

Sally and Bill Hanlon to be Recognized with 2021 Vail Trailblazer Award for 55 Years of Civic Involvement, Community Building and Friendships

14 March 2021



Sally and Bill Hanlon have spent more than 50 years serving as Vail's ambassadors in a way that helped define the community as a world class ski town and showed a unique and caring style to welcoming guests and new community members to town. The Hanlons have been selected as recipients of the 2021 Vail Trailblazer Award as presented by the Vail Town Council. The annual Vail Trailblazer Award honors those who contribute their time and talent to make Vail a great resort community. The Hanlons will be formally recognized at the March 16 evening Vail Town Council meeting in which a mayor's proclamation honoring their significant contributions will be read into the public record. Recognition will also take place during the Town of Vail Annual Community Meeting which will be produced as a virtual meeting and will be aired March 30 on the [Town of Vail Facebook page](#) as well as on [High Five Access Media](#).

Newlyweds Bill and Sally Hanlon moved from Boston to Crested Butte in pursuit of their ski town dream in 1966. When friends David and Renie decided to move their Gorsuch ski shop to Vail, the Hanlons joined them, arriving in November to open the Nu Gnu nightclub in the lowest level of Vail's Clock Tower Building with partner Paul Johnston. Bill and Sally ran the NuGnu while hosting at the busy Clock Tower Restaurant owned by John Kaemmer, and opened The Emporium gift shop in 1968, just before kids Meg and Joe arrived. By 1970, their first shop had evolved to become Wild Bill's Emporium, now in its 53rd year on Wall Street, and in later years, the couple opened Vail Village Travel Agency, established in 1976 and remains in operation today as Talbot Travel, then Vail Boot and Shoe which opened in 1982 and still operates in its original Meadow Drive location, followed by the opening of Bridge Street Antiques which was in business from 1982 to 1985.

Sally's civic involvement and leadership can be seen in both local government and with the ski company. She served 10 years on the Vail town liquor licensing authority and on the board of the first Vail Local Marketing District and was a longtime member of the Vail Resort Association, the original marketing group for the Vail community. Sally, who had worked as a teacher and guidance counselor before moving to Vail, joined with Joe Staufer to lobby and help lead the charge to open a school in Vail, persuading the community and Eagle County School District to support a neighborhood school. Red Sandstone Elementary School opened in 1976. Bill and Sally then spent a combined 22 years as members of the board of a second Vail school, Vail Mountain School.

Civic involvement was also a priority for Bill Hanlon, who served on Vail's Planning Commission and Design Review boards for a number of years in the 1970s. He emphatically supported the creation of a then-revolutionary idea of a need for a pedestrian core. He was a committee member again when Vail redesigned the core streetscape features in the early 2000s,

and he was able to explain a number of the mysterious historical features discovered during the street digs. His talents and leadership helped pioneer the alpine and pedestrian focus of Vail. Bill was a member of the first Vail Religious Foundation which built the Interfaith Chapel and an active supporter of the Vail Jazz Foundation. Founder Howard Stone noted Bill's involvement to bring the inner-city Washington Prep High School Jazz and Marching Band from South-Central Los Angeles as part of the annual Fourth of Jazz celebration in Vail as part of the Vail America Days parade. He stated, "Bill was a force to be reckoned with" as he helped arrange for lodging (the kids brought sleeping bags and slept on the floor of the gym of a local school), food (the school's cafeteria was opened and Bill got busy stocking it with treats and drinks), picnics in the park, free gondola rides and activities for the kids. The kids arrived on the night of July 3, 1999, after enduring a 20-hour bus ride and Bill was there to greet them. Bill was also an instrumental organizer of the Jerry Ford Invitational golf tournament. The golf tournament provided a great opportunity to share the town they love with Betty and Jerry Ford, with whom they became close friends, and to invite the former President's friends and family to donate to town charities funded through the tournament.

The Hanlons raised their family, including daughter Meg and son Joe, and enjoy a number of grandchildren who all live locally. The Hanlons have never been tempted to leave their treasured Vail Village home. Bill and Sally have sincerely wanted everyone, guests and residents alike, to appreciate the extraordinary features of Vail, and they do everything they can to share them. As a 50-year resident of the village core, Bill reports paths that need shoveling or bulbs that have gone dark to town staff; and they both often escort lost visitors to their destinations personally. At 85, Bill Hanlon can still often be seen riding his bike to work while carrying two Stetson boxes or a ladder. He rides to Wild Bill's on Wall Street nearly every day and describes his three-block bike ride as the best commute in the world.

Trailblazer nominators provided examples of the Hanlon's pioneering contributions of time and talent, courage, leadership, vision and commitment in their endeavor to enhance Vail's social, recreational, cultural, educational and environmental values that define the community. Their style and charm, integrity and steadfast pioneering effort over the decades has helped create Vail as a premier international mountain resort community. The Hanlons were the early believers and investors in the Vail community and over 50 years later have become longtime prominent business owners and amazing alpine skiing ambassadors, a beloved couple admired by many who have met them along the way.

The Hanlons described the Trailblazer Award from the town as "a humbling and deeply appreciated recognition" of the work they've done to contribute to their family's home and town they adore. Life in Vail has been a great gift to the Hanlon family, and they are proud of their time here. For decades Bill and Sally have warmly described Vail as "the finest ski town in the world."

The Vail Trailblazer Award was established during the town's 50th birthday celebration in 2016. The Hanlons are the sixth recipients to be honored and was selected by a Town Council committee from among other deserving nominations.

For more information about the Vail Trailblazer Award and the nomination process, visit the town's website at www.vailgov.com/trailblazeraward.

