



THE

POWER OF PLACE

*Confronted with a changing economy,
Steve Duerr and the Jackson Hole chamber
try to balance commerce with conservation.*

By Todd Wilkinson

Photograph by Tom Stanton

Steve Duerr has that healthy, rugged look, that archetypal cowboy look that sends dudes scurrying for their digital cameras.

A granite-jawed, stockily built, cowboy hat-wearing, pickup truck-driving, Republican attorney in the prime of middle age, Duerr is also a hard-skating hockey player from Minnesota. He isn't disposed to casually slinging touchy-feely catchphrases that sound like greetings on Mother's Day cards.

Yet when Duerr strings together three simple words – POWER OF PLACE – the executive director of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce betrays a softness beneath that rock-hard facade. He believes the phrase conveys something magical – yes, he says, even profound – about his adopted valley that rolls off the eastern slope of the Teton Range.

These days, as the tough guy perched on the seminal hot seat at the epicenter of Jackson Hole's rapidly changing economy, it is Duerr, the anointed defender of capitalism, who knows that Power of Place also represents a seismic fault line opening between Jackson Hole's mythologically tranquil past and its uncertain future.

Ask Duerr where Power of Place came from, and he openly acknowledges the idea behind Jackson Hole's new "brand identity" isn't his own. The concept finds its first origin in a poetic aside written by famed ecologist and local conservation activist Olaus Murie. In 1943, Murie wondered, "How can we encompass it in words? I have heard residents try to pin it down in outbursts of enthusiasm, but they couldn't find the words ... No, we can not describe the spirit of Jackson Hole – the

'Spirit of Place' – but many of us feel it."

Duerr, seen by some as a brilliant visionary, dismissed by others as quixotic and a wheeler dealer, is convinced that the underlying message of Power of Place can bolster the valley's economy while inspiring world leaders to visit and become better caretakers of the planet. If that doesn't come across as the pitch from your typical chamber of commerce honcho, welcome to Steve's world.

Three years ago when Duerr and the chamber adopted this slogan as Jackson Hole's modern mantra, it signaled an abrupt shift away from the nostalgic motto, "The Last and Best of the Old West." That slogan had played out like a theme park ride every summer for decades in the form of nightly gunfights, staged by local actors, around the Town Square.

The trademarking of Power of Place followed months of consultation with focus groups involving business leaders and prominent conservationists. Once adopted, the phrase quickly grabbed more than its share of attention across the West. Praised by neighboring resort communities, Power of Place seemed to embody the realization that the private

sector can embrace the natural environment as an asset rather than an impediment to the local economy.

Duerr suddenly became a rising star and received invitations to speak on the subject across the country, including giving the keynote address at a major convention of resort town planners in Banff, Canada.

Back home in Jackson, Power of Place's traction has been tempered by suspicion and distrust. The phrase indeed may have descended from Murie, but today it is synonymous with Steve Duerr himself, and his survival at the chamber may depend upon his ability to sell it at a time when once-thriving retailers fronting the famous

elkhorn archways are facing challenges from an ever-changing tourist economy.

"The fact that Steve hasn't been fired for developing the Power of Place theme is an indication of the kind of tolerance you find at the Jackson Hole chamber, an open-mindedness that you don't encounter at chambers in a lot of other communities," says Jan Brown, executive director of the Yellowstone Business Partnership, a sister regional organization to the chamber. "Everyone recognizes the power of Jackson Hole's scenery, but now the question becomes: How much farther beyond the slogan are people willing to go, and can Steve Duerr take them there?"

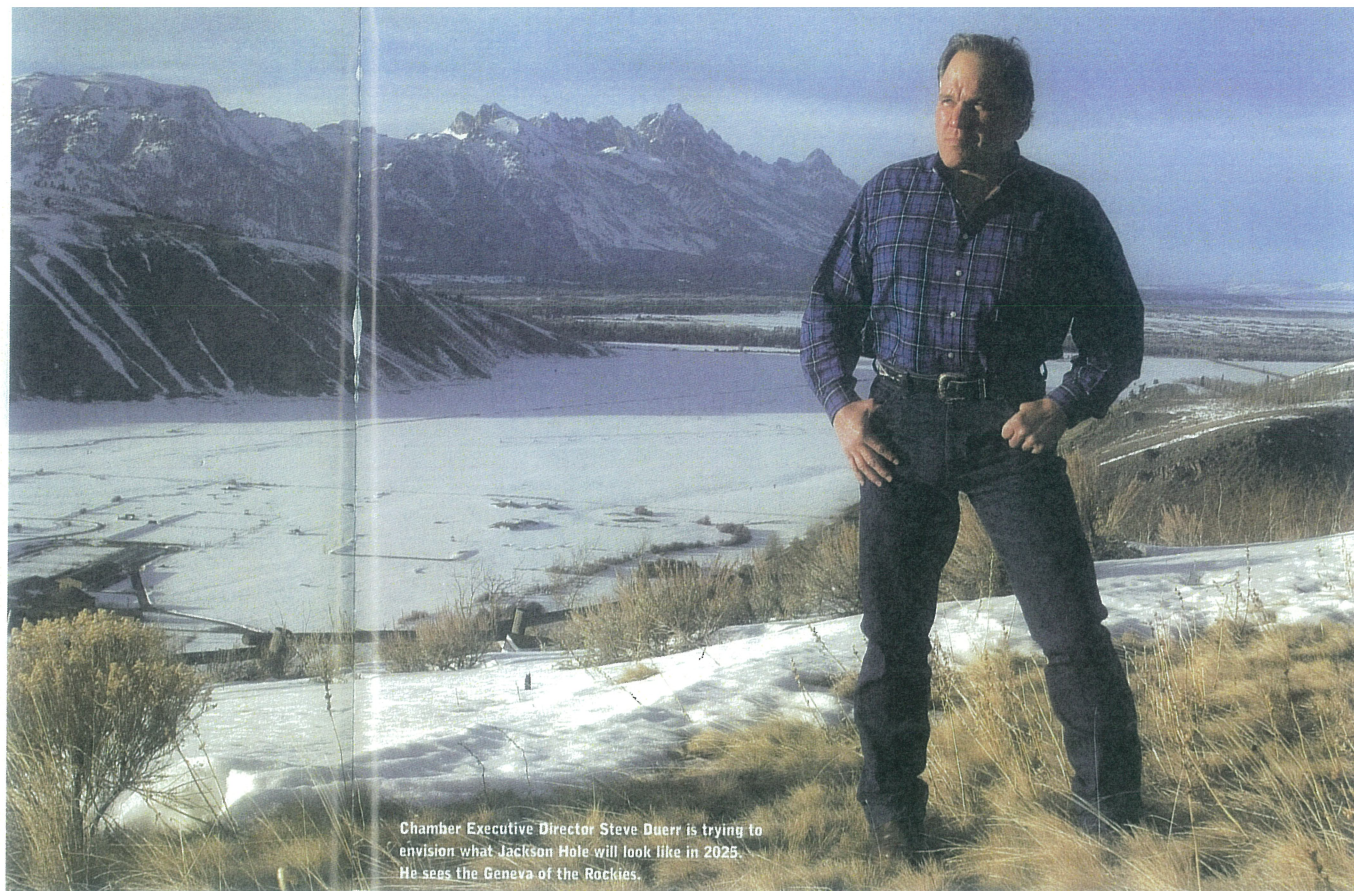
Across North America, nearly every community large and small has a local chamber of commerce, an advocacy organization dedicated to aggressively promoting business opportunity and economic prosperity. Many chambers subscribe to the political agenda and free market ideology spelled out by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which has tended to look upon planning, zoning and environmental regulation as potential impediments to progress.

Although Duerr says he does not take marching orders from the mother ship, he knows that when push comes to shove, the Jackson Hole chamber ultimately must

take sides in the battle between economy and ecology. A chamber, after all, can't have it both ways. Or can it?

"As Jackson Hole is not 'Anytown USA,'" Duerr once told me, "then our chamber cannot be 'AnyChamber USA,' either. Regardless of politics or philosophy, a common shared value is the glue that brings us together. In our town, the elements of a community that works are a vibrant commerce, stable jobs and families, but based on a balance between commerce and conservation."

Commerce and conservation. That battle has been raging for generations in Jackson Hole and reached a turning point



Chamber Executive Director Steve Duerr is trying to envision what Jackson Hole will look like in 2025. He sees the Geneva of the Rockies.

KELLY GRADCOCK



Making room for luxury homes atop East Gros Ventre Butte, once habitat for mule deer, grouse and other species.

more than 60 years ago when ranchers and businessmen tried to stop the U.S. government from carving Grand Teton National Park out of private ranchland. Leading that opposition was rancher and former U.S. Sen. Cliff Hansen, who more recently allowed that Teton park "is the best thing that ever happened to this valley."

The 51-year-old Duerr, who became executive director at the Jackson Hole chamber in 1999, would subscribe to that assessment but can't be easily pigeonholed as a dyed-in-the-wool greenie. It wasn't that long ago, actually, that Duerr was a hired legal gun for the oil and gas industry who encouraged the chamber not to take a stand against energy development on the valley's periphery.

"We are far removed from most U.S. Chamber of Commerce issues, but make no mistake, the job of a chamber executive director must be all about business," he says. "I am here to advocate for business issues and business people and to focus on advancing sound management policy with regard to the core mission of the Jackson Hole chamber."

Duerr believes, however, that keeping natural landscapes healthy is as important to promoting economic well-being as maintaining an infrastructure of roads, air

*This is the upside
of the downside
of growth.*

service and high-speed Internet. "Idealism must be tempered by practical action," Duerr says. "My job is to represent business, but it's all about mindfulness to the big picture and continually seeking the right balance. If I tend to be too far green, I should be fired. Being a conservation activist is not my job."

Duerr recognizes that national parks and other federal public lands, such as national forests and wildlife refuges, have proved to be multifaceted economic engines. But tourist patterns are changing, and statistics indicating little visitor growth at Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks over the past decade reflect this fact. American travelers are savvier, more discriminating in their vacation choices and more crunched for free time than their parents. The days of the Western family auto trip with four or

five national parks on the schedule have gone the way of \$1 a gallon gasoline.

At the same time, the greater Yellowstone region has experienced an influx of another sort: a wave of retirees and business people who uprooted themselves from the city seeking a more rural lifestyle without sacrificing the amenities of urban living. The 20 counties that comprise the greater Yellowstone region are among the fastest-growing rural areas in the West. Moreover, in Jackson Hole, where only 3 percent of the land is privately owned and 97 percent managed by federal or state government, real estate is hyperinflated, and a buyer's market only for the wealthy. In 2004, Teton County, Wyo., was ranked the richest county per capita in America based on U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

"Jackson Hole may not be better than its quaint past, but this is the upside of the downside of growth," says Suzanne Young, Duerr's predecessor as chamber executive director. She and Duerr insist that every business person in Jackson Hole's visitor economy, from restaurateurs to home builders, realizes that sustaining natural and historical assets provides a foundation for

opportunity, attracting brilliant entrepreneurs and more than 3 million tourists.

"The more expensive the land gets, and the more that these owners of large homes demand that things stay aesthetically nice, the more people are unwilling to put up with anything that negatively affects their experience," Young says. Preservation of real estate investment values, she explains, is linked to preservation of the scenic beauty and wildlife that exists on and around those properties. Even if a citizen isn't driven to advocate for environmental protection on altruistic grounds, economic self-interest has given many people a reason to protect nature.

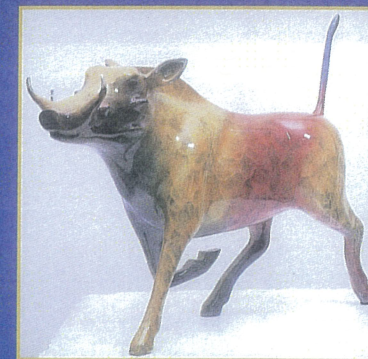
The challenge facing Jackson Hole, Young suggests, is finding the tipping point at which an unwillingness to embrace self-restraint when it comes to development and sprawl ends up impairing the environment to the point that property values suffer. Young believes that Duerr is wrestling with the conundrum and adds that the chamber's Power of Place campaign has resonance far beyond the Tetons because other communities across North America are coping with the same delicacies of trying to find balance.

Luther Propst, head of the Sonoran Institute, which promotes preservation of agricultural and natural landscapes through community planning, tells the story of Gatlinburg, Tenn., gateway community to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, whose traffic volume is nearly double Grand Teton's. "People traditionally took vacations to the Smokies to see a bear or watch the leaves turn color. Then some of the city fathers transitioned Gatlinburg into an amusement-based economy, which worked for awhile. Unfortunately, society's tastes changed and Gatlinburg was left behind in its own past," Propst explains. "It kind of lost its mystique because it was no longer the quaint and attractive gateway town on the edge of the Smokies. As a result of people no longer coming in the numbers that they came before, Gatlinburg has gone through a period of decline."

The only way a traditional park gateway community can carve out a niche in the future, Propst believes, is if the town is able to safeguard the rare or unique qualities that imbue it with greater meaning in a hectic world. "It's better to aspire to be Geneva instead of Gatlinburg," he says, referring to Duerr's vision that Jackson Hole could be a scenic backdrop



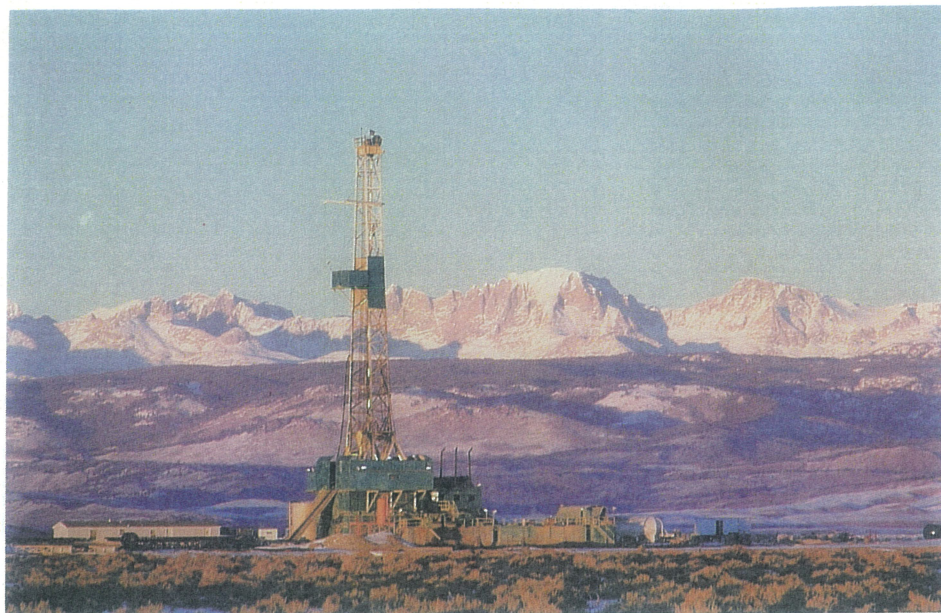
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Top: The peaks of the Wind River Range tower above the booming oil and gas fields outside Pinedale. High energy prices are filling the state's coffers, a trend expected to continue.

Above: Teton park's antelope herd, which migrates to winter range in the Upper Green River Valley, could be cut off by drilling. "The survival of that herd is now threatened by the gas boom," Duerr says.

for world leaders grappling with today's geopolitical problems.

Duerr says it was the valley's picturesque, unblighted landscape that led him to tout Jackson Hole as the Geneva of the Rockies, a setting for international summits. He points to 1989, when then Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze chose Jackson Hole as a venue for talks that ultimately led to the end of the Cold War. They did not pick a hotel in suburbia for the meeting. They wanted Jackson Hole because Secretary Baker had bought a ranch near the Wind River Mountains (ironically today located near one of the largest expanding sprawls of natural gas development in the world).

Like Vice President Dick Cheney, who owns a home at the exclusive Teton Pines subdivision on the west side of Jackson Hole, Baker recognized that having an inspirational backdrop would help them look past historic tensions. Baker's and Shevardnadze's visit prompted Duerr and a few friends to create the Jackson Hole Center for Global Affairs, a nonprofit organization working closely with the chamber, the U.S. State Department and the government of

China on a clean air initiative. Duerr is affiliated with the center as a side endeavor.

"Steve talking about Jackson becoming the Geneva of North America raised eyebrows," says Propst. "It is bold, and there's not a lot of chamber of commerce directors I know who have the creativity and courage to propose it. Would such a concept benefit the owners of rubber tomahawk shops? Probably not. But Steve's thinking about where Jackson needs to be in 2025, not in 1955."

Jackson Hole economist and social commentator Jonathan Schechter thinks of Duerr as a heroic figure. But he admits that he is biased. Schechter has helped cultivate the Power of Place campaign and helped establish the Center for Global Affairs. Together, Schechter and Duerr also coordinated a regional Power of Place conference in Jackson in March.

"Steve, in some ways, has gotten caught between people's expectations of what worked in Jackson Hole in the past and his own sense of idealism. Now he needs to convince his membership that he is right," Schechter says. "He sees clearly where the business community needs to go, but the chamber is the personification, in some ways, of the old economy. Typical chambers of commerce do not do a lot of long-range thinking. Steve is good at looking around corners. He sees what has happened in other communities, and he wants Jackson's fate to be different."

Duerr says his own "enlightenment" grew out of a series of personal trials and epiphanies. After a divorce from his first wife, he bought a quarter-section of ranchland south of Jackson Hole between the Green River and New Fork Lake, about 15 miles north of Cora on Green River Road. The property, located in the foothills of the Wind River Mountains, had never been developed. Duerr escaped there to decompress and to think about decisions he made in his life.

For eight months, he and his oldest daughter, Josie (then in the seventh grade), lived in a wall tent without electricity or running water. It was their shelter as he built a log cabin. Every morning, Duerr made the hour-long drive to bring Josie to school in Jackson and returned at night. "On that ranch the sun rises over the Wind Rivers and sets over the Wyoming Range, with the Gros Ventres and Union Pass to the north and in the other direction the view leads all the way to South Pass," Duerr

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says. Here he began to undergo a transformation, and it emanated, literally, from the power of a place.

"We lived very close to the land," he says. "Moose and elk were frequently present. The song and wetland birds were there in enormous number. In the winter, there wasn't a sound on clear, calm nights and the nearest artificial illumination was miles away. We would sit there under the sky and admire the northern lights in peaceful darkness."

Serendipitously, Duerr says his sabbatical in Cora, away from the rat race, has been accompanied by three other converging influences: He has since remarried; he discovered the paintings of Carl Rungius, which are part of the permanent collection at the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson; and he was introduced to Harvey Locke, founder of the Yellowstone to Yukon conservation initiative, which aims to safeguard the wildness of the Northern Rockies stretching from the Canadian province of Yukon more than a thousand miles to the southern end of the Wind River Range.

Early in his career at the turn of the 19th century, Rungius had painted in the Wind Rivers within the vicinity of the upper Green River drainage. Specifically, the celebrated wildlife artist had rendered several paintings of antelope in and around Cora. "Antelope is a code word for Steve," says Young, the former chamber director. "Antelope symbolize the fragile environment and what might be lost forever if we're not careful."

Duerr recalls he and his daughter watching the antelope herd that summers in Grand Teton pass through Cora on its migration to winter range near the Winds. "The survival of that herd is now threatened by the gas boom," he says.

If one drives south of Jackson into the sagebrush and timber-coated hinders around Pinedale and Big Piney, they will encounter the largest oil and natural gas drilling frenzy the state has ever known. And it is slowly creeping north toward Jackson. Duerr believes strongly that industries that exploit the environment ought to give back. Wyoming's history is littered with the remains of mining and energy booms gone bust and promises broken, leaving local communities more impoverished.

During the summer of 2004, Duerr embarked upon yet another path in his professional development. He ran for a seat in the Wyoming Senate, hoping to represent

citizens in Teton, Sublette and Lincoln counties. Although he lost, he logged thousands of miles meeting people, including executives from oil and gas companies that are drilling in neighboring counties.

Duerr says rather than lament the oil and gas juggernaut, which cannot be stopped, citizens instead should speak up to ensure that some of the huge profits being pulled from the earth, and exported out of Wyoming, stay here to benefit local communities and prepare them for the post-boom. He says federal environmental regulations are limited in what they can accomplish. As an attorney who has worked with energy companies, he says one of the most potent tools resides within the corporate constitutions of oil and gas conglomerates, compelling them to be good neighbors and stewards.

Unless energy companies do it right, Wyoming is going to suffer and Jackson Hole, too, will be hurt if the land and

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wildlife are despoiled, he says. Communities that do not speak up and fail to advocate for themselves and their long-term quality of life are destined to become victims.

"Leaders must not be guilty in hindsight of a failure to imagine," Duerr says. "That's the challenge of our time. Imagine Jackson Hole becoming the Geneva of North America and the southern anchor of Yellowstone to Yukon. How can commerce invest in that vision, especially the trillions of dollars that will come out of the Upper Green River and Sublette Mesa regions from oil and gas development?"

Recently, the chamber gave its first-ever Power of Place award to Bill and Joffa Kerr, co-founders of the National Museum of

Wildlife Art. Bill Kerr is an heir to the Kerr-McGhee energy company and the son of a prominent U.S. senator from Oklahoma. The Kerrs are also ardent conservationists and built the museum around a collection of Rungius paintings they hope would inspire visitors. "By their life example and investment of their interests and fortunes they are the first and best example of the brand promise of Power of Place," Duerr says.

The late conservationist David Brower, who delivered several speeches in Jackson, said most environmental battles are never permanently won, but rather fought to a draw and fated to repeat themselves anew with each generation.

The dynamic tension between the business and conservation communities was overt and flared during Suzanne Young's tenure at the chamber. To some, the schism is ironic because conservation measures, in the minds of most citizens, are credited with increasing Jackson Hole's desirability as a tourist destination. Residents of Jackson Hole know what is at stake, Young says, and the chamber has been a bellwether in the thick of it.

"To be a successful manager of the chamber you have to recognize the value of natural resources, but I don't mean just the value as measured by what those resources may return for individual chamber members," Young says. "You've got to be clear about how certain things [business activities] affect the economy and which things add value to it. For those latter things, you've got to be willing to protect them above all else."

During the late 1970s, the valley awoke to discover that an energy company wanted to drill for natural gas in the Cache Creek drainage along the foothills of the Gros Ventre Mountains within miles of east Jackson. The plan called for construction of drilling rigs, widening the bucolic road to accommodate industrial trucks, potential construction of pipeline, noise and air pollution, and visual disturbance in an area that had been a favorite backyard recreation area. Even more troubling was the concern from some geologists that the targeted gas pockets had the potential for containing lethal "sour gas," which, if it escaped into the air, could kill people who breathed it.

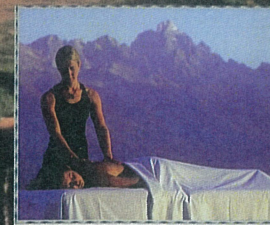
Citizens mobilized, and their opposition was expressed in two forms: a business petition drive against drilling led by the chamber membership and a groundswell that

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resulted in creation of the chamber's sometime nemesis, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance. "The fear over sour gas was real," Young says. "It was a lifestyle protection issue, but it was also a concern for the tourist economy. Business owners recognized that if gas development proceeded and, worst-case scenario, a sour gas accident occurred resulting in casualties, tourism would be devastated by the negative publicity."

During the early 1990s, the Sonoran Institute staged a workshop in Jackson to gauge the social pulse of the valley and try to

pinpoint the economic catalysts in the region. "The emphasis of those discussions had been on Jackson's position as a national park gateway community and in providing visitors with opportunities to view wildlife," says Propst, who led the discussions.

A dozen years later, Sonoran returned and met with community leaders again about a new set of concerns. "Things have changed dramatically, and the issues are much more like you'd find in a wealthy suburb or a large city," Propst explains. "The new discussions are not about what

time the wild West shootouts are taking place. Business people are talking about workforce shortages and an influx of immigrant workers from Mexico. Jackson has grown up, and it is no longer the cute little tourism community it once was."

Propst says Jackson Hole's economy, in the form it assumed going back to the 1950s, was fated to decline no matter what the chamber did or did not do. "Frankly, what has happened is beyond the chamber's control. A shift away from the old tourism economy was inevitable because of changing national demographics and lifestyle priorities and pressure being exerted by the retiree community upon it. In fact, it's hard to think of a single community that has remained popular as a traditional tourism stop. Every tourist community I know is transitioning. In place of selling cheap souvenirs, Jackson Hole is selling its landscape for multimillion-dollar dream homes and vacation retreats. It's been lucrative for some, yes, but it's full of tradeoffs, some of which may not be very pleasant for mom and pop tourism purveyors."

Propst admits that his analysis might be difficult for some to swallow. "This isn't going to provide much solace for people, but the rest of the world is dealing with the same kinds of change and isn't solving its land-use problems very well, either," he says. "The key to Jackson Hole's future is related to its ratio of public to private land and protecting the quality of the commons. That's not a bad thing; it's a good thing. As long as the public land is taken care of, this valley will remain a desirable place to be."

Schechter recites the old saw that economic growth hides a lot of sins. When Jackson Hole's economy was roaring in the 1990s, propelled largely by a lodging tax that generated nearly \$1 million per year for tourist promotion, the recession settling in upon tourist-driven retail business was less obvious. It also left shop owners praying for a turnaround based on the belief that if only the chamber did a better job of promotion, more visitors would come.

When renewal of the lodging tax failed because the county's voters felt promotion efforts were fueling unwanted growth, the tourism industry was shocked and frightened.

"A lot of accumulated dreams and frustrations and fears and expectations come together in the chamber membership," Schechter says. "If there is a level of anxiety, then the chamber is an obvious place to look for it. Many chamber members are probably

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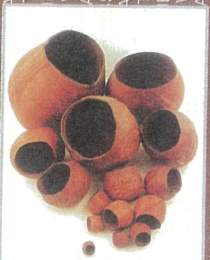
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The Town Square shootout still draws a crowd in summer, but like chuckwagons and the Pony Express, mom-and-pop rubber tomahawk shops are fast becoming relics of the past.

asking, "What am I paying my dues for?" but, of course, a membership in the chamber of commerce is no guarantee for prosperity."

Duerr knows keenly who the core of his chamber membership is – the small shop owners who anchor the traditional tourism economy – and he's not about to neglect their needs, or the services they expect for paying their membership dues. For his part, he has tried to creatively leverage the limited revenues generated through chamber membership dues, about \$300,000 annually, to give them more punch in the organization's national tourism PR campaigns. However, one attempt at ingenuity landed him in hot water, or in this instance, boiling java.

In 2003, Duerr found himself at the center of the "local business versus national chain store" debate when he proposed a three- to five-year deal, in conjunction with Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, to sell Starbucks coffee at venues around the valley in exchange for a \$100,000 sponsorship fee from the coffee giant (which would have been split between the ski resort and chamber coffers).

Owners of local coffee bars, who happened to be chamber members, were incensed when details of the proposed pact were made public. Duerr says he only was attempting to increase the chamber revenue stream as a way of delivering more services to members. Critics

saw the gesture as a betrayal of local mom and pop businesses and succeeded in killing the deal. The controversy left a stain on Duerr's reputation and gave some ammunition to those who questioned his Power of Place campaign. They weren't alone.

Conservationists, too, voiced skepticism about Power of Place's ability to chart a fresh direction for the business community while yielding tangible dividends for landscape protection. Engineer Pete Jorgensen, a state legislator and longtime trustee on the University of Wyoming's board of regents, says the chamber needs to demonstrate in action, not words, that it is committed to making tough decisions that may not make sense over the short term for free enterprise but protect, long term, the essence of Jackson Hole.

Jorgensen claims the chamber's position on environmental issues is spotty and inconsistent. If the chamber had guts, he says, it would oppose attempts to lengthen the runway at Jackson Hole Airport, which is located inside Grand Teton park. He believes the chamber should endorse sound zoning and planning, take a bold stand against creeping oil and gas drilling on national forest lands surrounding the valley, scrutinize massive development plans at Teton Village, and more forcefully advocate for working-class families on housing and wage issues because they represent the backbone of the service industry.



Move over pickup trucks: Stretch SUVs are the new valley car for some residents.

"I've always been suspicious that the chamber can't live up to what it says it is behind," Jorgensen says. "Steve Duerr is an interesting, complex guy. He is smart and intelligent. And he can be really supportive of principled statements, but in the position he's in, you're up against the money. This place any more is about money."

Jorgensen says one of the best books he has read recently is *Downhill Slide* by Hal Clifford, which talks about the greed of ski resort towns. "The only thing that saves us from destroying ourselves in Jackson Hole is the abundance of federal land," he says.

Sean Love, the 35-year-old newly elected chamber president and owner of a downtown retail shop, defends the chamber against accusations it hasn't done enough to back up its words with deeds. First, the chamber board is composed of volunteers, Love says, and it's hard for them to stay abreast of every issue and reach a consensus with the chamber's 800 or so members. Turnover of board members compounds this difficulty. Volunteers spend much of their time organizing community events such as Fall Arts Festival or Old West Days, in addition to running their own businesses.

"We can only use Steve Duerr so much," Love says, taking a break from working at his Jackson Trading Co. store on a Saturday afternoon.

Because of its limited resources, the

chamber has to pick its battles. "There's quite a few of us on the board who don't want to see us necessarily trying to respond to everything that comes along," Love explains. "For one, before long your opinion doesn't count very much."

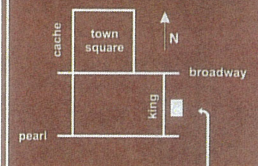
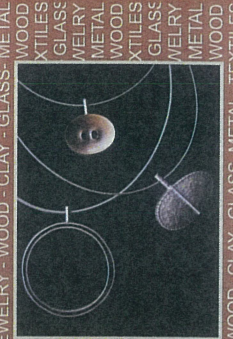
The chamber opposed annexation of the Jackson Hole Hereford Ranch by the Town of Jackson in 2000. Three years later, it was a chief proponent of a proposal to create a downtown redevelopment district, which would have allowed taller buildings and greater density. Voters ultimately rejected both plans by referendum. In these instances, the chamber acted to curtail sprawl, Love says. The downtown revitalization measure was a "very educated, and at least well-intentioned, approach to the question of where are we going to be 10 to 15 to 20 years from now," he says.

Most recently, the chamber in March opposed a plan by the Wyoming Department of Transportation to reroute Highway 287 over Togwotee Pass through a pristine area along the Buffalo Fork River called Rosie's Ridge.

Frank Ewing, the legendary Jackson Hole river guide, is one of the longtime community residents and business owners who approve of the direction the chamber is taking. Ewing recognizes the difficulty in balancing the need to make a living with protecting the common good. "When I get worked up, I have to remind myself that it's always easy to tell other people how to run

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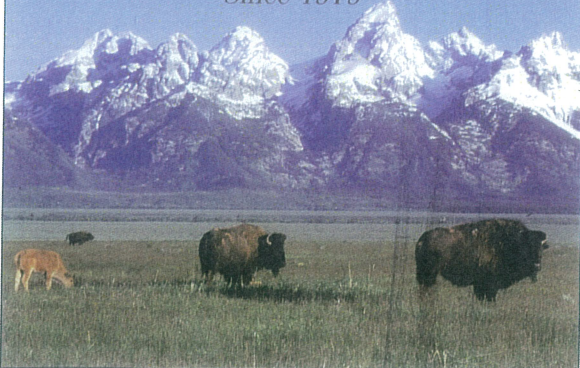
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Through its 25-year history, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance has grown into the most respected voice for conservation in the southern portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Through community-based efforts, the Alliance protects public lands, advocates for smart growth and development, and defends Jackson Hole's wildlife.

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their lives," he says. "At the same time everybody says they know what it is that makes Jackson Hole special, but no one wants to limit their own opportunity to make a buck. They always rationalize their actions by saying that if they don't take advantage of opportunity, someone else will. With that kind of mentality, everyone will lose the very things they love about this place."

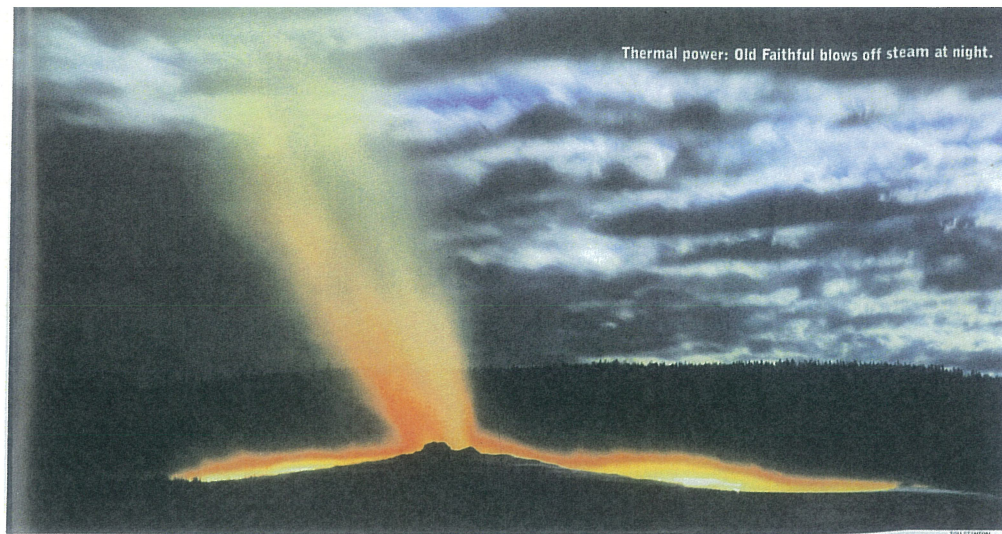
Ewing the businessman paddles in that delicate current between using the river to make a profit and fighting to ensure the Snake isn't loved to death. A former active board member with the chamber, he acknowledges that age has steered his conviction as a conservationist.

Ewing remembers when it was rare to see a pronghorn antelope in Grand Teton park. He has watched the pronghorn herd grow since the 1960s but today, as those animals have their historic migration route pinched and potentially severed by oil and gas drilling, he rues that he also may see the same herd wither and vanish. "Even though we have vast areas of public land, you wonder how much more pressure the wildlife can take," he says.

Ewing is an admirer of Duerr and, like former chamber director Young, is also a member of the chamber and Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, which routinely finds itself coming under withering attacks from some of Duerr's members.

"The Alliance has taken its fair share of criticism for allegedly being resistant to the economic welfare of the community, but I sort of feel like we've reached a new point now where the Alliance has regained or won anew the respect of a lot of people," Ewing says. "It is a champion of the lifestyle values that the business community markets to the outside world. While certainly the Alliance's primary motivation as an organization has never been to prop up property values, the victories that it has achieved with promoting more thoughtful planning and keeping industrial activity in check has had that effect. If you're a person who owns property in this valley and sees it as an investment, you ought to be thankful for the Alliance, not critical of it."

Alliance Executive Director Franz Camenzind was invited by Duerr to take part in the focus groups that led to the chamber adopting Power of Place as its slogan. "If you want to cast a favorable eye on what's happened here, we as a community have been as progressive and self-restrained as any other in the decisions being made about development," Camenzind says. "Between



Thermal power: Old Faithful blows off steam at night.

the tracts being protected in conservation easements through the Land Trust and the passage of local zoning laws, we've been ahead of the curve.

"Could we do more?" Camenzind asks. "The future of the valley and the survival of the few things we haven't degraded depends upon it."

A few months ago, the Yellowstone Business Partnership headed by Jan Brown was founded and touted as a green alternative to local chambers of commerce. Today, it has 150 members. Worth noting, Brown suggests, is that the Jackson Hole chamber was among the first to sign on. The Cody chamber, led by Gene Bryan, who formerly oversaw tourism promotion for the state of Wyoming, joined, too. Twenty Jackson Hole businesses, many of them somehow related to tourism, are members. "There is a suspicion in some of the rural communities that we are too green and places where people accuse us of not being green enough," Brown says. "One of the first things I learned is that we are not going to change the way we think and talk about issues overnight. This is a long-term process." Many other chambers are closely watching Duerr and the Jackson Hole chamber to see what comes from Power of Place, she adds.

The kind of battles raging in outdoor recreation meccas like Jackson Hole became cannon fodder for Clifford in his critically acclaimed *Downhill Slide*, a damning indictment of the corporate ski industry. According to Clifford, Jackson Hole is

fighting for its soul in a Faustian deal it struck with the real estate and ski industries to attract and coddle the rich and famous.

It's not that Jackson Hole isn't still inspiring, he says, but throughout the Rockies there's always been the sense that a cheaper, better place to call home exists on the other side of the mountain if one's own community goes to hell. During the 1970s, Clifford notes, Coloradans held up Wyoming and Montana as venues where a person could flee after one cashed out in Aspen or Vail. Today, disenchanted Wyomingites and Montanans are pulling up stakes and fleeing to Alaska, which represents the end of the line.

"If you've owned property in Jackson Hole and your asset has appreciated in value many times over, you're sitting pretty and it's hard not to think about taking the money and leaving," Clifford says. But when one's community identity is guided by the worth of real estate investment and not by one's desire to plant long-term roots in a place, it starts to feel like a suburb. The cut-and-run mentality undermines social stability and multigenerational connection, he says.

With respect offered to Duerr, Clifford admires the rhetorical stand he's taken but is dubious that the head of a chamber of commerce in a resort community like Jackson Hole can convince his membership to think about a time span longer than their own lives. It cuts against the grain of human nature, against the history of what has

happened in every other community, and against the *raison d'être* of the chamber itself.

"When I interviewed people for my book, folks in Jackson Hole had epic questions before them that I think are still unresolved," Clifford says. "The first question is whether they had come here to settle or simply camp, play, and hang out for awhile. The second question, much more meaningful, is whether they're willing to take a stand, in front of their community, and fight for the values that make Jackson Hole a good place to raise kids and grandkids. In my research, I did not see enough people interested in answering the question of what place do they want Jackson Hole to become in 20 years."

Faced with such challenges, can the chamber answer the question posed by Olaus Murie? In 2025, Steve Duerr sees world leaders assembled at Jackson Lake Lodge with the summit of the Grand Teton silhouetted on the lake's smooth surface. And he sees the valley's economy flourishing as people from around the world come here to experience the beauty of nature in a pristine setting. To some, it's Duerr's pipe dream. For others, it's the brightest future possible.

Writer Todd Wilkinson lives in Bozeman, Mont., and is a correspondent for several magazines and The Christian Science Monitor. His column also appears every week in the Jackson Hole News&Guide.