

PILLARS
a profile series

Watching the weather

Retired Western geology professor continues to teach, inform

Savannah Nelson
Special to the Times

Rain or shine, frost-bitten or sunburned, through the temperamental meteorological conditions of the Gunnison Country, there's always one thing you can depend on: long-time local and retired geology professor Bruce Bartleson is watching the weather.

Bartleson, an avid record keeper of temperature and precipitation since his retirement from Western State Colorado University in 1998, is held in high esteem for his numerous contributions to the Gunnison community. Before finding his passion in observing the weather, Bartleson was well known for other local achievements.

Originally from Chicago, Bartleson went to Beloit College in Wisconsin to earn a bachelor's degree. He continued his education at University of Illinois, where he earned a master's before finding his way to Colorado. After spending four summers in the Gothic area completing his thesis for a doctorate in geology from the University of Colorado, Bartleson made Gunnison his home in 1965. For 33 years, Western's geology department blossomed under the direction of Bartleson, as the program expanded when the geology professor took advantage of the local territory.

While at Western, he was given the title Outstanding Professor of the Year, was selected to be a graduation speaker by his students, was honored as Outstanding Emeritus Professor of the Year in 1998, and was recently deemed Outstanding Educator of the Year by the Gunnison Chamber of Commerce in 2012.

Even now, he's far from slowing down. He keeps his eyes on the local weather — still demonstrating his dedication and interest toward the wellbeing of the community. He's been nicknamed a "Local Weather Wizard," and referred to as "Barometer Bartleson." His data-

filled writing about the weather has given the Gunnison community something to talk about.

"People are always coming up to me, asking about the weather," Bartleson offered. "They want to know about my data — if temperature records are actually being broken, or if it's all speculation."

If there's anyone to ask around town, it would be Bruce Bartleson. When he first set out to research weather patterns, gaining information was much less accessible because the Internet was in its earlier stages. After being granted permission from the state, Bartleson was sent the official archives. Now, even as information is easily available online, authorized records continue to be sent to Bartleson every month.

Bartleson has personally invested much of his time and energy to understanding the weather, and gaining data-supported perspectives on the Gunnison Valley, always happily prepared to share his accumulated information with eager ears.

Yet, those who know him personally look to Bartleson for far more than simply weather patterns.

According to Duane Vandebusch, a close friend and former colleague of Bartleson, the geologist and part-time weather enthusiast is also an excellent skiing buddy. Having initially met on the slopes in Crested Butte during 1965, the pair of Western professors have spent time sharing their similar passions over the years, including both the outdoors and education.

Vandebusch describes Bartleson as "top of the line" within the community through various different aspects: "Bruce, as a person, is a scientist, and he is always on a quest for learning; he is never satisfied with what he knows," Vandebusch said. "As a professor at Western State, he produced a lot of great geologists and made a real impact. As a community member, he's been tremendous. ... He's very community-minded — he's always looking in the best interests of Gunnison Country."

Bartleson has maintained imperative public roles throughout

the years. He has been president of the Gunnison County Library Board, vice president of the Western State Alumni Board, had a scholarship given his namesake, and he continues to write a newsletter for the Western State Geology Department every year. Throughout his career, he has been involved in assorted projects, such as environmental studies for site development, gold and uranium exploration, oil and gas exploration, field mapping, evaluating the mineral potential of the West Elk Wilderness and being on the advisory board to the Colorado Geologic Survey.

As a professor, Bartleson taught many now-successful geologists and was an essential component of their paths to achievement. He has published several written works in professional journals, has made oral presentations at regional and national geological conventions and has led many field trips for students. His now-favorite task, Bartleson admits, is seeking information regarding the status of alumni, most often via e-mail.

"Bartleson has very defined elements of character, besides being the world's greatest Waukesha Walk dancer, which make him a pillar of the Gunnison community," Vandebusch joked. "He's extremely fair-minded and honest, he's an outstanding public speaker, he is always willing to learn, and he's always willing to listen to different views and opinions."

When asked to mention a highlight of his career, Bartleson had no hesitation stating that he is immensely proud of all of his students. "It is and always has been very rewarding to watch my students grow, and communicating every year through the alumni newsletter, to learn what's going on in their lives," he said.

As for Bartleson, you might catch him on the iced-over bodies of water speed skating with his wife Deirdre, or skiing the mountain backcountry in the winter. You might encounter him hiking, mountain biking or fly fishing in the summer. And, of course, he'll always be watching the weather.



Bruce Bartleson displays weather data recently in his home in Gunnison. The retired geology professor is well known for watching local weather patterns — in addition to numerous other contributions to the community.

Photo by Savannah Nelson

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