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*Isabelle  
Courtois &  
Jack  
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home for sale set by the seller  
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deal to purchase the home.



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**NOTE:** When community events take place, photographers may be present to take photos for that event, and they may be used in the publication.

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# HELLO SINGLETREE RESIDENTS!

February is here! The perfect time for a quintessential Valentine's Day story featuring Isabelle Courtois and Jack Sunderland, whose roots run deep in the neighborhood. Both were born at Vail Valley Hospital, grew up in Singletree, and attended Battle Mountain High School, yet their love story actually blossomed after college. Ultimately, their journey led them to say "I do" in the romantic city of Prague, and today, they are back home in Singletree with Avy, their beloved two year old golden retriever.

Our *Travel Tales* whisk us away to the captivating landscapes of Iceland. Ingrid and Craig Dampier caught the Iceland bug en route to Germany about 10 years ago and returned in July to embark on a cruise around the island. Join the Dampiers as they lead us on a virtual exploration of this Nordic wonderland, discovering its breathtaking vistas, cultural gems, and unique adventures that unfolded in its otherworldly terrain.

Speaking of adventures, John Tedstrom brings us along with him as he completes about 31 miles in the Birkie, the largest and most important cross-country ski race in North America, in Hayward, Wisconsin. Wisconsin is flat, you say? The course includes 35 hills and an elevation gain of 4,600 feet with a high point of 1,730 feet. A true test of resilience, John lets us in on the adrenaline rush at the start, his second thoughts on the course, and the triumph of crossing the finish line.

We take a look back at two memorable holiday soirees in December - the Singletree Holiday Party and the inaugural Art for a Cause: A Gathering of Giving, showcasing the creativity of our resident artists and also demonstrating our community's commitment to giving back, with 25% of the sales proceeds donated to The Bridge Fund for Castle Peak Senior Life and Rehabilitation.

May you find a quiet moment this month to settle in and enjoy these pages reflecting the spirit of your neighborhood. Here's to staying warm and finding joy in the simple pleasures!

Warm regards,

*Holly Proctor*  
 Publisher and Area Director  
 303-859-3369  
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# FEBRUARY CONTRIBUTORS

YOUR STORIES. OUR PAGES.

We believe the heart and soul of our publication lie in the vibrant stories of our residents. That is why we are extending an enthusiastic invitation to all of you - from junior writers to retirees and everyone in between - to contribute to and shape the future of *Stroll Singletree*. Whether you have a talent for engaging conversation with kids and teens, a yearning to connect with new friends and neighbors, or a wealth of insight and experience, we eagerly await your contributions.

Without your participation, this publication simply wouldn't exist; the continued growth and success of *your* neighborhood magazine relies on ongoing contributions from people like you. So take a moment to gather your thoughts, sharpen those pencils - or flex those typing fingers, and let your imagination soar!

Please email your stories and photos to [holly.proctor@n2co.com](mailto:holly.proctor@n2co.com). We look forward to hearing from you!



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**DEB ROBBINS**  
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 Meet Your Neighbors



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 Travel Tales & What's Cooking in Singletree



**MONTY SCULLY**  
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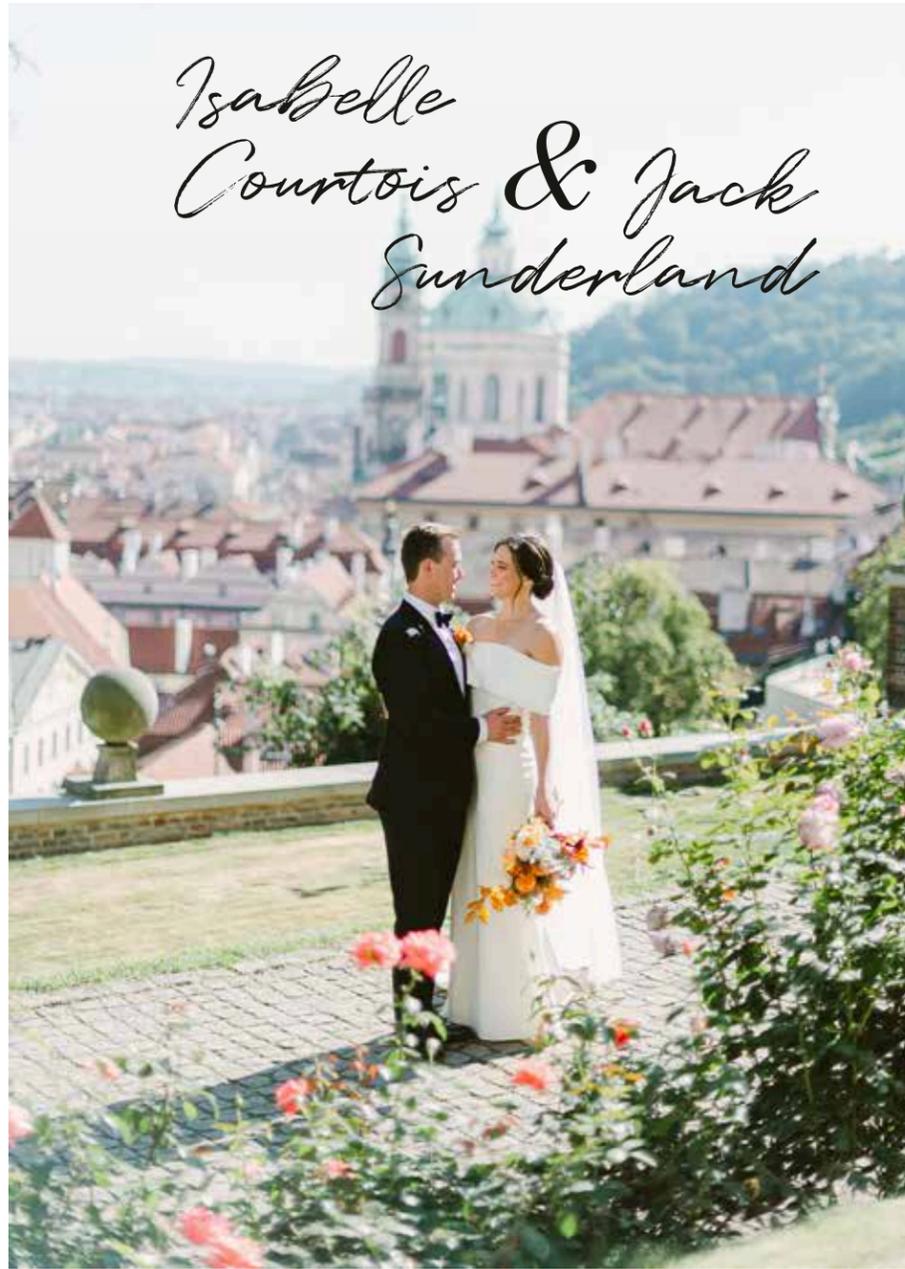
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Isabelle  
Courtois & Jack  
Sunderland



The Courtois family



The Sunderland family

**J**ack Sunderland and Isabelle Courtois each came into this world at Vail Valley Hospital 18 months apart: Jack in October of 1992 as a “Dr. Chow baby”, and Isabelle in April of 1994 delivered as a “Dr. Petrie baby”. Each were born into families with deep roots in the Vail Valley, and while the families in those years were merely acquaintances, both Jack and Isabelle lived happy childhoods and eventually crossed paths in high school, returned from college and began dating, put down their own roots in Singletree, and made their relationship official in a storybook wedding at a winery in Prague in the Czech Republic. But let’s go back to the beginning before we jump into the celebration!

Jack was the third born to JP and Kris Sunderland, residents of Singletree since the 1990s, joining his two older sisters, Claire and Sophie. Moving into the neighborhood at the age of three months, he grew up in the

house his father built on Singletree Road and attended Avon Elementary, Charter School, and graduated from Battle Mountain High School in 2011. Like many boys in the neighborhood, Jack took to soccer, hockey, baseball, golf, backpacking... and building stuff – often with help from his dad.

He laughs at the memory, “We had friends, the Jansen’s, in Homestead, and Ross played junior hockey in Canada. I would put on all his stuff when I was 3. I always wanted to play hockey!” Cold and ice were in his genes as JP grew up 20 miles south of Winnipeg and Kris was born in Minneapolis and raised in Grand Forks, North Dakota. When given the choice of spending his time in the winter on the rink or the hill, Jack opted for hockey – nevertheless managing to get in about 20-30 days a year on skis.

Isabelle grew up as the older sister to Bridgett and Claudette, the three daughters born to Philippe and Ellyn Courtois. Raised on Alpine Drive in West Vail, she attended St. Claire of Assisi for grades 1 through 8 and then went on to Battle Mountain High School a year behind Jack. The Courtois family moved to Foyal Circle in 2007. Isabelle was involved in dancing for years at the Vail Valley Academy of Dance and skiing with Devo and then onto the BMHS ski team in high school.

The couple was introduced through “friends of friends” in high school and Jack explains, “We kind of knew each other a little bit in high school but nothing came to fruition until after college.” That being said, the seed was planted by Isabelle’s best friend, Danielle, who attended prom with Jack as one of his best girl friends during high school. After they all moved home from college a few

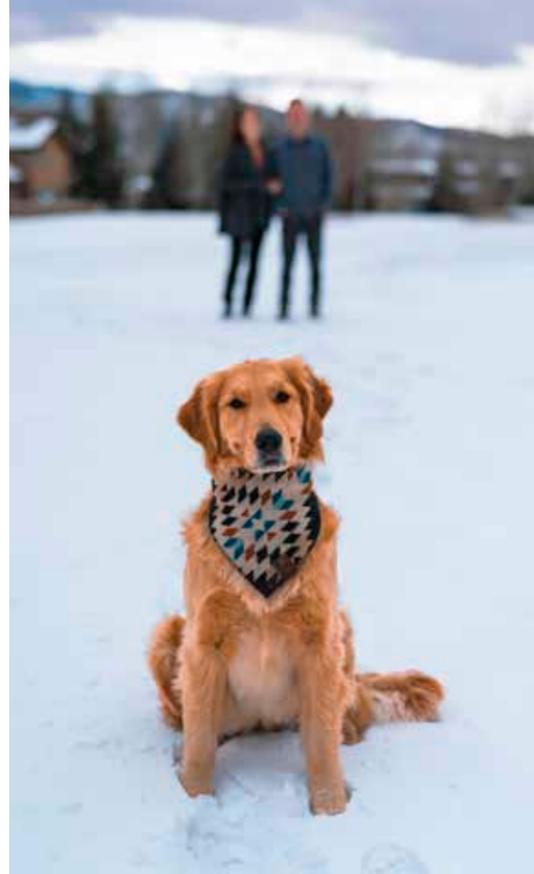


years later, she told Jack, “You should date Isabelle!”

Jack went off to California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, CA, to study Environmental Engineering, and Isabelle left a year later to attend Colorado State University. After receiving a degree in Health and Exercise Science, Isabelle returned to the valley and worked at the front desk at Howard Head, shadowing therapists, completing observation hours, earning a few more credits at Colorado Mountain College, and... started dating Jack.

Within a year, the young couple rented a house owned by Russ Varley on Charolais Drive - with local roommates, Wil Nolan, the manager at Blue Moose Pizza, Garret Funk, and Danielle Barry, the matchmaker. They both laugh as they acknowledge they were in their mid-20s, living with their parents, and it was time to get out of the house! They have many lots of memories of the great times they shared during that period as their relationship grew.

Upon graduating from Cal Poly, Jack returned to the valley in search of a job. As jobs were scarce at the time, Jack jumped at the opportunity to work with Alex Biegler, after being referred by Alex’s father, Barry, who – coincidentally - had been Jack’s hockey coach for 4 years. Of course, after a



period of drought, when it rains, it pours, and shortly thereafter, Jack was fortunate to receive four job offers – including one from his dad. “You can always join me,” JP offered. And so for the past 6 ½ years, Jack has worked alongside his father at Sunder Inc.

One of Jack’s favorite projects since joining Sunder has been a residence on West Meadow Drive, “a good white buffalo project”, as he refers to it. “It was an amazing project. It started as a spec home that was bought by the Jose Cuervo family from Mexico. They were nice clients and it was a pleasure working with them. They spared no expense. Everything was top of the line and the work was so intricate. You don’t get a lot of projects like that in a lifetime, so it was a great start to my building career.”

Having been a nanny in college, Isabelle had been responsible for taking a child with autism to therapy appointments and found the protocol and treatments to be intriguing. Fueled by an interest in the health industry in undergrad and inspired by a pediatric therapist at Howard Head, Isabelle enrolled at A.T. Still University to earn her degree in Occupational Therapy. Today, her passion for her career is



evident. “I just love being able to help people. Often I see patients post-op day 1 and they have no idea what to expect. I like to ease their mind and walk them

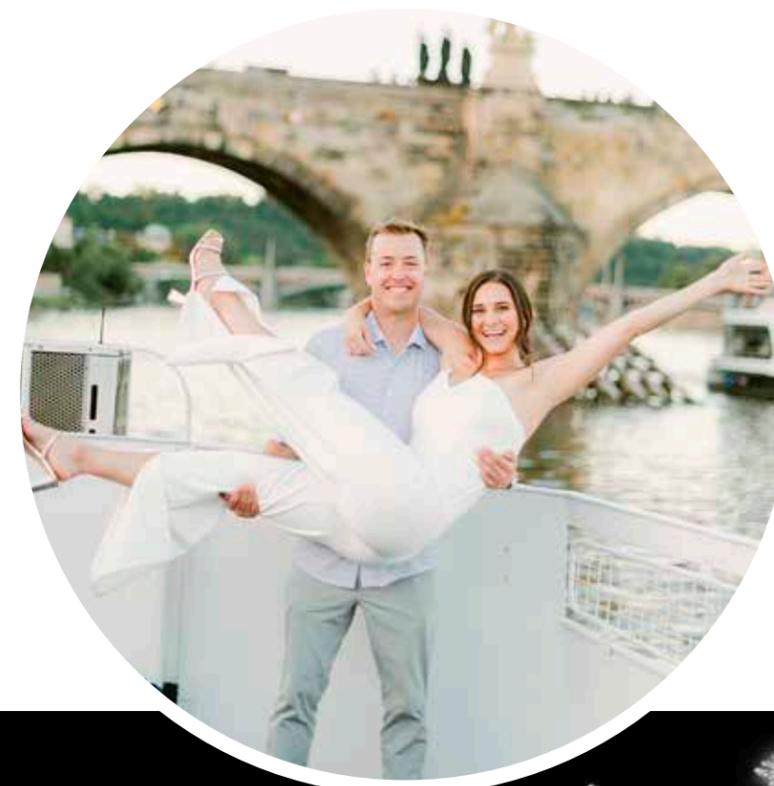
through what life is going to look like over the next few months.” Specializing in hands, wrists, and elbows, Isabelle works at the Howard Head locations in Edwards, Eagle, and Vail.

So how do these paths lead to a wedding in Prague? Coincidentally, both Jack and Isabelle had each studied for a semester in Prague – Jack in fall of 2014 and Isabelle in spring of 2015. Knowing Jack had preceded her, Isabelle reached out for any insight he could offer, and Jack obligingly sent her a long list of “local recommendations”. They had always talked about returning together, so when it came time to decide on a place to be married, Isabelle jokingly asked, “Would you ever want to get married in Prague?”

While not an easy process, a leap of faith and 10 Skype meetings with a local event coordinator who spoke English as her second language, led them to the ideal location and a magical wedding. Jack and Isabelle agree, “It was exceptional. Prague holds a special place in our hearts and everything exceeded our expectations.” The newly married couple exudes happiness as they recall the cathedral, the food, and

the venue overlooking the city. As a side note, Isabelle shares a historical fact in that Prague remains intact as a beautiful city because it was Hitler’s favorite city and therefore was left untouched in World War II.

Following their nuptials, Isabelle and Jack returned to life in Singletree where they spend a lot of time outdoors with adored Avy, their two year old golden retriever. On their off time, they take to the hills to ski, skin, backpack, and camp, or to the Sonnenalp Club to work out at the gym or play golf. And so for Jack and Isabelle, Singletree is and always has been home, providing a life deep in memories, rich in relationships, and full of promise for the future.



# THE POWER TEAM



Between Happy's 28 years as a Singletree resident and Lisa's local knowledge of Edwards going back 20 years, we are your "in-house" experts. Whether you are curious about what adds the most value to your home in this area or you are considering selling your Singletree home this year and looking to purchase in the neighborhood or anywhere in the Valley, please call us. We would love to help!

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3 bd | 4 ba | 1,955 sf | \$1,399,000
- 10 Stetson Drive A | Duplex  
3 bd | 3 ba | 2,141 sf | \$1,595,000
- 141 Chaparral Road | Single-family  
4 bd | 5 ba | 3,688 sf | \$3,195,000

### Sold

- 751 Singletree Road 3 | Townhome  
3 bd | 4 ba | 2,670 sf | \$1,450,000
- 68 Hackamore Road | Duplex  
3 bd | 4 ba | 2,516 sf | \$1,735,000
- 1163 Winslow Road | Duplex  
3 bd | 4 ba | 2,834 sf | \$2,750,000
- 165 Charolais Circle B | Duplex  
3 bd | 3 ba | 1,958 sf | \$1,200,000
- 141 Saddle Drive B | Duplex  
3 bd | 3 ba | 2,263 sf | \$1,525,000

### Under Contract

- 751 Singletree Road 9 | Townhome  
3 bd | 3 ba | 2,670 sf | \$1,850,000

Source: VMLS 11.15.23 – 12.15.23



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## **Singletree Property Owners' Association Annual Meeting**

Tuesday, March 5 at 6 PM  
Singletree Community Center

Run for the SPOA Board of Directors – one seat is up for election, and it is a three-year term

The SPOA 2024 budget maintains annual dues at \$200 per unit. The Annual Dues invoice and Annual Meeting notices have been mailed together to all SPOA property owners.

# SINGLETREE

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- » Seriously consider hiring a home inspector to perform a pre-listing home inspection.
- » Put together a plan to make necessary repairs and cosmetic upgrades so that your home shows and inspects well once it comes on the market.
- » Get an unbiased, objective evaluation of your home so that you know what you need to do to get the most value out of your asset in the current market.
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## OUR ADVENTURE IN IRELAND: CIRCLING THE ISLAND ABOARD A CRUISE

CONTRIBUTED BY INGRID DAMPIER, SINGLETREE RESIDENT



Viking Star docked at Heimag



Afternoon tea

About 10 years ago, Craig and I decided to try Icelandair for a trip to Germany to visit my relatives mainly, because it was much less expensive. Icelandair offered a stopover in Iceland for 3 days which we eagerly signed up for. Those 3 days were magic – we had a rental car with which we explored the Golden Circle, including the Gullfoss waterfall and the Geyser Geothermal Area. We walked through the Atlantic Rift, formed by two tectonic plates - the North American tectonic plate and the Eurasian plate. Over the millenniums, these two plates are moving apart – literally tearing Iceland apart.

We walked through Reykjavik to see the Hallgrímskirkja church and the Harpa concert hall. We passed the house, where in 1986, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev discussed

nuclear weapon restrictions which became the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987. And our last stop on these 3 wonderful days in Iceland was a visit to the Blue Lagoon where we soaked in the geothermal waters.

It only took 3 days to get me completely hooked on Iceland. I began reading everything I could find about the country. So when we found a cruise that would take us around the entire island, we booked and sailed this past July. We stayed the first night in a hotel near the cruise docks. We had hamburgers – for roughly 100 dollars total! It is expensive in Iceland because mostly everything is imported (except for sheep, sheep wool, and locally farmed produce and fish) and they have a 34% sales tax.

The next day we boarded the Viking Star – it was beautiful! I learned that Viking uses a “lego” construct to build their ocean cruise liners – where cabins are built on land as a module that then is “easily” lifted onto the boat. Walking around the boat, I was impressed by the many public areas for reading and just relaxing. We enjoyed afternoon tea in a comfy space with a big window.

Our first day on the ship was an overnight in Reykjavik, we went to a relatively new hot springs, Sky Lagoon. The perfect way to get the kinks out after sitting on a plane and enjoy a gorgeous view of the Atlantic Ocean.

The next day we took a scenic drive across the Reykjanes Peninsula, home to volcanoes, extensive lava fields, geysers, and hot springs. We passed Kleifarvatn Lake, one of the deepest and the largest lake in Iceland. We also walked through many multicolored hot springs of boiling mud and powerful jets of steam erupting from the crater-pocked terrain. It was like a mini-Yellowstone. We saw multiple areas that were mining for the geothermal energy and hydropower plants that together provide 99% of total electricity consumption in Iceland. So, while the sales tax is high, there is little cost to warming your home!

We also visited the Viking World Museum, where the main attraction was a Viking ship that is an exact



Reykanes peninsula – geothermal bubbling mud



The Viking Museum – the replica of a Viking boat



Ingrid holding the bird stick on Vidur Island

replica of an old Viking ship called the Gokstad ship. This replica ship was sailed to New York in 2000 to commemorate Leifur Eiriksson’s journey to the New World a thousand years earlier. The museum also outlined the early history of the Vikings, or Norse, as they raided many northern European countries in their sleek and fast ships. In the 800s, many Norse settlers inhabited previously uninhabited islands of the Faeroes,



Black guillemots with their red feet



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Fnjóskadalur - Gullfoss Waterfall



Mývatn volcanic lake area volcanic craters - Mini Yellowstone



Djúpivogur - The Eggs Statues



Outside of Heimaey through the islands created by volcano eruptions - this one is known as the Elephant Island



Lava Towers



Seydisfjörður - The Blue church and Pride painted main street



Magnet made in Iceland not China - perfect for Grill Master Craig



Heimaey - Outside The Volcano Museum - one of the many houses destroyed by the 1973 Volcano

Iceland, and Greenland bringing their livestock and their way of life.

On Day 3, we set sail and our first stop was Isafjordur on the northwestern tip of the island. We took a small boat from the Ísafjörður's harbor and sailed the Djupfjord to the island of Vigur, which is alive with birds. We saw Arctic terns, a few puffins, eider ducks, and black guillemots. On arrival, we were handed a stick with a little flag on it. It had two purposes - the flag indicated which boat we would be taking back, and secondly, it provided protection from all the birds. We were not to hit them with the stick, just hold it upright so it was higher than our heads and the birds stayed away from us.

It was a lovely tour - we learned a lot about the birds and their migration schedule. For example, the eider duck male would arrive on the island literally in his colorful glory. Then he would mate and lose

his color and LEAVE. The mothers would hatch the eggs and stay a year until their ducklings were walking, flying, and able to feed themselves, We also learned how the eiderdown was harvested after the ducks shed their coats. We still use our eiderdown duvets which were a wedding present 53 years ago and are still quite useable and the best blanket ever.

Only 10 people live and work on the island with the owners Gísli, Felicity, and their son, Práinn Freyr. An interesting note about Felicity, a physicist and meteorologist, is that she became the first woman -- and only the third person in history - to ski across the entire continent of Antarctica alone. Before that, she joined a race across Arctic Canada known as the Polar Challenge. She was part of the first all-female team to complete this race; they came in 6th place out of 16 teams. I found that fascinating and need to read her book.

On Day 4, as we were on our way to Akureyri, we crossed the Arctic Circle. That was exciting - Craig has crossed the equator numerous times on Navy ships, but crossing the Arctic circle was a first. Our first stop was in the Fnjóskadalur Valley to see the majestic Godafoss waterfall. There were a lot of trails around the falls, so we had many different views. Our next stop was the Mývatn volcanic lake area, where we saw impressive craters, towering lava castles and grottoes, and the geothermal wonder of hot sulfuric mud springs and gurgling sulfur cauldrons at Námaskard.

Day 5 found us in Seydisfjörður, a small but very picturesque town. The town has 688 people, and our ship had a lot more, yet we were warmly welcomed. We toured on foot - taking in views of the colorful streets and the Blue Church. It was the last day of Pride Weekend and the town's walkways were painted in the LBGQT colors, showing their support of the

LBGQT community. We stopped at the Herðubreið Community Center and enjoyed a musical performance of traditional Icelandic songs.

There were numerous knitting shops and art exhibits. I was on the hunt for a magnet (a habit that I have - a collection of magnets on the frig from all the places we've visited). I had read that the majority of tourist shops sold magnets made in China. Here in Seydisfjörður, I found a magnet made in Iceland! The weather was nice and we had a grand time walking around. We also got to taste some traditional Icelandic cuisine.

The stop the next day was at Djúpvogur - and I think this was my favorite stop. We walked around the town and stopped at The Tank. The tank, in its prior life, stored the locally produced fish liver oil. Now, it is a cultural venue that supports local musicians and artists and boasts unique acoustic features. We sat in a circle around candles perched on the floor. The local woman who sang had an amazing voice and the sound in the tank was mesmerizing.

The second favorite was the Eggs of Merry Bay, a set of sculptures that showcase the eggs of 34 bird species that nest along the coastlines of Iceland. It was fun to see the difference in shape and size. And last, but not least, was Audun's Mineral collection, which Audun has been collecting around Djúpvogur for 30 years. He cuts the stones in half to see the beautiful crystals inside. He had crystals, agate, quartz, and zeolite - all over the museum. Audun told us the charming story about how he uncovered a very big stone and was positive that it would be beautiful inside. In the wild, the stones are just big gray stones - the beauty inside is not apparent. It weighed about 1,000 pounds so he begged his brother to help until he finally said yes! And how happy everyone must have been because once the huge stone was cut in half as they saw the most beautiful white crystals inside.

The next to last day of our cruise was to Heimaey, located in the Vestmannaeyjar (Western Islands) archipelago formed by underwater

volcanic eruptions. Heimaey is the largest and only inhabited island. It has 2 volcanoes, Helgafell and Eldfell. The Eldheimar Museum documents the last eruption of Eldfell, which took place in 1973 less than a mile from the town of Heimaey. Over 400 homes and buildings were destroyed. The museum was built around a house totally destroyed by the volcanic ash and flames. It was quite moving. All 5,000 inhabitants had to evacuate the island and escape to the mainland. Fortunately, there had been a bad storm so the entire town's fishing fleet was sheltered in the harbor. Everyone was able to get to safety by these boats. The story of the eruption, escape, and then the rebuilding of the town is amazing.

Our last evening on board, the ship slowly navigated through the Vestmannaeyjar archipelago - just amazing how the volcanic eruptions resulted in so many islands. The next morning found us back in Reykjavik and on our way home. It is a beautiful country - full of waterfalls, mountains, and volcanos.

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# SINGLETREE COMES TOGETHER FOR A HOLIDAY SOIREE TO SUPPORT ART FOR A CAUSE: A GALLERY OF GIVING

Singletree artists gathered to celebrate the season in the neighborhood, display their work, and donate 25% of the proceeds to raise funds for The Bridge Fund at Castle Peak Senior Life and Rehabilitation



Joe Hess, Photographer and Director of Health Services at Castle Peak, Olga Barron, Stroll Singletree Sponsor, and Will Theoharides, Event Host and Owner of Avon Frame Shoppe (L to R)



Singletree artist, Jill Flanagan, with her husband, Brian



Jewelry maker Cindy Duncan crafts unique pieces with husband



Margo Thomas exhibiting her dynamic mountain works



Singletree artists (L to R): Melissa Nelson, Jami Nix Rahn, and Beth Levine



Susan Mackin Dolan (L) sharing her prints on her self made paper



Photographer Raymond Blesz (R)





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# A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE OF MONTY THE SINGLETREE CAT

CONTRIBUTED BY MONTY AND ANNAH SCULLY, SINGLETREE PET AND RESIDENT



**M**eow, everyone! It's me, Monty the Singletree Cat, here to share some of my favorite tales from my 19 years in this charming neighborhood.

Let's start with my early years. Born in Singletree, I quickly made a name for myself as the golf course's "sand trap inspector." Yes, I have the distinction of pooping in all of the sand traps on the golf course, and have found them all worthy of my deposits. Thank you to the Sonnenalp for providing such luxurious litter.

But I wasn't just a mischievous golf course explorer. I took my role as the neighborhood's chief rodent exterminator very seriously. Singletree owes its almost varmint free reputation to my stalker/hunter skills. And in return for my hard work, I'd often bring home "gifts" to my mommy and daddy, Annah and Mark Scully. They might not always appreciate the critter parts I left on the doorstep, but I considered it my way of saying "you guys would starve without me."

Now, let's talk about a talent I've perfected over the years—throwing up on the carpet just inches away from the tile floor. It's an art, really, and I must admit I've become quite a vomit virtuoso. My mommy Annah has certainly learned to keep those paper towels handy.

And speaking of Annah, she's my favorite human to distract. You see, I have a special fondness for laying on the computer keyboard when she's trying to work. It's my way of saying, "I am much more interesting than your spreadsheet and twice as furry."

Also, I love to boop noses with the deer that visit our backyard. It's like our secret little Greeting, and I can say without a doubt, I unequivocally prefer deer to those hyper, sycophant creatures called dogs.

One of my proudest achievements has been raising my two human babies, Anthony and Maria. I've been there for them since they were just tiny humans, and I've taught them the importance of never having to be alone in the toilet. You see, I firmly believe that no one should ever experience loneliness when nature calls.

So there you have it, dear readers, a glimpse into my life as Monty the Singletree Cat. Born in this beautiful neighborhood 19 years ago, I've brought great joy to my loving family, the Scullys. Through it all, I've learned that being a cat is a grand adventure, and I plan to savor every moment of my golden years here in these beautiful 'meow-tains' we call home.





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<https://www.castlepeak.org/donate/>

**Untitled**  
11”x11”  
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# SKIING THE AMERICAN BIRKEBEINER: A UNIQUELY WISCONSIN WAY TO START RETIREMENT

John Tedstrom joins 11,000 participants to complete the 49th annual cross-country ski race in Hayward, WI

CONTRIBUTED BY JOHN TEDSTROM, SINGLETREE RESIDENT

What do you get when you combine Wisconsin beer cheese soup, Norwegian heritage, sayings like “Uff-Da”, “Let me squeeze right past ya”, and “Let me see that once”, with more than 11,000 participants, 40,000 spectators, 4,000 volunteers, more than 50 km of cross country ski trails, and freezing temperatures in a place where there’s one “stop-and-go-light”? It’s an amazing event called The American Birkebeiner, or Birkie for short. It is one of the most difficult ski marathons in the world, and it was the first big goal I set for myself upon retiring. I had skied it in 1991 and tried to ski it twice since, but the race was canceled due to lack of snow. Call me crazy, but I love cross-country skiing and wanted to prove to myself I could do it again.

For 50 years, thousands of people have come to Hayward, WI, from all over the world every February to challenge themselves, test their limits, and reap the feeling of accomplishment that comes from completing a seemingly impossible task. So now you’re thinking, “Wait. What? Cross-country skiing in Wisconsin can’t be that difficult. Sure, it’s cold but at least it’s flat!”. Actually, the Birkie course is deceptively hilly with over 35 hills, 4,600 feet of elevation gain, and a high point of 1,730 feet you can look



forward to. It’s the largest and most important cross-country ski race in North America.

The pre-race experience starts in Hayward the day before at one of the best Nordic Expos in the US. Here you get to see all the latest and greatest Nordic gear. Nordic equipment, clothing, socks, and underwear you never knew you needed. But always wanted. As you exit the expo, you get some real Wisconsin hospitality as the ladies of The Sons of Norway offer you homemade cookies and wish you a sincere “good luck tomorrow.”

### IT’S ALL IN THE PREP

Our race prep got geared up the night before as we talked about what to wear, what to eat, and what time to leave



Paul Gotthelf at the Birkie memorial in Hayward

in the morning to get there on time (because everyone has different start times). There’s a lot of talk about what wax did you use? What structure did you put on your skis? Soon the self-doubt starts to pop into your head about temperature, weather, forecast, wax reports. Should I have used the blue or green wax? My friend said, “Use this” and the Swix report said, “Use that” and the guys at Riverbrook Ski and Cycle said, “Only use this” while the guys at Pioneer Midwest said, “Only use that.” Arghhhh... what do I do?

This year, the forecast was fair and 10 degrees at the start, with low 20s during the race. There’s no good way to take layers off once you start, so you’ve got to plan on being cold at the start and not too hot as the race goes on. Lots of skiers wear Lycra speed suits – which I knew for me would be neither faster nor warm. I went with a couple of layers under a light jacket on top, with long underwear and race pants on the bottom, warm socks, and a hat.

### BIRKIE FEVER AT THE START

At the start, you catch the pre-Birkie frenzy in the huge warming tent where skiers are doing all kinds of prep. The floor of the tent is covered with a layer of hay over the thick ice, so where you stand is important if you want to keep your feet warm. There’s a guy to my right stretching, wearing a cape, and on the other side of the tent, someone in full fur and Viking horns is practicing with his Viking horn. I decide I’m good with my choice of race clothing. I hear one person talking about 37 layers of wax on their skis. I don’t know what that means but hope my layers of PS 5, 6, and marathon wax work for me – the Birkie special from my friends at the Vail Nordic Center, my home training course.

The race is run in waves so that groups of skiers with similar abilities and times are spread out along the course. Skate and classic waves alternate every five minutes. Since I hadn’t skied in a Birkie since 1991, I was in Wave 7 out of



Dan Timm, Paul Gotthelf, and Andy Jaekels (from Milwaukee in his 24th Birkie) at the start



The International Bridge in Hayward

8. Once your wave is called to the starting gates, the skiers bouncing up and down to keep warm and putting on their skis.

There’s nothing like it when the announcer calls your wave and says, “We are underway!”. And nothing like a dry mouth and a surge of adrenaline to start the race. If you don’t have Birkie fever right now, something is wrong with you! The whole start area is buzzing, it’s electric, it’s contagious!

It’s really congested at the start and someone skied over my pole and threw me down in a mass of skiers. I was happy my pole didn’t break, so I wouldn’t have to use one of the spares they had ready, which all looked short. Amazingly, I saw a one-armed skier using his one-arm-poling-motion to ski the whole course.

### ON COURSE

Fast forward to midway through the course. I’m standing at the top of “Heckler Hill” and rethinking my choice of retirement goal. Most people just play a lot of golf. But here I am with tired legs at the top of a tricky downhill, with a left turn at the top and a right turn at the bottom, near a snowmobile trail. There are signs shouting, “Turn back”, “You’re not going to make it”, and “Danger” on the side of the trail. There are raucous snowmobilers on both sides, heckling, and “scoring” skiers’ falls. By the time I reached the hill, it had been skied by thousands of skiers and shaved into three concave ice shoots with thin piles of snow between

them. More like bobsled runs than something I could ski on my skinny skate skis. As I watched, three skiers skidded off the course. Since there was only one way to go, I pushed forward, skiing between the lanes in a careful snowplow using the snow in between as much as possible.

The Birkie course is unique in the world and the hills make it even more interesting. There's "Firetower Hill", which takes skiers to the 1,730 foot highpoint early in the race, after a 400-foot climb. But in case you were thinking it's all downhill from there - the highest point is a false flag planted just to give you hope - the rest of the 35 hills are to come. "Bitch Hill" comes just when you think you're doing OK after 40 km/25 miles. It is truly a beast of a climb. It features groups of cheering spectators at the top, encouraging participants to take shots from a shot ski, as they go by. Another hill was cleverly named "Son of a Bitch Hill" in Strava. I gave several of the other hills names in my head while on the course; like "Holy Crap, Another One" and "OMG Hill".

The downhills are challenging too, including "Bobblehead Hill" and "Sledder Hill". As I came down Bobblehead Hill this year, I saw another skier upside down, in the brush off the trail, being helped by course officials asking him if he could return to the course or not. Another guy in a cape passed me on Sledder Hill.

Throughout the course, there are signs every kilometer - "49 kilometers to go" and "48 kilometers to go" - which can be overwhelming, but as you get closer to the finish and see "20 kilometers to go", "10 kilometers to go", "5 kilometers to go" and the countdown to finish, you start to gain perspective. Seeing skiers around me also helped me stay motivated. I used self-talk like "30 K? I did three 30 K training days. It hurt but it was no problem.", "20 K - that's a regular training day", and "That woman doesn't look like she would be able to do this. And she's passing me!". Of course, I think my time was decent and I passed a lot of people too.

The last 2.5 miles of the race run over Lake Hayward, which initially gave me a surge of adrenalin. Now my self-talk was about how close I am to finishing. But the raging arctic wind was straight in my face and it seemed to go on forever. In the last part of the race, it's just you, your skate rhythm, and groups of families partying out on the ice until you hit a bridge over Highway 63. The American Birkebeiner International Bridge takes us over U.S. Highway 63 to the snow-covered Main Street of Hayward and the finish line of the race. Skiing up and down the bridge is no easy feat, on legs that have now been skiing for over 5 hours.



The support team: Carri Tedstrom and Sondra Engelstad



Andy, Dan, and Paul celebrating after the finish



John before recovering at the finish



Rich Engelstad, Rob Engelstad, John, and Ellen Itzler after the race



John, Peter Tedstrom, Milo Tedstrom (Dad), and Eric Tedstrom in 1990



Topo map of the Birkie course

### WHAT'S ALL THE EXCITEMENT ABOUT?

Skiing the Birkie is a life experience, that's not quite an out-of-body experience, but you feel that way at the end. Participants include Olympic and National team members, professionals from every state, North America, and Europe, as well as thousands of recreational skiers, and a strong contingent from Vail this year.

31 miles is about 50,000 meters and the average skate stride is about 2 meters. So I figure I skated about 12 or 13,000 strides per leg in this race. I skied on my 10+ year old Rossignol Xium skate skis, 20 year old Rossi boots, and borrowed Leki poles. I carried a water bottle and a few energy bars, and still ate and drank everything in sight at every aid station. Warm water. Energy drink. Full handfuls of energy gels. Greasy bananas, orange slices and crème filled cookies. And it still wasn't enough. The body can only consume around 360 calories an hour if you use multiple sources of carbohydrates, but cross-country skiing over Birkie-like terrain can burn up to 1,000 calories an hour. So even if you eat constantly, you're still burning more than you can replenish. I guess that's one way to diet.

The top racers skate the full 31 miles in a little more than 2 hours, averaging 15 miles an hour! But most of us average humans ski it in 4-6 hours, with some classic skiers on the course more than 8. After this year's race, we were able to find archived results from our first Birkie in 1991 - and it took us 8.5 hours. In 1991, it snowed over 1 foot during the race, making it hard to skate.

In 2023, my time was 5 hours and 15 minutes. Many participants have skied multiple races and they wear a sticker on their bib for that number. I wore a "2" but saw people wearing "25"s and even a "42". One man—Ernie St. Germaine, a former employee of the Telemark Resort, where the Birkebeiner started —had completed every Birkie since the first one in 1973. I can't tell if he skied it in 2023 - but I hope so, especially if he skied it in a faster time than I did!

### COMING BACK FOR NEXT YEAR!

Back in 1991, we skied most of the race with a guy whose ambition was to win the "Golden Broom" award - the last person to finish before they swept skiers off the course due to time. He was the comic relief for us. One of his sayings was "Cotton is for the undertaker" - while showing us he was wearing mostly cotton gear, completely soaked through.

I remember sitting in the warming tent at the last aid station, wet, cold, and exhausted. I told Carri it would be so easy to crawl onto one of the cots in the warm tent and get a ride the last few miles to the finish. Of course, she said, "You can do whatever you like, but I'm finishing." Knowing what it would be like to live with that for the rest of my married life, I got fired up and finished too.

32 years later, the cheers of thousands of spectators after crossing the American Birkebeiner International Bridge and the promise of a Wisconsin brat plus beer and maybe some of that beer cheese soup made the day worth it. Like the 85% of participants who return every year, I'm sure I'll be back for more. After this, retirement should be as easy as a Wisconsin meat pie - only up here we call them Pasties.

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**SPICE UP THE  
SUPER BOWL  
WITH A FEAST  
OF FIERY WINGS**

CONTRIBUTED BY INGRID DAMPIER,  
SINGLETREE RESIDENT

Watching football to many people involves indulging in chicken wings. So I thought it important to write about chicken wings as we are at the most exciting time in football and these Thai Green Chicken Wings are our favorite snack for Broncos games!

We loved the original recipe created by Grace Parisi, a bright young cook whose recipe first appeared in Delish on January 14, 2010, and again in October 2017 in Food and Wine magazine. I read her original recipe and immediately tried her wings. And they were delicious and amazing. So, what made Grace Parisi's recipe different? The chicken wings were NOT fried in oil but baked at very high temperatures in a baking pan. They were basically fried in their own fat.

Over time, we learned that her recipe, while delicious, made a mess of the oven so we experimented with grilling and air frying. Grill Master Craig has concluded that grilling is the

preferred method for the best wings and I agree – even in a snowstorm!

**THAI GREEN CURRY HOT WINGS**

**Ingredients:**

- 2 Tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 lb chicken wingettes and drumettes
- 1 ½ Tbsp Seed Ranch Thai Green Hot Sauce
- 1/2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted

**Directions:**

- 1/1 hour before serving: mix the flour with the salt and coriander in a plastic bag. Add the chicken and massage the bag to thoroughly coat the chicken.
- 2/ Heat the grill to 400 - 450°. Place wings on the grill for 15 minutes, turning often. Note: If the weather precludes grilling, air fry the prepared wings at 400 for 20 minutes, turning them over after 10 minutes.
- 3/ Mix the sauce in a large bowl and add the grilled or air fried wings to the sauce and toss to coat.

The beautiful thing about this basic recipe is the variations that can be made to change it up and I have not been the only one experimenting with new ways to create new flavors. Here is the original Grace Parisi recipe as well as her recommended variations. For each one, mix the sauce, add the grilled chicken wings, and toss to coat. You can't go wrong!

**SAUCE VARIATIONS**

**Original sauce from Grace Parisi:**

- 2 1/2 Tbsp green hot sauce
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1/2 Tbsp fish sauce
- 1 tsp Thai green curry paste

**Green Jalapeño Hot Wings**

- 3 Tbsp green jalapeño hot sauce
- 1 Tbsp chopped pickled jalapeños
- 1 garlic clove
- 3 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted

Omit the coriander from the flour mixture. In a mini food processor, puree the hot sauce and pickled jalapeños and garlic until smooth. Add melted butter.

**Maple-Chipotle Hot Wings**

- 2 1/2 Tbsp red hot sauce, preferably Frank's Red Hot
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 1 canned chipotle pepper, minced
- 2 Tbsp maple syrup

Substitute 1 tsp dried sage for the coriander. Whisk the hot sauce with the butter, chipotle pepper, and maple syrup.

**Classic Hot Wings – my son's favorite**

- 3 Tbsp red hot sauce, preferably Frank's Red Hot
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted

Whisk the hot sauce with the butter.

**Ginger-Honey Hot Wings**

- 2 1/2 Tbsp red hot sauce, preferably Frank's Red Hot
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 1/2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 2 Tbsp minced fresh ginger
- Scallions

Substitute 1 teaspoon ground Sichuan peppercorns and 1/4 teaspoon five-spice powder for the coriander. Whisk the hot sauce with the butter, soy sauce, honey, and ginger. Garnish with sliced scallions.

I hope you enjoy these wings at the Super Bowl! And thank you, Grace Parisi, for your inspiration!



## A DECADENT INDULGENCE FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

**P**ots de Crème was the first "French" dessert I served some 40 years ago and has been a standard Valentine's desert since then. On my recipe card, I had written the name phonetically - Poh-de-crème, and also attributed where I found the recipe - in a 1985 book by Peggy Melody and Linda Rosenblum, *In the Chips: The Complete Chocolate Chip Cookbook*. The first years I used our tea/coffee cups which are a bit bigger than needed. However, as I was wandering through an antique store quite a while ago, I found Wedgwood Queensware cups that seemed to me to be a perfect touch to Valentine's Day.

Once google became a household name, I googled Poh-de-crème and learned a lot. They originated in France in the 1700 hundreds. Crème was the name for custard, and the "pots" was the name of the little porcelain pots they were baked in. The original "pots" were reported to be about 3" tall and had lids. Lucky for me, 3" is exactly the height of my Queensware cups and thank goodness I had been using a recipe that did not call for putting the pots in the oven!

I also learned about semisweet chocolate. The term semisweet chocolate is not strictly defined as to the exact amount of sugar required to be called "semisweet". Essentially, semisweet chocolate is dark chocolate because it does not contain milk solids, with at least 60% cacao. I recommend using a dark chocolate chip with at least 60% cacao. And it doesn't have to be the world's most expensive chocolate. I used a store brand Dark Chocolate Chunks with 72% cacao and it makes a deliciously rich, dark Pots-de-crème.

So I hope you enjoy this simple recipe for Valentine's Day:

### POTS DE CREME

**Ingredients:** Serves 4

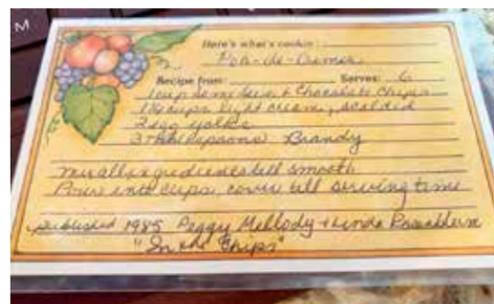
- 1 cup (6 oz) semisweet or dark chocolate chips - cacao level at least 60%

- 1 ¼ cup Half and Half cream, scalded
- 2 egg yolks
- 3 Tbsp brandy

### Directions:

- 1/ Scald the cream: Place in a small saucepan over medium-low heat until small bubbles appear around the edges of the pan.
- 2/ Combine the chocolate chips, egg yolks and brandy in a food processor or blender.
- 3/ Add scalded cream to the blender and mix till smooth (holding the lid down - when adding a warm liquid it can blow the blender lid off).
- 4/ Pour into cups, cover, and refrigerate until serving time.
- 5/ Serve with a little whipped cream if desired.

For additional recipe ideas, please visit Ingrid's blog at [MyAmazingCookbook.com](http://MyAmazingCookbook.com).



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