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Exploring Montana: Spring 2024

Where Nature, History, and Community Converge

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Celebrating 18 Years of Back to the Future:

A Journey Through Time with Our Montana!



Our Montana had the pleasure of celebrating a significant milestone - the 18th anniversary of our award-winning Back to the Future program.

This event marked not only a celebration of the program's longevity but also a tribute to the dedicated volunteers and coordinators who have contributed to its success over the years.

Back to the Future is more than just a program; it's a journey through time, aimed at igniting a passion for history, adventure, and exploration in young minds across our community. Since its inception 18 years ago, the program has been instrumental in shaping the way 12,000 of our youth view history through hands-on experience.

The recent celebration held on April 4th was a testament to the impact of Back to the Future. Hosted at Our Montana's office in the Billings Community Foundation Building, the event brought together volunteers, coordinators, and supporters to commemorate the program's achievements and honor its legacy.

One of the highlights was the recognition of two Trail Blazers of the program who have led the program since its inception-- Judy Foster and John Pulasky. Judy's retirement after 18 years of dedicated service was met with heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for her unwavering commitment to the program's mission for almost two decades. Similarly, John's contributions were acknowledged with admiration and respect, underscoring his leadership in taking the program from an idea to an award-winning program and his commitment to continue the program for years to come.

John Pulasky
Back to the Future
Coordinator

**Marlene
Saunders**
Historical Research
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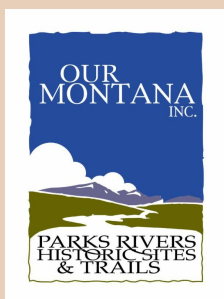
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Researcher

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Past Chair

Dave Walzenried
Restoration and
Improvement
Projects

Ross Wapels
Trail Coordination &
River Monitoring

Don Woerner
Buffalo Restoration



As volunteers gathered to share memories and reflect on the program's impact, there was a palpable sense of camaraderie and pride in what Back to the Future has accomplished over the years. The interactive learning experiences have left an indelible mark on the lives of countless students, inspiring them to embrace the past while looking towards the future. And where better to make this happen than in a college setting as BTFF is always hosted at City College.

The celebration also served as an opportunity to express gratitude to all those who have supported Back to the Future throughout its journey. Whether through volunteerism, sponsorship, or advocacy, each individual has played a vital role in ensuring the program's continued success.

Cheers to 18 years of Back to the Future, and here's to many more adventures ahead!



Our Montana Program Updates!

Our Montana Board Member Ralph Saunders Honored with the 2024 Montana Heritage Keeper Award

The Montana Historical Society (MTHS) has announced Ralph Saunders, a distinguished board member of Our Montana, as the recipient of the 2024 Montana Heritage Keeper Award. This prestigious accolade is granted annually by the MTHS Board of Trustees to

individuals who have made significant contributions to the preservation and promotion of Montana's rich history and heritage.

Ralph Saunders has been recognized for his exceptional efforts in uncovering and interpreting historical sites and events across the state. His work has played a crucial role in enhancing public understanding and appreciation of Montana's historical landscape, contributing significantly to the mission of Our Montana.

The decision to honor Mr. Saunders followed a robust selection process, with nominations received from various corners of the state. His nomination highlighted his remarkable achievements and steadfast dedication to historical preservation.



Mr. Saunders will be formally recognized at a special ceremony, with the details of the time and date to be announced.

Laura Marsh, a staff member at the Montana Historical Society, will coordinate with Mr. Saunders to finalize the arrangements for this celebratory event. Additionally, his contributions will be acknowledged at the Society's annual Montana History Conference, where his efforts will be showcased to the broader community.

Molly Kruckenberg, Director of the Montana Historical Society, expressed the board's enthusiasm about Mr. Saunders' selection: "We are delighted and honored to recognize Ralph Saunders as this year's recipient of the Montana Heritage Keeper Award. His contributions have not only preserved but also illuminated the narrative of our state's past. We look forward to celebrating his outstanding work."

Our Montana extends their heartfelt congratulations to Ralph Saunders, thanking him for his enduring commitment and impact on Montana's historical preservation.

In a notable mention, this award marks the second time an Our Montana board member has been honored with the prestigious Montana Heritage Keeper Award. Howard Boggess, a respected past board member, received this accolade approximately ten years ago. This recognition underscores the enduring impact of Our Montana's leadership, both current and former, in preserving and promoting the rich historical legacy of our state.

Significant Conservation Victory: Our Montana Celebrates Lower Yellowstone Land Acquisition Success

We are thrilled to announce a significant milestone

in conservation efforts along the Lower Yellowstone River—the acquisition of the 328-acre Wildcat Bend Wildlife Management Area. This vital project was made possible in part by the dedicated advocacy of Our Montana board member, Mike Penfold.

Mike played a crucial role in this achievement by producing an informative video and presenting it to the Lower Yellowstone committee, which helped gain the necessary support for this initiative. His efforts culminated in a favorable decision from the Montana Land Board, marking a triumph for public access and wildlife habitat preservation.



This new area, located east of Forsyth, will enhance the habitat for various wildlife species and provide Montanans with increased access for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. We are proud to recognize Mike's pivotal contribution to this project and look forward to seeing more initiatives like this come to fruition.

For more details on this exciting development, [Click Here](#).

Trail Expansion in Billings: *A New Chapter for the Marathon Loop*



In Billings, Montana, a significant development is underway that promises to enhance outdoor recreation and connectivity across the city. The Marathon Loop, a planned 26.11-mile multiuse trail encircling Billings, is set to complete a crucial segment along the scenic Yellowstone River. This development is largely thanks to the collaborative efforts between the Billings Chamber of Commerce Trails Committee, key stakeholders like the KOA Campground, and notable community board member Ross Waples..

The trail aims to provide a continuous, off-street path that circles the city,

Our Montana Partners with Conservation Elders to Preserve Wild Lands

Our Montana recently hosted the Montana Conservation Elders, an organization dedicated to the preservation of wild lands. This group is distinguished by its decades-long commitment to protecting natural areas and engaging Montana youth in outdoor activities. Our Montana has maintained a long-standing engagement with key federal agencies, including the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, which have been instrumental in developing conservation plans for the public lands in the Pryor Mountains.

These plans acknowledge the Pryors as regions that fulfill the natural criteria for formal designation within the American Wilderness System. To deepen understanding of this diverse ecosystem, the Wilderness Leaders, including Our Montana's representatives, received an in-depth briefing from Dick Walton. This was followed by a comprehensive field tour of the Pryor Mountains, providing firsthand insight into the unique ecological attributes of the area.

linking various neighborhoods and promoting both recreational and commuter biking and walking. Currently, about 68% of the Marathon Loop is complete, featuring sections like the Shiloh Trail, Swords Park Trail, Jim Dutcher Trail, and Riverfront Park.

The ongoing negotiations for a right-of-way through the KOA Campground, represent a pivotal breakthrough. This cooperation could soon resolve one of the last major barriers to completing the loop, enhancing access to the Yellowstone River and connecting additional recreational spaces throughout Billings.



Standing above Vermillion Valley in the Pryor Mountains. From left to right: Chuck and Jerry Jenson, Greg Schatz and Debra, Frank Vitale, Roy Jacobs, Lou Bruno, Joan Montagne, Mike Penfold, Wayne Chamberlin, Teddy Row, Cliff Montagne.

Our Montana Prepares for a Field Camp on the Crow Reservation

Pioneering work will be done this summer to accurately map the location of the Bozeman Trail through the Crow Reservation. Board Member Ralph Saunders has completed his “forensic” mapping work on the trail from the Bighorn River to Virginia City.

The trail work on the Crow Reservation will be enhanced by drone imaging done by Our Montana supporter Ryan Willett. The field work will also have the expert assistance of Bill Yellowtail, a Crow leader, rancher, and keenly interested in Crow history. Bill Yellowtail has traveled over much of the landscape on horseback.



Ralph Saunders, Bill Brian, Ryan Willett, Bill Yellowtail, and Becky Kallevig on the Bozeman Trail, near Pass Creek, Montana.

Heritage and Preservation:

Coulson Boothill Cemetery Park

Reviving History: *The Restoration and Reimagining of Coulson (Boothill) Cemetery Park*

Nestled at the intersection of Aronson Avenue and Swords Lane near MetraPark, the Coulson Cemetery Park, commonly known as Boothill Cemetery, offers a two-acre glimpse into the turbulent past of Billings' predecessor, the town of Coulson. Named after the

The Place Where the White Horse Went Down: A Historic Sign's Journey and Future

Coulson Packet Line, a steamboat operation disrupted by railroad competition in the mid-1800s, this hilltop parcel holds the secrets of between 130 and 150 souls, many of whom lived and died during Coulson's fleeting boom from 1877 to 1882.

The history of those interred, shrouded in mystery and often marked only by assumed names, tells tales of violent ends and unclaimed bodies. The first to be buried were Klint Dills and Milton Summer, trappers who fell to Nez Perce warriors on July 13, 1877. The final burial occurred in 1884, ending the cemetery's active use. The site, maintained for a time by I. D. O'Donnell who later bequeathed it to the City of Billings in 1929, features a striking rock and mortar obelisk erected in 1922 bearing the inscription "Died, 1877-1882."

Despite its historical significance, the park has faced challenges over the years, including potential disturbances during roadway construction and the replacement of original markers with temporary crosses during a Boy Scout project in the mid-1970s. In a bid to better define and protect the gravesites, a 2019 ground-penetrating imaging project by Montana State University Billings students under Professor Thomas Rust re-identified many burial locations.

Today, an initiative led by Dave Wanzonried and the Friends of Coulson (Boothill) Cemetery Park, in partnership with the Billings Community Foundation, Our Montana, and the Billings Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Department, aims to restore, upgrade, and maintain the park while preserving its rustic character. Efforts include the installation of formal entry signage, and the construction of a modest interpretive center using the existing Boothill sign base as a cornerstone.

Plans also include enhancing visitor engagement through traditional informational panels and modern technologies like QR codes, which will provide access to a rich database of stories and historical data about the area. These updates promise a more



Situated near MetraPark, the Coulson Boothill Cemetery Park has long been home to a historic sign that has sparked curiosity and reverence among those who visit. The sign, which stood there until August 2023, commemorates a poignant tale of self-sacrifice according to Crow Tribe oral history.

The original placement of the sign at the cemetery remains shrouded in mystery. The act of self-sacrifice it commemorates is believed to have occurred near the MetraPark, approximately a half-mile from its previous location. The area around the arena, notably the cliff mentioned in the story, underwent significant alterations during its construction, further complicating the sign's historical context.

In response to the need for a more fitting location that honors both the sign's significance and its historical accuracy, the Friends of Coulson Boothill Cemetery Park, under the leadership of Dave Wanzonried, arranged to relocate the sign. This initiative is part of a broader effort to restore, improve, and upgrade the Coulson Boothill Cemetery Park.

In January 2024, the Yellowstone County Commission approved placing the sign at the Earl Guss Park on Bench Boulevard, just east of the First Interstate Arena. Plans call for its installation to be

respectful and educational experience for those visiting the park, ensuring the legacies of those interred are honored appropriately.

The project is financially supported through donations made to and managed by the Billings Community Foundation, ensuring all contributions are tax-deductible. The community's involvement is crucial to bringing these plans to fruition, celebrating Coulson's unique history at the crossroads of ancient trails and epic historic events.

completed by the middle of May 2024.

The collaboration between the Friends of Coulson Boothill Cemetery Park, the Crow Tribe Historic Preservation Office, and local authorities underscores a community-driven effort to preserve and respect the rich tapestry of local history. As these plans move forward, the sign is set to continue its role as a beacon of cultural heritage and historical reflection at its new home.



Spotlight Videos

Explore Our Montana's Rich Programming on Community 7 Television

Exploring the Yellowstone River and Parks Association with Our Montana



Join Mike Penfold and Bob Mackin, President of the Yellowstone River and Parks Association (YRPA), in this enlightening episode of Our Montana. Learn more about the expansive role of YRPA in managing and enhancing parks and recreational areas, including the scenic Dover Park. This episode provides a deeper understanding of the efforts to preserve and enhance these vital community spaces along the Yellowstone River and beyond.

Watch the Episode Now!

[Click Here](#) to watch the full episode, recorded on April 5, 2024, on Community 7 Television.

Welcome to Our Montana's showcase on **Community 7** Television, where we bring the spirit and stories of Montana directly to your screens. Through engaging interviews and compelling storytelling, we celebrate the cultural, historical, and environmental richness of our state.

Access Our Extensive Archive

Interested in more? You can access Our Montana's entire library of past programming on Community 7 Television, providing a treasure trove of content that spans several years.

Discover the Billings Community Foundation on Our Montana



Discover how you can contribute to your community in this latest episode of Our Montana. Join Mike Penfold as he interviews Zack Terakedis, Executive Director of the Billings Community Foundation. Learn about the foundation's goals, its impactful initiatives, and how you can get involved to make a significant difference locally.

Watch the Interview Now!

Get inspired to support community efforts. [Click Here](#) to watch the full interview with Zack Terakedis, recorded on April 25, 2024, and discover more about the pivotal role of the Billings Community Foundation in community development.

Whether you're interested in learning more about local arts, history, or environmental initiatives, there's something for everyone in our extensive archive. Visit [Our Montana on Community 7](#) to explore all our programs.

Join Us in Building Community Through Connection

Our ongoing partnership with Community 7 Television reflects our commitment to building community through communication. By providing access to a wide variety of programming, we help showcase the best of Billings and Montana to our diverse community audience. Don't miss out—tune in to discover new stories or revisit old favorites!

Celebrating Montana

Show your love for our Treasured State

Discover the Enhanced Explore Yellowstone River App!

Discover More on Our Digital Platform!



Experience an even more immersive adventure with our updated Explore the Yellowstone River App! Our team has worked tirelessly to bring you exciting new features and enhancements, elevating your exploration of this majestic river

The **Android** version has received a significant upgrade, offering smoother navigation and improved functionality. To enjoy these enhancements, we kindly ask Android users to delete the old app and download the new version from the Google Play Store. Don't worry, the Apple version remains unchanged for iPhone users

Join us on this enhanced journey along the Yellowstone River. Download the Explore the Yellowstone River App today and embark on your next adventure!

Our Montana's Mission

Promoting
Stewardship and
Enjoyment of
Montana's,
Natural, Historic
and Recreational
Resources

Looking to delve deeper into Our Montana's initiatives and projects? Look no further than our revamped digital platform, OurMontana.org!

Our website serves as a treasure trove of information, offering everything from captivating historical insights to thought-provoking interviews.

Whether you're seeking the latest updates on our endeavors or simply eager to explore Montana's rich culture, our website has something for everyone.

So, if you haven't already, be sure to pay a visit to OurMontana.org today. Join us on our digital journey as we celebrate the beauty and vibrancy of Montana!

OurMontana.org.

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Our Montana is a license plate for ALL Montanans! Available NOW at your local licensing office. Funds help the organization work to preserve the scenic, historic, archaeological, scientific, recreational, and natural resources of Montana.

Our Montana, Inc.

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