

# STEPPING *Out*

June 20 – 26, 2012 • arts, entertainment and fun

## REEL DEAL

Film documents  
bar's place in  
valley history.  
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ANGUS M. THUERMER JR. / NEWS&GUIDE FILE PHOTO

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Jennifer Tennican's new documentary, "The Stagecoach Bar: An American Crossroads," will premiere June 27 at the Center for the Arts.

**Who:** Filmmaker Jennifer Tennican  
**What:** Premiere of 'The Stagecoach Bar: An American Crossroads'  
**When:** 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. June 27  
**Where:** Center for the Arts  
**How much:** \$10  
**Web:** TheStagecoachBarFilm.com

By Katy Niner

**D**errick Hufsmith is a quintessential Stagecoach Bar character: He grew up in Jackson, tried to be a hippie but failed, moved to Teton Valley, Idaho, bought a farm, now "raises lentils," and every Sunday he crosses Teton Pass to play electric guitar in the Stagecoach Band. Hufsmith is the band's closest thing to a true local, fellow bandmate Christine Langdon said. Fittingly, he cues the opening of Jackson filmmaker Jennifer Tennican's documentary, "The Stagecoach Bar: An American Crossroads."

Two years in the making, the hour-long film premieres June 27 with the community that made it possible. Befitting the subject, a party will follow the screening.

More than story that solely focuses on a saloon, the documentary traces the valley's defining historic and contemporary currents through the prism of the personalities found at the Stagecoach. Cowboys, dudes, old-timers, dancers, hippies, hipsters, second-home owners — Tennican features them all. She hopes the film seeds discussions on the sweep of top-

ics covered, from identity to inequity and sobriety.

"The West has never been a place for churchgoers," historian Andrew Gulliford says on camera. "The Episcopalian priests in Wyoming did everything they could, and it sort of took, but the West is an unchurched place. So, where do you go to connect? You go to the bar."

To chronicle the Coach, Tennican wove archival footage and photography with new interviews she conducted and fresh film she took.

The narrative unfolds with people's memories — in saddles, on barstools, on the dancing floor. Rob Cheek recalls sidling up to the bar as a young teenager and ordering a whiskey and water on his way to the rodeo chutes. To his surprise, the bartender accepted his 50 cents.

In the early days, the Stagecoach serviced the adjacent rodeo arena, the site where dudes, cowboys and genders converged. Come winter, it was an antidote to long episodes of isolation.

The band began playing in February 1969, several years after the rodeo left. In the film, as in life, music is a river running through it all. Tunes eased tensions between old-timers and the 1960s hatch of hippies.

"We were all dancing together, so somehow, we all made up," says one of the newcomers, Dail Barbour, though it did take a while for the hippies to become accepted as part of the valley tapestry.

"A place like the Stagecoach offers

### Locally grown

Jennifer Tennican takes pride in the fact that "The Stagecoach Bar: An American Crossroads" was done locally, thanks to the brave backing of the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum. Many local talents played a part. Rebecca Huntington co-wrote it with her, and Trask McFarland was editor. Marni Productions enabled post-production, and Eric Hansen did the sound. Melinda Binks stood behind the camera (Tennican, too). Ben Winship and select members of the Stagecoach Band offered their musical genius, and the bar's owners — Rod Everett, Pete Cook and Bill Field — gave Tennican free rein and access. Journeys School interns Owen Winship, Hayden Shae and Tess Landall helped throughout.

After two years of talking to people about the project and engaging them in its development, Tennican is thrilled to have something to show them. Beyond the June 27 premiere, she is submitting the films to festivals and to Wyoming PBS.

If, at the end of this journey, she could stand on a soapbox, she would speak to the value of the arts and the importance of paying for creative projects. The opportunity, every Sunday night, to put aside our differences and find those commonalities," historian Sherry Smith says in the film. "If we lose those places, we lose that opportunity to find community."

While many aspects of the Coach



People of all backgrounds, young and old, cowboys and hippies, become dance partners when the Stagecoach Band plays. This photo captures a night in the 1980s.

have remained constant, change, too, shapes the storied saloon. From Disco Night to the new dawn of downhill biking, the Stagecoach has adapted to new clientele.

The bar has weathered economic game-changers, like the construction of the first golf course in 1964, the year-round economy

created by the Jackson Hole Ski Area and the blossoming of the second-home market in the mid-1980s.

The film telescopes between stories from the Coach and histories of Jackson Hole. Several characters bridge the two, like Bill Briggs, banjo fixture and ski mountaineer-



Billy Saunders takes on Pecos Bess during a rodeo behind the Stagecoach Bar in the early 1950s.

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### Premiere party

A night at the Coach is never ordinary. Neither will be the premiere of "The Stagecoach Bar: An American Crossroads."

Channeling the vibe of the watering hole's Sunday Night Service, the June 27 premiere party will feature live music by the Stagecoach Band, dancing lessons, vittles, beverages and, of course, a screening of the 60-minute documentary.

The fun begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Center for the Arts. General admission tickets cost \$10 and are currently on sale.

Just as it took a village to make the movie, the community is pitching in for the premiere.

After the film screens, the center stage will become a dance floor a la the Coach. Poet and professor David Romtvedt will add his accordion to the Stagecoach Band, slated to play two 40-minute sets. Dancers' Workshop instructors will lead two-step and western swing lessons. Bring cash to partake in Cafe Genevieve's pulled pork sliders and beer from Snake River Brewing Co. Also for sale: Stagecoach souvenirs by local artists John Frechette and Sue Fleming.

Thomas Macker, photography director at the Art Association, has made prints of archival photographs, which will be on display and available to order.

At the premiere, people can pre-order "The Stagecoach Bar" DVD for a discounted price of \$12 (full price: \$15).

Proceeds from the evening benefit the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum.

ing pioneer.

Tennican uses art, music and humor to lace segments together. She commissioned Anika Youcha to paint her colorful impression of the Coach and also make a drawing of its development over the decades. For



The Coach has weathered many economic game-changers but looks today the same as it did in this photo from the late 1980s.

musical interludes, Tennican set up a recording session with Stagecoach Band members in Ben Winship's Henhouse Studio.

She delights in the magical moments — like centenarian George Green closing down the place by dancing on the bar to "Keep on the Sunny Side of Life" — as well as bigger themes like surviving as a musician by way of affordable housing. Or trying to stay sober when a bar serves as community hub.

Patiently, the film paints the Coach

as an enduring symbol — and site — of the Teton melting pot.

"The best friends we have in the world, we met most of them at the coach," said Bill Nash, who had never stepped foot inside a bar before moving to the valley 30 years ago. Now, he is a Sunday service stalwart.

Now, as then, the Coach welcomes all to roost.

"I always tell people to go to the Coach when they move here," Barbour said. "All those good vibes are just holding it up."