**Duane Dailey**

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

Duane Dailey, 2023 Pioneer of the Year for the Middle Park Fair and Rodeo, has spent countless hours and traveled innumerable miles in Middle Park as a competitive skier, youth ski coach, mill worker, Conoco gasoline truck delivery driver, Grand County Commissioner, and in his current job as Veterans Service Officer for Grand and Summit counties.

Born in October 1951 in Kremmling, Duane is a classic example of someone who lived, survived (and sometimes thrived - but says he is too poor to leave) within the conditions and situations that were present at each stage of his life. And, as is true for many people, the experiences at each stop prepared him for the steps to follow.

His pioneer roots run deep in the county. Born and raised in Hot Sulphur Springs, he still hangs his hat each night as his home address in the county seat of Grand County. His great grandfather was William Jefferson “Ute Bill” Thompson, who came into the county in the 1860s from Central City and homesteaded east of Hot Sulphur Springs.

Ute Bill married Mabel Smith in what was the first marriage affiliated with the Hot Sulphur Springs Community Church. Mabel’s father, Preston Henry Smith, was a homesteader from Breckenridge and it was one of his son-in-laws who helped develop the Smith-Eslick Court in Grand Lake. The Smith-Eslick Court combined the advent of the automobile with overnight lodging and was a precursor to what are known today as motels.

Mabel and Ute Bill’s oldest son, Fred Thompson, (a WWI veteran) was the father of Shirley Thompson who would become the mother of Duane, his brother Donald, and their sister Marlys (deceased).

Duane and Donald’s father, Harold Arthur “Buck” Dailey graduated from high school in 1931 in Iowa, traveled west and reunited with a cousin in Oklahoma. That led to a job near Garden City, Kansas, working on US Hwy 50. Both settled in Prowers County prior to moving on the construction road that led him to Canon City, the Royal Gorge, and Buena Vista.

He lived for a time in Como from where he hitchhiked over Boreas Pass into Breckenridge. Buck made his way north where he got a job as an equipment swamper for the construction of Green Mountain Reservoir in the 1936-1940 timeframe. He was living in Hot Sulphur Springs when he left to serve in World War II in the Merchant Marines and then the United States Navy.

Upon returning to Colorado, Buck eventually bought the Granby Dairy and operated that in the 1950s and 1960s. He also served as the Veterans Service Officer for Grand County, a role that Duane would fill, starting in 2012. In the long history of that position, there have been only six people who assumed those duties: Judge W. W. Shiflet, Leo C. Mater, Buck Dailey, Homer Jennings, Davy Jones, and Duane Dailey.

Duane grew up going to school in Hot Sulphur and Granby, graduating from Middle Park High School in 1969. A gifted skier, Duane competed in slalom, grand slalom, jumping events, and cross-country. He was an 8th grader on the high school team that won a state championship.

After high school and a stint at Mesa Junior College, Duane served in the U.S. Army for which he served briefly in Vietnam prior to being reassigned to Fort Wainwright in Alaska.

In September 1976, he started working at the Henderson Project molybdenum mine and mill, working his way up to a shift boss at the tailings pond and with transportation maintenance. He was one of the last employees let go during the shutdown period of the late 1980s.

His journey then led him to drive a gasoline delivery truck for Enhle Oil, in Kremmling. To give himself more flexibility and time to coach skiing, he then worked as a delivery driver for Granby Dairy. Duane was an assistant ski coach at both the middle school and high school teams. He had the privilege of coaching his daughter, Elizabeth, at both levels.

At earlier stops along his life’s journey, Duane worked as a dispatcher for the sheriff’s office, he and his dad took over the operations of the ambulance service in the county, and he worked for Bud Tillotson, doing dirt work for projects like the Val Moritz ski area and the road system for the Columbine Lake subdivision.

While working as a driver for Coca Cola in the late 1990s, Duane suffered a severe hand injury that necessitated he re-think his career path. Upon hearing that Paul Ohri was retiring as the county commissioner of District 3 and armed with the knowledge and experience of working with and meeting people throughout the county, he threw his hat into the political arena.

Duane was elected for two terms as county commissioner, serving from 1999 to 2006. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, he says it was while serving as the President of the Grand County Little League that he learned the collaborative decision-making skills that would help him as a county commissioner.

The mountain pine beetle infestation that killed millions of lodgepole pine trees in the Rocky Mountains was raging during much of Dailey’s tenure and he threw himself into public education, and pre-and post-attack measures for landowners.

After his career as county commissioner ended, he worked for the county road and bridge department, plowing snow in the Fraser Valley as well as working at the Kremmling and Granby airports.

In 2012, he took the job as Veterans Service Officer, a position from which he can provide assistance and advice to the veterans in Grand, Lake, Summit, and adjacent counties. In that position he is a past board member of the Colorado Board of Veteran’s Affairs, three of those years as Chairman of the Board.

Thank you, Duane for your tireless service to Middle Park. No matter the hat you were wearing, you were and are always looking to help people. The fact that you have been able to do so with a constant smile and wry sense of humor is frosting on the cake.

Congratulations for being named a Pioneer of the Year for the 2023 Middle Park Fair and Rodeo.