

pointswest

SPRING 2023



SPRING
BRANDING

GIVING
BACK

RIVER
JOURNEY

FROM THE DESK OF THE WEST

REBECCA WEST

Executive Director and CEO

In the winter of 1994, I began dating a rookie on the Cody Volunteer Fire Department. Chuck Hulbert and I would marry eight months later by a creek in Sunlight



Basin, near the Northeast Entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

I knew nothing then about the level of commitment required from a volunteer firefighter, especially one covering the largest

volunteer fire district in the lower 48 states.

Reality hit one night when Chuck's pager went off for a structure fire at the Flying H Ranch, located more than 40 miles up an isolated river valley from Cody, Wyoming. I later awoke to a 3 a.m. phone call from one of his colleagues telling me not to worry, but that the fire crew would be busy until at least mid-morning.

My new family of firefighters and Women's Auxiliary members exemplified true community support.

Although Cody and its surrounding communities have changed and grown alongside the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, the concept of "community" remains essential for all who live, work, play, and pass through our marvelous corner of Wyoming.

The Center has one of the largest physical plants and workforces in Cody, but having a grand footprint and a 106-year history is not enough. Through the pandemic, last year's floods around Yellowstone National Park, and the other challenges of the past three years, we have learned that the Center needs the community as much as it needs us.

During recent focus groups, the Center specifically asked community members, "What do you need from us? What can we do better as part of the community?" The answers were honest, inspiring, and have helped shape our strategic plan.

In this issue, we're pleased to share how many of our staff members give thousands of volunteer hours to the community, and how the Center as an organization strives to become a welcoming place to convene, exchange ideas, share knowledge, and provide inspiration.

I appreciate and applaud these efforts, and look forward to our continued work along those lines in the months and years ahead.

Rebecca West



spring branding

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Charles Belden captures "rustlers" branding calves

ABOUT THE COVER |

While a rider out of view holds the lasso taut around a calf's neck, a cowboy ropes its heels during a 2020 spring branding at the Pitchfork Ranch, a sprawling, historic property near Meeteetse, Wyoming.

Points West is dedicated to connecting people to the stories of the American West as the membership magazine of the private, nonprofit Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

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BUFFALO BILL CENTER OF THE WEST



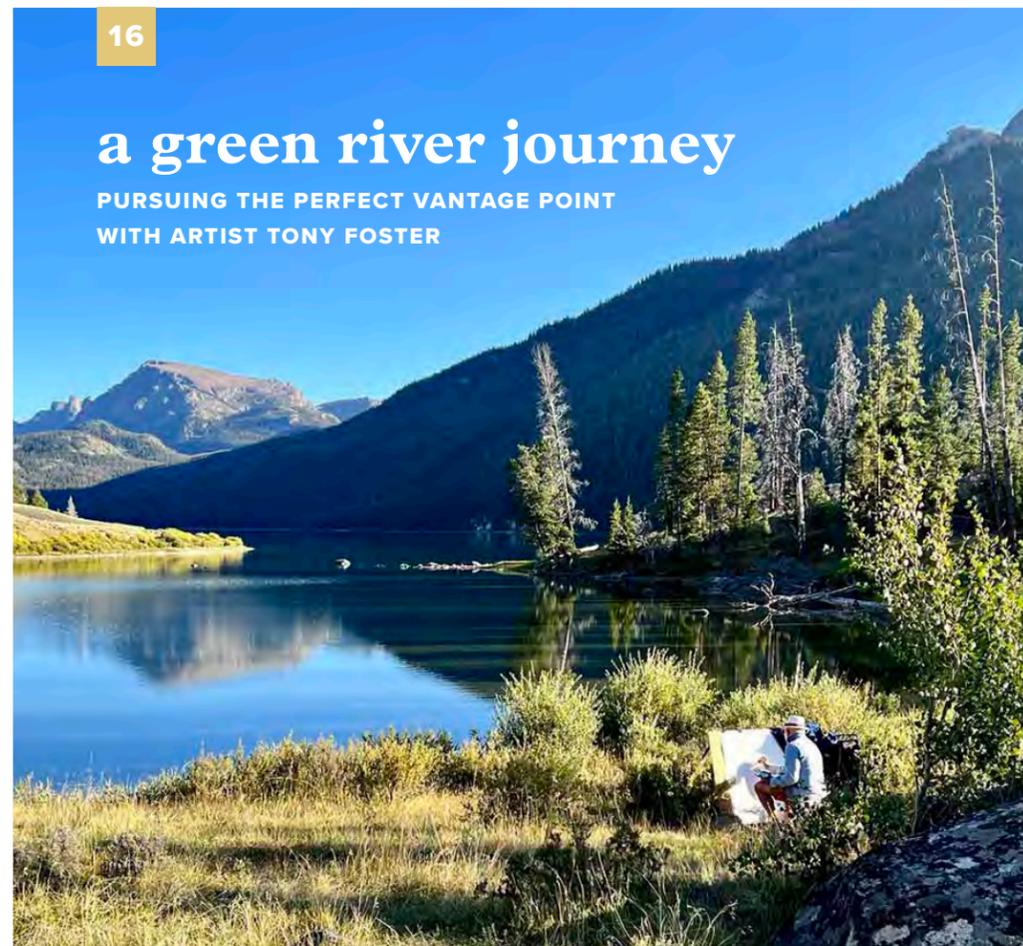
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PURSUING THE PERFECT VANTAGE POINT WITH ARTIST TONY FOSTER



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THE WAY WEST



William F. Cody received a patent in 1911 on these brass spurs with nickel-silver buffalo heads. They may have been used in the Wild West Show.

EARN YOUR SPURS

BY JIM ARNDT

William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody wore spurs as both practical tools of his trade and as ornamental elements throughout history and to the present day, spurs have long presented dual elements of function and fashion.

The Spanish introduced spurs to North America in the 1500s. The styles have changed since then, when the rowels (rounded discs or spikes) on those early spurs could reach a circumference of six inches or more.

The Spanish influenced Mexican spur makers, who became masters of the craft. Many cowboys crafted their own spurs, while other spurs were made in small shops, larger factories, or even prisons.

The spur is designed to fit on the heel of riding boots. It is secured with a buckled strap, usually leather, that attaches over the top of the foot. The cowboy will brush the spur against the horse's flank, often along with verbal com-

mands, generally directing or encouraging the horse to action.

Like belt buckles, fancy spurs are sometimes awarded to rodeo champions, giving rise to the expression of “earning your spurs.”

Western-style cowboy spurs have rowels—sometimes a spinning wheel or disc—attached at the tail end of the spur shank. Rowels are typically round, but can also be in the shape of a flower, star, four-leaf clover or other configuration, like a series of spikes. Some cowboys have even used silver dollars for rowels.

Sometimes a cowboy might attach a pair of jingling pendants (known as jingle bobs) to his rowel pins to make a little extra music when he walks.

The shank (the slightly curved piece of steel between the rowel and the heel band that wraps around the back of the boot) can either be plain or have a more interesting shape, such as a snake.

Spurs can be utilitarian to meet the needs of a working cowboy, or they can be beautifully artistic, dictated by the taste of the cowboy and the skill of the maker.

Spurs might sport additional decorations on the outside of the heel band, on the button that the spur strap hooks onto, or even on the chap guard, which is a small protrusion that keeps the chaps from getting entangled in the rowel.

Popular decorative elements might include longhorns, stars, moons, hearts, brands, and initials.

Hand-forged steel spurs can be inlaid with copper, brass, silver, or gold, and may include turquoise and other stones.

Whether they are antiques or modern masterworks, spurs help express a cowboy's personality and communicate with a horse. They have also become collectible and coveted artifacts, and even one-of-a-kind works of art. Giddy-up!



Jim Arndt is a nationally recognized commercial and editorial photographer and author of the books *The Cowboy Boot Book*, *and The Art of the Boot*. Excerpted with permission from *Arndt's How to Be a Cowboy*.



RELOADED

A CHERISHED WINCHESTER MODEL 67

BY RUSTY ROKITA

When asked which firearm I am personally attached to, I immediately thought about my father's Model 94 Winchester octagon-barrel 30-30 rifle. Manufactured in 1896, it came to Montana in a horse-drawn wagon and has been in our family for nearly 100 years.

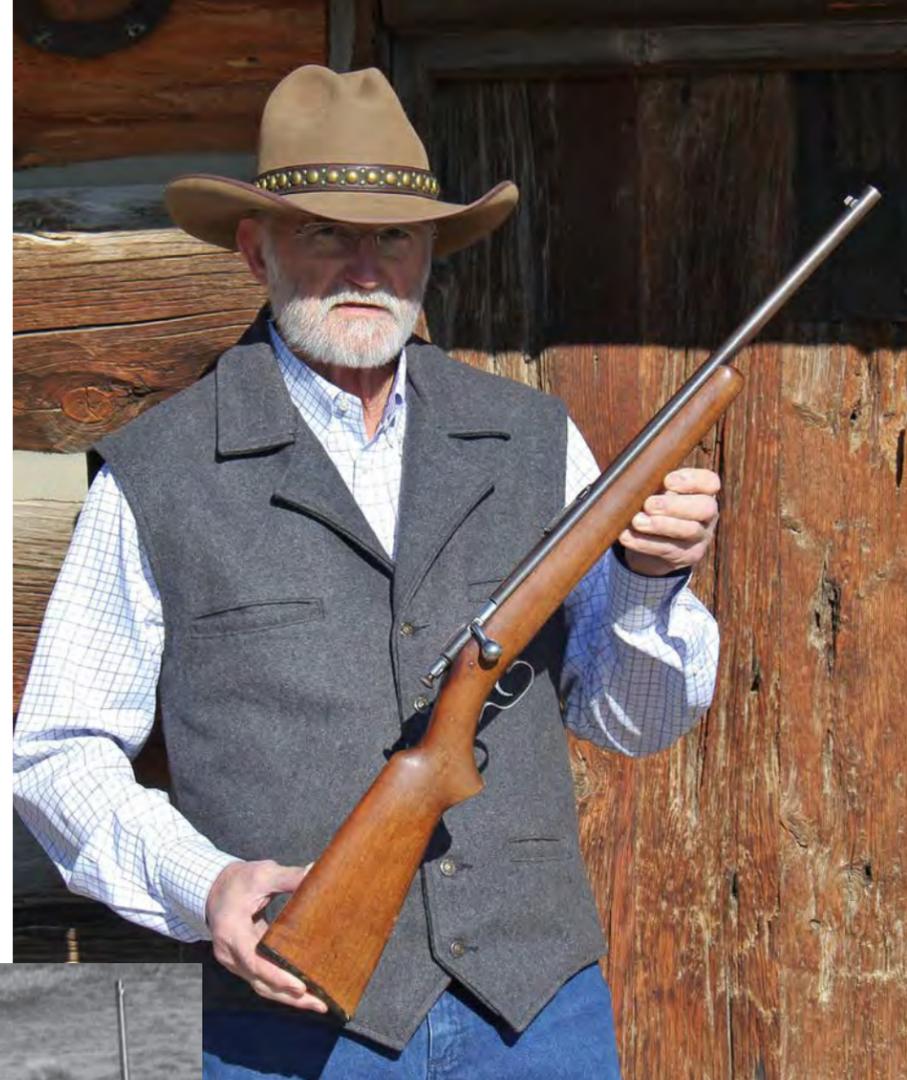
But then, I also considered a nice old Holland and Holland side-by-side 12-gauge, which I purchased long ago from a friend in Scotland. Now retired, he was a longtime magazine writer, a gamekeeper, a ghillie, and a shooting instructor who once taught Prince William and Prince Harry how to break a few clays. Every time I pick it up, I think of him and imagine the gun's grand past.

Among the many firearms that have special meaning to me, however, I most cherish a .22 caliber, "Junior Model" Winchester Model 67 single-shot manufactured around 1937, or shortly thereafter. My grandfather bought it and gave it to my mother, who shot it for years before letting me borrow it when I was about four years old.

Four-year-olds don't view property rights the same way adults do, so with presumption and possession, it became my gun by default. It forever rested behind a kitchen door ready for use, just as it does at our home today. Simply holding it transports me back to a time long ago when many fine memories were cre-



Rusty Rokita displays his beloved Winchester Model 67, which he has enjoyed shooting for more than seven decades. Inset: In 1952, Rokita, with his dog Butch by his side, holds his rifle.



ated—to a time when my grandpa and mom and dad taught me how to shoot and to act responsibly with a firearm. They trusted me, just as I have since taught and trusted many young people who used it for their first-ever shooting experience.

With minor exceptions, the Model 67 Junior Model came with a 20-inch barrel and a walnut stock that was just over an inch shorter than the original version. Like all the 67s sold in the U.S., it has no serial number and wasn't bothered by checkering or other nuances that generally make firearms collectible.

For several reasons, including its reduced size and an original price of \$4.25, it was marketed as a good beginner's rifle—a youth rifle. To operate it, you open a bolt, load each cartridge singularly, lock the bolt down, pull

a cocking mechanism, and place it manually on "safe." It handles .22 shorts, .22 longs, and .22 long-rifles interchangeably with the same amazing degree of accuracy. You can also take the stock off using a penny as a makeshift slotted screwdriver to tighten or loosen the retaining screw. I have never had a reason to do that, nor, come to think of it, do I recall ever cleaning it.

I suppose when growing up, I was always too busy shooting tin cans (sometimes out of the air), old bottles, occasionally small game or a skunk, as well as irregularly providing porcupine guard hair for traditional Crow Tribal dance regalia.

In case you wonder, I still use the rifle, and I continue to practice, because lately, after more than 72 years of shooting it, I am beginning to notice some improvement.

Rusty Rokita grew up on a ranch in southeastern Montana and lives with his wife, Deborah, in Hardin, Montana. He is chair of the Cody Firearms Museum Advisory Board.

GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT

flat iron steak salad

with creamy horseradish peppercorn dressing



PREP
25 min

ASSEMBLY
15 min

READY IN
45 min

Spring is a great time to enjoy a steak salad, and a flat iron cut is ideal for this recipe. The horseradish dressing brings a tangy zing that will wake up your tastebuds. It can be served with steak hot off the grill, or chilled, allowing for advance preparation.

INGREDIENTS:

Meat:

- 1 to 2 lb. flat iron steak
- Montreal seasoning

Salad:

- 8 oz. sliced cherry tomatoes
- 1 sliced English cucumber
- 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup blue cheese crumbles
- 1 lb. salad greens, such as spring mix and arugula

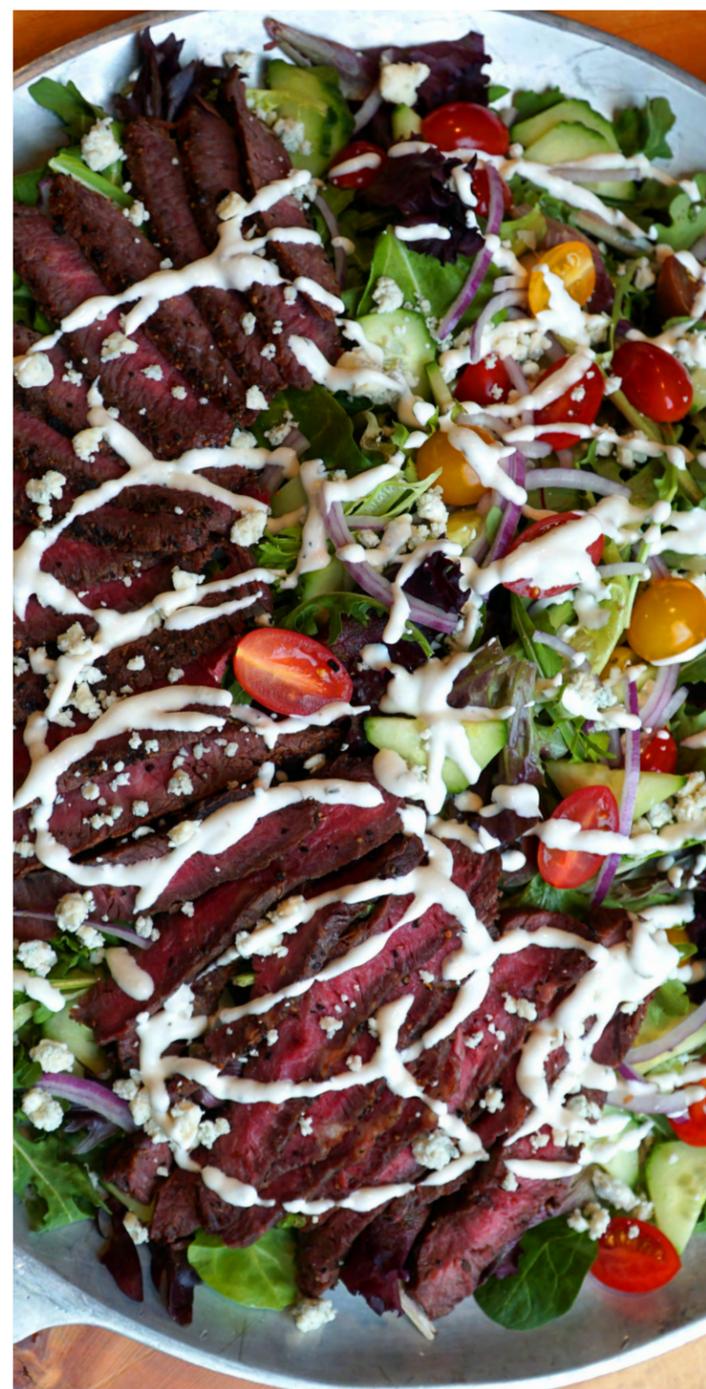
Dressing: Makes 16 oz.

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1 tbsp horseradish
- 1/2 tsp course black pepper
- 1/8 tsp garlic powder
- 4 tsp chopped chives
- 1 tbsp parsley flakes
- 1/8 tsp celery salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Rub both sides of steaks with Montreal seasoning.
2. Combine dressing ingredients in large mixing bowl, whisk until smooth. Refrigerate until serving.
3. Arrange salad greens in large bowl or a platter for family style dining. Top with sliced vegetables and refrigerate until serving.
4. Grill steak on medium heat, using thermometer to check temperature. Medium rare is 130 to 140 degrees. Let steak rest 5 minutes before slicing.
5. Add steak slices and fan out over salad, top with blue cheese crumbles and drizzle dressing over top.

RECIPE BY CENTER OF THE WEST EXECUTIVE CHEF COURTNEY SCHEIBER AND CHEF/KITCHEN SUPERVISOR ROMI ST. JOHN-POLLOCK





A young girl shows off her painted face during the 2022 Buffalo Bill Center of the West Summer Block Party, one of many annual events offering free admission to the local community.

CENTER & EMPLOYEES BRING WORLD OF BENEFITS TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

GIVING BACK



The June 2022 Summer Block Party offered community residents free admission to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West and a chance to enjoy music, food, and family fun.

BY MARK DAVIS

William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody was justifiably famous around the world for his exploits as an entertainer, and as a scout for the U.S. Army. But despite his considerable fame and his connections to powerful and influential people, many of his business ventures outside of show business returned little profit, or even lost considerable money.

Cody invested in mines in Arizona, ranching in Nebraska, and, of course, developing the town named after him in Wyoming, where he owned the local blacksmith shop, newspaper, livery stable and several nearby ranches. According to Robert E. Bonner’s book, *William F. Cody’s Wyoming Empire*, half of the approximately 500 people who lived in Cody in 1899 were financially dependent on Buffalo Bill, “and many more applied to him for occasional charity, with which he was famously generous.”



Students from Northwest College view items in the Buffalo Bill Museum during Northwest College Day, a special event open to the school’s students, alumni, and staff.

Buffalo Bill never achieved great wealth from his tourism ventures in Wyoming, but his legacy of generosity toward and support of the local community thrives at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

Rebecca West, Executive Director and CEO of the Center, said that “our staff and board members give incredible amounts of time, expertise, funding, and vision back to the community, and we are proud of their efforts.”

“We want to apply this energy to a higher organizational commitment toward becoming a place that makes a difference in the lives of our community members,” she said.

The Center is working on “using those individual commitments and connections to organizations and causes to mobilize our spaces, people, collections, and knowledge, and to identify true community needs.”

The Buffalo Bill Memorial Association

was originally organized by Cody residents as a nonprofit charity on March 1, 1917, to build and maintain a monument to Buffalo Bill. *The Scout*, a heroic equestrian statue by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, was completed in 1924. The five museums operated by the Association have since become the town’s primary tourist attraction, as well as a major employer offering competitive pay for a wide range of skilled positions.

The value of the Center’s acclaimed collections is obvious, although it can hardly be estimated or quantified in dollars. By comparison, though, the significance of the Center’s role as a positive force in the local community often remains overlooked, and almost certainly undervalued.

The Center opens its doors to groups and the community for many special occasions, including a free admission open house event around the Christmas holiday

season. Low-cost Family Fun Days offer a chance for locals to participate in activities and learn about exhibits and programs. A Summer Block Party brings live music, free admission, and food trucks from across the region. Local students enjoy free admission and free summer workshops that include adventure camps, art classes, and programs in science, technology, engineering, and math.

The Center also offers free admission to Park County school classes for tours of the Center all year-long, and homeschool families are also welcome. Center educators use Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other technologies to educate students in classrooms across the country.

A wide range of free lectures and activities draw visitors year-round, including mid-day presentations in the Coe Auditorium aimed at sharing the Center’s research, history, and expertise with the local community.

Just as important, though, is a strong sense of civic participation among many Center employees. Dozens volunteer to serve on local boards and organize beloved events, fundraisers, and other activities that are key to Cody's community identity.

John Gallagher, the Center's Information Technology Department Manager, is just one of the many people at the museum who give back to the community in important and often overlooked ways.

Gallagher has been instrumental in establishing mountain bike trails in and around Cody that rival anything riders might find in the West. He has served as President of the nonprofit Park County Pedalers group, working for years to develop bicycle facilities in the area.

The Beck Lake Bike Park includes jumps, a rolling pump track, thrilling agility runs and miles of single-track trails through the nearby foothills.



Center staff member John Gallagher has worked to improve numerous trails around Cody, Wyoming.

His work continues by organizing many dedicated volunteers of all ages to maintain and improve the park and trails.

"It is important for everyone to know their recreation infrastructure does not just happen without a lot of hard work and ongoing maintenance that often falls on the shoulders of a few volunteers," Gallagher said.

Once he gets a chance to enlist volunteers, they soon gain a sense of ownership and earned membership. Through Gallagher's efforts, not only does the project see improvement, but so does the community.

"If you have worked on a trail, you sure are going to take care of it in the future by staying off of it when it is wet, fixing an



Volunteers with the nonprofit Park County Pedalers perform maintenance on one of the many multipurpose single-track trails in the area.

erosion problem, or just picking up trash. Kind of like renting a car versus owning it," he said.

Gallagher is also a member of the Park County Recreation Collaborative Steering Committee. The group's volunteers work to develop recreation infrastructure designed to create points of access to wilderness areas throughout the Bighorn Basin. The Collaborative seeks to build bridges (literally), and create recreational opportunities within some of the world's most beautiful, yet sometimes hard-to-access public lands.

That includes years working to develop a system of multipurpose trails north of

Cody known as the Outlaw Trails.

"Trails make people healthier and happier, they make our town a better place to live, and they are an economic driver and diversification instrument," he said.

But Gallagher is just one example of the Center's positive reach. There are dozens more employees bringing positive change and sustained benefits to the community.

Conservator Beverly Perkins has the important job of collection conservation and restoration within the walls of the Center. Outside of work, Perkins is also the treasurer of the Absaroka Chapter of the Wyoming Archaeology Society and volunteers

at the Buffalo Bill Art Show, which strives to support established and emerging western artists, engage patrons of the arts, and enliven the Cody community with events that provide education and entertainment.

Terry Harley, the Center's Human Resources Director, donates much of her free time to organizations seeking to assist in clothing families in need of assistance in the Cody area. She also volunteers at Habitat for Humanity and Toys for Tots.

Emily Buckles, an Interpretive Specialist and Natural Science Educator at the Center, serves on the board of the Park County Nordic Ski Association and organizes free kids' cross-country ski programs. She is also a member of the Friends of Heart Mountain, a group that advises The Nature Conservancy on its outreach efforts surrounding the vast land preserve. And she serves on the District Literacy Team for Park County School District #6.

Susan Barnett, curator of the Whitney Western Art Museum, serves as the muse-

um's representative on the Cody Public Art Committee and the Buffalo Bill Art Show & Sale Art Selection Committee. She also occasionally volunteers to play music at the Cody Farmer's Market and sings alto in the Cody Community Choir.

Many other employees work with youth in the area, like Live Raptor Program Manager Melissa Hill, who volunteers for Cloverbuds, a group for children too young for membership in 4-H. Director of Revenue Bruce Sauers worked with Marketing and Public Relations Director Ken Straniere to develop Northwest College Day at the Center, opening doors to young adults to build key skills for their academic careers. Sauers also helps collect food for local emergency pantries.

Staff members from every department regularly host lectures or lead events around the community designed to share their special knowledge and expertise in a wide range of subjects.

A popular maxim, one often mistakenly

identified as a Greek proverb, states that "a society grows great when elders plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit."

By that measure, Buffalo Bill Cody's efforts at planting shade trees in Wyoming has grown into an admirable population of skilled and giving individuals. Though their mission at the Center is to tell the stories of the American West, their generosity and good works extend ever farther each year into the lives and well-being of thousands of friends and neighbors across the vibrant, growing community that bears Cody's name. Who could think of a more fitting tribute?



Mark Davis is the outdoors reporter for the Powell Tribune. He has worked previously as a reporter and photojournalist in Chicago and Omaha and enjoys hunting, fishing, birdwatching, and all outdoor sports.



Students visiting the Center as part of Northwest College Day stop by the lab at the Draper Natural History Museum.

BRANDING

SPRING

W
It's social,
practical,
and it's fun.

— MARY BUDD FLITNER



A rider at the Pitchfork Ranch sports a pair of well-traveled spurs and tassled chaps.



STORY & PHOTOS BY RUFFIN PREVOST

Each year, around the end of April or the beginning of May, a centuries-old tradition plays out on family ranches around the West. Spring brandings combine lots of hard work—and often a fair amount of fun—in a process that may look like controlled chaos, but is essential to a way of life that is as difficult as it is romanticized.

“What we get out of it is mainly a lot of work from friends and neighbors, and we like to reciprocate,” said Mary Budd Flitner, a cattle rancher and author who retired last year from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West’s Board of Trustees after more than two decades as an advisor to the Buffalo Bill Museum and, later, the McCracken Research Library.

“It’s social and practical and it’s fun,” said Flitner, who wrote a chapter about spring branding in *My Ranch, Too*, her memoir covering six decades of ranching with her husband Stan and their family in the remote and isolated community of Shell, Wyoming.

A typical spring branding has some of the same elements of a barn raising, where many hands make light work. Residents and workers from nearby ranches show up at a single ranch to help round up months-old calves from winter enclosures and brand them before they are turned out onto wider, open pastures.

All the calves are typically vaccinated, and males are often castrated as part of the branding, which usually also involves a few high jinks and shenanigans, followed by a sprawling potluck meal, and maybe even a cold beer or two. On a different day, a different ranch will host its own branding, and all the neighbors will pitch in again, returning the favor in an effort to get every calf branded.

“The purpose of it is identity,” Flitner said. “A brand is like a passport. That calf has a unique brand it will wear for life.”

A western tradition of cooperation & identity

ABOVE: Riders gather near a temporary corral at the Pitchfork Ranch, where calves await branding and vaccinations in spring 2020.

RIGHT: An impossibly cute ranch dog with a permanently curious eyebrow checks out a stranger at a 2020 spring branding.



Using a hot iron to burn a brand onto domesticated livestock is a process that dates back thousands of years. It is depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics, and ancient Romans branded animals as a part of a protective ritual.

In Wyoming and other parts of the West, a brand is required to sell a calf or cow, and it must be registered with the state Brand Inspector's Office, said Jeremy Johnston, the Center's Ernest J. Goppert Curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum.

The practice was especially important in the 1800s, when vast herds grazed across huge tracts of open range, intermingling on public land.

"Stockgrowers associations intended registered brands to protect member ranchers against cattle theft," Johnston said. "But in many cases, an honest rancher without a registered brand was mislabeled as a rustler by their competitors, sometimes resulting in an unjust execution."

"For them, the branding was an important business practice where they were claiming their property," he said. "Members of the associations were making sure they were getting their cattle marked and claimed, sometimes at the expense of people who were not."

After railroads began connecting the West in the late 1860s, independent ranchers were able to more easily get their cattle to market, and worked to take advantage of land acts that were designed to promote small farms and ranches, Johnston said.

The big cattle barons responded by consolidating land, grazing, and water rights, often requiring their workers to file a homestead claim and sign it over to their boss, he said.

After the devastating winter of 1886-87 nearly wiped out Wyoming's cattle industry, the state passed the Maverick Act, giving the Wyoming Stock Growers Association ownership of any unbranded cattle, further marginalizing nonmembers. Small ranchers were often falsely accused of rustling, and sometimes jailed or hung.

Tensions boiled over in the spring of 1892, in what became known as the Johnson County War. Hundreds of small, local ranchers banded together to take on a few dozen hitmen hired by



LEFT: A cowgirl holds her rope taut around a calf's neck as another cowgirl sets up to rope its heels during a 2020 spring branding at the Pitchfork Ranch.

BELOW: Lenox Baker, co-owner of the Pitchfork Ranch near Meeteetse, Wyoming, prepares to brand a calf in May 2020.



big cattle barons to kill the leaders of an upstart independent cattle association. The clash was one of the darkest in the history of range conflicts in the American West.

Among the wealthy ranchers suspected of funding violence against smaller operators was Count Otto Franc von Lichtenstein, a German-born nobleman who established the Pitchfork Ranch near Meeteetse, Wyoming, in 1879.

Franc was a powerful and politically connected rancher who had well-documented conflicts with local cowboys. While serving as a justice of the peace in 1894, Franc sentenced Meeteetse resident Butch Cassidy to prison for horse theft. Cassidy denied the charges and blamed what he said was his unfair treatment by Franc with steering him to a life of crime.

In 1903, Franc died at 55 from a gunshot wound under mysterious circumstances. The official story was that Franc accidentally shot himself in the chest while trying to retrieve his shotgun after crossing a barbed wire fence. Others

speculated that he met a violent end at the hands of one of the cowboys he had tangled with.

Ownership of Franc's ranch eventually passed in the early 1920s to Charles Belden, a photographer who had married into the family that bought the ranch after Franc died.

"In the 1920s, dude ranching was taking off, Western films were playing on the silver screens, and the working-class cowboy was seen as the leading American hero," Johnston said. "Belden was right in the middle of it, and was able to take wonderful shots of actual cowboys doing actual work."

Belden's photos of the Pitchfork Ranch were widely published, appearing in *National Geographic*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and even the cover of *Life*. Some were staged, and romanticized cowboys' lives and work. But they also often accurately portrayed the difficulties and dangers of ranching, Johnston said.

After a May 2020 spring branding,

current Pitchfork Ranch co-owner Lenox Baker led a tour of the cramped attic darkroom where Belden developed and printed his iconic images, many of which are now part of the McCracken Research Library's collections.

"It's amazing to think of all the photos that came to life here," said Baker, who retired as a heart surgeon in 2010 to live at the Pitchfork full-time with his wife, Fran.

Baker said he enjoyed the tradition of spring brandings, and always liked to help out when he could. He didn't hesitate to pick up a branding iron and get to work.

Despite the convivial nature of the gathering, a branding is serious business, with cowboys and cowgirls—and it's very much both at most brandings these days—working with professional focus to keep people and animals safe.

Flitner highlights some of the potential branding pitfalls in her book:

If we're fortunate, we have a lot of extra help on branding day, but some of the

helpers ride horses that haven't been ridden all winter; some are friends of friends, and they don't know our ways and we don't know theirs; and some are simply "over eager." If the helpers arrive with too much enthusiasm and not enough know-how, maybe bringing their dogs and their grandchildren, the action can get complicated, just keeping everyone out of the way.

For an operation like Flitner's Diamond Tail Ranch, which may have between 200-600 calves each spring, depending on the market and other factors, handling branding chores in a single day might be difficult or impossible without help from neighbors.

Other small ranches may only have a few dozen calves to brand, but the wider community still pitches in, Flitner said, because of the importance of the tradition.

As small family ranches are becoming harder to maintain, and new technologies like radio-frequency identification chips are being used more commonly, Johnston said he hopes spring brandings will endure.

"It's a great example of the collaborative nature of ranching that is often overlooked," Johnston said. "Everybody comes together, despite the popular image of the cowboy as a rugged individualist."

A good brand is an asset, said Flitner, whose Diamond Tail brand has remained unchanged since 1906, while her father's family's brand is the same as it was in the late 1800s.

"A branding is about getting work done, but also food, camaraderie, and definitely identity," Flitner said.

The tradition of spring branding imparts identity not just for each calf that bears the brand, but also for each ranch and for the West itself.



Ruffin Prevost is a freelance writer from Cody, Wyoming, and editor of Points West. He operates the Yellowstone Gate website and writes for Reuters News Agency.

A Green River Journey

PURSUING THE PERFECT VANTAGE POINT WITH ARTIST TONY FOSTER

BY KAREN BROOKS MCWHORTER

On May 20, 2023, the Whitney Western Art Museum debuts the special exhibition *Tony Foster: Watercolour Diaries from the Green River*. Coordinated in partnership with the artist and The Foster Museum, the exhibition includes 16 paintings of locations on the Green River, whose source is in Wyoming.

Often referenced as the headwaters of the Colorado River system, the Green River is a critical western waterway of ecological and cultural significance.

For 40 years, Tony Foster has created paintings while on extensive journeys to some of the world's wildest places. He often works at large scale, completing as much of his watercolors as possible in the field and never paints from photographs. He only finishes the paintings back in his studio in Cornwall, England.

His beautiful and highly detailed works include handwritten notes, and are mounted with "souvenirs" like small sketches, collected or purchased objects, fossils, or bits of maps, all relating to his personal experiences of the places he depicts, as well as their histories.

Foster made most of his Green River paintings between 2018 and 2022, inspired by several trips to the American West during that time. On the last of these expeditions, I accompanied the artist and a film crew into the Wind River Mountains in west-central Wyoming. Foster came to paint a watercolor of Squaretop Mountain, and the film crew

and I were there to offer him support and help document the project.

In mid-September of last year, our group gathered in Pinedale, Wyoming, at a popular campground near the outlet of Lower Green River Lake. That first evening out, Foster and I found ourselves several miles away from camp as the sun was setting, having tarried too long on the trail. I brought up the rear as Foster set a steady pace.

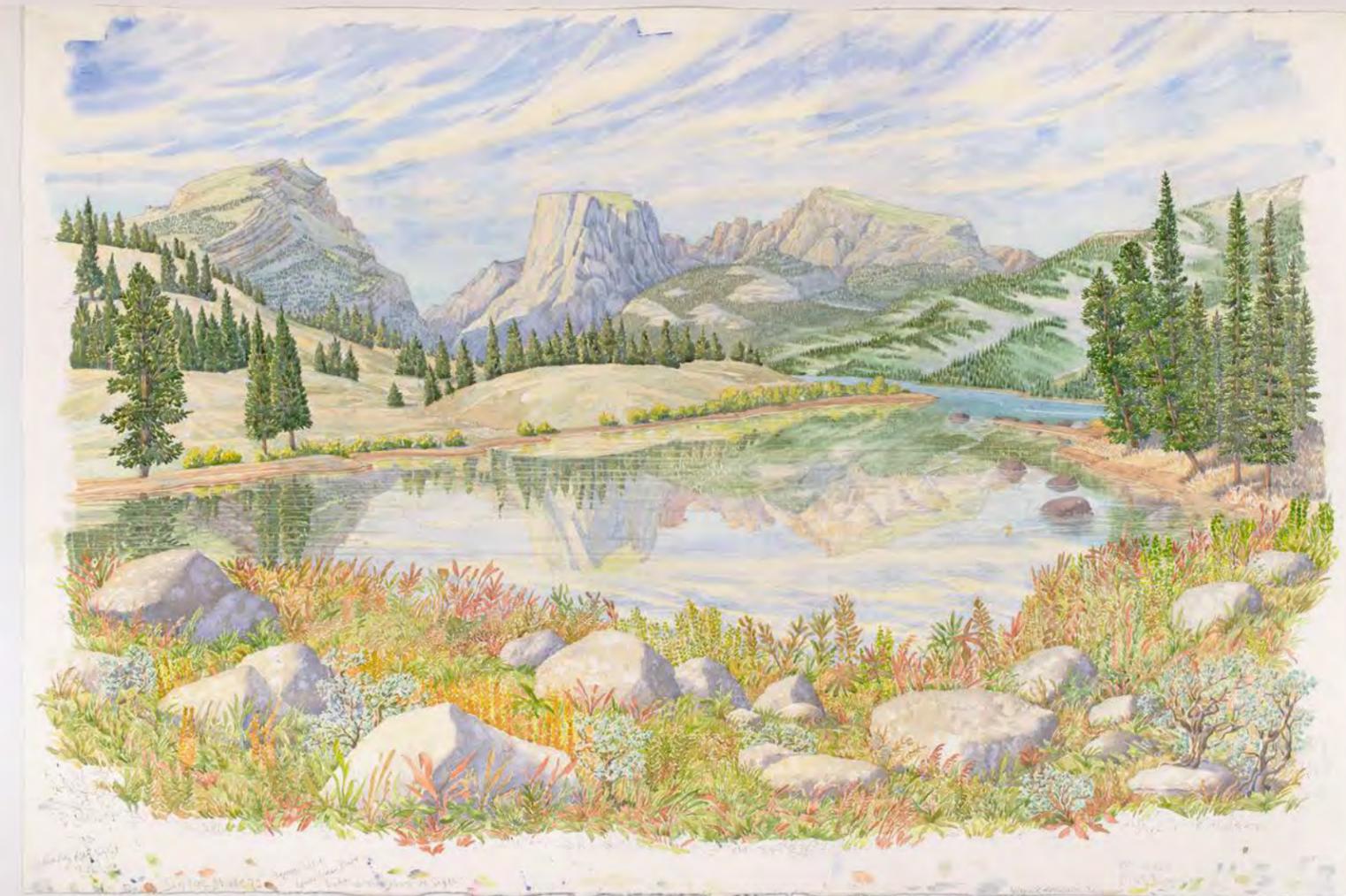
We kept conversation to a minimum, working hard to walk fast as the day darkened. Our boots padded rhythmically, and our hiking poles clicked against rocks. We heard little else. Atypically, there was none of Wyoming's famous gusting wind, just a light breeze carrying intermittent birdsong.

The setting sun spurred us on, but also compelled repeated breaks to appreciate the valley's beauty. Turning around, we faced Squaretop. From that northerly vantage point, it was framed by the timbered slopes of closer peaks. The mountain's iconic, roughly rectangular profile was awash on its west face with a warm, peachy glow. Its east side and lower reaches were cast in pale lavender shadow. Haze from forest fires in nearby states had softened the palette to pastels.

As we approached the boundary of the Bridger Wilderness, we could see reflections of Squaretop and the surrounding mountains in Lower Green River Lake. The cloudless sky was azure blue, but fading fast. We made it back to camp with just enough light to set up a simple field kitchen, and we



LEFT: Tony Foster (b. 1946, Lincolnshire, England). *From Lower Green River Lake Looking South South East*, 2022. Graphite and watercolour on paper, with glass bead necklace by Chastity Teton, map, 45 1/2 x 58 1/2 inches. RIGHT: Artist Tony Foster on the trail in the Wind River Mountains with Squaretop in the background, September 2022. Photograph courtesy of the author.



prepared rehydrated backpackers' meals for dinner.

Squaretop stands sentry near the source of the Green, and represents the origin of the river in Foster's series. The true source can be traced to snow fields and glaciers along the Continental Divide. In those highest elevations, the runoff lacks much definition until it accumulates in small lakes that lie above 10,000 feet in elevation. It then drops into Three Forks Park, where it is fed by other creeks. There, the river garners scale and substance until it empties into Upper and Lower Green River Lakes.

We raced sunset that evening because we lost track of time seeking the ideal site from which Foster could paint Squaretop. Before the trip, most in our group thought the perfect view might be from the shores of Upper Green River Lake, based on the many

photographs people take from that spot. To vet the majority opinion, Foster gamely hiked there with us. Emerging from dense woods, we found a stunning vista—knee-high golden grasses ran up to the water's edge. Across the lake and behind a handful of hills, Squaretop rose like an imposing citadel. As a testament to the scene's beauty, a young couple was having their engagement photographs taken there. In part because of its popularity, the spot was less than appealing to Foster. Also, as a scene, it lacked complexity for pictorial composition. It is a straightforward view, with Squaretop at the center overpowering its surroundings.

"Nobody else has ever managed to find me a subject, no matter how hard they've tried," Foster said with a smile as we sat around the campfire that night.

When we first arrived at our campground

on Lower Green River Lake, Foster had walked around the northern shore and was surprised to quickly find a compelling site for his easel. From the Lower Lake's outlet, Squaretop appears nestled between peaks of nearly equal size. Foster later confessed he was "suspicious" about having "hit on the right thing" so quickly. He cited another experience when it took him 16 days to settle on the right spot from which to paint the Grand Canyon.

Foster said that for him, site selection hinges on gut reaction, but also has as much to do with "formal requirements of a landscape painting as anything," especially for larger works. One needn't always follow the rules, though. "I don't," Foster said, "but there are certain circumstances where you just look at something—you know that's going to work."



Foster's chosen site for his Squaretop painting. Photograph courtesy of the author.

“There are certain circumstances where you just look at something—you know that's going to work.”

— TONY FOSTER



Foster discusses his hopes for the exhibition around the campfire. Photograph © TFJ LLC.



Foster at work, sketching the scene and colors for reference. Photograph courtesy of the author.

Perhaps as impressive as Foster's artistic eye and instinct was his sparse *plein air* painting gear. He has honed his field kit to just the essentials: one tiny paint box, one folding drawing board with the back routed out to reduce weight, a small plastic deli container lid to use as a mixing tray, and several brushes.

For his Squaretop painting, he unfurled a large piece of paper from an aluminum tube, clamping it to the drawing board with binder clips. He sat on a simple folding stool and got to work, sketching out the scene swiftly and skillfully. When he retired for the night, he replaced the painting with a simple, handwritten note: "Artist at work. Please leave alone. Thanks, Tony Foster."

Armed with the experiences of many wilderness adventures, Foster arrived at the trailhead of this latest journey imminently prepared yet remarkably flexible, and guided by an earnest hope to inspire people to think about "the absolute exquisite complexity and interest" of the places he visits.

On our last night together in the Winds, as sparks from a crackling fire dissipated into the starry sky, we discussed our hopes for the exhibition.

I wanted the project to inspire appreciation for a unique Wyoming wilderness area, and to introduce visitors to Foster's passion, talent, and vision—and his ability to connect us with nature.

Foster said that this journey, as part of

his life's work, was "about looking at things in depth and thinking about them over a long period, and studying them, and trying to convey the sense of what it's actually like to sit in a place... absorbing the place."

When so many of us have become increasingly disassociated with the natural world, and we are driven to look and think quickly instead of deliberately, Foster's work encourages us to slow down and recognize, thoughtfully, the value of wild places like the Green River. His work invites our curiosity about what makes his landscape subjects unique, and why we should care.

Watercolour Diaries from the Green River runs concurrently with another special exhibition, *Alfred Jacob Miller: Revisiting the Rendezvous — in Scotland and Today*, coordinated by the Buffalo Bill Center of the West and the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art. Both of these shows invite visitors to experience Wyoming's Green River through art, artifacts, and stories.



Karen Brooks McWhorter is Director of Curatorial, Education, and Museum Services for the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, and co-curator of Tony Foster: Watercolour Diaries from the Green River.

Remembering Jim Nielson

Parallel to the breezeway connecting the main entryway of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West and the Plains Indian Museum, a charming, tucked-away outdoor feature offers visitors a quiet spot for a moment of reflection and calm. You might miss it if you aren't looking for it, but the dependable, unassuming appeal of the James E. Nielson Water Garden is an apt metaphor for its namesake.



James E. "Jim" Nielson joined the Center's Board of Trustees in 1973, and served continuously and faithfully for 49 years, one of the longest tenures of any Board member. He died in November at 91, and a February Board resolution declared that it was "all but impossible to

find, in the history of this institution or the town of Cody, Wyoming, a single individual who has loved both entities more, or done more to support each of them, while also showing such consistent kindness, humility, openness, benevolence, and good cheer."

Rebecca West, Executive Director of the Center, recalled Nielson as "a kind and caring individual, and a foundational pillar of his community for decades."

"When he supported a project or an idea, he would see it through with his determined, quiet-but-firm approach," West said. "You never had to guess what Jim wanted or was thinking—he was a great communicator. It has been an honor working with Jim, and especially rewarding to share laughs, memories, and to watch him enjoy life with his wife Anne and his family."

Born in Cardston, Alberta, Canada, in 1931, Nielson moved to Cody as a young boy. He graduated Cody High School in 1949, with 48 other classmates who remained lifelong friends. He attended Cranbrook School and the University of Wyoming with fellow Trustee and high school classmate and friend Alan K. Simpson. When Nielson attempted to resign from the Center's Board in 2016, his old friend rejected his resignation letter, saying Nielson's presence was too vital to let him go.

Nielson said in a 2008 interview that his father, Glenn, gave him some good advice that has served him well.

"If you're going to pull a fast deal, you better make it a good one, because you'll have to live on it the rest of your life," Nielson recalls his father telling him. "He really believed strongly that you have to treat people fairly and honestly."

That lesson guided Nielson for decades as he worked as a leading executive in the regional energy industry, serving as a cornerstone of the local oil and gas economy.

Along with his wife, Anne Young, Jim had a longstanding desire to share the Center's collections and expertise far and wide. This included helping to fund the acquisition of the Paul Dyck Plains Indian Buffalo Culture Collection, and sponsoring numerous exhibitions and programs, including: *Invisible Boundaries: Exploring Yellowstone's Great Animal Migrations*; *Albert Bierstadt: Witness to a Changing West*; the Peter Hassrick Public Programs fund; and the upcoming *Alfred Jacob Miller: Revisiting the Rendezvous—in Scotland and Today*.

Nielson supported youth education and outdoor activities in the area, playing a key role in reviving the Sleeping Giant ski area.

"Cody is a good place to raise a family," he said. "Your children can't disappear in a crowd, and that makes them think twice about something before they do it."

"I also think we need to have things for older people to do. You shouldn't stop learning, and older people are useful. We need to find things for them to do," he said.

That wasn't a problem for Nielson, who stayed active and continued to learn and lead into his 90s, making it difficult to surprise or stump him on Cody or museum matters.

But after extensive efforts at secrecy, Nielson was clearly delighted and surprised at the June 2019 dedication of the water garden created and named in his honor. A fitting tribute, the garden, like Nielson himself, is quiet and persistent, an ever-present and tranquil reminder of the power of steady, stable, and certain perseverance.



FUNDRAISING PRIORITIES

BY CAROLYN WILLIAMS

When I meet with our donors, I'm often asked what our current fundraising priorities are at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. Here's where our efforts will be focused for the next couple of years:

General Operations

It doesn't sound very exciting, but this supports everything we do! Our general operations budget is more than \$11 million, and each year we must raise about 40 percent of that amount from members and donors, which comes to about \$4.5 million. Your gift to general operations goes to wherever it's needed most.

Vault Storage

Every museum needs a safe place to store objects that aren't currently on display. Called "vaults," these rooms must be secure, have fire protection, and be climate-controlled. Purpose-made, metal, smoke- and water-resistant cabinets that can efficiently store many objects, often of various sizes, are integral to vault design.

Research and planning for a proposed Collections Storage Project is underway to provide longevity and access to the objects and archives at the heart of the organization.

If the project moves forward, collections currently stored in substandard vaults would be relocated to a large, newly created vault. Extra-large and odd-sized objects from all of our museums also would be moved to this space. Storage cabinets not up to standard would be replaced, along with the large, rolling racks on which wall art is hung.

Unrestricted Endowment

We currently raise funds for about 40 percent of our budget each year. Our endowment payout contributes less than 25 percent to our annual budget, quite a bit less than for many other top museums. Having to raise so much each year just to keep the doors open is not sustainable. We must increase our endowment by tens of millions of dollars over the next several years to increase the percentage of the budget it can cover each year.

A larger endowment would secure the future of the Buffalo Bill Center of the

West. We would be better equipped to ride out economic downturns, pandemics, natural disasters, and other unpredictable events. Not having to worry about fundraising for current-year operations would give us the capacity to fundraise for more innovative and exciting projects that enable us to better tell the stories of the West.

Air Handlers and Other Infrastructure

We have once again applied for grants to help us with more major infrastructure projects. Like our recent award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, these grants will likely require matching funds from donors. Stay tuned.

Estate gifts are an excellent way to contribute to the endowment. Most people are able to make much larger gifts to charity through their estates than they are able to during their lifetime. If you would like to preserve the history of the iconic American West long after we've all ridden into the sunset, contact me at 307-578-4013 or carolynrw@centerofthewest.org.



Free Kids' Admission

Dozens of donors and friends of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West have banded together as part of WyoGives in July 2022 to generously fund free admission for the youth of Park County, Wyoming. Kids 6-17 plus one accompanying adult get free admission to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. Kids 5 and younger are always free. Many Park County youth only get to visit the Center during school field trips. Thanks to our donors, kids now have the opportunity to come back with their families and explore our collections freely.

This one-year pilot program was launched on September 1, 2022. Gifts given during the annual WyoGives campaign were matched with donations from The Homestead Foundation/John and Meredith Sullivan, the Thomas & Elizabeth Grainger Family Charitable Fund, and the Hughes Charitable Foundation.

Please share the good news with your neighbors and friends.

Cody Culture Club

Cody Culture Club events are \$20 per person, with ticket packages available. Events include a lecture along with a reception featuring drinks and light appetizers. Space is limited so reserve your spot early by clicking here. Call 307-578-4008 to learn more.

For our April Cody Culture Club event, Plains Indian Museum Curator, Gordon Ambrosino, discusses his past and current research, collaborative exhibition development with Native communities, repatriation work and the collective impact on his upcoming projects at the Center. Living Land: Insights on Memory, Society, and Sacred Space with Dr. Gordon Ambrosino starts at 5:30 p.m. April 13, 2023.

Draper Field Trips

What caused the Chugwater formation to turn bright red? Why is Heart Mountain a geologic wonder and anomaly? Was the Bighorn Basin underwater? Adults are invited to take a field trip with the Draper Natural History Museum this summer and discover the answers to all these questions and more. You may have seen the Draper Natural History Museum's new web-series, Layers with Larry on the Draper's YouTube channel. But did you know that the Draper is developing a series of geology field trips in the Bighorn Basin expected to launch this summer?

Leave the little ones at home, this adventure is for adults! Be on the lookout for an opportunity to take a tour with local archaeologist Larry Todd and a few special guests on half-day adventures in Wyoming's Bighorn Basin. Follow the Draper on Facebook and Instagram @DraperMuseum to stay up to date.

"Tours & Toddlies" Events

As part of our exclusive "Tours and Toddlies" series, enjoy an engaging program led by a curatorial expert followed by questions and answers, charcuterie, and drinks. Space is limited.

ed, so buy your ticket today! Events are \$60 per person; \$55 for Center of the West members.
April 21: Whitney Western Art Museum
May 12: Draper Museum Raptor Experience

Coffee & Curators: Cody Firearms Museum

Free for members, our Coffee & Curators events invite members to enjoy coffee, refreshments, and the company of other members as one of the Center of the West's curators speaks on a topic inspired by the Center's permanent collections.

Our April program features the Cody Firearms Museum, from 10-11:30 a.m. on April 1.

Space for this members event is limited and reservations are required. Call 307-578-4008 or e-mail us to reserve your seat. Meet us at the main entrance — or stay tuned for information on how to attend virtually if you prefer.

Upcoming Coffee & Curators events:

- May 6:** Whitney Western Art Museum
- June 3:** Draper Natural History Museum
- August 5:** McCracken Research Library
- October 7:** Buffalo Bill Museum
- November 4:** Plains Indian Museum



Wyoming Baroque: Heroes and Heroines

Join us for an amazing evening with a delicious Italian dinner followed by a moving concert by Wyoming Baroque on Wednesday, March 29. This Heroes and Heroines performance is part of the group's regional tour of Montana and Wyoming.

Late 17th and early 18th century Baroque composers often evoked legendary figures from ancient Greece and classical literature to express their musical passion. Heroes and Heroines emulates that tradition with music inspired by literary heroes like Don Quix-

ote and Hercules, and celebrates Venetian masters Antonio Vivaldi as well as Barbara Strozzi, who had a successful career as a composer in the early 18th century when it was rare for women to do so.

Tickets for Wyoming Baroque: Heroes and Heroines are \$75 per person for non-members and \$65 per person for Center of the West members. Doors open for the evening at 5:30, dinner is at 6:00 and the concert starts at 7:00. Purchase tickets online at tickets.centerofthewest.org.



CHARLES BELDEN CAPTURES 'RUSTLERS' BRANDING A CALF



While the name Charles Belden may not ring a bell for many people, his photographs are likely to. Belden's widely published black and white images of cowboys working in rugged Wyoming landscapes have become iconic, living on in the public imagination long after they first appeared, roughly between 1915-1940.

Belden lived and took photographs during that time at the Pitchfork Ranch, a sprawling outpost near Meeteetse, Wyoming, first established in 1879 by a German-born nobleman named Count Otto Franc von Lichtenstein.

After Franc's death in 1903, the Pitchfork was bought by L.G. Phelps, a Montana land baron. His son, Eugene, was friends with Belden. The younger Phelps joined Belden on a 1909 tour through Europe and Russia, and Belden brought along a Zeiss Minimum Paltmos camera, capturing images on 4-by-5-inch glass plates.

Belden later visited the Pitchfork and took a liking to the landscape, its animals, and the cowboy lifestyle. He also had an eye for Eugene's sister, Frances. They married in 1913 and lived on the ranch the following year.

By 1915, the Pitchfork expanded into dude ranching operations, and Belden began using his photography to promote the property. His photos appeared in *National Geographic*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and even the cover of *Life*.

Belden was as adept at self-promotion as he was at "framing" an amazing tableau that captured the romantic life of cowboys on the Pitchfork. He was known to take artistic license with his

shots, sometimes compositing images in the darkroom printing process.

But his photos also managed to convey many core truths about life in the West that the American public and others around the world knew little or nothing about. Belden was serious, sincere, and skilled at conveying the realities of ranch work like brandings and roundups.

Belden captured this image on or near the Pitchfork in the 1930s, one of thousands in the McCracken Research Library's collections, and available online at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West's website. It purports to show cattle rustlers branding a calf in the mountains.

A typed notation on the back of the print written by Belden's daughter, Margot Belden Todd, states:

This is the way the cattle thieves used to work. In the early days of the cattle business, the rustlers would drive off unbranded cattle into some rough mountain pocket, and there brand them, often using a ring heated in a sagebrush fire and held between two green willow sticks as shown here. This would relieve them of the necessity of carrying a cumbersome branding iron.

It's almost certain Belden used a couple of Pitchfork cowboys to demonstrate the technique, rather than stumbling upon—and photographing—a pair of rustlers in the act.

But like many of Belden's photos, the image functions as a visual short story, or any other good work of fiction, revealing immutable truths about its creator's world and worldview that are often more compelling than a strictly factual accounting.



HOW HE GOT THAT SHOT



POINT YOUR PHONE'S CAMERA AT THIS CODE
 to browse and search more than 2,500 Charles Belden photos in the McCracken Research Library's Digital Collections

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Need not be present to win. Any applicable taxes and fees are the responsibility of the winner. Void where prohibited by law. Must be 18 or older to enter. Vehicle is raffled as-is and must be collected within 30 days of the drawing at the winner's expense. Raffle tickets are not tax deductible. May not be exchanged for cash.