

HARDWARE STORE HERALD

Volume 22

News from the Wrangell Mountains Center

Winter 2021/22

Connecting people with wildlands through art, science, and education in Alaska



Contents

Year-end Letter	1
Spring Fling and Other Things	2
Dance Artists In Residence	3
Field Studies Program	4
Tall Tales	5
Faces of the WMC	6
Remembering Frank Soos	8
Thank You	9



▲ Photo by Jon Erdman

Year-end Letter

by *Jon Erdman, Executive Director*

Like everyone else, we were still under the long shadow of COVID-19, but it felt a lot like a normal summer at the Old Hardware Store. For most of us, it was the first time we were interacting with people, in person, on a daily basis. This was a learning curve that required a lot of patience and communication, especially as we restarted programs that had not been run for two years. And if that weren't enough, our entire staff (myself included) were running WMC programs for the first time!

It was a very challenging summer, but on the other hand, that seems to be par for the course in Alaska. Since 2010 I've worked summer gigs in remote regions like Uyak Bay in Kodiak, Glacier Bay National Park, and of course McCarthy, doing everything from general management to commercial fishing, and there's never been a deficiency of intensity!

So while there were plenty of bumps in the road this summer, we put together a successful season of programming and had quite a good bit of fun in the process. And we did it the only way it can be done in McCarthy and at the WMC: through cooperation, collaboration and hard work. Our Facilities Manager Dave Sarbell, and Kitchen Manager Kris Wiley, were key staff members whose skill and dedication made a crucial difference for the WMC this summer.

Prior to the summer I was in my shelter-at-home frame of mind, like most of you reading this. I was deeply immersed in the world of screens, then emerged from my cave of isolation and jumped right into the deep end with programming. This transition was illuminating.

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Year-end Letter

(Continued from page 1)

Now more than ever, I feel better able to appreciate how important it is for human beings to experience life – and each other – up-close and personal, unmediated by screens. And yet at the same time, the pandemic has also brought home the reality that our lives are now intertwined with technology. So as we continue to emerge from the pandemic I have been thinking about our role as an organization in relation to technology.

In the past, the WMC has been a blessed haven and oasis from technology. This of course will remain central to our experience and ethos, but perhaps there is more that we can do, especially given the very real dangers of screen addictions. Perhaps at the WMC we can also be a central hub for ongoing discussions about approaching technology in a healthy manner that acknowledges its value while honoring our essential humanity and enhancing our appreciation for the nonhuman world, even as more and more of our work and communication takes place in virtual spaces.

At the Wrangell Mountains Center, our objective in connecting people with wildlands has always been to approach the wild world with the time and intentionality required to begin to appreciate the world on its own terms. For those who are able to participate in our programs, to submerge themselves in the wildlands of the Wrangells, they find, time and again, an internal clearing and the inner space necessary for change. It's truly a beautiful thing.

While there are many for-profit businesses that provide ecological entertainment and outdoor adventures, at the Wrangell Mountains Center our goal will always be to go for the deep dive, to take the time to connect with the wild world and reflect more intentionally on the lessons we can learn within ourselves and from each other through the intelligence and relationships that are so intimately interwoven into the tapestry of all life on this planet.

Thank you so much for your support! 🌸



Spring Fling and Other Things

By Michelle McAfee & Jon Erdman

WMC hosted a casual get-together in Anchorage to kick off the season, thanks to Board Member Molly who opened her backyard to us. Melissa Mitchell and others played music as everyone emerged from their COVID caves. We weren't sure what to call it, so this enriching WMC reunion became The Spring Fling Thing!

This year's Spring Bird Walk in McCarthy, with Mark Vail, saw nearly 30 folks in raingear show up on a soggy morning to attune their ears and eyes to the world of local birds. At the Rec Hall in Kennicott, our Summer Arts and Lecture Series was well-attended with a fascinating talk by Dr. Eric Petersen, who monitors local glacier activity; and Alaskan author Rosemary McGuire who shared readings from her latest book, *Cold Latitudes*.

At the peak of summer, Robin Mayo from WISE (Wrangell Institute for Science and Education - partners with WMC) and Lara Applebaum put on a stellar Aquatics Day Program for kids. It was a blast, and the kids discovered a lot of life swimming around in the water here in the Wrangells.

Special thanks to everyone who made these in-person events happen safely this year, as we all began to gather and connect with each other again. 🌸

Spring Fling Thing Get-Together in Molly's Backyard. ▲

◀ Photo by Jon Erdman



▲ Alexandra Williamson teaching Irish Dance Class at the Rec Hall in Kennicott (Photo by Jon Erdman).
Jeremy Pataky reading “Ablation Zone” (Photo by Corrina Cook) ▼

Dance Artists In Residence

By Jon Erdman

Our formal Meg Hunt Artist In Residence Program was postponed for 2021, but we took on two artists who contacted us for an informal residency program.

Both Alexandra Williamson (New Jersey) and Dr. Betsy Fisher (University of Hawaii) were from different corners of the world but had a serendipitous connection that resulted in quite the creative collaboration! They taught Irish Dance, Creative Dance, and performed solo dance pieces along with a collaborative dance piece that choreographed Jeremy Pataky’s poem “Ablation Zone” – [Corrina Cook](#) wrote a wonderful [article](#) on this final dance performance. All events were well-attended.

The WMC Artist In Residence Program aims to support artists of all genres, writers, and inquiring minds, providing a unique, rustic, and beautiful space to

foster creativity. We will resume our formal residency in 2022 under the direction of [Kristin Link](#), AIR Program Coordinator. ☞





▲ *Preparing Food for Field Studies Program*
Field Studies Program Students ▼
 (Photos by Dave Sarbell)

Field Studies Program

by Jon Erdman

It is always a challenge to run the flagship Wrangell Mountains Center [Field Studies Program](#), but this year we had the added challenge of new staff following a year's hiatus. If that weren't enough, our partnership with The Evergreen State College in Washington state is still young and still evolving.



It was a lot of work, but our staff stepped up, big time, along with supporters and friends of the WMC, and when we bid our students farewell in early August, we all felt a deep sense of gratification, because at the core of the field studies program we find the mission that motivates us at the WMC: connecting people with wildlands. Something special happens when we make that connection.

Everett, one of this year's students, summed it up when he talked about masks. In the backcountry, he said, every mask falls off, eventually. He wasn't referring to the pandemic masks. It was a lesson he learned about self and freedom gleaned from immersion in the wild.

All biological life is interconnected, and we evolved to thrive in the wild, intimately connected to all life. Our internal biological system of nerves and neurons evolved to fire and flow in conjunction with the natural rhythms of the world. And to experience that — to really get it at the deepest level of body and blood — expands and deepens our perspective. ↻

Tall Tales



▲ Tall Tales at the Old Hardware Store
Audience at Tall Tales Listening to Storytellers ▼
(Photos by Dave Sarbell)

By Jon Erdman

This summer we broke new ground for the local Tall Tales storytelling event by expanding to three venues: an in-person storytelling venue at the Golden Saloon, as per tradition; an in-person storytelling venue at the Old Hardware Store; and a virtual venue in October where we heard from the previous top storytellers.

It was a delight to swap stories again in McCarthy, as we emerged from the pandemic. And of course it was particularly special to host an Old Hardware Store Tall Tales, emptying out the Great Room and setting up chairs for a crowd of over 60. As we opened the night for stories, I stood in front of the crowd. It was heart-warming to gather together in the Great Room and share stories.

The people gathered in that room created an

atmosphere that inspired the storytellers, which in turn generated a momentum of creativity in the way that can only happen when the the audience is engaged and attentive. In a world that seems more and more divided, I was struck by the fact that this kind of event is precisely what we need: forums to create space for honest and authentic stories. Visit our [YouTube](#) page to watch Tall Tales stories.☞



Faces of the WMC

by Michelle McAfee & Jon Erdman

Ellen Guyer was one of the first to step on the WMC campus this spring to help us get going, and wow was she ever productive! Ellen did much of the intense prep work required to plant our gardens, all within a 3 week stay. Says Ellen, “I learned a lot about gardening during my stay, but more importantly how to build community and welcome people into it with open arms.”



▲ Ellen Guyer (Photo by WMC Staff)



▲ Mallory Dockery (Photo by WMC Staff)



▲ Joey Boots-Ebenfield (Photo by Dave Sarbell)



▲ Dave Sarbell (left) / ▶ Kris Wiley (right) (Photo by Dave Sarbell)

Mallory Dockery joined us mid-summer when our programs were in full-swing and brought a good deal of gardening expertise. Things were hectic at times but Mallory was centered. Says Mallory, “WOOOFing at WMC this summer has been such an incredible experience. Things grow strong, big, and fast during the short growing season in Alaska. The beauty in this area is unreal. I’ll never forget the time I spent in the garden, ice climbing, hiking, meeting new people, and hanging out in McCarthy.” She made the most of her short time, which is truly the Alaskan way.

Folks that find their way to the WMC tend to be multi-talented. Joey Boots not only helped the gardens and grounds run smoothly this season, but he was also the winner of the Old Hardware Store Tall Tales storytelling event! Joey joined us at the end of the season and provided some much-needed help in shutting down the WMC campus. He hadn’t quite had enough of Alaska, though, and joined Dave up north to work in Chena for the winter.

Dave Sarbell joined the WMC in May as a full-summer WOOOFer, but after a week of work he had repaired and updated the water piping system at the Old Hardware Store. By June we brought Dave on as our Facilities Manager. In addition to having mad maintenance skills, Dave is also media savvy and has a wacky sense of humor that keeps us smiling.

The Kitchen is the heart of the WMC. It’s the feeling center and a small space where big things happen, each and every day. As Kitchen Manager, Kris Wiley brought both a big welcoming heart as well as efficiency and a lot of elbow grease. The entire staff was new to programs in 2021, so it was challenging at times, but both Kris and Dave stayed steady at the helm and helped guide us to a successful summer. 🐾





The Old Saloon

Photo by WMC's September Instagram Guest Artist [Anna Mikušková](#)

Anna grew up in the Czech Republic and is currently based in Alaska. Her photographs and artist books have been exhibited nationally and internationally, and are held in private collections in the United States and the Czech Republic.



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and education in Alaska!***

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Remembering Frank Soos

By Michelle McAfee

The news of Frank Soos' passing rippled through our community and echoed through the Wrangell Mountains. We lost a good soul, a Writer, Essayist, Teacher, Outdoorsman, and Alaska's Writer Laureate in 2014. Frank was the visiting writer/instructor the first year Maria Shell came to the Wrangells in 2001. He joined WMC writers on several subsequent river trips, including the Copper River Stories Expedition, hosted jointly with Friends of Kennicott, Chitina to Cordova in 2003, and Riversong with his pal David Lynn Grimes in 2015.

Frank was especially touched by the old mining-era relics around McCarthy, which reminded him of his coal mining heritage in Virginia. His parents owned a grocery store, and he was always curious to keep company with whoever was working in the WMC kitchen. He contributed to the Porphyry Place capital campaign and advocated for the WMC with the Alaska State Council on the Arts.

Frank taught several workshops through WMC, including our first interdisciplinary Writing Workshop in 2010, which combined writing, visual arts, and performance, co-taught by his wife Margo Klass, Nancy Cook, Maria Shell, and Jonny Gray. Frank's lanky stature, quiet presence, dry, witty humor, and gravitas made him a formidable and fun teacher.

We are grateful for the time Frank spent teaching here and we will miss him dearly. ♡

Frank Soos (tall one in back) with WMC Writing Program ▼



▲ WMC Staff hiking across the glacier from Mt. Donahoe (Photo by Dave Sarbell)



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The following list acknowledges donations received after last year's Newsletter (early December) through November 2021

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▲ Half-Marathon runners in the rain
(Photo by Dave Sarbell)



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▼ Top: Kid's Aquatics Day (Photos by Jon Erdman)
Bottom: Bird Walk with Mark Vail



▼ First Snow came early this year - September 21st! (Photo by Dave Sarbell)



The WMC is located on the traditional territories of the Indigenous Ahtna People. We acknowledge and honor the ancestral & present land stewardship and place-based knowledge of the peoples of this territory.