

NOTABLE NEIGHBORS

By The Custodians of Conventional Wisdom

Lyons is a town that's more like a neighborhood.

Lyons folk hike the same trails, hang out in the same parks and cheer together for local teams. We say "hi" at the local coffee shops and when we pick up mail at the Post Office each day. We run into each other at festivals and concerts, at church and other town gatherings. We learn a great deal about each other through encounter and observation. As in most small towns, acquired knowledge is then enriched by a bit of well-intended speculation. Emerging from the limitations of rigid fact to a more flexible and open-ended state, our knowledge evolves into what is loosely termed "Conventional Wisdom."

So what happened over a cup of coffee one morning?

Five business owners (and known custodians of Conventional Wisdom) were discussing the fact that some of our neighbors are really notable, if not outright famous. True, there are no Nobel Prize winners, or even nominees, living here, but we secretly suspect the four who reside down the road in Boulder would rather live in Lyons. Thinking along those lines that February morning, we began to doubt any American town of 1800 residents has the kind of High Achievers that have become our neighbors. It was then easy to decide that this heretofore unnoticed characteristic deserves a page in the Lyons Chamber of Commerce Guide.

This is that page.

Not to put too fine a point on the obvious, but writing this is a team effort. We're not reporters or biographers or even fact checkers. Moreover, we don't want to work too hard at the task. So we decided to go with Conventional Wisdom. It nicely describes people we're proud to call our Notable Neighbors. What follows is 95% factual, give or take a bit. But it's our truth, and we're stickin' with it!

Our Neighbors

As a young man, one neighbor held summer jobs ranching and hard-rock mining, both trades being common to our town's history. In time, he traded pickax and branding iron for the pen, became a wordsmith and the long-serving editor of both *The Smithsonian* and *Natural History* magazines. He is the author of hundreds of articles and nearly 50 books, both fiction and nonfiction. Bookending an amazing couple (pun noted) is his wife and partner, a journalist and *National Geographic* photographer with a worldwide lens. She not only coauthored several books with her husband and provided the award winning photographs that adorn them, she wrote a number of books of her own.

Want a bamboo fly rod, handcrafted to your custom specifications? The Master lives in Lyons, where he produces some of the best custom fly rods in the world. Of course, you'll have to order and make a large down payment today. And you'll wait five years for delivery. Only about four dozen rods can be produced at the Master's level of quality each year. Every one is a superb fishing tool, a custom piece of art, a keepsake and an investment of steadily appreciating value.

Our most famous organic gardener is a former journalist whose passion for horticulture spurred her to write ten hugely popular mystery novels within the last decade, each one lauding the virtues of gardening while expressing disapproval of the occasional murder committed near the

compost pile or over by the hydrangeas. Equally notable is her late husband, a prizewinning *New York Times* reporter whose accomplishments include helping track and expose the Watergate fiasco.

Another neighbor is a singer songwriter and member of a national bluegrass group with two Grammys in her possession. Known (and awarded) for her mastery of resophonic guitar, slide guitar and pretty much any other guitar variant, she is a much sought after record producer and veteran performer on public radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* with Garrison Keillor.

Other veterans of that program are a Lyons husband and wife singing duo. In 2006 a ranking musical personage unexpectedly went missing before a scheduled performance on a live national broadcast of *A Prairie Home Companion*. A day before showtime, the call went out for replacement talent. Sponsored by KUNC-FM, the event was broadcast live from the Budweiser Center in Loveland to about five million people throughout the nation. The program's staff auditioned hundreds of local applicants. Keillor sang with the finalists, selected our neighbors – and then gave them great stage and air time! At dinner a couple hours after the show Keillor marveled at what great artists these folks are. (These notable neighbors are Back East for a while. We happily anticipate their return.)

More Neighbors

Sometime in the last century or so America dropped the ball and failed to build the definitive national museum to honor the history of our Marine Corps. (Isn't that an odd omission considering the fact that the other services have their own museums and the Marines don't willingly take a back seat to anybody?) Deciding to fill that void, one of our neighbors, a retired Marine officer, teamed up with several of his brethren and raised bazillions of dollars to plan, fund and construct the missing museum. In November 2006, the vast Marine Corps Museum and Heritage Center in Quantico, VA, opened to rave reviews. Fortunately for the Corps, our neighbor continues to serve the institution in a key stewardship role.

A world class triathlete and sports drink spokesman lives here, along with a fellow competitor who recently won the Iron Man Triathlon in Hawaii. It's not just a boy's club either – a few women triathletic superstars call Lyons home as well.

There aren't many clawhammer banjo champions in existence. We have one. She's also a highly regarded producer and manager. A multi-instrumental musician of such renowned skill, she's probably better known in the music industry than in Lyons. For example, she plays bass in a bluegrass Super Group she cofounded with the Grammy winner mentioned earlier. The group has a certain mystery about it because it plays only occasionally. The reason? Several of its members are heavily booked elsewhere because they are international solo stars of the First Magnitude. The kind of people nationally known by their first names. We're not done here – she's also a clothing designer with an innovative streak and an exclusive clientele. Among her achievements, this Notable Neighbor recently designed the new tour jackets for Sir Paul McCartney and his band.

We're proud of the local clown, a Lyons student in whiteface, who was invited to join 41 other clowns from all over the world on an international tour devoted to "Healing Through Humor." Their tour leader? Dr. Hunter "Patch" Adams, M.D., whose improbable story was turned into a movie starring Robin Williams as Patch.

Contemplate the range of experiences that this Notable Neighbor has acquired. At one end she slept on dirt floors in Africa with people whose language she could not speak. Why? So she

could establish micro-loan programs in villages where a \$50 loan could start a business that would support a family. On the other end of her experience range she dealt with big loans also – sometimes quite firmly. There are no dirt floors in presidential palaces on this side of the world where she would negotiate with government leaders, telling them in effect that she would approve or deny hundreds of millions of dollars in World Bank loans (she had that power) depending on whether or not they got their act together and began to recognize human rights and provide services to the poor.

How about our classical violinist? She solos on stages throughout the world. She even serves as artistic director of a famed Canadian music festival. Do you think this Julliard grad with an ascendant international classical career could also be a toe-tapping fiddler? Do you think she loves to play down-home folk and Celtic standards and even released a recording in this genre? You think right. And she's our neighbor. Another Notable!

One local lad was twice a state champion in bicycle road racing before his 18th birthday. Training in our hills made him one of the nation's most talented young riders. Now 20 years old and already racing with the pros, he is competing against the best national competition and winning. His boosters say he is heading to France. As in "le Tour de."

Still More Neighbors

These five singer/songwriters appear in public wearing vintage nighties. They do this more often than any of our other Notable Neighbors. Capturing center stage in the Lyons Music Scene, they also combine folk, bluegrass, cowboy swing and old favorites with gobs of energy, charisma and humor. That blend joyfully demonstrates that a group can be far more than the sum of its parts. It also explains their success. But questions remain. They are unrelated and they are even-tempered. So why do they claim to be moody sisters? And which one is a former nun? Not all questions are meant to be answered. It's the music that counts. Especially with these five talented women.

So, the *New York Times* finally selects the nation's best pale ale, right? We're proud to note that this great brew is crafted right here in Lyons. As if that weren't enough, the brew that made the judges swoon came in a can. (They couldn't believe it either.) Along with several other fine and internationally lauded beers, our local microbrewer was the first to introduce handcrafted beer in a can he lined with polymer to protect the flavor. *Food and Wine* magazine called it one of the "100 Things You've Got To Try in 2007." We concur (and concur.)

Listen to public radio? When Tom and Ray (Click and Clack to the initiated) tell their six million listeners to "call 1-800-CarJunk" the phone is answered in Lyons. A husband and wife and team of locals built the national product and service center for public radio's 700 stations and 28 million listeners. Their company not only hosts Car Talk's online store (The Shameless Commerce Division), it is the national supplier of products bearing the brands of Morning Edition, A Prairie Home Companion, This American Life, All Things Considered, NPR News and a couple dozen other nationally broadcast radio and TV programs.

One local luminary (sadly) isn't in town much. That's because he's off leading trauma teams in exotic and desperate places throughout the world. He trains local officials and provides expert leadership to major global disaster relief efforts. We just wish he had a bit less work to do!

He's the most successful fishing writer in history. His books, all best sellers, were produced over the last two decades and the old titles still appear in bookstores alongside the new; at least one book is now in its 20th printing! Get this – critics have compared this local writer to Mark Twain,

because his knack of making fishing adventures become metaphors for life and love and other matters large and small has earned an international readership, and because he would never write a run-on sentence like this one.

Did you know that the world famous Telluride Bluegrass Festival is owned and managed by a Lyons group? Or that our neighbor who leads the enterprise is one of the nation's most influential music impresarios? His crack team also hosts the award winning Rockygrass Festival, Rocky Mountain Folks Festival and the Festival of the Mabon right here in town! His breathtaking custom built festival site is located in a crook of the St. Vrain River just two blocks from Main Street. Many great musicians play and hang out in town because they live here. Because of these festivals, our neighbors join, and are joined by colleagues like Doc Watson, Earl Scruggs, Joan Baez, Edgar Meyer, Sam Bush, David Grisman, Greg Brown, Peter Rowan, Norah Jones, Taj Mahal and the young virtuosos that form the band Nickel Creek.

Everything said here may only be Conventional Wisdom, but it is about 98% right. Even without notable residents, we have a diverse and vibrant community that is as rich and colorful and varied as the landscape it inhabits. We also note that people of high achievement usually have great latitude in selecting an ideal place to live. Exercising that freedom, a large number of these luminaries chose to live in this spectacular little town specifically because it is a spectacular little town. We share a super quality of life grounded in the music, art, culture, kids and outdoor activity in a town that's more like a neighborhood. Which brings us back to the starting point of this article. Remember, we were wondering what other neighborhood of 1800 people would have such a concentration of notables.