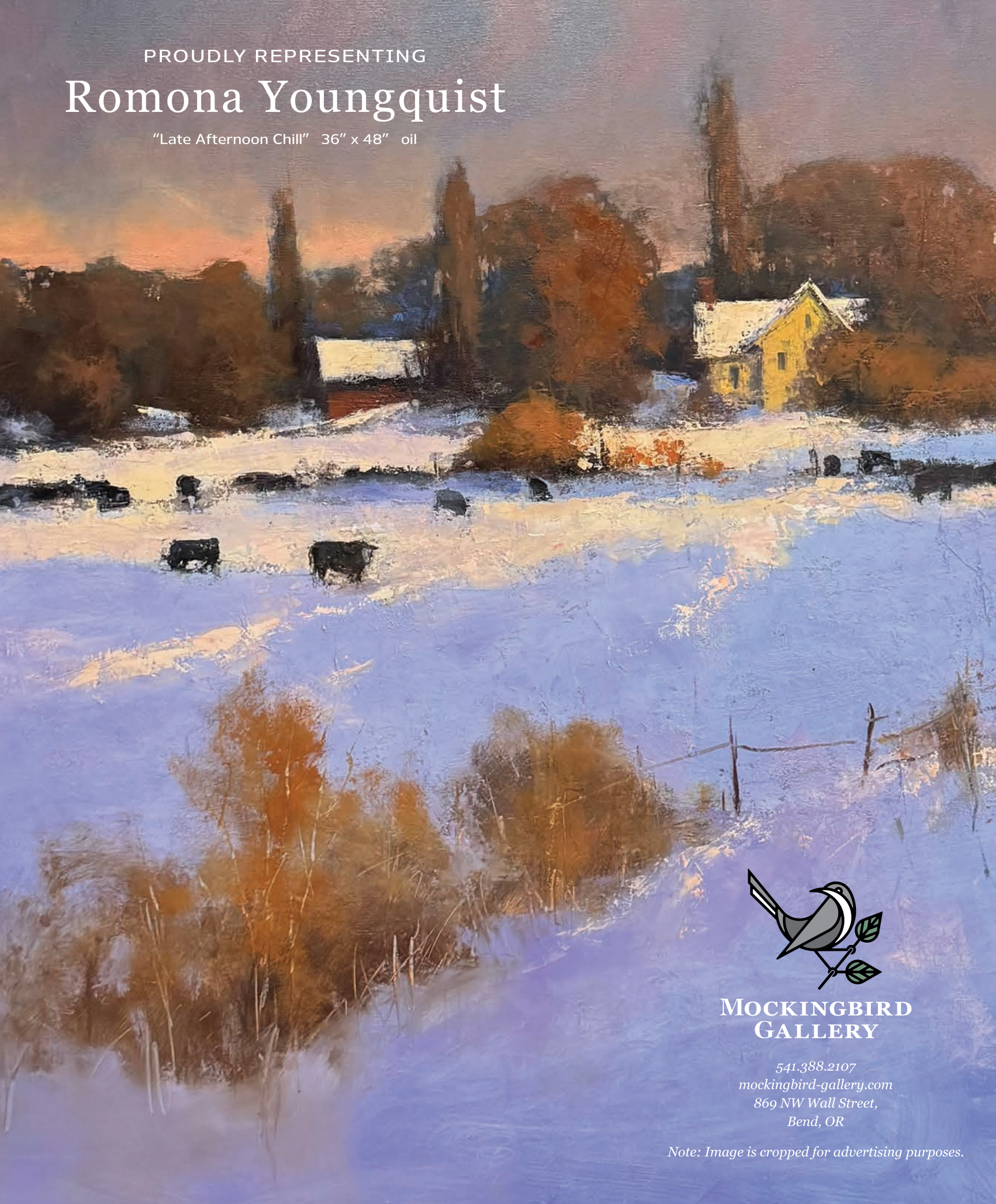
A professor at Oregon State University in Corvallis, David Hill studies the movement of water and snow across the landscape. He is also a National Geographic Explorer and a member of the Science Alliance's Protect our Winters. He has been backcountry skiing for 30 years, is an affiliate member of the American Avalanche Association, and teaches avalanche education classes at OSU. He has been exploring Oregon for the past 15 years with his wife, three daughters and two dogs. Read his feature on understanding watersheds and the latest science used to measure the snowpack on page 84.

SUZANNE JOHNSON
WRITER

A Midwestern transplant who found her home in the Cascades, writer Suzanne Johnson loves chatting with interesting people and learning what makes them tick. Her stories dive into topics of family, nature, food and adventuring across this beautiful planet. Johnson is currently working on a historical fiction project related to turn-of-the-century women adventurers inspired by the journal of a friend's great-grandmother. This month, she brings us to BOSS Fitness on page 65, where they coach people about how to have stronger bodies and minds. Plus, she skis to Elk Lake and reports on its new trails and lodge on page 72.

CODY RHEAULT
PHOTOGRAPHER

A professional filmmaker, photographer and budding writer, Sisters-based Cody Rheault travels the globe telling stories of people and places with his camera. Using a candid documentary style, Rheault's work is inspired by the outdoors. He's spent much of his career honoring the life of military veterans through short films. When not behind the lens, Rheault enjoys time with his family, hiking local peaks, disc golfing or riding his motorcycle on backroads. On page 84, see how he captured the beauty of Bend's Municipal Watershed, along with capturing bits of irrigation's history.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> FOR THIS MARCH AND APRIL ISSUE, WE MADE A COLLECTIVE DECISION TO CLIMB—AT LEAST METAPHORICALLY—AND LOOK AT BEND FROM A HIGHER ELEVATION."

Editor's LETTER

Life is about perspective. From where I sat at my desk this winter, the changing season nearly slipped by unnoticed. That's saying something, given that snowfall usually makes itself known around here. Working downtown during inversion days was less about not seeing Drake Park for the trees and more like not seeing the mountains because of the freeze.

Twenty miles up Century Drive, above the fog, it was a different story. While some waited for fresh powder, the team at Mt. Bachelor kept lifts running and spirits high for those who ventured above the clouds. They shaped groomers and created an invitation to see views that stretched from Pine Marten Lodge to forever. The beauty from above was a 365-degree reminder that perspective isn't about denying the gray—it's about rising above it.

This isn't all about the ski season: The world can feel a bit upside down these days. Headlines pile up. To-do lists multiply. Worries shrink our vision until everything feels urgent and close. So for this March and April issue, we made a collective decision to climb—at least metaphorically—and look at Bend from a higher elevation.

That view threads through these pages. On page 65, we meet Kevin Boss who shows us how coaching can go beyond lifting weights to uplifting people. Bend author and photographer Tommy Corey shares images and notes from his book *All Humans Outside* on page 78 to remind us that nature is one of our earliest and most patient teachers. Dagmar Eriksson and her teammate Dorlee Kingen took a long view of athleticism by not letting age define them. Eriksson won three gold medals at the 2026 Masters World Cup at the age of 80 (read about it on page 51). And David Hill's story on Bend's watershed and snowpack (page 84) feels especially poignant this year, during a low-snow season (at least so far).

During a year like this, spring is confounding: We hold out hope for one more winter storm even as daylight stretches and we salute the sun. During this in-between time, it's important to remember to find small ways to embrace the season.

I was struck by this after revisiting the essays of the late Brian Doyle, who had an unmatched ability to find the sacred in the small. He wrote that "we are mostly walking miracles," pointing to hummingbirds' hearts, fleeting glances between partners, and ordinary moments that quietly confirm our existence. From higher ground—literal or emotional—it's often these small miracles that are reminders of the most important things.

So thanks for being human with us. Let's remind one another that spring is about growth, starting again and the small shifts in vantage point that can make the biggest difference in our lives. We're grateful to zoom out together on the pages ahead.

Cheryl Parton, *Editor in Chief*


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ON *the* WEB

1. PRAY FOR SNOW: Winter isn't over! Get a fix of snow fun by checking out Pete Alport's backcountry adventures at *bendmagazine.com*.
2. FOODS TO NOURISH THE SOUL: Udon at Yokocho Izakaya might become your next favorite, craveable meal. Find 42 sample menus from local restaurants in *Savor* magazine at *bendmagazine.com/savor-dining-guide*. **3.PLAY OUTSIDE:** Get outside and plan your next adventure by linking to *bendmagazine.com/outdoors*. **BONUS:** Get a FREE year of *Bend Magazine* delivered by mail with code SPRING4 at *bendmagazine.com/subscribe*.

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The team at Bend's water intake facility helps provide clean, safe and reliable drinking water for the city.

PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

World-Class Water

City of Bend celebrates 100 years of stewarding this natural resource

Bend is lucky to have some of the best water in the world, and the City of Bend is celebrating. For 100 years, the community has relied on clean, clear water that begins high in the Cascade Range, with rain and snow recharging the watershed and aquifer. But the city's water services story is bigger than drinking water alone: it's an interconnected system that includes water supply, wastewater treatment and stormwater management, all working together to keep Bend healthy, resilient and thriving.

Since 1926, Bend has transformed its water infrastructure from wooden pipes and river-drawn drinking water into a modern, safe and reliable dual source drinking water system. And the City continues planning far into the future, caring for a system that safeguards public health, supports the local economy, protects natural areas and delivers reliable, great tasting water every day.

"We're proud to deliver some of the highest-quality water in the world, but that doesn't happen by accident," said Bend's Public Works Director Mike Buettner. "It's the result of a dedicated team of staff, strong community support and a commitment to investing in the systems that keep Bend's water clean, reliable and resilient."

As part of the centennial celebration of Bend's water systems kicking off in March 2026, learn where the City's water comes from, about people behind the scenes and ways this valuable resource can be protected for the future. See *bendoregon.gov/celebrate-water*.

Eric Leadbetter, Aaron Moore and Kaleb Kelleher perform at Bend Fall Festival 2025.

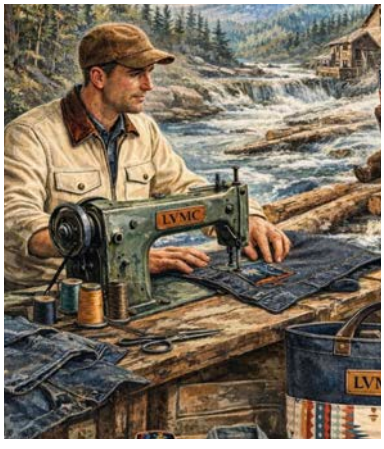
WHAT WE *love*

WHAT WE ARE LISTENING TO: **LEADBETTER BAND**

The fourth album by the Leadbetter Band, "Spell" casts a spell on us. Tracks channel musical eras, but this hometown trio stays rooted in rock. After the album's fall 2025 debut, the band kept up one of the busiest gig calendars, with the early shows sometimes including Eric Leadbetter's 9-year-old son Silas. We'll keep listening, and we dare you to crank up the song "Sky to the Ground" and not dance. See *ericleadbettermusic.com*.

WHAT WE ARE WAITING FOR: **A BEND TEA HOUSE**

More gathering spaces, more art and more tea? Yes, please. Something has been brewing on Bond Street in downtown Bend. Kicked off with a mural-painting session it called a "giant paint-by-numbers" wall, Bend Teal Tea & Art Lounge was created with the intention to build community. The tea house will serve local teas from Metolius, Inspired Leaf and others from around the world, and will host art workshops. See *@bendteal*.



WHAT WE ARE WEARING: **UPCYCLED CUSTOM DESIGNS**

Logan Mckelvey has been sewing as the brand LVMC for a decade. Starting with American-made denim, vintage fabrics and hardware, he designs, cuts and sews each custom piece to become what he hopes will be "your favorite jacket." Designs show off lapels of Pendleton fabrics on Levi's and workwear, or become flourishes of color on tote bags. The brand channels the independent spirit of the West. See *@lvmcbend*.

WHAT WE ARE EATING: **SWEET (AND SAVORY) WAFFLES**

This cross-hatched comfort food comes flat, stuffed or dipped. At Lone Pine Coffee Roasters, housemade Liège waffles are soft inside with a hot-iron caramelized-sugar shell. Stuffed savory or sweet options abound at the Secret Waffle Society food truck where there's a standing $5 menu option to buy waffles for a stranger in need of nourishment. A new food truck in town, Wandering Ranchero, serves up a Tex-Mex cornbread version with jalapeño, bacon and cheddar. Add pickled pepper, egg or queso to giddy up the breakfast ante. See *lonepinecoffeeroasters.com*, *@swsbend*, *@wanderingranchero*.

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SHANNON LIPSCOMB

RESEARCHER + CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

Driven by community impact, Oregon State University–Cascades developmental scientist Shannon Lipscomb is helping advance how Central Oregon supports children and families facing adversity. As associate dean of research and faculty advancement and professor of human development and family sciences, Lipscomb leads nationally funded work focused on resilience, early learning and trauma-informed practice. Her projects include Roots of Resilience—a program funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, now scaling statewide—as well as studies supported by the National Institutes of Health that examine children's health, school readiness and environmental exposures. Through OSU-Cascades' Human Thrive Research Lab and community-engaged projects, her work reflects a deep commitment to equity, early intervention and helping Central Oregon's children, educators and communities thrive.

SAM BOUSFIELD

INNOVATOR + ENTREPRENEUR

A lifelong innovator, Sam Bousfield—a Prineville-based aerospace entrepreneur—has spent decades turning cutting-edge ideas into real-world solutions. As the designer and CEO behind the Samson Switchblade flying car, his work is reshaping how we think about regional travel, blending sports-car performance with certified flight in a vehicle that fits in a standard garage. In December 2025, that vision earned national recognition when he received the GSA Global Innovator Award and a U.S. Congressional Medallion at a Capitol Hill ceremony, honoring what lawmakers recognized as the only viable flying car ever produced. Ideas that took flight in Central Oregon are now being brought to a global audience by Bousfield and his company, Samson Sky.

TODD DUNKELBERG

LEADER + LIBRARIAN

A champion for the Central Oregon community, Todd Dunkelberg has shaped how Central Oregonians connect to knowledge and one another. Dedicating 26 years to the Deschutes Public Library system—including more than 16 as library director—his leadership has guided the district through the Great Recession, a global pandemic and major bond-funded expansions, with a focus on keeping libraries open, welcoming and staffed. Beginning his career as a children's librarian, he brought a deep respect for learning at every age to his work after moving to Central Oregon in 1999. As he prepares to retire in fall 2026, Dunkelberg is helping usher in a landmark moment—the opening of the new 100,000-square-foot Central Library at Stevens Ranch in May. Bright, energy-independent and community-centered, the space reflects the Deschutes Public Library's enduring vision and the commitment to Central Oregon.


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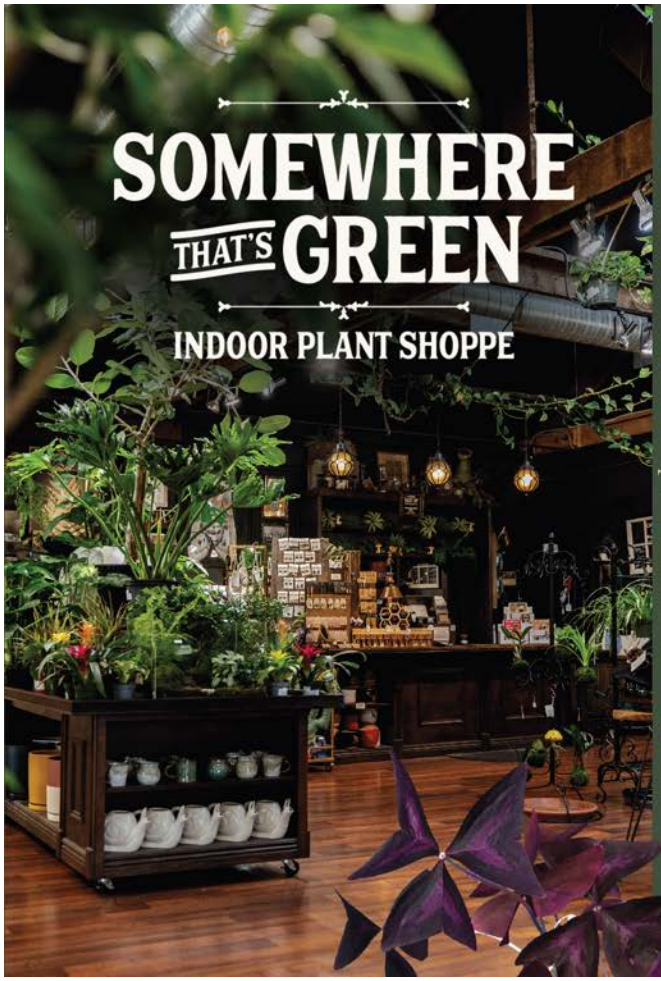

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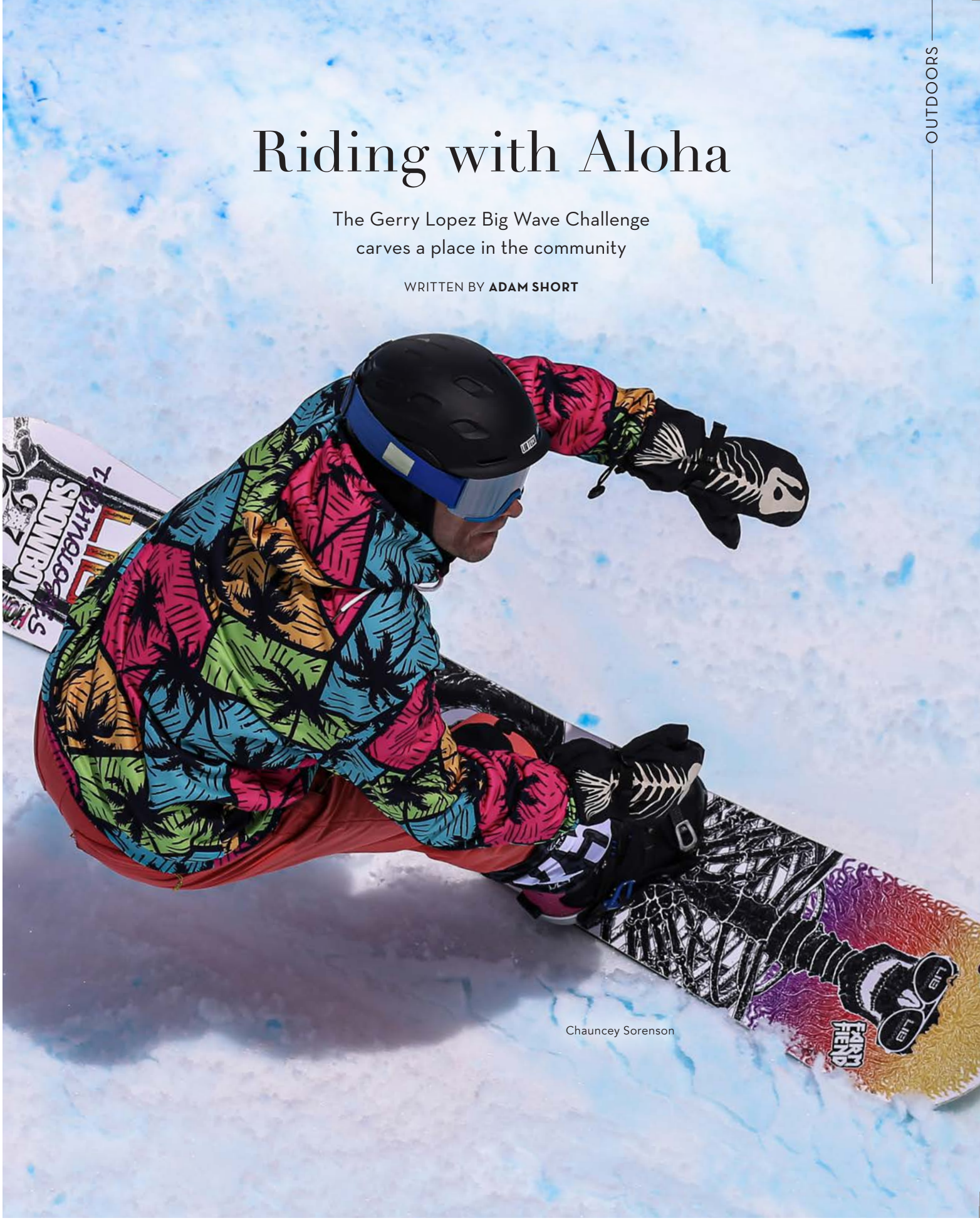


Chauncey Sorenson

PHOTO BY GRANT MYRDAL

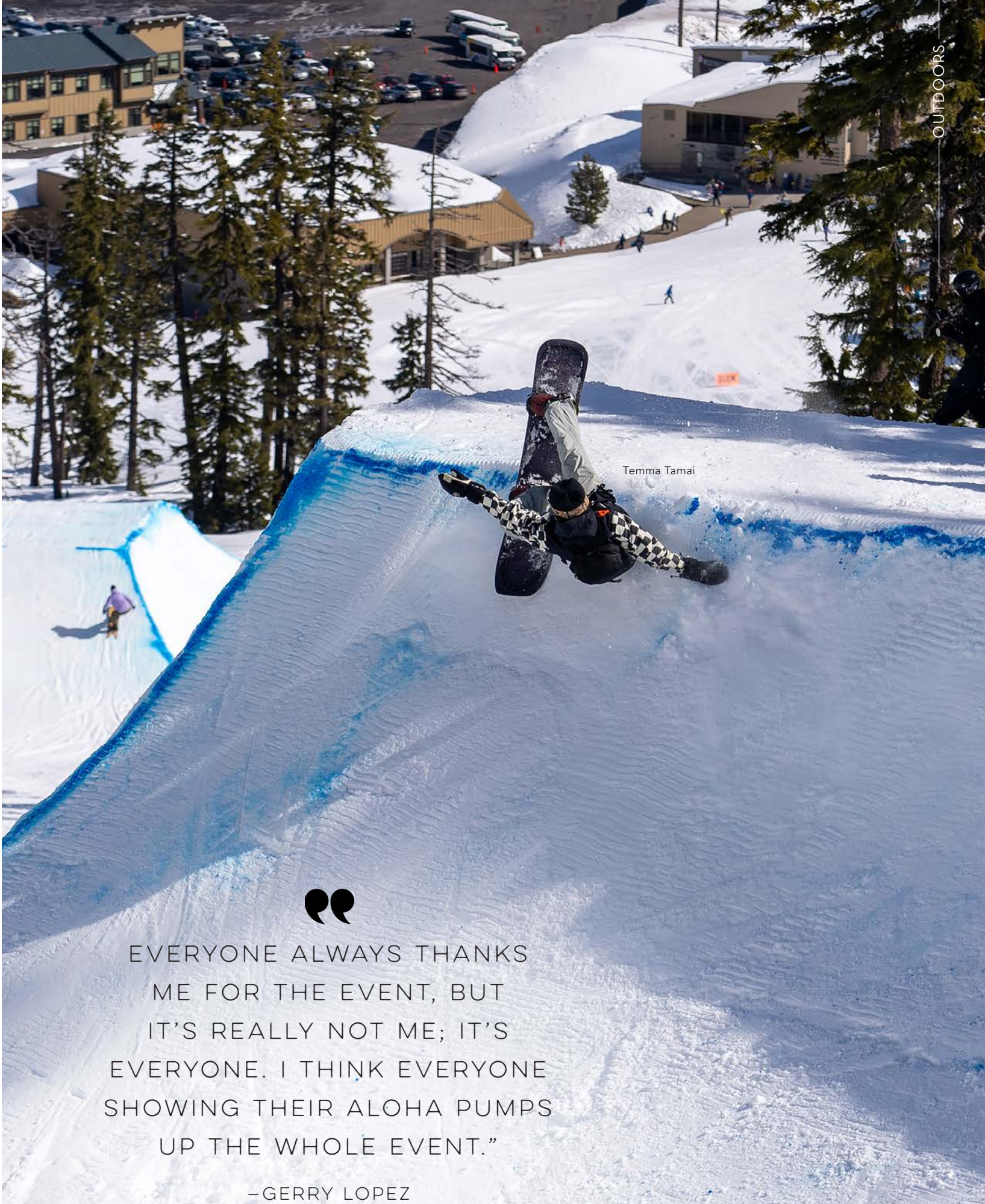
For many, the word aloha is associated with a greeting. But for Gerry Lopez, aloha is a way of being. Rooted in Native Hawaiian values, it helps guide how people treat one another, the land and themselves, plus it's a core value of the namesake snowboarding event he founded. The Gerry Lopez Big Wave Challenge will be held for its 14th year at Mt. Bachelor March 26 to 29, 2026.

Much of the aloha behind the Big Wave Challenge is inspired by early Hawaiian surfing contests that Lopez, a resident of Bend for the past 30 years and one of surfing's big-wave pioneers, experienced when he was a kid, before professional surfing events existed. "The surf contests were a kind of celebration, a gathering of all the different surf clubs and the different families and communities that would all come out to support," Lopez said. "It was a real celebration of aloha. It wasn't like this dog-eat-dog thing. It was: Come, we have this surfing contest, someone's going to win and others aren't gonna win, but afterward we'll all eat and have a good time."

SURF CULTURE INSPIRES BEND'S SNOWBOARDING EVENT

If surfing is the trunk of the board-sport tree, snowboarding is the branch that reaches to the mountains, but shares its roots in self-expression, style and progression. Similar to early snowboard events in the '80s and '90s, the Big Wave Challenge event harkens back to a time when contests felt less like a competition and more like a community gathering, paralleling the events from Lopez's childhood days. Many participants are focused less on winning and more on having fun, being in the moment with others and having the shared

Gerry Lopez



Temma Tamai

> EVERYONE ALWAYS THANKS ME FOR THE EVENT, BUT IT'S REALLY NOT ME; IT'S EVERYONE. I THINK EVERYONE SHOWING THEIR ALOHA PUMPS UP THE WHOLE EVENT."
>
> –GERRY LOPEZ

PHOTOS OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT BY SEBASTIAN TRONOLONE JR. | RIGHT BY GRANT MYRDAL | THIS PAGE BY SEBASTIAN TRONOLONE JR.

Nathan Jacobson

Tune in to the full interview with Gerry Lopez on *Bend Magazine*'s "The Circling Podcast" with Adam Short. As always, our podcast can be found on all major podcast platforms.

experience of witnessing the creativity on a course that changes every year.

Hosted by Mt. Bachelor since 2010—and inspired by the mountain's wave-type terrain and Lopez's own love of snowboarding—the Big Wave Challenge has been infused with community spirit from the beginning. Across the years, it has raised money for a number of causes through registration fees, auction items and donations. This snowboard-only competition gives riders of all ages and abilities the opportunity to express their creativity on a world-class, custom-built, surf-inspired course made up of banks, hips, spines and quarterpipes.

The Gerry Lopez Big Wave Challenge also translates the aloha spirit of generosity and care into meaningful action by directing all proceeds toward local individuals and organizations in need. Individuals like Pat Malendowski and Michele Schnake, two long-time Central Oregonians, have each significantly contributed to the sport of snowboarding locally and globally, and are both battling cancer. This year, 100% of proceeds from the event registration and online auction will be used to support Malendowski and Schnake in their treatment. The Big Wave Challenge also partners with organizations like Oregon Adaptive Sports and Urban Surf 4 Kids to provide access to board sports.

Lopez characterizes the event as a collective achievement rather than a personal one, and he showcases the spirit of aloha through humility by crediting the success of the event to everyone involved. He emphasizes that without the efforts of the whole community—specifically mentioning the volunteers, Mt. Bachelor and the individuals who participate—the event wouldn't be possible. "Everyone always thanks me for the event, but it's really not me; it's everyone. I always want to say, 'No, no, thank everybody else,'" said Lopez. "It's a lot of people coming together and making a big effort on their part. I think everyone showing their aloha pumps up the whole event." Even by deflecting praise and highlighting the contributions of others, Lopez demonstrates that aloha isn't just something you say; it's something you practice. See *bwcsurf.com*.

PHOTO BY GRANT MYRDAL

Trifecta Season

Pole Pedal Paddle turns 50, but a triathalon in Bend covers a wide range of sports and activities

WRITTEN BY **TIM NEVILLE**

A few years ago, Ralph Tadday had an idea. It was spring in Bend and the longtime resident of the West Hills knew just how great the season could be. As an avid skier, tennis player, soccer fan, cyclist and traveler, Tadday, a physicist, spends a lot of time outside, especially at that time of year.

PHOTO BY RICHARD BACON

From April to May, the mountains typically wheeze under a cushion of snow so thick and pillowy the high-country wildflowers won't push through until well into summer. In spring, however, the sun is already high and the light is warm, creating a corn-snow cycle that yields silky fast turns for skiers, arguably the best conditions in the country. Meanwhile, down low, the roads are dry and the trails turn buffed and tacky, which makes for ideal biking. People gather outside for tennis, pickleball and beach volleyball. You can sit outside on the deck at Monkless without the heaters on, watching the river and counting the days until your first float. It's the best of all worlds.

"What really makes this time of year so unique, I think, has to do with how long the snow holds," Tadday said. "Many people are done—the powder is gone—but we really have this second season that's a different ballgame. But then to add to that, obviously, there's mountain biking and paddling. People like to go back to golf. Two friends of mine will even go skiing and then water skiing on the same day. You really can do so much."

POLE PEDAL PADDLE HIGHLIGHTS SPORTS OF THE HIGH DESERT AND MOUNTAINS

Spend any time in Bend and it doesn't take long to learn how the town's unique location in the transition zone between the American high desert and the roaring Cascades means you can access all four seasons, in any of the four seasons. Summer in winter? Point road-bike tires east. Winter in summer? Climb the Sisters and ski the Hayden Glacier. The sports you love most, that make Bend Bend—skiing, biking, hiking, paddling—are never truly limited to a specific season. Spring is the time when that holds particularly true, and a combination of two to three (or more) sports can be experienced in a day. Call it Bend's trifecta time.

This year's edition marks the 50th anniversary of the Pole Pedal Paddle (PPP), easily the tidiest metaphor for the recreational bounty that spring in Bend really brings. For that reason, along with the fact that it's just so fun, the race has come to be one of the largest, if not the largest, multisport contests in the Pacific Northwest. As the biggest fundraiser for the Mt. Bachelor Ski Education Foundation, participants ski a run down Mt. Bachelor. They cross-country ski a course on Bachelor's Nordic trails, pedal a bike down the Cascade Lakes Highway into town, and run to the Old Mill District. They paddle the Deschutes River, then make a sprint for the finish. All in a day. All in less than two hours if you're Marshall Greene, a seven-time winner who set a course record in 2007 at 1 hour 43.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Spring in Bend can mean multiple sports in a day.
THIS: Marieka and Marshall Greene.
ABOVE: Pole Pedal Paddle, 1988.

PHOTO OPPOSITE PAGE BY MARTIN SUNDBERG | THIS PAGE COURTESY OF MBSEF

"There are days I would do three to four sports in training," Greene said. "Spring here is awesome. You can be at the mountain, in the forest, on the river." But the PPP isn't just for elite athletes: Tadday has earned at least four prize mugs, all for his performance in the retro category, where racers must use old equipment. Tadday even dresses the part, wearing vintage lederhosen.

The PPP may very well be what happens when the *esprit de Bend* meets stopwatch with a $1,000 prize, but its popularity also perfectly encapsulates why you don't need to be some uber-athlete to enjoy spring's multisport season. Surely there are legions among us who log our own beer-league trifectas every weekend, all at our own pace, with whatever rewards we choose. Laps at Mt. Bachelor. Singletrack at Phil's Trail. Maybe play some golf or tease the rainbows with a fly. Oregon Adaptive Sports, a group dedicated to helping people with spinal cord injuries and mobility challenges ski and bike, takes full advantage of our spring conditions to hold an annual Turns and Berms camp, where adaptive athletes from all over the country come to ski and bike in a day. Afterward, you may catch them rounding out their trifecta having a beer on an outdoor patio. "It's just so fun," an adaptive athlete from Montana told me last year while we sat outside at Boss Ramber, well before it was bulldozed (may it rest in peace).

Pat Addabbo, OAS's executive director, said Central Oregon is the place to have such an event. "You can't do this at the same caliber anywhere that I can think of," he said. "The combo is unique."

As for Tadday, he woke up early one morning ready to create his own trifecta. He strapped his skis to a backpack, hopped onto an ancient Peugeot 10-speed bike, and began pedaling his way up the Cascade Lakes Highway well before sunrise. By dawn he'd covered the 30 miles or so from town and was hiking through the old-growth forest toward South Sister. He hit snow, strapped on his skis, skinned his way to the top of the 10,360-foot volcano, skied a long run down, and rode his bike toward home. He almost made it. A friendly driver stopped and offered him a ride the rest of the way home, which he took.

At home he had a celebratory beer, "that made it my trifecta," he laughed, "which I complete every time." See *pppbend.com*.

Finding Hidden Treasures

A rockhounding guide to uncovering agates, thundereggs, and Oregon's state gemstone

WRITTEN BY **LUCAS ALBERG**

PHOTO BY ALLISON JEAN COLE, AUTHOR OF *A ROCKHOUND'S GUIDE TO OREGON & WASHINGTON*

Jeff Petersen still remembers the moment he saw it—a flash of gold on a sandpile in a remote Oregon field. "I was driving up the hill on a tractor and the sun hit it just right," he said. "I jumped off the equipment without even stopping, kept my eyes trained on it so I wouldn't lose it, and made my way to that sparkle on the ground." When he grabbed it and held it up to the sky, his jaw dropped. Petersen had found a 350-carat, golf-ball-sized sunstone shimmering with coppery schiller. Today, it's his pocket rock and a reminder that in Oregon, extraordinary things can be hiding right underfoot.

Moments like these are why spring draws so many rockhounds to places across Central Oregon.WIth seasonal moisture darkening the soil and exposing fresh layers, agates, thundereggs, petrified wood and even sunstones—Oregon's state gemstone—begin to reveal themselves. Finding them doesn't require a lot of expertise—just a keen eye, a bit of patience and the simple joy of discovery.

Central Oregon is uniquely suited for rockhounding. Rhyolitic volcanic flows, especially those shaped by the Wildcat Caldera near Prineville in the Ochocos, created ideal conditions for silica to pool, harden and eventually form the agates and thundereggs for which the region is known. "Those flows are why we have so much here," said Janice Van Cura, a rockhound of nearly 30 years. "It produced some of the most beautiful agates you'll ever find."

For others, the appeal is more personal. Bend resident Jill McKevitt discovered the hobby during a difficult time in her life, finding solace wandering streambeds east of Bend. "Everything else falls away," she said. "You just focus on nature, and suddenly you're seeing color everywhere."

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Rockhounding requires very little equipment—typically a small shovel or hand rake, gloves, a rock hammer or pick, and a bucket. A spray bottle helps reveal color in dusty stones. Sturdy shoes are essential.

So is preparation. "Maps are everything," Petersen said. He emphasized never going alone, bringing plenty of water and understanding land boundaries: private mining claims are common and public-access rules vary. Claim corners are usually marked with posts and paperwork; if you're unsure, don't dig.

Surface collecting, or picking up material already on the ground, is allowed in most places and is often an ideal starting point. Kids are especially good at spotting "float" pieces: chips shed from larger deposits that wash down hillsides or creek beds.

THIS: Oregon Sunstones.

BELOW: Clockwise from top left: Fossiliferous limestone, teal greenstone, chartreuse epidote, and red jasper.

Guided tours bring rockhounds together to learn, explore and connect with others.

WHERE TO LOOK

Ochoco Mountains (Prineville area)

The heart of Oregon rockhounding. Whistler Springs and White Fir Springs, both just outside the Mill Creek Wilderness, allow public digging for thundereggs, jasper and agate-filled nodules. Inside the wilderness, only surface collecting is permitted. "You can find agates and petrified wood almost anywhere," said Van Cura.

Nearby Congleton Hollow and Dendrite Butte are local favorites among seasoned diggers. Petersen calls them "some of the best and most beautiful agate-digging spots in the state," where long limb casts and intricate agate patterns can often be found right on the surface.

Crooked River/Lower Crooked River Canyon

A scenic, easy option for families. Gravel bars along the Lower Crooked reveal moss agates, jasper and small pieces of petrified wood. "It's just a beautiful place to wander," McKevitt said.

Hampton Butte

East of Bend boasts one of Oregon's most accessible rockhounding areas. Hampton Butte is known for its green petrified wood—found only there—as well as jasper and carnelian. Much of it lies within a foot of the surface. McKevitt called the area "amazing for the sheer abundance."

Sunstone Public Collection Area (near Plush)

Farther afield, Oregon sunstones gleam in the high desert. This official state gemstone can be clear, champagne, pink or deep red and green when copper inclusions are present. Petersen's prized pocket rock—a large golden schiller stone—is a testament to what can be found there.

JOIN THE COMMUNITY

For beginners wanting guidance, rockhounding clubs and events are the way to go. One of the best is the Prineville Powwow, which will be celebrating its 80th year in June 2026. During the event, Petersen and other rock and mineral enthusiasts lead field trips to private claims, offer demonstrations and freely share their expertise. "Everybody goes home with rocks," Petersen said.

Whether you're hoping to find a showpiece sunstone or simply spotting your first thunderegg, spring is the season Central Oregon reveals its hidden treasures—and once you find one, you'll never look at the ground quite the same way again.

PHOTOS TOP BY ALISON JEAN COLE, AUTHOR OF *A ROCKHOUND'S GUIDE TO OREGON & WASHINGTON*
MIDDLE BY KIRSTEN SOUTHWELL | BOTTOM BY KELLY TURSO

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Habitats Meet Humanity

Bend's Think Wild responds to a growing need for wild animal rescue and rehabilitation

WRITTEN BY **TERESA RISTOW**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SUE DOUGHERTY**

Great Horned Owl nestlings

In the middle of a hiking trail at Virginia Meissner Sno-Parklast July, an animal rarely seen in daylight was found struggling to survive. The patient—an orphaned northern flying squirrel—was alone, underweight and hypothermic. Estimated to be just a few weeks old, its rescuer brought her to Think Wild for a shot at survival.

"This species is nocturnal, and the rescuers found her on the trail in the middle of the day," said Molly Honea, development and communications coordinator for Think Wild. It was the first flying squirrel ever treated by the organization, which was founded in 2016 and opened its wildlife hospital and conservation center on the east side of Bend in 2020. For weeks, the tiny squirrel received round-the-clock care, including time in an incubator and five feedings a day.

Its rehabilitation was handled by Think Wild's staff of 17, and supported by some of the hundreds of volunteers who help power the nonprofit.

As Central Oregon has grown and development has pushed deeper into forest and high desert habitat, Think Wild's services have expanded and become increasingly essential. In 2025, the organization fielded about 4,000 calls and cared for approximately 900 injured and orphaned animals. The rising demand reflects both increased human-wildlife encounters and a growing public awareness of where to turn for help when encountering a wild animal in need.

The steady call volume to Think Wild increases during the spring and summer's baby animal season, when instances of orphaned squirrels, birds and small mammals begin to flood the hotline and hospital. Think Wild employs a full-time veterinarian and several wildlife rehabilitators, allowing the hospital to handle more complex injuries and fragile young patients than ever before.

GROWING POPULATIONS AND INCREASED INCIDENTS

The organization's campus is growing to meet that demand. Construction is underway on a new beaver and otter enclosure, and a new education yurt and restroom building are paving the way for more events and public-education opportunities on site.

Many of Think Wild's patients arrive in the organization's care because of a human-caused impact, such as a vehicle strike, tree removal or habitat loss, underscoring the importance of Think Wild's work to help these animals. "We're all part of the same habitat, and we're causing a lot of the harm wildlife are experiencing," Honea said. "There are many things that people disagree on today, but I think most people care about animals, and we can come together to protect them."

That awareness fuels the organization's proactive programs. Think Wild's Wildlife Education team delivers hands-on programming for K–12 students, with a focus on rural and low-income communities, while also engaging the public through bird walks, trivia nights and other events. Through Beaver Works Oregon, the nonprofit restores riparian ecosystems, monitors wildlife and helps mitigate conflicts between landowners and animals. Its Humane Wildlife Services program supports coexistence through nest boxes, bat houses and customized wildlife habitat consultations.

Soon, the public will have an even closer view into that work through a new osprey nest cam expected to go live on the organization's website this spring, providing an educational window into the wild lives the organization works to protect.

For the young flying squirrel found on the trail last summer, that care ultimately led the animal back to the wild. "We drove right back to the coordinates where she was found to release her," said Honea, who was present for the squirrel's return to its natural habitat. After weeks of careful rehabilitation, it ventured out to explore a large dead ponderosa tree, nibbled on lichen and found a crack in the bark to nest in. See *thinkwildco.org*.

To report a wildlife encounter or animal in need, call the Think Wild rescue hotline at 541-241-8680.

TOP LEFT: A baby bobcat is held with care.

BOTTOM LEFT: Infant raccoons are fed by hand by the Think Wild staff.

THIS: In Oregon, bald eagle eaglets typically hatch between March and May.

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Defying Ages

Dagmar Eriksson and Dorlee Kingen at the Masters World Cup

WRITTEN BY **SUZANNE BELL**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CODY RHEAULT**

Dagmar Eriksson

"It was minus 26 degrees and you couldn't race until it got to minus 20…it could freeze your lungs," said Dorlee Kingen, describing her frigid 2024 Masters World Cup cross-country ski race in Finland. As if that wasn't enough of a challenge, she was 81 at the time.

Today, her haircut—tightly trimmed sides, short curls on top, and not a single flyaway strand—reflects the formality of her former career as a military nurse practitioner. She's soft-spoken and so matter-of-fact that she makes training for the 2026 Masters World Cup sound nonchalant. "It's fun," she said.

Kingen is one of six Central Oregon skiers aged 70 and older who competed in the event held January 31 through February 5 in Sappada and Forni Avoltri, Italy. There, athletes skied in age groups

Dagmar Eriksson and Dorlee Kingen

starting as young as 30. Participants 80 years and older race 5-, 10- and 15-kilometer distances. "Even in my age group, so many are Olympians or have skied all their lives. I haven't," said Kingen.

Don't let this unassuming, barely 5-foot-tall octogenarian fool you. In 2024, a Norwegian competitor kept blocking Kingen from passing. Kingen jumped out of the skate-ski section into the classic ski tracks, leapfrogged past and snagged a silver medal. "The gal wasn't too happy about it, but that's OK," she said.

Kingen started skate skiing at 70 to meet new friends and have fun outdoors. After a few lessons and YouTube videos, she joined She's on Skis, a Mt. Bachelor Nordic program for women to build community and learn the sport. Her coach was local cross-country ski legend Dagmar Eriksson, who is now Kingen's teammate and was her travel partner to Italy.

Eriksson, too, didn't catch the competitive ski bug until later in life. The German native never skate skied until training for the Pole Pedal Paddle at age 50. Eriksson thrived with the structure of competitive training, allowing her to push beyond her own limits. She later dove all in, training with coaches like Justin Wadsworth, a former U.S. Olympian and head coach of the Canadian cross-country ski team to earn her first three gold medals in 2001.

"I wish I had started earlier. I wish I had known what it was all about. Who knows what I would've done?" said Eriksson, donning a black fedora and a navy scarf tucked tightly into her gray, zip-front fleece, a style both with European flair and unapologetically athletic. While she enjoys the social aspect of the Nordic skiing community, Eriksson had a very different goal for 2026: claiming a gold medal for her 80th birthday.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR AGING

"Nordic is unique because it rewards people who learn good technique," said Ben Husaby, a former Olympian and founder of Bend Endurance Academy. At any age, you can control how fast or slow you go, and good technique can trump speed, he said. That might be why the 60- and 70-year-old age classes are among the most competitive.

When snow is scarce, Kingen and Eriksson train with twice-weekly weightlifting sessions, hiking and biking. Both follow a routine that tests athletes half their age, but Eriksson defies norms. She recently tried bunny-hopping steps at Central Oregon Community College after seeing a high school Nordic team train this way on YouTube. "I couldn't do it without holding on to the railing, but I got up some steps," she said.

At 80, this level of fitness rewrites the rules of aging, even humbling many middle-aged weekend warriors. But for Kingen, skiing is great fun and exercise: "I hope I'm still doing this when I'm 90. We'll see. I still have a few more years."

WORLD CUP RESULTS: *Eriksson took gold in both the 5- and 10-kilometer skate races and silver in the 15-kilometer classic race.*


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First-Class Design

A new hotel in Bend's historic post office celebrates craftsmanship, community and regional heritage

WRITTEN BY **CASEY HATFIELD CHIOTTI** | PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BENJAMIN EDWARDS**

During the Great Depression, the construction of a neoclassical U.S. post office in downtown Bend provided much-needed employment. It also gave people hope with its grand brick and terracotta façade featuring a column detail and Art Deco flourishes. Reborn as a 23-room hotel, The Westman has once more become a beacon of light and a community gathering spot. After visitors and guests enter the rectangular foyer with its soaring 16-foot ceilings and a lobby bar, they'll find stories that unfold in every elegant corner.

The Westman co-owner Gil Burgess, a successful businessman who grew up in rural Oregon, remembers trips to Central Oregon with his family, where they would buy sandwiches at a local deli, walk around downtown Bend and camp on the Metolius River.

"I have a lot of fun memories of Bend. It was a very special place to me growing up," said Burgess.

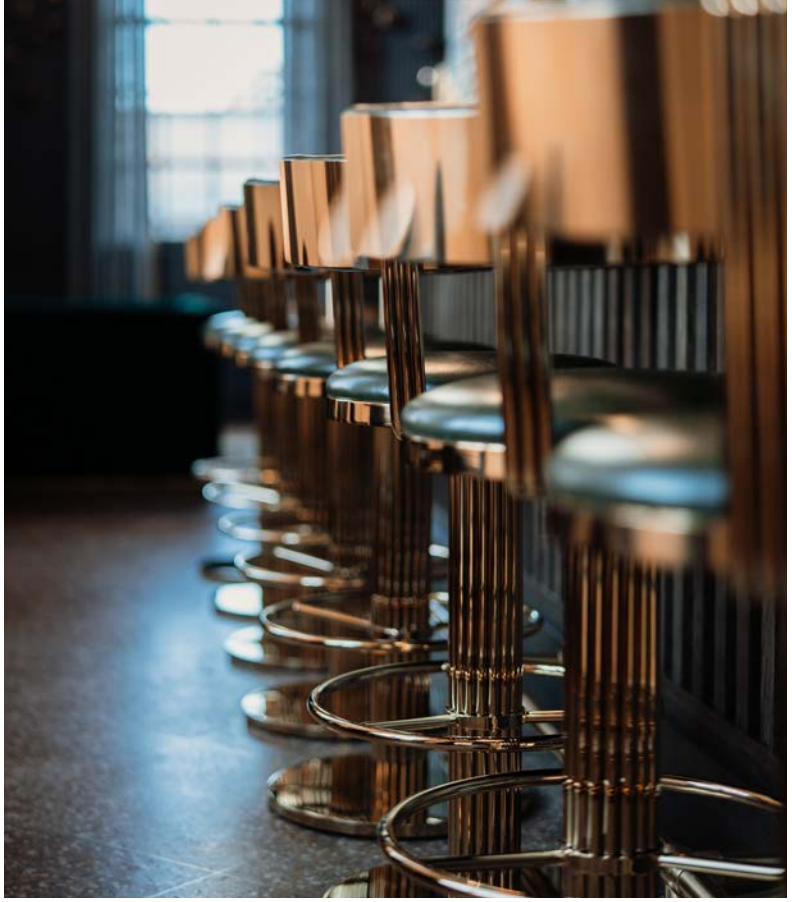
During dinner, his business partner asked a profound question, "What if we did something that would spark joy in both of us? What would that be?" Eventually, they decided on hospitality. When the old post office came up for sale, they jumped on it, determined not to let it go the way of Bend's Pilot Butte Inn that was demolished in 1973 despite having a historic designation.

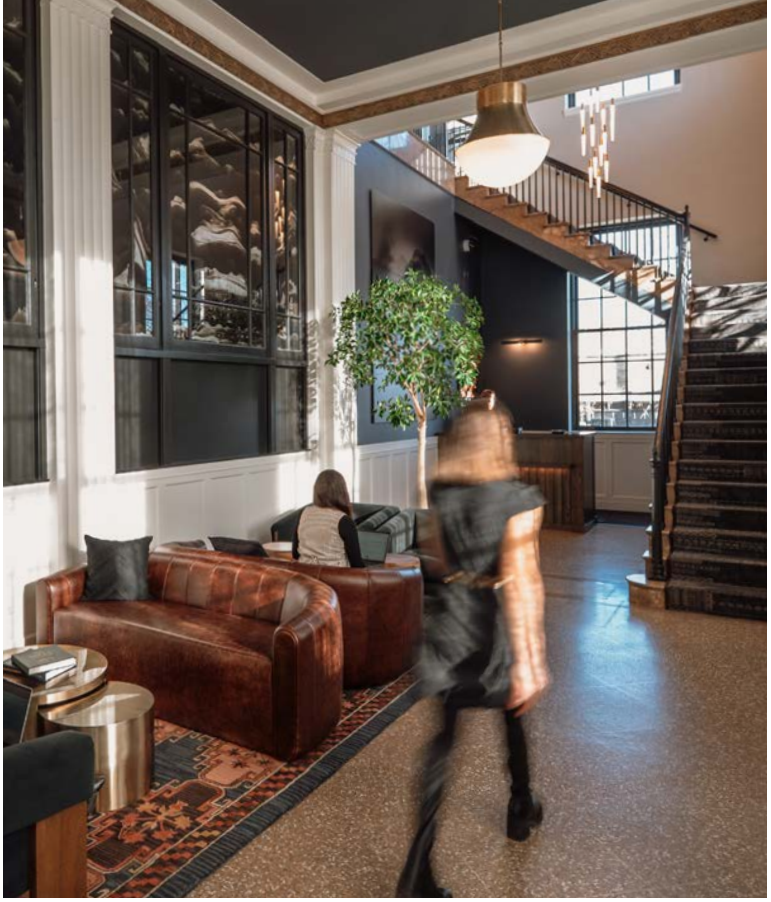
"It was really important for us to maintain all the historic elements of the post office and do it the right way," said Burgess.

INSPIRATIONAL INTERIORS

Burgess and the hotel's management group, Embarcadero Hospitality, prioritized saving as much of the building, on the National Register of Historic Places, as possible. They preserved 175,000 bricks, 1,900 square feet of gold terrazzo flooring, 1,700 tons of concrete and 44 original windows, while also creating a luxurious hotel with modern comforts, like an oversized heated outdoor soaking tub.

Interiors are a modern take on Art Deco with nods to Mountain West style. Senior interior designer Jenny Baines at LRS Architects of Bend and Portland was tasked with selecting interior finishes, furniture and fixtures.





FAR LEFT: Hospitality at the hotel extends to pets.

BOTH MIDDLE: Art Deco accents at Minnie's.

RIGHT: Painted interior windows add layers of elegance to the welcoming lobby.

THIS: Find a spiral staircase leading to the sleeping loft.

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: Rooms pay homage to the building's history.

RIGHT: Bend woodworker Aaron Johnson created postmaster-style desks for rooms.

BELOW: Standing tubs are featured in many of the suites.

Baines chose four Kelly Wearstler schoolhouse-style pendant light fixtures for the lobby. Echoing the shape of the space's pilasters, Artistic Frame bar stools feature fluted bases. The jewel box of a parlor features rich green velvet sofas and a handmade brass fireplace crafted by MW Designs in Salem. There's a river rock art installation on the wall and a dramatic charcoal crystal light fixture.

"High-end hospitality in Oregon needs to have a level of elegance, but it also has to have casualness to it. People don't want stuffy, they want comfortable," said Baines.

Inspired by the building's history, architecture and the surrounding landscape, guests will spot walls painted U.S. Forest Service green—the Forest Service was an original tenant—and dark blue, a nod to the night sky. Pops of dark gray and rich brown recall postal uniforms and leather mailbags.

PRESERVATION CHALLENGES

The hotel's namesake, Minnie Westman, was the first woman mail carrier west of the Mississippi. Riding horseback through Oregon to deliver mail in the 1880s, Westman even encountered bears along the way. The Western motif wallpaper in the public bathrooms on the main floor, a custom design by local artist Mikayla Bivona, is an ode to her adventures. It requires grit and determination similar to Westman's to turn a nearly 100-year-old post office into a hospitality venture, but Emerick Architects, a Portland firm with extensive experience in historic restoration, was up for the challenge.

"There are a lot of constraints, but that's part of the fun. It really demands a lot of creativity to try to crack that code and figure out the puzzle," said principal architect Brian Emerick.

Working with the existing square footage and original wooden windows allowed for larger rooms. Each of the 23 guest rooms, including 15 suites, has a unique layout. Lower-level rooms have outdoor patios with firepits in old window wells to let in natural light.

The Mailroom Suite, one of three guest rooms with spiral staircases and loft sleeping areas, has a fluted marble fireplace.

The corner Franklin Street suite showcases one of Baines' favorite details: handstitched cashmere scarf-like draperies that accentuate the verticality of the spaces. Each guest room has a white oak kitchenette with a built-in refrigerator, a design akin to something found in a high-end home.

CARETAKERS OF HISTORY

In the early 1900s, people would congregate in post offices to receive news about loved ones during wartime. It feels fitting that this important building is once again a gathering place. At the lobby bar called Minnie's, the menu includes a Minnie Westman-inspired Smoking Revolver cocktail and a refreshing Marionberry Bramble with Wild Roots gin, fresh lemon juice and marionberry puree, along with a plate of tater tot waffles topped with Pacific Northwest smoked salmon.

The care taken to create The Westman experience extends to all the senses. When visitors walk into the hotel, they'll immediately smell the intoxicating scent of cedarwood atlas, sandalwood and oakmoss blended with an oregano tincture. It's a signature scent created by Bend-based natural perfumer Kristine Ambrose. "I wanted to capture the scent of Central Oregon, but I also wanted to include the entire region through the lens of Minnie and the routes she took," said Ambrose. Portland-based interior mural and hand-painted wallpaper company Lonesome Pictopia applied gold leaf to lobby windows inside, creating a swirling, storm-like effect.

The Westman is a love letter to Bend and the building's history from the walnut wood postmaster-style desks made by Bend woodworker Aaron Johnson to the post office's original vault door emblazoned with an American eagle emblem, showcased in a special suite called the Vault.

Just like the 90-year-old ficus trees in the lobby, which lived in the post office for decades, the stewards of this project haven't forgotten the roots of this space, "What we'll have here cannot be duplicated or replicated," said Burgess.

Walls Can Talk

For any space, from a kitchen or office to a bedroom, art turns walls into galleries and declarations of what matters. Defining more than a room, carefully collected works of poetry, song lyrics or syntax become daily reminders of creativity and conviction. Beyond design elements, these selections shape atmosphere and identity, telling guests what a space stands for while reflecting the spirit, and people, within it. BJ

LOCATION: School of Rock Bend | INTERIOR DESIGNER: Heylen Thienes, Tricorn Black | GENERAL CONTRACTOR: SunWest Builders | COFFEE TABLE: Ink & Wood using Local Plastic

PHOTO BY ZEE WENDELL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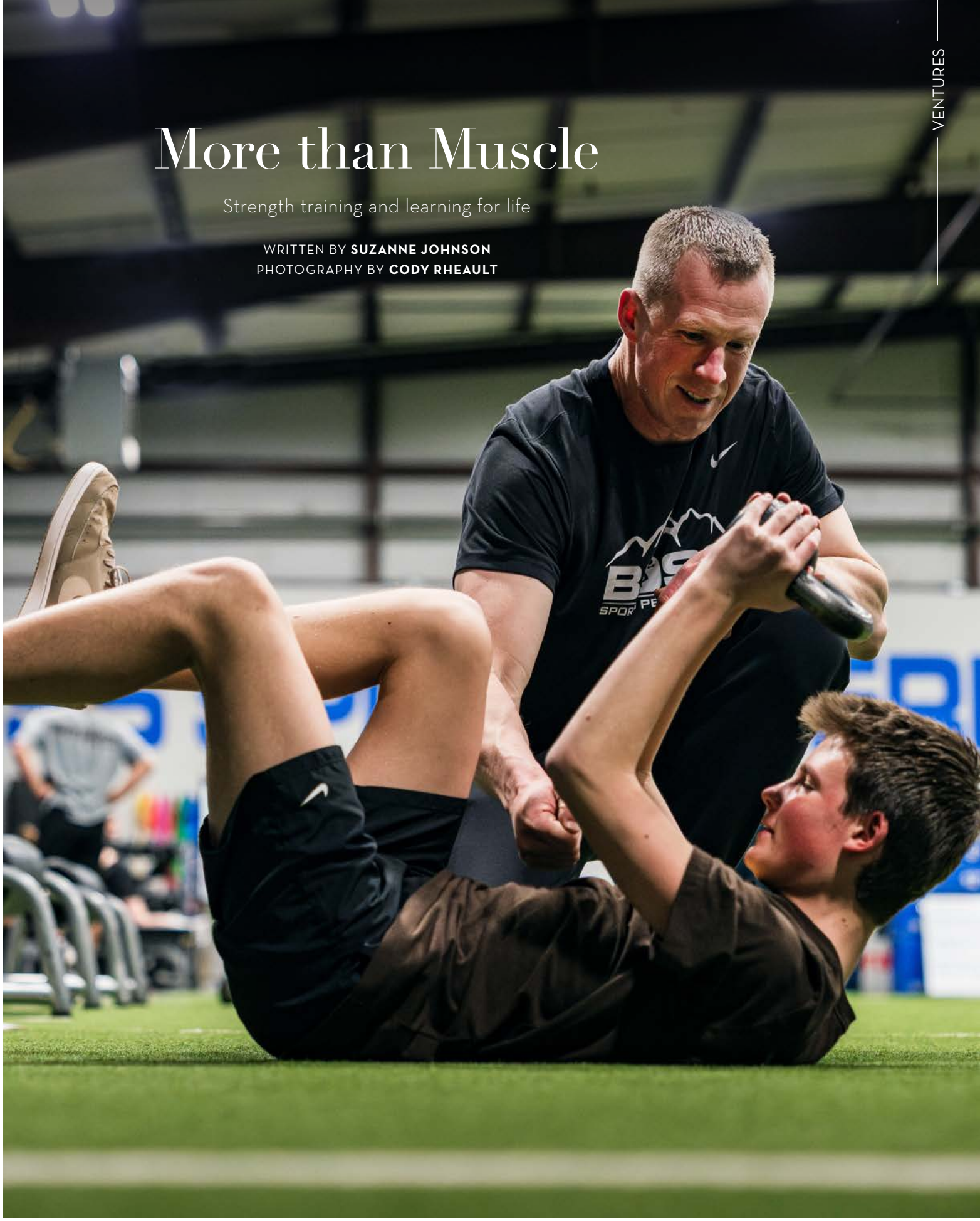
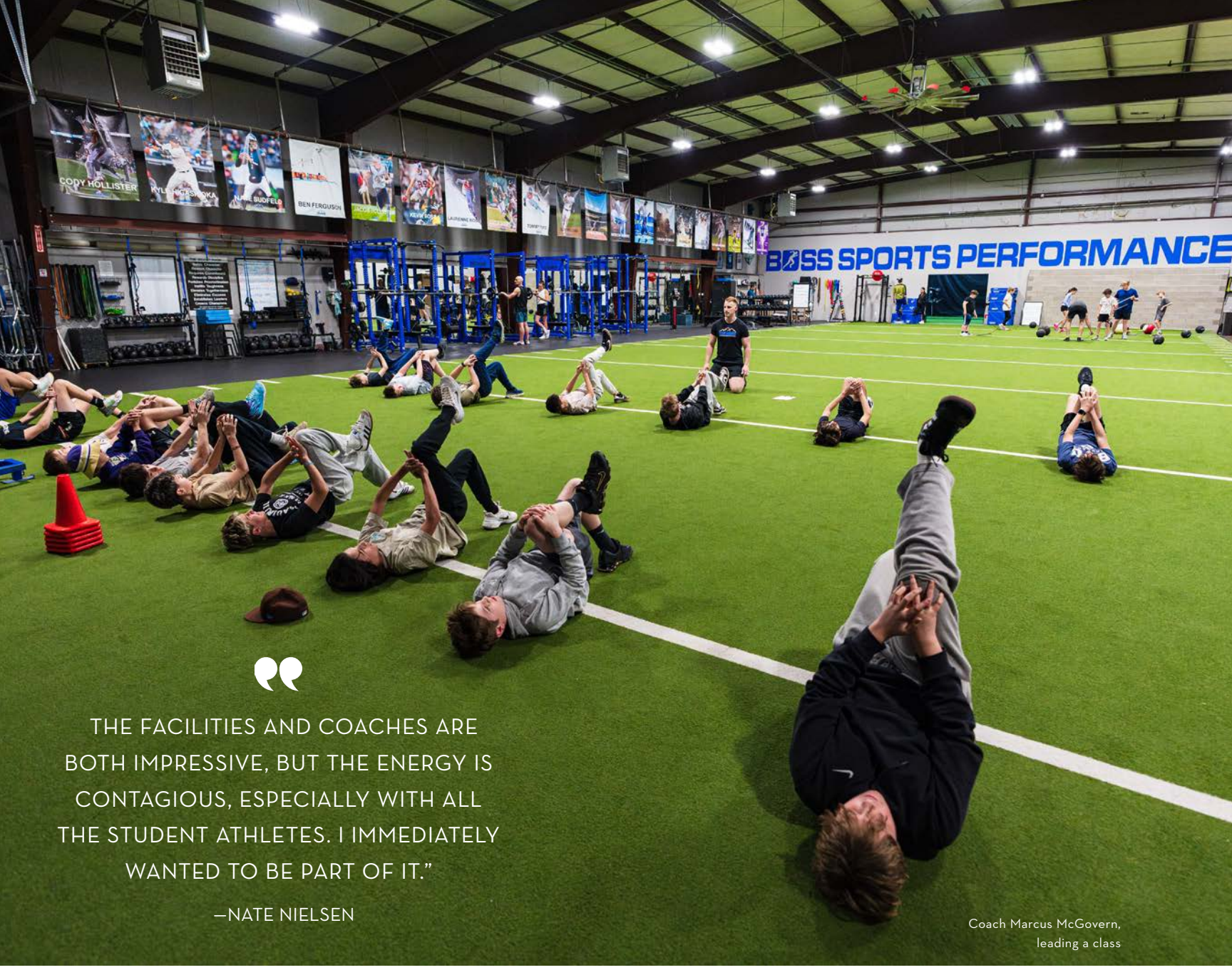
More than Muscle

Strength training and learning for life

WRITTEN BY **SUZANNE JOHNSON**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CODY RHEAULT**





> THE FACILITIES AND COACHES ARE BOTH IMPRESSIVE, BUT THE ENERGY IS CONTAGIOUS, ESPECIALLY WITH ALL THE STUDENT ATHLETES. I IMMEDIATELY WANTED TO BE PART OF IT."
>
> —NATE NIELSEN

Coach Marcus McGovern, leading a class

When Bend local Nate Nielsen began looking for a gym, he wanted more than a warehouse of equipment. A lifelong sports fan, Nielsen was focused on strength and mobility for golf and pickleball, but he also wanted a community.

"At most gyms, people plug in their music and ignore each other. I wanted a welcoming environment where people get to know and support each other," said Nielsen.

He's not the only one drawn to a different approach to fitness. From teens to seniors and weekend warriors to pros, today's athletes seek a more holistic approach, one that builds strength as it supports body, mind and spirit. It's a new perspective on weight training to build more than muscle mass—it elevates metabolism and bone density, ignites speed and power, and boosts mental health and resilience.

Nielsen found the community he'd been seeking when a friend invited him to BOSS Sports Performance, a strength and fitness training hub in Bend that embodies this approach to fitness. "The facilities and coaches are both impressive, but the energy is contagious, especially with all the student-athletes. I immediately wanted to be part of it," he said.

CULTIVATING STRENGTH, STARTING WITH THE KIDS

Kevin Boss founded BOSS Sports Performance in 2014, after retiring from a professional football career that included a 2007 Super Bowl win for the New York Giants. His vision for the business was clear: use everything he'd learned in football to teach not only sports, but persistence and confidence in young athletes.

From Boss's perspective, resilience is a byproduct of strength training, especially in teens. "There's no instant gratification in the weight room. You have to keep showing up, and the reward comes slowly. Seeing kids grow into their abilities is the best part of my job—and that will always be the heart of what we do," Boss said.

Kevin Boss

Brooklyn Fobi, of Bend, is one of those teens. She's a Bend High School junior aiming to play college volleyball. "The training helps me in volleyball with more vertical and explosive strength on the court. It keeps me disciplined, and that will help me in college," she said. For Fobi, it's the coaches who make the difference. "You can see that they feel like a family. The coaches are so approachable and positive, and they know me," Fobi added.

Since its beginnings with an initial focus on youth, the gym has grown to include adults at all levels, from professional athletes during their offseason to amateur enthusiasts who want to up their game on the trails, ski runs and courts. Addressing this wide variety of goals and abilities, coaches tailor group classes to allow each individual to succeed at their own level. As Boss put it, they want to make workouts the best part of the day.

COME FOR THE COACHING, STAY FOR THE COMMUNITY

How does a fitness center cultivate that sense of community? Marcus McGovern, coach and director of adult fitness at BOSS Sports Performance, sees it as a top-down intention. "Kevin brings our staff together into a close-knit team that cares deeply for each other and the work we do," he said. The team's enthusiasm for strength and health spreads to the clients and infuses the gym with energy. As McGovern explained, being surrounded by positive people

Coach Christian Parr

> EVERYTHING WE DO IN THE GYM IS DESIGNED TO SERVE LIFE OUTSIDE OF THE GYM."
>
> —MARCUS MCGOVERN

is the best way to adopt a healthy, happy mindset that sets the tone for the rest of the day.

"Everything we do in the gym is designed to serve life outside the gym—to help people keep doing what they love, injury-free," said McGovern. "Bend is full of wildly active people, and strength training is like putting on armor. It protects your body against injury from the forces that can beat us up, and makes us more durable."

This approach is what keeps clients like Nielsen and Fobi coming back. "When everybody knows your name, you feel welcome. You go for an hour, move your body, interact with friends—that sets you up for a good day," said Nielsen.

Strength plus community equals resilience outside the gym. Kevin Boss seems to have found the formula for turning exercise into the best part of a day.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Bright Eyes, Bold Vision

A family partnership focuses on building an Eyeonize brand

Jak Green and his son Sanjay

When screens, slopes or late-night grinds start to show their effects, most reach for coffee. Eyeonize, a caffeinated and menthol-charged under-eye balm, offers a different solution: a pocket-sized boost that refreshes tired eyes and helps them stay sharp and focused.

Founded by Jak Green and his son Sanjay, the company blends real-world experience with entrepreneurial energy. The duo went through the Bend Outdoor Worx (BOW) program together, learning how to bring the brand to the masses, and today, with a mix of personal passion and community-minded ambition, Eyeonize is finding its stride.

Was there a specific moment or experience that made you think, "This product needs to exist"?

I used to own a sales agency that represented a bunch of different brands, one of which was Skullcandy Headphones [which are popular in the gaming world]. I thought that I should develop something for the gaming community that helps them play longer and easy to use.

After researching what can happen to people when they stare at a screen for long hours—a side effect called Computer Vision Syndrome—I learned it's an issue that impacts millions of people. Symptoms can include eye fatigue, dry eye and headaches.

When you realized this idea could turn into something real?

When I fell in love with the product! Eyeonize can benefit people who are doing all sorts of things: gaming, driving, studying, working, adventuring, snowboarding, mountain biking, traveling, playing stick and ball sports, or just anytime a person wants to be more alert and focus on what's in front of them.

What were some of the biggest challenges in building Eyeonize?

Time, focus and resources. I didn't want to be busy launching a new brand and not have enough time to be present with my kids. I also love working in real estate, my current day job. Plus, there are so many fun things to do in Bend. So it was difficult to focus on giving Eyeonize the time needed to bring it to life.

Like most startups, it's expensive to invest in everything needed to grow. We'd like to scale quickly, which requires heavy investments.

How has living and working in Bend shaped the way you think about your priorities?

There's an supportive entrepreneurial community here, but there are also a lot of other great things to do. It's tough to strike the balance of taking care of business while still enjoying all that Bend has to offer. Being in an active and healthy community also has us thinking a lot about the ingredients we use. It's important for us to use the cleanest ingredients possible, so the product is not only effective, it's also healthy and good for the skin.

How has the local community influenced Eyeonize's growth?

Bend Outdoor Worx was incredible and helped support us in the work needed to get to market, and amazing local retailers were quick to bring our product into their stores.

Having this kind of support has been fantastic for refining Eyeonize, as well as helping us build the confidence needed to keep moving forward. The community has motivated us to want to grow this into a company that provides rewarding, local opportunities and a cool company culture—something we can be proud of—and a culture supportive of adjusting schedules as needed to enjoy whatever is important in a person's life. The work still needs to get done, but we aim to attract people who will thrive in a healthy work/life balance.

When you imagine the future of Eyeonize, what kind of impact do you hope it has on people's everyday lives?

We hope it offers people a healthy habit that helps them stay tuned in. A side bonus is that it benefits customers in ways that we didn't anticipate. People have told me how it reduces eye puffiness. I've experienced firsthand how much it helps with keeping contacts from drying out. Before using the product, my contacts would dry out when I went snowboarding and mountain biking. Now I use Eyeonize when doing these activities, and it's a nonissue.

Having a positive impact is a big motivator for us. Our plan is to give 10% of profits to social and environmental organizations that are already out there doing great work. The more we grow, the more we plan to give. See *eyeonize.com*.

Tune in to the full interview with Jak Green on the new "Birth of the Brands" podcast series. *Bend Magazine*'s "The Circling Podcast" with Adam Short can be found on all major podcast platforms.

ELK LAKE

Skiing new trails to old favorites

WRITTEN BY **SUZANNE JOHNSON**
PHOTOGRAPHED BY **BENJAMIN EDWARDS**

It was a bluebird day when six friends and I gathered at the far edge of Dutchman Flat, near Mount Bachelor. There hadn't been much fresh snow, but that didn't dampen our spirits. Whatever the conditions, we were giddy with anticipation for the adventures ahead.

If it were summer, we'd be on the shoulder of the Cascade Lakes Highway, watching cars whiz past toward a multitude of lakes, trails and summits. But with its gate closed for winter, the unplowed road has transformed into a snow-lover's playground.

This year, thanks to Elk Lake Resort's new emphasis on trail grooming, the area is more accessible than ever for cross-country skiers. With its new state-of-the-art PistenBully 400 snowcat, the resort is consistently grooming the 11-mile, mostly-downhill stretch from Dutchman Flat to the lake, plus a 7-mile loop around it.

When the snowcat churned up to us, leaving perfect corduroy in its wake, we loaded overnight bags into the cab, which also has room for guests to ride inside. We stepped into our skate skis and set out to traverse one of the most scenic landscapes in Central Oregon. We paused near Sparks Lake to take in the panorama of peaks from South Sister and Broken Top to Mount Bachelor. We glided past hillsides of black volcanic boulders topped with snow and through forests of pine and fir. It wasn't all downhill—the few rolling ascents were enough to make us appreciate arriving at the lodge. We cozied up to a woodstove and gave lodge pups Ace and Tex scratches behind their ears. It was time to enjoy a well-deserved beverage, just as folks have done at Elk Lake for more than a century.

A Bend Landmark, Reinvigorated

Since the Wilcoxen family built the first Elk Lake lodge in 1921, Bend locals have flocked to the resort's shores. The resort has survived wildfires and droughts, added all-season cabins and amenities, and has changed ownership several times. In 2025, a group of Bend families purchased Elk Lake Resort with the shared vision of updating the facilities while preserving its history and rustic spirit.

"Our goal is to restore this iconic resort and elevate the experience, with a focus on responsible stewardship of the lake," said Ken Natoli, co-owner and assistant general manager. That meant upgrading infrastructure, blending new fixtures to match old logs and historical decor, and overhauling the kitchen. The new food and drinks menu incorporates locally sourced products, and keeps old favorites like elk chili and burgers.

The renovation held surprises, too, like uncovering an original stone fireplace in the back of a storage room. Now cleaned and restored, that fireplace serves as a touchstone to the past and a focal point in the lodge.

Unlike other local areas, Elk Lake's groomed trails are open to snowmobilers, as well as snowshoers, fat-tire bikers and dog-sledders. Trail etiquette encourages everyone to stay aware of other users and slow down as needed. Preserving the grooming is part of trail etiquette too, especially as more skiers join the mix.

"In past years, no one thought the Nordic ski community would support this lodge, so grooming trails was not a priority. We're betting they will. So far we've seen a lot of enthusiasm," said Natoli. And with a full calendar of events, including ski-in, shuttle-out moonlight dinners, Elk Lake is now on a must-do ski touring list.

Expanding the Map of Local Groomed Trails

Steve Roti, president of Meissner Nordic Ski Club, and Tina Pavelic, a Nordic ski instructor, have seen growing enthusiasm for adding skiable miles, beyond the trails at Meissner Sno-Park and Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center. All three areas post grooming updates on Nordic Pulse, an app specific to ski trail conditions. With more local options online, skiers can compare conditions and make the most of their time on the trails.

As Roti noted, the High Cascades often have a prime quality and quantity of snow. "Because Elk Lake sits in the center of the Cascades, the area holds more snow than on the east slope—far more than at Meissner, even though the elevation of Elk Lake is lower than at Meissner," he said.

For Pavelic, skiing into Elk Lake brings a different perspective. "It's more like a European ski experience, skiing point-to-point through a spectacular landscape, ending at a warm lodge with food, and the option to shuttle back. Also, these trails are perfect when training for long-distance races," she said.

Skiers can expect the same wide, rolling trail conditions on the 7-mile loop around the lake. Ski in a clockwise direction, and the wide, open trail ascends gently before unfolding through dappled shade, which can get icy. Ski counter-clockwise for punchier hills and easier descents. Either way, watch for the sign to Hosmer Lake, about midway on the loop. It's worth the walk along the short ungroomed spur to check out the lake and the view of Mount Bachelor.

Adding 18 miles of groomed trails puts Bend on a par with renowned Nordic ski areas like Galena, Idaho, and Winthrop, Washington, according to Roti. "We've now exceeded 100 kilometers of groomed trail with varying steepness and difficulty. That's the standard for top-tier destinations, but this one is close to home."

Sweat, Plunge and Repeat

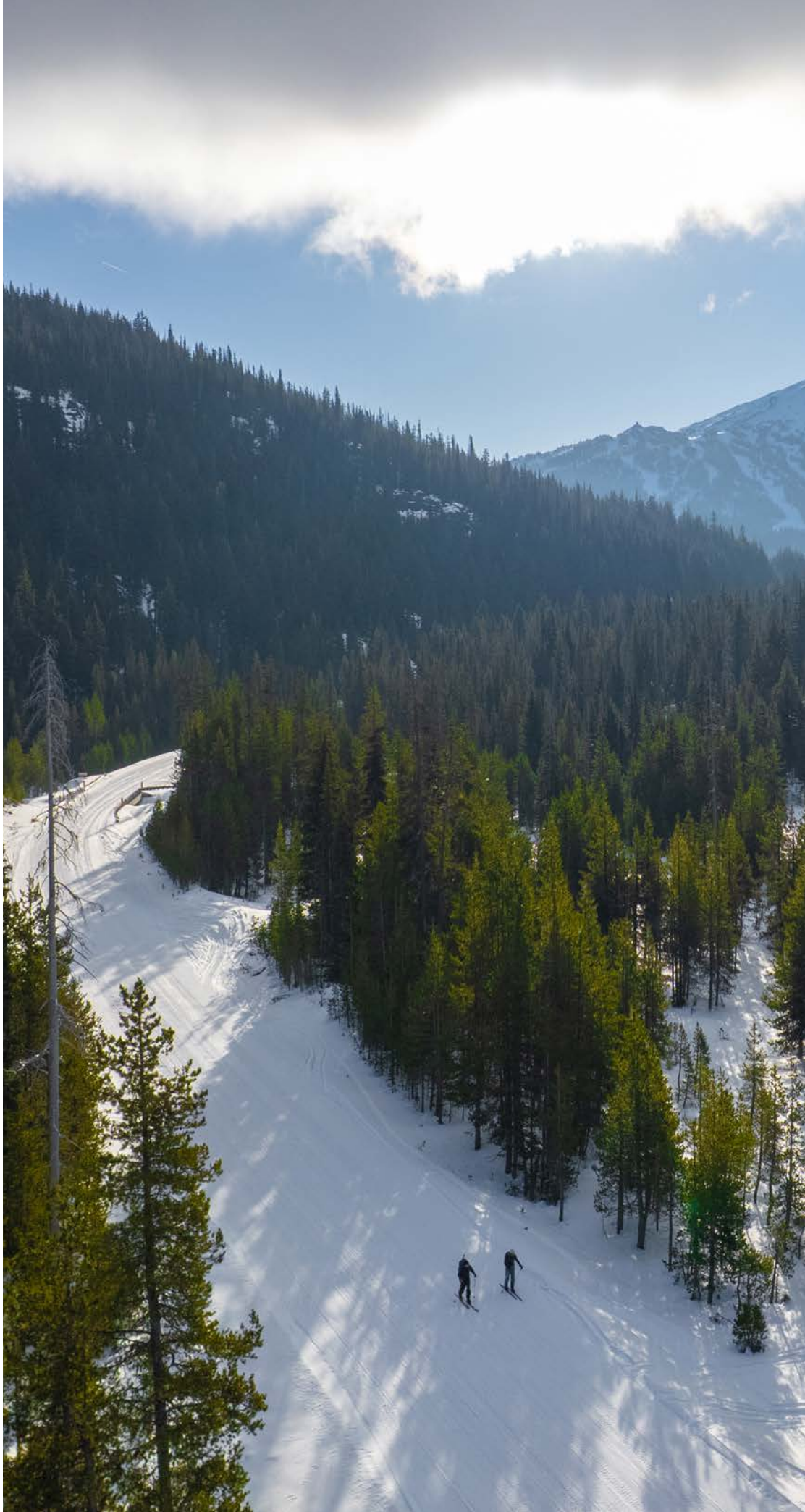
Skiing is not the only way to break a sweat at Elk Lake. Behind the lodge, close to the frozen lake, sits a barrel-shaped, wood-fired sauna. More than an antidote to post-ski chills, spending time in the intense, steamy heat relaxes sore muscles, lowers stress and promotes deep sleep.

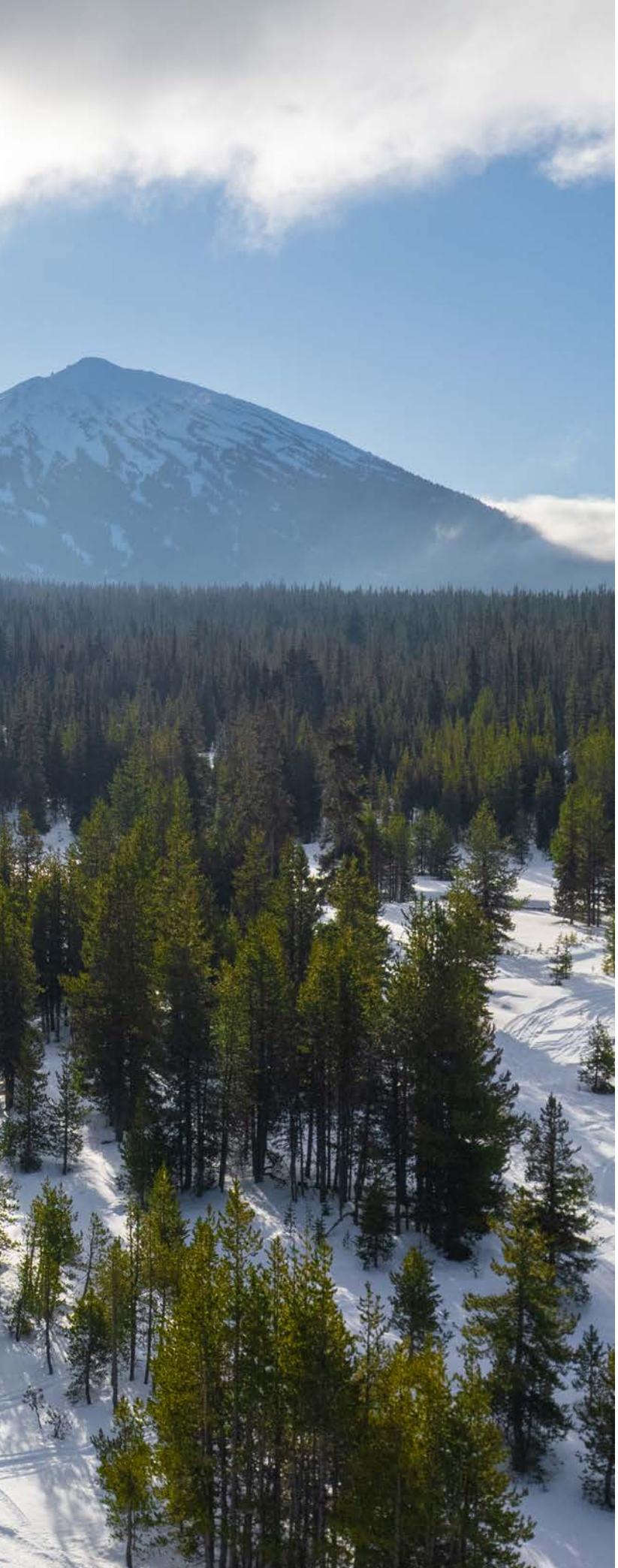
During our weekend at Elk Lake Resort, my group of friends reserved the sauna for a late afternoon session, after a ski around the lake loop. The sauna benches were big enough to hold the seven of us, and we ladled water over the hot rocks for a rush of steam. Through the sauna's window, we watched the lake's ice glow lavender in the twilight. But what really caught our attention was the hole cut into the ice, just a short walk away.

Twenty minutes into our sauna session, the cold plunges began. Dashing across the ice, taking a deep breath, we jumped into the waist-deep icy water, dunking as deep and as long as we could stand it. Skin tingling, spirits lifted, we'd return to the sauna for more heat. The sauna session left us both invigorated and calm, warmed from the inside out, connected to this lake in a new way.

The next morning, we walked out beyond the cold plunge hole to the middle of the lake, where the ice was thick and free of snow. A soft booming sound echoed from below the surface, a tuneful moan like whales singing. One friend recognized it as the sound of the ice itself, expanding and changing.

Back at Dutchman Flat, we glanced down the trail we came from. A ribbon of corduroy gleamed in the sun, offering an invitation to return to Elk Lake and the deep connection to nature, now more accessible year-round.






HARVIA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ELK LAKE
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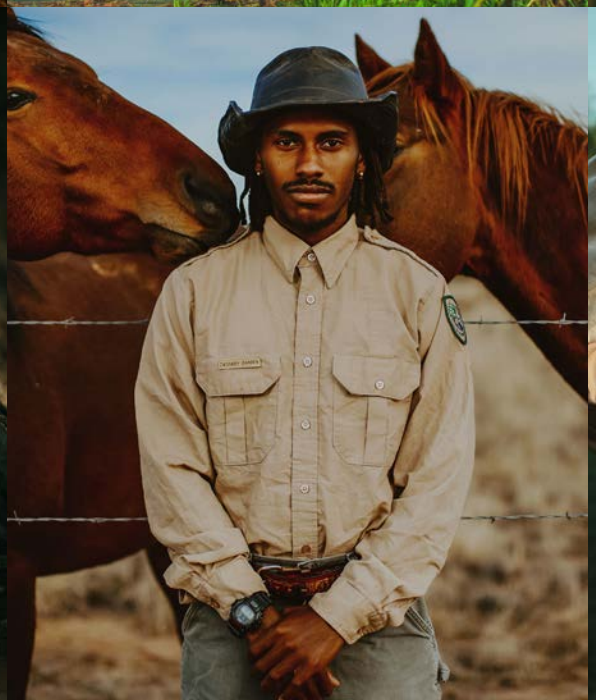



ALL HUMANS OUTSIDE

BELONGING STARTS WITH STEPPING INTO NATURE

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TOMMY COREY**

For every human that has walked the earth, their ancestors hunted outside together, built shelters, swam in lakes and rivers, and even migrated to survive together. Nature has always been an integral part of our DNA. Community, belonging and the outdoors are at the core of our being.

It has resonated with me since I was a young child; but it was hiking more than 2,600 miles alone on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) that helped me realize that we all have these portals to our past, and led me to write the book *All Humans Outside: Stories of Belonging in Nature*.

STARTING OUT ON THE TRAIL

The sound of my 4 a.m. alarm woke me each day on the PCT. I'd shuffle for a few minutes in a 10-degree-cold-rated sleeping bag, and although the temperature was near freezing, the morning air mixed with the scent of pine was comforting and warm. As I boiled water to make instant coffee, I was reminded of early mornings camping when my dad would make breakfast on a cast iron skillet, drinking his Folgers out of a giant Stanley cup as he waited for my brothers and me to get up. Minutes later, fully awake, I would throw a Hyperlite pack over my shoulders, ready to hike another 32 miles on the trail.

AT LEFT: One hundred and one people from across the country, including some from Central Oregon, were interviewed and featured in the book project authored by Tommy Corey. TOP (left to right): Dani Araiz, Caziah Franklin, Mirna Valerio; MIDDLE: Amelia Dall, Kamal Bell, Joe Stone; BOTTOM: Ben Mayforth, Zachary Darden, Nicole Rivera Hartery.

Priyam Patel

Geoff Babb

When I reached the Trinity Alps Wilderness in Northern California, I couldn't help but feel a stinging nostalgia. I had run, hiked, played, laughed and cried in these mountains every summer since I was 9 months old, snuggled into a backpack strapped on my dad's shoulders before my own feet could carry me on the trail. Despite feeling a connection to my family and this mountain range, exploring a wild and familiar place by myself was just as lonely as it was comforting. Throughout the five and a half-month journey, while some moments were scary or unnerving, most of them left me feeling empowered and brave, and sharpened my awareness of how much humans need connection to each other and to nature.

That recognition led me to compile photographs and short stories of 101 people from across the United States. The project, *All Humans Outside,* encapsulated the theme of not just belonging in nature, but the way human connection exists by way of the great outdoors.

FIRST PORTRAITS AND PAGES

During interviews for the book, I asked subjects about their connection to nature, and often they spoke about their connection to others or a desire to belong. As I listened and began shaping those voices into stories, the theme of belonging surfaced again and again.

It wasn't until I was halfway through writing the book that it clicked: Belonging to a place breeds a longing for further connection to each other. It's why we carry such vivid memories of home, a childhood camping spot or a vista where we watched the sunset. Nature reminds us where we come from, and when we recognize our shared origin, we can't help but search for deeper connection with those around us. Plus, nature is free and available to us all.

Belonging is what led me to travel across the United States for two years, photographing each person in the spaces that they felt most connected to. While celebrating the individuals and their stories, I was able to record them on land that felt familiar, meaningful, or even like home, to enliven and reiterate that message.

Social media has conditioned us to admire lone silhouettes on a ridgeline. I was flooded with the same praise when I finished my thru hike as if that

KATIE DUNBAR

A PCT thru hiker and artist, Katie Dunbar is inspired by nature and has called Bend home since 2019. Her art reflects sky gradients, hidden patterns, vibrant colors and the resilience of trees. Her work is warm, emotionally expressive and spans many mediums, rooted in a desire for connection and shared human experience. That same collaborative spirit carries into Terranaut Brewing, the community-focused brewery she co-created with her partner, Bryon Pyka, that was built around music, nature, comfort, upcycling and care for the planet.

WESLEY HEREDIA

Wesley Heredia was raised by a hardworking single mother, first in Los Angeles and later in Salem, Oregon, where community support and mentorship helped shape his love of the outdoors. Through football, wrestling, and track, he discovered camaraderie, discipline, and a guiding mantra to "leave things better than you found them." His work in environmental education and youth mentorship, including with Vámonos Outside here in Central Oregon, centers on connecting Latino youth to the outdoors and fostering healing, confidence, and belonging through nature and community.

Autumn and Beverly Harry

independence, resilience and solitude were the highest achievements of being outside. But my earliest memories of nature were never about grandiose outdoor accolades, they were about togetherness—much like the people who shared their stories with me. Nature, for me, was about those cast-iron scrambled eggs and bacon and the smell of my dad's coffee seeping through the nylon tent as our wake-up call—it was always belonging.

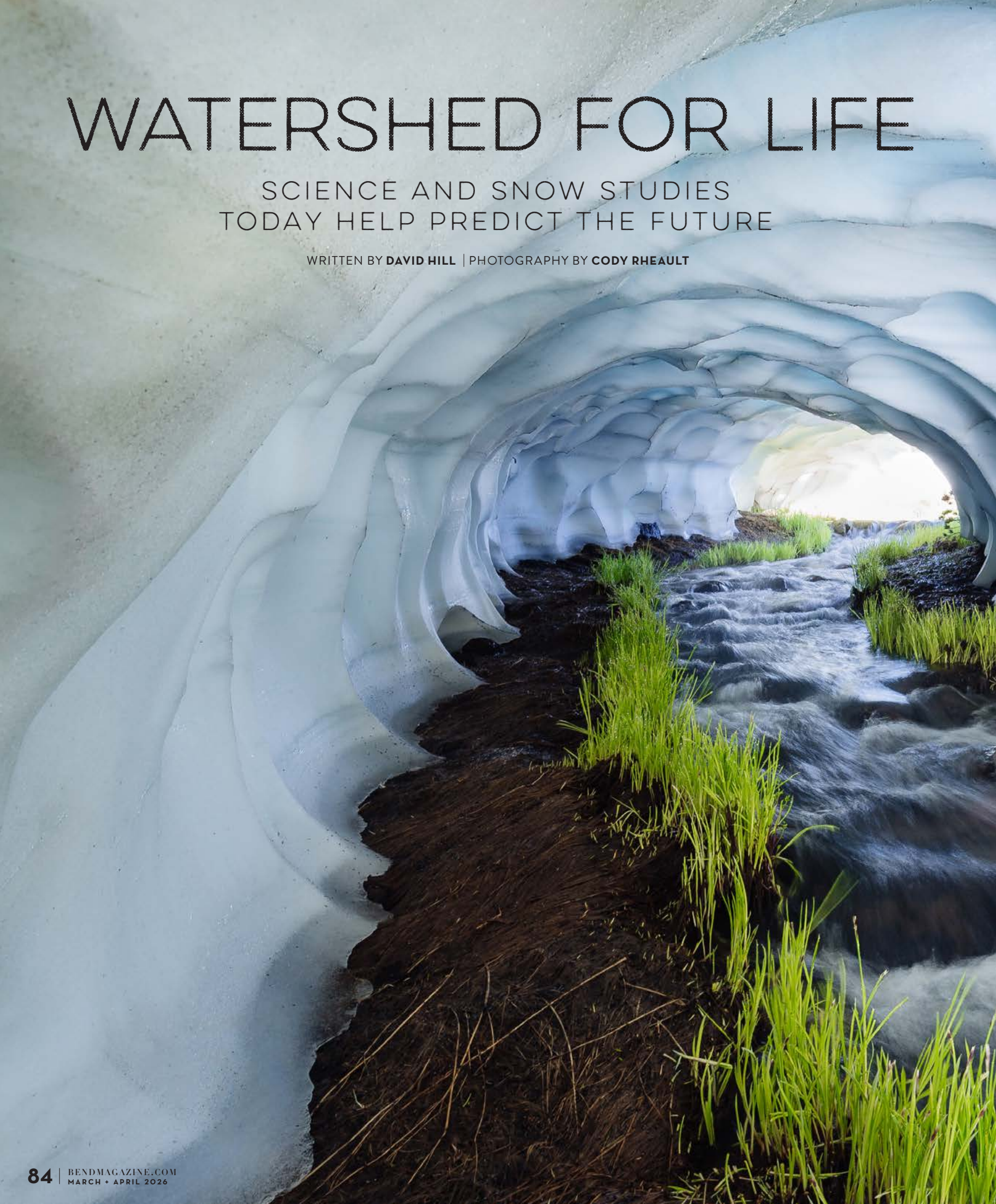
All Humans Outside reminded me that a purposeful life is finding connection with other humans in the outdoors and anywhere life welcomes it. Today, the truest lesson I have come to hold dear isn't how to wake myself up in the dark and hike 30-plus miles a day, but just how deeply human it is to want someone else there when the sun rises and the coffee is ready. The people on these pages have turned their outdoor world into a playground for human connection and true belonging.

Anna Le

WATERSHED FOR LIFE

SCIENCE AND SNOW STUDIES TODAY HELP PREDICT THE FUTURE

WRITTEN BY **DAVID HILL** | PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CODY RHEAULT**



"Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting," a quote that is attributed to Mark Twain, is possibly apocryphal and is absolutely apropos. Whether your preferred drink is bourbon, IPA or ginger ale, your daily life is supported by a highly orchestrated and at times fragile balancing act between supply and demand for water. In the best-case scenario, this balancing act is a case of "no news is good news:"The taps keep flowing, irrigated crops keep growing and hydroelectric dam-powered lights keep glowing. At other times, equilibrium is lost and the news cycle fills with stories of floods or droughts.

In the Pacific Northwest, the start of the 2025-2026 winter was a confounding one. Ample mid-October snowfall had skiers and snowboarders hanging their mountain bikes in their garages and scrambling to sharpen their edges and wax their bases. Early season hopes were quickly dashed, however, with a dry November followed by a damp but very warm December that kept the precipitation more wet than white. This resulted in record-high river levels paired with record-low snowpacks in many places. The seesaw behavior carried on into January. There was enough snowfall to get the chairlifts spinning at local ski resorts, but the high-pressure system and sunny skies that followed led to deflated announcements of paused operations.

A WATER RESOURCE PRIMER

If you've climbed South Sister or another Cascade peak and had a good look around, you already know a few things about hydrology and water resources. From the Cascade crest, a look to the west plunges down into the McKenzie River and eventually the Willamette River watersheds. Dominated by Douglas fir, the western slopes of the Cascades see 80 to 100 inches of precipitation in most years. To the east is the Deschutes River watershed, which is thirstier as it is located in an area with annual precipitation totals of only 10 to 20 inches per year, and its landscape is punctuated with ponderosa pines, their deep roots better suited to tap water deep below the surface. This west-to-east transition cleaves Oregon like an axe and is one of the most striking things about driving through the Columbia River Gorge between Hood River and The Dalles.

Snow and water resources in Oregon are really a story of where, when and how much.

Natural springs from the Middle Fork of Tumalo Creek eventually flow through the Bend Municipal Watershed.

Regarding *where*: The west-to-east transition exemplified by precipitation and vegetation also exists in winter temperatures, with Bend and Burns far colder than Beaverton and Brownsville. All of these spatial patterns layer together to control where snow falls in the state. The Willamette Valley is plenty wet, but too warm for much snow. Eastern Oregon is plenty cold, but too dry (Wallowas excepted) to produce significant snow accumulations. This leaves the skinny Cascade crest as the sole purveyor of the meters-deep snowpacks for which the Pacific Northwest is known.

SNOWPACK AS RESERVOIR

The *when* of water availability can be just as important as the *how much* when it comes to planning for water use later in the year. In western Oregon, where it is too warm for significant snowfall, the rise and fall of its rivers largely mirrors the seasonal patterns in rainfall. In the event that this timing is not convenient for users, including cities and farmers, it can be (and often is) changed through water infrastructure such as surface water reservoirs, groundwater recharge basins and distribution networks of canals and aqueducts. In colder areas that experience snowfall, there can be a several-month delay between when water falls from the sky and when it runs off in a river. This delayed gratification is worth the wait, however, because the lag helps to reduce flooding, and keeps stream temperatures cool and aquatic species happy well into the summer. In effect, the snowpack is as much a reservoir as are Green Peter, Detroit and Lookout Point lakes. The snowpack "reservoir" has the added benefit of being distributed over the landscape and, as a result, it treads lightly. It requires no heavy construction or environmental impact statements, and it does not impede fish passage or hold back sediment.

With water and snow in such high demand, it makes sense to develop ways of keeping

Here, a portion of Bridge Creek's flow is diverted from the stream and routed into Bend's municipal water system for treatment and delivery.

our eye on them. Water is the easier subject, by far. Reservoirs behind dams are just big buckets after all, and the volume of water they contain is simple to determine. Water in the ground may be out of sight, but by monitoring wells, scientists and water managers are able to estimate how much is down there. Water in rivers is accurately measured by a network of hundreds of gaging stations in Oregon. These gaging stations measure the elevation of the water surface and use an equation to convert this to a water flow rate (in cubic feet per second). The superpower of these stations is that they give the lay of the land. River flow at any location is the response of a watershed to all of the hydrologic processes that have occurred upstream.

STUDYING THE SNOW

Snow has a higher price of entry for those who want to study it. First of all, it is not neatly packaged, like the water sitting behind a dam or flowing in a river. By distributing itself across vast expanses, snow plays very, very hard to get. In some areas, it can be costly, tiring or dangerous to measure. Secondly, snow changes quickly from one location to the next and from one day to the next. Just when scientists think they've got it all figured out, they don't. The snowpack in Oregon is continuously measured by dozens of automated SNOTEL—SNOwpack TELemetry—stations that determine how deep the snow is and how much water is in it. Snow levels are also measured manually at dozens of other locations called snow courses, where trained personnel take samples of the snow once a month and weigh it to see how much water it contains. A third type of measurement uses lasers carried by drones, airplanes or satellites to create very detailed and accurate maps of snow depth.

The Community Snow Observations (CSO) project is bringing all of these efforts together in the mountains west of

Bend over the next three years in an effort to improve what we know about snow and water in the upper Deschutes River watershed. Initially supported by NASA and now by the Bureau of Reclamation, CSO will be collecting snow depth data from volunteers armed with avalanche probes and smartphones. The project will also measure snow depths with laser-instrumented planes flying over the basin. In addition to monitoring the snow, all of these measurements will help computer programs to better model the arrival and departure of the season's snowpack. For community members who want to contribute to this effort, the CSO Project welcomes volunteers.

This fusion of hands-on measurements, remote measurements and computer models is a perfect example of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. Each tool has something to say about the past and the present of snow on the landscape. And the more we learn about today, the more confidence we can have in our ability to predict tomorrow. However, it might be the unpredictability of snow that makes it so magical. As poet Frederick Seidel wrote, "Snow is what it does; it falls and it stays and it goes." See *communitysnowobs.org.*

TOP LEFT: Science helps monitor snowfall.

THIS: The Crooked River flows below an aqueduct created to irrigate arid farmland.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The original aqueduct was drilled beneath Smith Rock in the mid-1940s.

SMITH ROCK AQUEDUCT

WRITTEN BY **CHERYL PARTON**

Carved into the basalt cliffs above the Crooked River canyon, the Smith Rock Aqueduct is easy to miss. Rock climbers and hikers come for the routes and views, but they may not notice remnants from some of Central Oregon's lesser-known but most consequential pieces of history. The aqueduct infrastructure quietly carried water across the gorge for decades, bringing farmland to life.

It dates back to the late 1930s when the federal government was investing in irrigation projects across the West. As part of the federal Deschutes Project, overseen by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the job was ambitious: moving water from the Crooked River to dry farmland north of Bend.

Engineers faced a formidable challenge at Smith Rock, where the sheer rock faces plunge hundreds of feet into the canyon below. Rather than reroute water or lose elevation, designers opted for a steel pipeline supported by reinforced concrete piers to span the gorge. Construction was completed in the 1940s and played a key role in regional development.

The impact was lasting. Reliable irrigation transformed thousands of acres of high desert into productive farmland, fueling Jefferson County's agricultural economy. Potatoes, alfalfa and grain became staples, and rural communities grew alongside newly irrigated fields.

As Smith Rock gained international recognition as a climbing destination and state park, the aqueduct faded into the background, hardly noticed. The 1945 Smith Rock canal system was replaced by a pressurized pipe system as of 2022 to modernize water delivery.

Today, the Smith Rock Aqueduct stands as a reminder of an era when federal engineering projects paved the way for Central Oregon's future.

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Smashing Their Way into Your Heart

This burger culture is thick (and thin)

WRITTEN BY **JARED RASIC**

Americana

PHOTO BY TAMBI LANE

I think I figured it out, but much later than most of you. I was one of those people that initially balked at the concept of a smash burger, unable to wrap my head around wanting anything other than a half-pound monstrosity, dripping with mayo, some sort of spicy aioli, a pickle or six, and a tomato thicker than a smash burger patty itself. Honestly, I thought the concept was a brilliant way to sell me a smaller burger for a similar price as a large one.

Oh, how wrong I was. There is a science to the smash burger, one that seems deceptively simple on the surface, but is so easy to botch that the difficulty spike is downright intimidating. While heat, fat, seasoning, lacy edges and a juicy center are all key ingredients, what I realized from the following chefs and Burger Geniuses is that the approach is to be taken seriously. Underestimating a smash burger is to have failed at having a good one.

A GROWING BUSINESS IS THE AMERICANA DREAM

Its own success story, Americana went from an unassuming Sprinter van food truck to a brick-and-mortar restaurant in downtown Bend in less than five years, and today has a line to the door within seconds of opening. What's remarkable about Americana and its owners Olivia and Joseph Franco is that, even when nine out of 10 people in Bend will tell you it's their favorite burger, Olivia doesn't think she's reached her full potential yet. "[The] concept was a fluke off of wanting to have an American bistro truck. The burger was as far as that concept went, and we ended up doing just the burger," said Olivia. "We didn't even sell fries in the beginning. Smash burgers presented a challenge. I wanted to work on them after cooking so many cheeseburgers in my career. I don't think I've perfected them yet, though." Try The Popper—with pickled jalapeños, jalapeño cream cheese, white American cheese, caramelized onions, bacon, ranch, secret sauce, shredded lettuce, fresh tomato with a double patty on a brioche bun—and get close to smash burger perfection.

NOSTALGIA AND QUALITY AT BLUE EYES

"Smash burgers are how burgers really started," said Parker Vaughan, owner and head chef of Blue Eyes Burgers and Fries. While opinions, legends and stories vary, most agree that the origin of the smash burger (also known as a smashburger or smashed burger) goes back to the Great Depression when, in order to make the meat go farther, cooks would smash the patties to stretch the portions. "They were street food meant to be cooked fast and be flavorful," said Vaughan, who is also a student, teacher and historian of the burger. "And like all great food, regional versions started popping up all over the country and led to chain restaurants such as Fosters Freeze, White Castle, Whataburger, In-N-Out and one of my favorites, Krystal. Believe it or not, before these places were commoditized, they were amazing burger spots where everything was made from scratch." Regardless of origin, we're definitely in the throes of a smash revival.

Nostalgia hit me when entering Blue Eyes, whose location off Greenwood in midtown Bend immediately sent me back to being 6 years old and getting a dipped cone at the Fosters Freeze my grandpa built in Paradise, California.

At Blue Eyes, quality is a priority, and while you might pay a bit more than other burger joints in town, the burger is worth every cent. Blue Eyes uses locally sourced, 100% grass-fed beef from Pitchfork T Ranch in Sisters, buns developed by Vaughan and baked by M's bakery, and scratch-made onion rings. Put a Rainshadow Double in your mouth and tell me the combo of Duke's Real Mayonnaise, pickled jalapeño, bacon, BBQ sauce, onion rings, a griddled sweet bun and Pitchfork T meat magic isn't burger alchemy.

Blue Eyes
Burgers and Fries

PHOTOS BY ALYSON BROWN

WillieBurger

> THE CHEESE MELT ON A SMASH BURGER FROM WILLIEBURGER FOUND AT DESCHUTES BREWERY'S TASTING ROOM STILL LIVES IN MY DREAMS."

SIMPLICITY IS THE KEY AT WILLIEBURGER

The magnificent WillieBurger rocks a very simple menu. Order a single, double or triple smash burger from Andrew George, the owner and chef who knows what makes a perfect burger and doesn't mince words about achieving it. He explains it's butter on a grilled bun, paper-thin onions, a meatball pressed to a certain size without over-smashing and then, the edges are "rolled" to get a lacy, crispy edge but still have a juicy thicker center. "[We] modestly season with our secret seasoning, flip, add a little house sauce directly on the patty and then top with cheese. A double patty. Nothing else," said George. The cheese melt on a smash burger from this food truck found at Deschutes Brewery's Tasting Room still lives in my dreams.

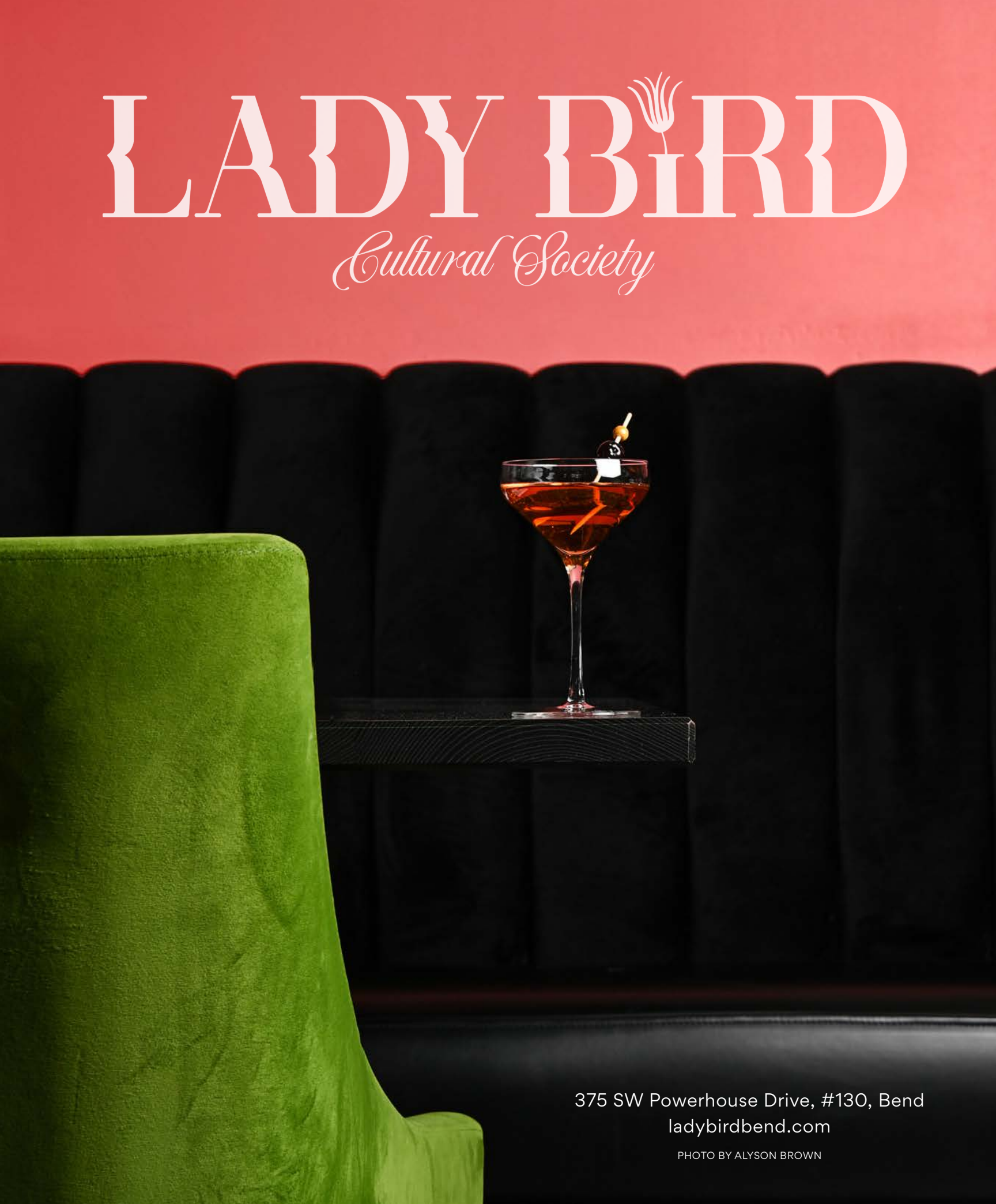
CREATING A FOLLOWING, FROM NEW ORLEANS TO BEND

Mike Aldridge, owner and chef of MidCity SmashedBurger, was early to the smash burger revival when he founded his franchise in New Orleans during the pandemic. When he opened a Portland food truck in 2021, he sold 1,000 burgers in eight days. The Bend truck is at 3rd Street's Waypoint Hotel where you'll find a Smashy Boi, which for $6 is one of the best burger deals in town: The char on the 80/20 Oregon beef sourced from Painted Hills is tender, juicy and without flaw. "Smash burgers, for us, were always meant to be nostalgic," said Aldridge. "A small, affordable cheeseburger that is simple but stands out for a couple reasons. A smash burger is the 'family-friendliest' burger there is."

Pardon a ridiculous metaphor, but I think I've figured out what makes a smash burger so remarkable. Each smash burger is like a perfectly curated and crafted snowflake. Over three weeks, I've tried even more than I've mentioned here and no two were the same.

I think at first it was easy to look at smash burgers like a fad that would go the way of pogs or pet rocks, but they're not and they shouldn't. Sure, the mediocre ones will fade away, but the real genius chefs, like the ones on these pages, aren't just out to make a buck on a skinny burger. They are about striving to build a new version of an American classic; elevating something so simple, yet so easy to get wrong. I can't wait to see what comes next. B

PHOTO BY ALYSON BROWN



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A Taste of Regional Mexico

Xalisco Latin Cuisine in Redmond is anything but a flyby

WRITTEN BY **CATHY CARROLL**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TINA PAYMASTER**

Tacos Kraken

Just off the highway en route to the Redmond Municipal Airport, an unassuming strip mall is hardly a place associated with escape or excitement. Yet tucked into this unlikely setting, Xalisco Latin Cuisine transports diners straight to the Mexican state widely regarded as the birthplace of many of the country's most iconic dishes. Drawing from the Jalisco region's robust cuisine—where pre-Hispanic traditions meet Spanish influences—the restaurant is centered on family recipes and regional specialties. Many are reimagined with elevated touches that reward diners with creativity and quality, and defy the restaurant's modest exterior.

The dishes reveal a place built on family, second acts and a deep emotional connection to food. For owner Maria Medina, Xalisco is a culmination of decades of lived experience, migration and resilience—served daily.

Dedication is evident in the food. The *carnitas*—slow-cooked, tender, richly flavorful pork—is Medina's mother's recipe. The fundamentals come into focus in other specialty dishes such as the *carne en su jugo* (a Jalisco specialty of beef simmered in a savory tomatillo broth with beans and fresh garnishes), *arrachera* (marinated skirt steak) and tacos *de camarón*, or shrimp. "If you can do the basics really well, it says a lot about a menu and a place," said Medina.

One of the lesser-known menu items is *torta ahogada*, a traditional Guadalajara-style sourdough-bread sandwich of braised pork or pork belly *carnitas*, in a salsa of dried chiles and tomato with red onion and lime. "That's a dish that a lot of people have never encountered before, and it's one of my favorites. It's just a classic that is delicious," said Medina. "I always recommend it spicy as well. It gives it a good extra kick."

For Medina, food has long been a source of comfort and connection, especially when she arrived in Los Angeles from Mexico, "freshly 21 years old and feeling so homesick, and so alone really," she said. Finding familiar food helped ease that isolation while working as an office administrator for a textile business.

Medina moved to Redmond from Los Angeles about a month before opening Xalisco in May of 2021 in her 50s while navigating a new chapter of life following her divorce. "It's never too late to start something new," she said.

Maria Medina and Ángel Buenrostro Medina

Arrachera

CLOCKWISE: Margarita flight,
Tropical Tequila cocktail,
Ahi tuna tostadas,
Tacos de camerón al mezcal

Antonio's Chamorro

Had she known more about the challenges of the restaurant business, she likely wouldn't have taken the leap, she said, but what made it possible was family. Medina's brother, sister-in-law, niece, nephews, grandniece and daughter all play roles in the restaurant, from the kitchen to the dining room. "I was never alone," she said. "Without them, we would not be where we are."

At the helm of the kitchen is Medina's nephew, Ángel Buenrostro Medina, who studied gastronomy in Guadalajara. His training shows up in creative renditions of family and traditional recipes—an approach that has helped develop a cadre of devoted regulars. Among them are Dawn and David Haffey of David Haffey Fine Jewelry in Redmond, who have frequented Xalisco at least twice weekly since it opened, after one of their own customers recommended it.

When they first saw the location, they didn't have high expectations, but their presumptions vanished with the first bite of *camarones momia*, bacon-wrapped shrimp finished in a rich, creamy sauce. Other standouts soon followed, such as the *arrachera*. Dawn enjoyed margaritas made with freshly squeezed limes. What struck the couple just as deeply was the atmosphere. "They treat you like family," said David. "You can feel the love that goes into the food."

That mix of culinary creativity and authentic hospitality has turned an unlikely spot into a gastronomic destination.

Xalisco Latin Cuisine
3835 SW 21st St., Redmond
541-923-3943

Fritz Makes a Splash

ROAM elevates a classic cocktail

WRITTEN BY **SIENA DORMAN**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TINA PAYMASTER**

ROAM's Fritz Old-Fashioned is delightful evidence that taste begins with smell. Before the glass reaches your lips, this cocktail declares itself with aromatics of citrus and spice, preparing you to experience one of history's first cocktails. "I'm a big believer in classics remaining classics," said Mackenzie Garretson, ROAM's assistant food and beverage manager. "This stays true to an old-fashioned, with just a little more creativity."

The steady profile of Buffalo Trace bourbon forms the backbone. Then, the creativity comes quietly with the salted maple simple syrup, made in-house with Vermont maple syrup. It is not cloying but provokes just enough sweetness on the palate to make room for the drink's Montenegro Amaro and salt. "The salinity really brings out the flavors," Garretson said, "especially with bourbon."

The Fritz only works with large ice cubes. First, it's stirred with one, then poured over a second extra-large ice block. The result is a dilution with patience, an especially polite offering for a slow-sipper. An orange peel is expressed over top, then rubbed along the glass's rim, and the drink is finished with a cherry.

Although bourbon-forward, the drink opens in layers. At the nose, an unmistakable fragrance of orange oil meets a hint of cherry, then the grip of bourbon lands with the caramel-like warmth of maple, providing something to linger on. "We're not masking the bourbon," said Garretson, "it's totally balanced."

Named after a beloved dog called Fritz, this is a cocktail that stays. It pairs wonderfully with a filet or ROAM's harvest chicken, where salty-sweet meets savory-sweet. The Fritz Old Fashioned lures guests in at first encounter and reveals why it never leaves an otherwise rotating menu. See *roambend.com*.

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Life's Symphony

Michael Gesme conducts 30 years as maestro of Central Oregon Symphony

WRITTEN BY **HOLLY HUTCHINS**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CODY RHEAULT**

"You don't have to give up The Beatles to accept Beethoven," was the advice given in 1995 by a University of Missouri–Columbia music professor to then-graduate student Michael Gesme. Fast forward 30 years, and this advice continues to inspire exquisite musical moments for Gesme, Central Oregon Symphony's conductor and music director, who is in his final season as maestro. And what a run it has been.

The Central Oregon Symphony (COS) had modest beginnings in 1967, and played its first musical notes before a capacity concert weekend crowd of 200 to 300 people in the cafeteria of today's Pilot Butte Middle School. When Pinckney Center for the Arts opened on the Central Oregon Community College

(COCC) campus in 1983, the symphony held concerts there until the mid-1990s and then moved to Mountain View High School. Enjoying increasing popularity, COS moved to Bend High School in 1997 and experienced an attendance surge to more than 2,500 on concert weekends. However, a major, ongoing remodeling of Bend High resulted in another venue move in 2023, this time back to Mountain View High School. Gesme and the symphony's nearly 80 members currently share their talents with a diverse range of musical groups, including the Central Oregon Chamber Orchestra, Cascade Winds Symphonic Band, OperaBend, to provide full symphony concerts and various youth concerts.

Then there's Gesme's day job. Originally from Illinois, Gesme and his wife, Janet, an accomplished violinist and cellist, landed in Bend in 1996. He joined COCC as professor of music, a position he continues to hold today. "I consider myself one of the luckiest people I know," he said, "I landed my first and only full-time job in such a beautiful place perfect for raising my kids, and in such a warm and arts-accepting community." At COCC, Gesme said he was able to do two of the things that he loves the most: conduct an orchestra and teach music, which also explains why with so many tempting opportunities over the years to take his conducting skills to places around the world, he opted to spend his entire career in Bend. "I have had a dream gig in a dreamy place," he said.

Another huge plus that led Gesme to Bend and COCC was the symphony's unorthodox way of handling tickets. A year before Gesme arrived, the symphony association, under leadership of the late Bob Armer, decided to no longer charge admission to concerts. Instead, shows were made admission-free, and then the symphony asked those attending to make a donation to support the concerts. "This was 100% in line with my own philosophy on how music should be accessible to as many people as possible," Gesme said. "The donations were exponentially beyond what was ever collected when tickets were sold, and we have continued to thrive and grow under this model. I just jumped onto this amazing wave that started with Bob. He is fabled, if there is such a thing in Central Oregon Symphony lore," he added.

Looking back, Gesme is quick to emphasize that the symphony's success is a direct result of the extraordinary talents of the volunteers who make up the orchestra. A viola artist and a symphony member since 1979, Leslie Knight shared her choice of heartfelt descriptors to show that the feeling is mutual. "When I think about Michael, these are the words that leap to mind. I say 'leap' because Michael is always leaping on the podium to put a fine point on the finale of a piece: 'Shows up, inspiring, energetic, enthusiastic, authentic, empathetic, compassionate, humble and kind with a generous heart.'" Knight maintained that the symphony has achieved so much in the past 30 years "because the guy waving his arms up front has created a vibrant musical community by turning friends into symphony musicians, and symphony musicians into friends."

Trumpeter Jeff Briggs, a 38-year symphony veteran, shared similar accolades, including a quality he rarely sees today in classical musical conductors. "He takes the stuffiness out of a concert," Briggs explained, "by speaking directly from the podium about the history of a particular piece of music, then encouraging the audience to listen for the special parts of the piece that mark a composer's signature." But for Briggs, Gesme's legacy is his dedication to the art. "Michael is always prepared. He knows what he wants. He knows what it takes from all of us to meet his standards, so we know we must be prepared as well," he said.

Looking for Gesme's successor, Symphony Association Executive Director Travis Allen explained that he expects to know by mid-spring who will be replacing Gesme, both at COCC and the symphony.

As for Gesme, he's confident that there will be other conducting roles for him in the future, either in Bend or in another community. What he really looks forward to is enjoying and supporting his wife's passion for learning and teaching languages in other parts of the world. He also hopes to help bring a performing arts center to Bend.

So, come next spring, the curtain comes down on a journey of growth for Central Oregon Symphony, to be followed by the promise of continued expansion and even more memorable musical moments for all to enjoy. B

Īko Rabit painting "Rahu"

Art and Archetypes

Īko Rabit creates images inspired by nature and astrology

WRITTEN BY **ROSEANN DENNERY**

"Gemini"

Stepping inside the creative mind of Megan Stumpfig, who goes by the moniker Īko Rabit, is a transformative and thrilling journey for the observer. Her abstract-realist paintings boldly come to life in portraits of the natural world and the astrological realm, through a variety of mixed media, including acrylic, oil and watercolor.

Growing up in Bend, Rabit recalls early memories of being drawn to observing nature and the patterns of animals in their habitats. Her first acrylic painting—of a Dalmatian, created in the 6th grade—proved she held an innate gift and set in motion a lifelong desire to create art. Today, Rabit's work is still inspired by the infinite wisdom of nature, which she refers to as her "number one muse." Her subjects often include animals and their symbolism, and are also widely reflective of a connection with the rich cultural contexts found in her travels.

At the age of 19, Rabit took a gap year to explore Ecuador, Peru and the Galápagos Islands—an experience she attributes to giving her the confidence to begin pursuing art as a career. In the years that followed, she studied oil and printmaking at Portland State University and continued traveling and living in countries such as Colombia, Costa Rica and Ecuador a second time, as well as in California where she performed live painting at electronic music festivals.

Rabit's art serves as a tool of self-discovery, one that feels raw and deeply personal yet welcomes viewers into an ever-changing dialogue to better understand their place in the world.

See the 2,400 sq ft, 2-wall mural in Redmond.

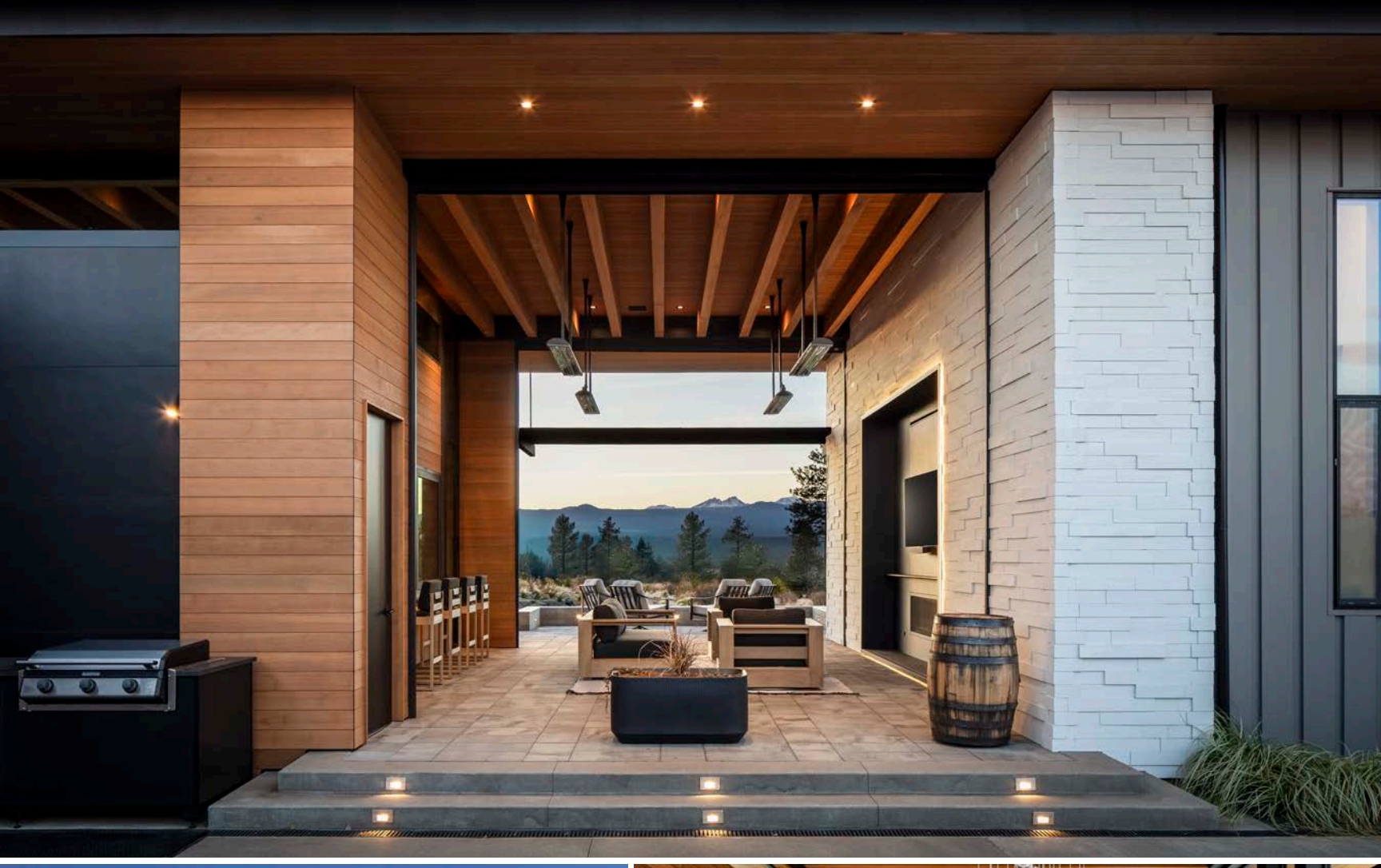
She describes this relationship as a curious and transformative exploration—one she hopes will stir something within others as well. It is a place she often revisits through her art, in both times of grief and joy. "The creative process has taught me how to truly trust in life," Rabit shared. "I've come to realize that as long as I continue making art, everything seems to work out, and my life expands in ways I couldn't have imagined."

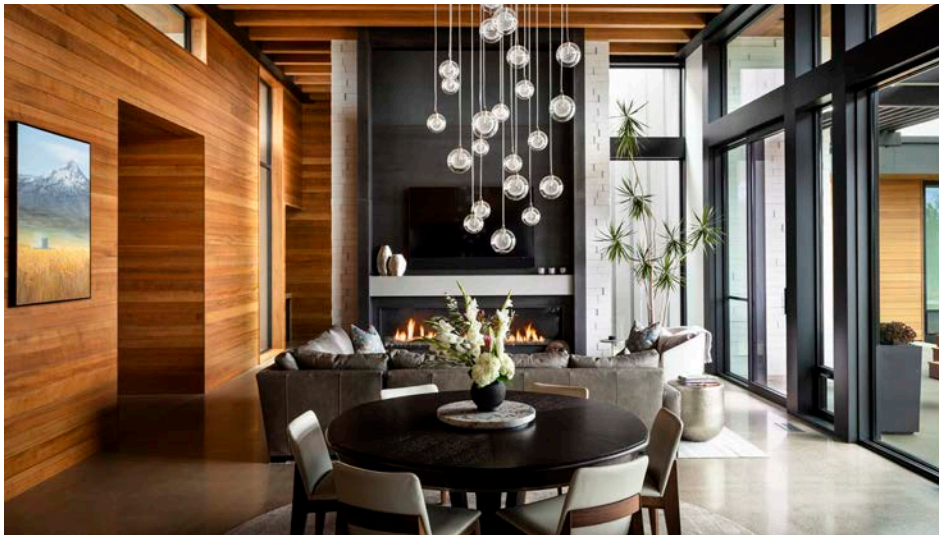
This process inspires rhythms of a subtle yet energetic tapestry of patterns, colors and textures that skillfully materialize in her work. Rabit's creative energy proves to be both fluid and dynamic, carrying over into recent projects like the illustration of an oracle deck and in a series of paintings exploring the ancient wisdom of the zodiac's astrological archetypes. Currently, she is in the process of creating her biggest canvases yet: 12-by-8-foot and 5-by-7-foot paintings of dragons from the mythology of the lunar nodes.

Rabit's intuitive approach as an artist keeps her fulfilled and inspired, and gives her an ability to pivot toward what she feels invited into creating at the present moment. Her diverse talent can be seen on display in Redmond at the corner of SW 6th Street and SW Black Butte Boulevard, where she and a partner created an impressive mural more than 100 feet long that captures the natural beauty and historical references of the town.

No matter the subject, Rabit sees her art as a powerful means of exploring the delicate intersection of the familiar with the unseen through a new lens. "I believe that nothing is static in the universe, everything is interconnected. The subjects of my art are often quite clear, bold, familiar…yet when you peer more deeply into the details, there is a whole universe and story that begins to unfold," she described. "There is always so much more than meets the eye, within everything, when we pause enough to notice and to feel." See *ikorabit.art*.

"Taurus"





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ARTS and CULTURE

"Face Off (Elegant Day)"

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM SHOWCASES HILARY BAKER

"Prophets," an exhibition by Los Angeles–based artist Hilary Baker, will be on view at the High Desert Museum from Feb. 21 to April 26 as part of the Art in the West collection. Baker's work examines the symbolic and often contradictory nature of moths, from omens of misfortune to symbols of transformation and endurance. Intricate brushwork and vivid color palettes create immersive imagery that invites contemplation and sparks curiosity. See *highdesertmuseum.org*.

MODERN DANCE COMPANY AT THE TOWER THEATRE

Professional modern dance company Repertory Dance Theatre performs May 5 at the Tower Theatre. Presented by the nonprofit Tower Theatre Foundation, the Salt Lake City–based company, founded in 1966, is dedicated to the creation, preservation and performance of modern dance. Celebrating its 60th anniversary season, RDT is recognized for its expansive repertoire, spanning early pioneers of dance to contemporary choreographers, and it is considered both a living archive and a laboratory for innovation of dance as an art form. See *towertheatre.org*.

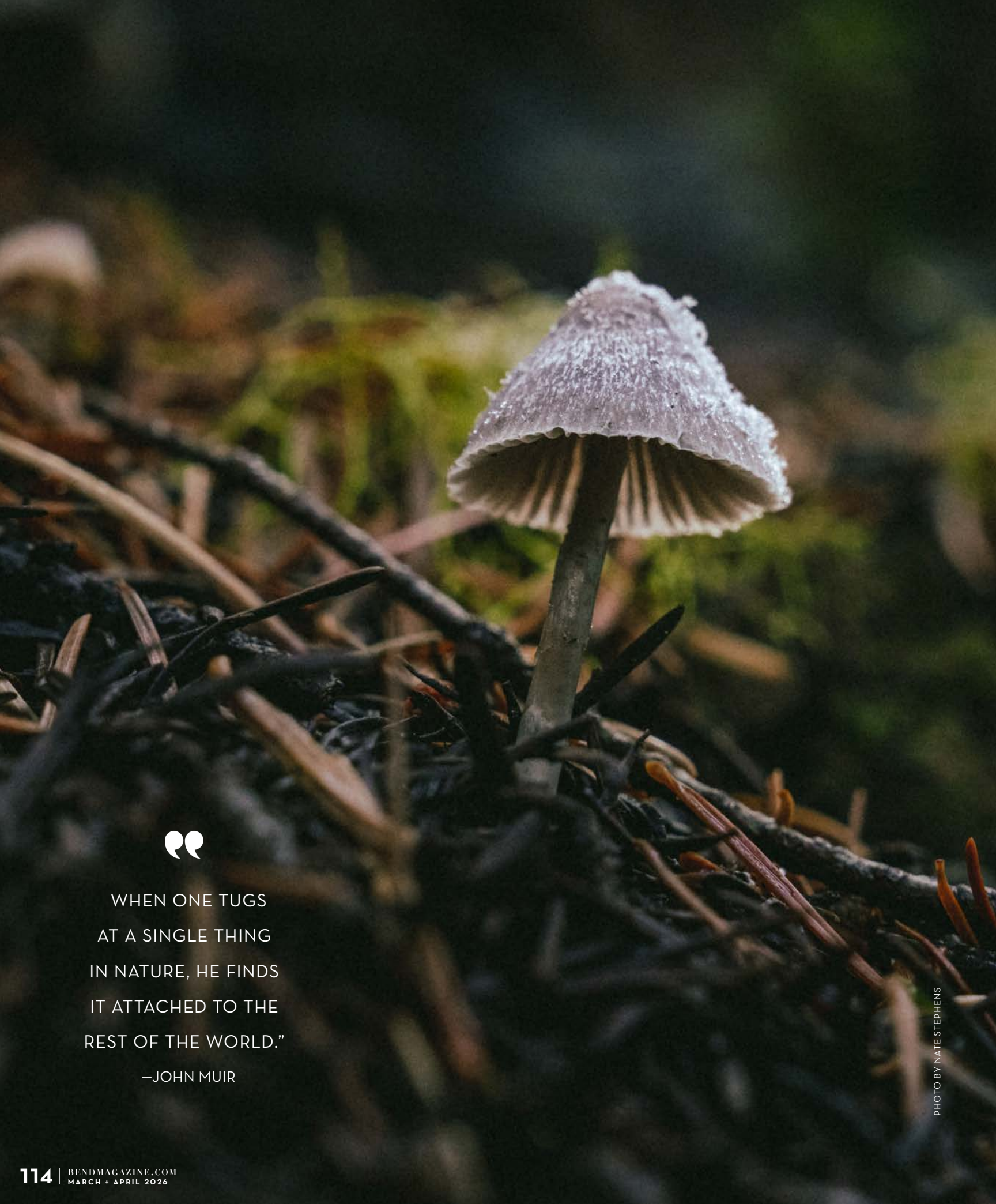
BEND AUTHOR PUBLISHES NEW HISTORICAL NOVEL

Kerry Chaput, an award-winning writer of historical fiction, released her novel *The Secret Courtesan* on February 10, 2026. Known for stories centered on daring women, Chaput has earned honors from the Historical Novel Society, Midwest Book Review and a Sarton Women's Book Award. Her latest novel follows an art historian racing through Venice, Italy, to uncover the truth behind a lost Renaissance sculptor. Chaput weaves together a story with dual timelines, art history and intrigue. See *kerrywrites.com*.

HOPES FOR A CENTRAL OREGON AVA

Central Oregon's wine industry is taking a step forward with a bid for recognition as an American Viticultural Area (AVA). On January 13, the Central Oregon Winegrowers Association (COWA) submitted an application for the federal designation, which would allow local wineries to label bottles with the region's name. The federal review process is expected to take up to 24 months. If approved, the AVA status would give Central Oregon wines a regional identity, help consumers understand where their wine comes from, support long-term sustainability for vineyards, and open the door for future winery development and agritourism, according to the COWA. See *centraloregonwinegrowers.com*.

PHOTO TOP LEFT COURTESY OF HIGH DESERT MUSEUM | TOP RIGHT BY BECCA WEBB
BOTTOM COURTESY OF FAITH HOPE & CHARITY VINEYARDS



“WHEN ONE TUGS AT A SINGLE THING IN NATURE, HE FINDS IT ATTACHED TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.”

—JOHN MUIR

PHOTO BY NATE STEPHENS

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