

# Hiking guide grateful to nature

Business, life are good for outdoors entrepreneur.

By Brielle Schaeffer

Cathy Shill’s spirit can be summed up in one of her most unforgettable guiding experiences.

When one of her young clients wanted to see a moose while on a hike up Shadow Mountain, Shill said she was doubtful they would get the chance.

“I was in an area that moose wouldn’t really be seen,” said the 47-year-old biologist and owner of The Hole Hiking Experience, her naturalist-guided tour company.

But as they were finishing up, a big, bull moose crossed the path right in from of them.

“I was flabbergasted, and she was just tickled,” Shill said of her client.

“The fact the moose was there, I’ll never forget it,” she said. “It blew my mind.”

Shill said she told the young client to thank Mother Nature for the experience, something she does a lot herself.

“I say thanks,” she said. “It seems to work.”

Shill has a lot to be grateful for these days.

The Hole Hiking Experience is in its 22nd season. Shill and her five employees guide trips up to 14 miles long for groups of children, families, tourists and even corporate workers.

She said her company guides several thousand people per year on trips in both the winter and summer.

“We do stay fairly consistently busy,” she said.

On Hole Hiking Experience trips, guides talk to participants about ecology, natural history, geology, and flora and fauna in the montane and alpine environments.

“We talk a lot about what we see,” Shill said. “People say, ‘I never thought hiking could be this fun.’”

She said she and her guides are all “friendly, outgoing, engaging and fun, but that’s a bonus.

“Mother nature does the work,” she said.

Shill is working on moving her company to a more holistic slant and plans to guide trips that work with the body as well as the mind.

“If you come into nature and center yourself and be present ... you can touch that wisdom,” she said.

Shill will lead “Wakeful Walking” workshops July 13, Aug. 10 and Sept. 14 for the Teton County/Jackson Parks and Recreation Department. Each workshop, designed to “discover the presence in nature,” runs from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. and is free.

“It’s a way to give back,” she said.

A biologist by education, Shill first encountered the Tetons on a weekend trip to visit a friend.

“I came to Jackson in the mid-’80s and fell in love, like everybody else does,” she said. “My heart was here. It wasn’t with a person, it was with a place.”

Shill eventually came back and started working as a naturalist at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort.

“I wanted to use my degree to share a love of nature,” she said.

Little did Shill know that two wary flight attendants would inspire her to create a business. While she was working at the resort, they asked her if there were any hiking guides who could take them out.

“They were mostly frightened of bears,” Shill said.

She thought to herself, “I can do



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**Fun and education come together when Cathy Shill, owner of The Hole Hiking Experience, takes clients out onto Jackson Hole-area trails. “Connect to the landscape, learn about the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and make the most of your visit,” she said.**

that. I can guide hikes.”

But Shill wanted to share nature, not just act as a bodyguard against bears. So she applied for a permit to lead hikes in the national forest.

“In the permitting office, they kind of laughed,” she said. “They never thought a biologist could make a living guiding hikes.”

There was one permit available, and Shill got it.

During the years since then, her business has grown to include guided

winter trips in Grand Teton National Park.

“You can’t start a company like mine today,” she said. “The Forest Service is at capacity for business.”

Shill’s love of nature is contagious, and she’s willing to share it with anyone.

On a hike up Cache Creek last week, she picked up trash along the trail; chatted with passers-by about moose browsing, explaining that bushes had been pruned, but not by people; and pointed out medicinal qualities of plants

“Most plants have properties to them,” Shill said. “All plants have a role in nature.”

Take gromwell, for instance.

“Shoshone Indian women learned this plant, if you make a tea, it stops the estro-cycle,” Shill said. “Isn’t that wild?”

Shill is all spunk, tanned skin and high energy.

Her zeal for nature started when she was a kid.

Growing up in Ohio, she used to hike frequently with her grandmother. Trekking was a usual week-

end activity for her family.

In her spare time, Shill can be found doing yoga, meditating, birding, biking, climbing, skiing and traveling.

“I’m not a knitter,” she said.

She has gone trekking in Nepal, Bhutan, Italy, New Zealand and Africa, and she’s planning a trip to India this fall.

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– Cathy Shill

OWNER, THE HOLE HIKING EXPERIENCE

“It’s funny, but I like to hike,” Shill said.

But she will always return to the Teton area, with its ecosystem the size of West Virginia and the greatest wildlife diversity in the lower 48 states.

“It’s a feel-good place, it’s a high-energy place,” she said. “There’s clean air, amazing country, great animals.”

No matter what, Shill accepts what Mother Nature and the universe give her, whether it’s a permit to start her guiding business or a bull moose on the trail.

And she gives thanks.

“Things just seem to align,” she said.

## LOOKING BACK



### 45 years ago...

Nine people were thrown to the ground when a lightning bolt struck the ground near Old Faithful Geyser in Yellowstone National Park. They were treated for minor injuries.

... The town announced it would enforce a noxious weed ordinance aimed at exterminating weeds on vacant lots. ... A rodeo performer who was thrown from a Brahma bull named Nicotine and sent to the St. John’s hospital was reported slightly improved. The bull’s hooves struck him in the head and knocked him unconscious. ... A search for a missing 9-year-old girl from Colorado spread to the valley after tourists reported they had seen her. ... Trucking industry leaders nationwide met in Jackson for the eighth annual Western Regional Safety Rendezvous. The event focused on safe driving practices and featured speakers and panel members from regulatory agencies. ... Harry Brown, former manager of the Anvil Motel, awoke to find a horse caught between his signpost. The horse had broken down a fence in the Teton National Forest and blindly wandered into the sign. ... The Fine Arts Festival Symphony Orchestra welcomed famous conductor Otto-Werner Mueller for two weeks. Mueller, who had been thrilling audiences in Canadian venues, took charge of the symphony all during the festival. ... The Wyoming Game and Fish Department distributed more than 2 million fish throughout the state.

### 30 years ago...

Teton County commissioners decided not to impose a limited moratorium on new subdivisions in South Park. ... Airport officials worried a potential strike by air traffic controllers would affect air service to Jackson. They said the government would nationalize the commercial airline business in the greatly reduced traffic pattern if the strike were to take place. ... Kayakers from the Jackson Hole area braved icy spring waters in the annual Hoback River Regatta. ... The Mangy Moose Saloon held its annual arm-wrestling contest. The event drew fewer contestants than in the past, but the crowd of spectators was large and loud, cheering on the competitors. ... The county celebrated dedication ceremonies for the C-V School for the handicapped. The new building included residential cottages, classrooms and an administration center.

### 15 years ago...

Grand Teton National Park rangers saved two men from drowning in the Snake River, but a third man died in the Greys River. Rangers closed a portion of the Snake due to dangerous high waters and log jams. ... Sen. Alan Simpson called Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Michael Finley’s comments on the New World Mine “inappropriate and improper.” He said Finley was “gimmicking” the environmental impact statement process on behalf of environmentalists. ... The Jackson Town Council rejected a recommendation to levy an additional mill of property tax to support the fire district. The council adopted a budget totaling \$42.9 million. ... Marc Fischer, the first Jackson Hole News editor, died suddenly from a throat obstruction in Montana. A graduate of Grinnell College in Iowa, she joined the Jackson Hole Guide in 1970. ... The Teton County Board of Education approved the \$2.63 million maintenance plan for the Kelly School remodeling. The renovations included replacing the roof, repairing the outside and adding two multipurpose rooms. ... Teton County voters had their first opportunity to pick a country prosecutor and a district court clerk from among competing candidates.