

FACES OF THE MOUNTAIN

Introducing three of the people that make Smugglers' Notch stand out

by Rebecca Klein

The panorama of ski trails winding their way down the mountains as you approach Smugglers' Notch Resort or the breathtaking views taken in from the top of the mountain peaks showcase the natural beauty you'll find here. But, there's another part of the landscape that only becomes visible once you spend time at the Resort, and that's the many members of the Smugglers' family who go to great lengths to entertain, inform and educate visitors. Read on as we turn the spotlight on three Faces of the Mountain. Even if you already know them, chances are you'll learn something new.



Snow Reporter: **Hugh Johnson**

Hugh Johnson's high-energy, recorded morning snow report, that launches with his signature "Good morning skiers and riders" greeting, is heard by hundreds of callers. If a shout-out of "Pow, wow wow, yippie yo, yippie yay" follows, you can expect fresh powder.

Hugh's days at the Resort date back to 1977, when the school bus would drop him in the Village, and the 6th grader would take some pre-homework runs. His family, originally from South Carolina, had just moved to Vermont after spending years in New Jersey. They leased a home at Smuggs before eventually moving to a nearby farm.

In high school, he worked at Smuggs as a lift attendant and moved into a ski instructor role during college and beyond, along with doing some radio announcing. He wished for more ski time for himself and thought about a night job. In 1996, Smuggs wooed him with the invitation to become the Resort's first snow reporter.

Hugh's role has expanded from recording the day's snow conditions as early as 6 a.m. to include a nightly report; weekday blog posts; Facebook updates and trail reports on smuggs.com, sometimes even done from the lift; appearing on-camera in the Resort's No Bull Snow Report; photographing events and skiing with visiting press. "I try to

convey the feel of the mountain, the whole mountain experience," describes Hugh, who spends most of the day wearing skis. "People joke, 'Do you ever take your ski pants off?' Not in the winter."

Some use his scenic blog photo of the day as screensavers, leading up to their vacations. Hugh also posts real-time phone snapshots on Facebook. "It's exciting to get that great photo of the day, to capture the beauty of Vermont and the whole outdoor experience."

Hugh is used to hearing, "Don't I know you, wait a minute, you're the guy from the phone," from visitors. "That's when they'll tell their kids to do their impersonation of 'Good morning skiers and riders.'"

Hugh's wife, Harley, who runs Snow Sport University and the summer camps, trained him to do the snow report. This father of three just may have a replacement in the wings. "My son is ready to take my job." Luckily, he's only six.

Dial x1111 for the snow report. Check out Hugh's Blog and video reports on smuggs.com.



Photo by Katie Settel
www.katiesettel.com

The Friendly Pirate: **Rockin' Ron Carter**

Smugglers' Notch may be a far cry from any of the Seven Seas, but the Resort does have a resident raider — Rockin' Ron the Friendly Pirate. Ron Carter, who set sail here in 1997 for a sales position, moved into his singing pirate role in 2002.

Maybe you've seen him do his Friendly Pirate Rap or sing with Pearl the Purple Pirate Princess (played by Harley Johnson). You may not know that long before rubbing shoulders with Mogul Mouse and Billy Bob Bear, he did the same — behind the scenes — with Cyndi Lauper, Herbie Hancock and Paul McCartney.

In 1996, while working as a regional music promoter for EMI Records and living in Northern Virginia, he and his wife decided to move to Vermont, buy a farmhouse and start a bed & breakfast. Ron planned to quit his job once their home sold. In 1997, just after securing a buyer, they learned EMI

was going out of business. Instead of quitting, Ron walked away with severance.

After finding their Jeffersonville farmhouse, Ron, a novice skier at the time, started selling season passes at Smuggs. The B&B plan faded as his role at the Resort grew. He started filling in one day a week for his friend, Hugh, on the snow report. He also began doing some entertainment, trying out various characters, including a singing pirate he created earlier for his own amusement. The pirate role stuck. It seemed fitting for an area with a history of smuggling and bootlegging.

Ron's lyrics include pop-cultural and historical references as well as his self-described "bad puns." "It's by design. I need to keep myself entertained as well." Several members of the Smuggs family appear in his rap video (view it at RockinRonTheFriendlyPirate.com); his wife, April, plays his first matey.

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Mother Nature: **Beth Tailer**

There are times when Beth Tailer stands so still that birds land on her. Kids have wondered aloud if she's real.

"They've also asked, 'How do you make the birds do that?' It's a teachable moment. We don't make them, we invite them," shares her husband, Tom.

Beth, known as Mother Nature, leads a winter nature program from a tipi on lower Morse Mountain on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Tom, a science teacher, volunteers with her on Saturdays.

Beth teaches children about plants and animals, sustainability and Native American traditions. Snow Sport University campers, taking lessons on Morse, warm up by the fire in her tipi as they learn about nature. Beth, who has Cherokee ancestry, often starts by playing her homemade drum or small

clay flute. She frequently teaches with her medicine wheel, which depicts pictures of animals. It's a Native American tradition to hand down stories through pictures. "We talk about those animals and their place in our environment and our habitat."

Families can drop in too. Beth often serves hot apple cider and passes around hot stones for visitors to hold and warm their hands on blustery days.

In 1998, Beth, a neo-natal intensive care nurse, spent a winter also working as a weekend children's ski instructor at Smuggs. She, her husband and their four daughters were already skiing here. The next year, when management announced plans for a nature program, Beth volunteered to lead it.

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The Friendly Pirate: Rockin' Ron Carter continued ...

Of his character, Ron says, "There's a non-threatening sense of adventure... Most people react to it." Even adults greet him with an "RRR" or "yo-ho-ho."

Ron, who started writing songs at 14 and graduated from Berklee College of Music in Boston, released a 2010 CD (available at the Country Store) featuring 18 pirate songs in many styles, including nursery rhyme, reggae and folk.

He performs at Morse Mountain Grille Pirate Meals, does a science show with Garry Loomis, the FunMeister, and makes additional appearances around the resort and beyond. Ron also coaches participants in the resort's Sound & Stage summer camp to write a song and perform it. "I just see so much hope, so much creativity. It does my heart good."

See the Resort Information Guide for Rockin' Ron's scheduled appearances.

Mother Nature: Beth Tailer continued ...

Beth's Mother Nature position has inspired her to become involved in many science programs. She and Tom head up the Governor's Institute on Engineering at the University of Vermont and took a teenage team to Italy to compete in the International Earth Science Olympiad.

Beth also credits her Mother Nature role with giving her a lift at the hospital, where she's worked for 32 years. "It totally refreshes my spirit so that when I go back and work with these critically ill infants... I come renewed."

There have been many magical moments, such as the little girl who returned to the tipi with her dad to demonstrate the bird feeding skills she learned. Her father cried and explained his daughter has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and can't sit still in class. "Here she was standing in the forest, absolutely focused."

A local girl, who frequently visited for years with her ski classes, stopped by the tipi to announce she earned an environmental engineering degree and thanked Beth for playing a role.

Beth has even experienced the full-circle thrill of seeing children she first met as babies in intensive care ski to her tipi. It's happened more than once.

Visit Mother Nature along Morse Mountains's Nature Trail on Wednesdays & Saturdays.

Rebecca Klein is a freelance writer and video producer in Baltimore. Rebecca has been visiting Smugglers' Notch since her childhood. It's only fitting that her new St. Bernard pup is named Smuggs. She thanks her parents, Elaine and Roger Klein, for many vacation memories. Her 5-year-old daughter, Samara, has memorized all the words to the Friendly Pirate Rap and proudly sports her Rockin' Ron the Friendly Pirate t-shirt. Seth, age 7, promises to take Rebecca and her husband, Grant, to Mother Nature's tipi this winter.



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