

A love song for Snowmass

Article and Photos—Ann Larson, Snowmass Sun



Why do so many love the charms of Snowmass Village, the Brush Creek Valley and its surrounding hills and mountains? Singer, songwriter and entertainer extraordinaire Twirp Anderson has summed up why so many people are enthralled with this little piece of heaven in a song called “Snowmass,” which he wrote for the 40th anniversary of the ski area.

It includes this chorus:

"We've skied her mountain majesty,
We've walked her many trails
While wiling many happy hours away
And thankful this is home to us
And where our joy prevails
In the sweet embrace of Snowmass let us stay."

Although he has never lived here himself, Twirp has spent much of his time working in what is now Snowmass Village.

Born and raised on a ranch in northern Idaho, which was homesteaded by his grandpa, Twirp moved to Boulder to further his singing career. His band, the Hustlers, which included Jan Garrett, began spending so much time playing at the Red Onion in Aspen, that in 1966 he moved to the Roaring Fork Valley with his wife and two children.

For the next three years, the Hustlers worked in Aspen and at the Leather Jug in Snowmass, where John Denver was also beginning his career.

"I first met John Denver in 1967, when I was head of music for the annual Deaf Camp concert fundraiser. John was our first big star. I've got great sentimentality for him for doing that," he said.

His association with Denver gave Twirp a chance to get into the movie business, when he appeared in the singer's TV movie "The Christmas Gift."

Like so many who decide to make Snowmass their home, he had a multitude of jobs in order to support his family. He was a truck driver for the iron mine at Ashcroft, a farrier, a ski patroller, a deputy sheriff, the announcer at the Snowmass Rodeo, a wrangler at the Snowmass Stables and an auctioneer, all the while singing and playing throughout the Roaring Fork Valley, but mostly beneath the shadow of Mount Daly.

After the break-up of the Hustlers, Twirp began to play at the old Timbermill, where The Office at the Cirque now stands, as part of the Country Cannonballs with Cash Cashman. At the time Twirp was playing the fiddle, and a variety of guitarists filled out the band. Sometimes John Denver would come and join in.

“The Timbermill was a fantastic après ski bar. A great place with a great crowd. The floor would undulate under the dancers with their ski boots still on. They would all get down on the floor doing the ‘Alligator,’ it was crazy,” he said.

Starting in 1969, after playing his gig at the bar, Twirp would go to work for Doug McLain at the Snowmass Stables, harnessing up the huge Belgians for the sleigh ride to the Divide Cabin, where guests enjoyed eating a BBQ dinner while listening to Twirp sing. After the Divide Cabin closed, the sleigh ride dinners continued at Gracie’s Cabin for many years.

“We had great fun. It was a wonderful family outing,” he said.

When the Snowmass Rodeo started in 1973, Twirp was there to help build the arena. A saddle bronc rider for the first two years of the rodeo, he worked as the announcer in exchange for his entry fee.

“I was runner-up for the buckle each year. I was the bridesmaid,” he quipped. Although he stopped competing, he never stopped announcing and can still be found each summer at the Snowmass Rodeo serenading the diners at the BBQ dinner, announcing the events during the rodeo, and then leading the singing around the bonfire while kids roast marshmallow.

He hopes that Snowmass Village never loses the rodeo as it did the sleigh rides. “If the town could only see how many people come to the rodeo. I’ve seen how much fun people have with their kids over the years with the BBQ and all the activities for the little ones,” he said.

For the past 11 years, Twirp has been playing all over the greater valley with John Sommers, who was part of John Denver’s band and who wrote “Thank God I’m a Country Boy.” They originally met at the end of the ‘69-’70 ski season, when Sommers collided with his friend and another local musician, Sandy Munro, while skiing. Twirp was one of the ski patrollers who came to their rescue.

Along with Cash Cashman and Randy Utterback, Sommers and Anderson have formed a band, Heart of the Rockies, which put out a CD last spring which includes Twirp’s latest song.

“ ‘Snowmass’ is a wonderful song. The very first time he played it, the people just loved it. We’d already finished the 12 tracks for the album, but decided that we had to add it,” said Sommers, who has much admiration for his partner and friend.

He added, “Twirp is just one of the finest entertainers that I’ve been around. People just love his personality. He’s a legend up here.”

During the ski season, “Heart of the Rockies” plays every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 3 – 6 p.m. in the Silvertree Hotel’s Conservatory. During the rest of the year they play for local events and private parties.

At the Conservatory, they often invite members of the audience to join in on the fun. Recently, members of the Frying Pan Blue Grass Band stopped by after finishing a gig of their own nearby and were invited to play along to the delight of an overflowing crowd. “They’ll call you up and make you work,” said John Livingston, who credits Sommers and Anderson with

helping the Frying Pan Blue Grass Band get their start after moving here in 1993.

This just shows another side of Twirp and John, who not only love to sing and play, but also want everyone to join in.

For all who love Snowmass Village, but don't know how to put into words why, "Snowmass" on the new "Heart of the Rockies" CD captures the reasons in a beautiful, poetic song. The CD is available at Sundance Liquor and Gift at the Snowmass Center as well as in Aspen and downvalley. It can also be purchased through their Web site at www.heartoftherockiesmusic.com, along with Twirp's CD, "Just Me, The Cowboy."



HEART OF THE ROCKIES

Cash Cashman, Twirp Anderson and John Sommers