**Virgil and Terry Fisher**

**Pioneers of the Year – 2023 Middle Park Fair and Rodeo**

Virgil and Terry Fisher were raised during an era of Grand County history, and specifically the Fraser Valley, that was distinctly different from what exists today.

The first pioneers of Grand County were trappers, hunters, miners, loggers, ranchers, railroaders, and merchants for a county that was landlocked by mountain ranges. The county boasted of abundant natural resources that were soon to become the object of desire for the developing western part of the United States.

People from Virgil and Terry’s era took up the mantle for the development of communities and infrastructure, the management of natural resources, the education of its youth, and the change from a pioneering society to what has become an economy based largely upon tourism and recreation.

Virgil was born in 1946 and Terry in 1947, but Terry’s roots in the Fraser Valley are a little deeper. Her grandparents Lloyd and Elnora Smith were Fraser Valley residents and Elnora was Middle Park Fair and Rodeo Pioneer of the Year in 1963. Terry’s mother, Jean, married Ed O’Neil Jr. and Jean was a MPFR Pioneer of the Year in 1999.

Ed and Jean O’Neil purchased a ranch on Grand County Road 5 in 1957. That ranch would become home for several of Ed and Jean’s family throughout the years.

Virgil moved with his parents, Boyd and DeEtte Fisher, from Holyoke, Colorado in 1951 when he was four years old. His father had worked for the state road department in eastern Colorado and he continued that work in the Fraser Valley. For a few years, his family owned an ice cream store named J & J Dairy Delight in Tabernash. It was in the building where the Snooty Coyote liquor store was located for many years.

Virgil and Terry were raised in Tabernash when the town was known by three distinct geographical designations. Terry’s family lived on the Sunny Side of town while Virgil was raised on the Shady Side of Tabernash. Those were distinguished from Swamp Town, which was across the railroad tracks and subject to the springtime flooding of the Fraser River.

They met “either in school or Sunday School” and went to school together in Tabernash, Fraser, and later Middle Park High School in Granby.

After graduating from MPHS in 1965, served in the military and is one of Grand County’s Vietnam War veterans. Virgil’s primary vocation in his adult life was with the Denver Water Board. He started working as a ditch rider, he became the caretaker at Williams Fork Reservoir near Parshall, and ended his career as an assistant district foreman at the Denver Water Board facility near Fraser. He was able to retire in 2008.

Starting in 1973, Virgil was the assistant caretaker at Williams Fork for eight years before serving as the caretaker for another 13 years until 1994. During that time, their children Kelly and Autumn attended school in Kremmling and graduated from West Grand High School.

Kelly is a concrete contractor and lives with his wife Sofia near Fraser. Autumn had a career in banking in Grand County and is currently working for the Grand County Sheriff’s Department.

When the Denver Water Board moved its facility to its current location near the tubing hills in Fraser, employee housing was no longer available, and Virgil and Terry built a house on the O’Neill Ranch on Grand County Road 5. Built in 1997, it remains their home to this day.

Terry worked at the Winter Park Ski Area in ticket sales as well as a telephone operator in Granby. She loved her job as a driver of the senior citizen’s bus in Kremmling. Both Terry and Virgil bowled for many years. They have bowled in the lanes that no longer exist in Granby, Kremmling, and Grand Lake as well as the Foundry in Fraser.

Terry served as a board member, president, secretary/treasurer for Grand County Bowling Leagues and was able to enjoy bowling in Grand County for 40 years. She followed in the footsteps of her mother, who had a 45-year streak of bowling at national tournaments throughout the United States.

Congratulations Virgil and Terry Fisher for the contributions you made to the development of Grand County. You were integral parts of various aspects of society that helped define the community life that many have treasured in Grand County. Thank you for your service to the community and it is hoped that your values and ideals can be maintained.