

Christie Greene's Wild Aware

By Penny Randell

It was 1986 when Christie Greene embarked on the heartfelt decision to follow her dreams. Not knowing a single soul at her destination, she moved from Tennessee to Denver in hopes of living in the mountains where wildlife abounds. Once stepping off the plane she was disappointed, for she saw no mountains nearby. However, it wasn't long before she made a friend who introduced her to Evergreen and she fell in love. Three years after her arrival in Denver she found the perfect mountain house and moved to Evergreen. Sadly, years later she witnessed an automobile collision that took the lives of two elk. Christie says, "I started noticing more road kills in general over the years. Shaken by these happenings, this determined and caring woman vowed to make efforts to avoid such killings and somehow make a difference.

Once married in 1991, Christie gave birth to a son Matt in 1993 and a daughter Emily two years later. Capitalizing on her concerns for the mountain area, she decided to be a stay-at-home mom and utilize the time she was afforded. Beginning with her children's school, Montessori School of Evergreen, she became a dedicated volunteer in major proportion. Her days were filled with field trips, clearing the land of debris on foot or by bike and anything else she could do to help the community.

Working with the youth created a path to the Jane Goodall Institute and Goodall's organization of Roots and Shoots. This global program is designed to provide resources that encourage and motivate young people to act on local issues that matter most to them. Since 1991 millions of kids have accepted this challenge and in response they work to save animals and the environment. The Evergreen chapter of Roots and Shoots officially kicked off in 2005 through the efforts of Christie. In addition, she became involved with 350.org. This organization is an online grassroots campaign dedicated to solving the climate crisis. Working together they were successful with their all their endeavors. In addition, Christie actively supported the continuation of the Mountain Area Earth Day Fair.

But Christie didn't stop there. After her son and daughter graduated from Montessori School, Christie committed herself to volunteering at Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). Managing 42 Colorado parks and 307 wildlife areas, CPW greatly appreciated the "knock on the door" and immediately took her input seriously. Too, eager to help in all animal areas, she had also become a foster parent for Evergreen Animal Protective League and volunteered for Intermountain Humane Society as well.

During the months of November and December of 2019 this unstoppable human force made the decision to really get serious. Reaching out to folks she found on Facebook and elsewhere, Christie found the support needed to create Wild Aware, Evergreen's newest wildlife advocacy group. At that time many in the community were also distraught over the continuous deaths of elk and deer on Highway 74 and they, too, were ready to take action. With a mission to provide education, resources and advocacy for Colorado's wildlife; including reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions, providing on-site wildlife education and safety tips at Evergreen Lake, plus working to reduce bear-human conflicts, Wild Aware remains vital. Originally working with only 12 volunteers,

Christie discovered and recruited dependable help, which keeps the organization going strong until this day.

Immediately after its founding, Wild Aware began researching ways to mitigate high rates of wildlife-vehicle collisions as originally intended. In doing so, Christie contacted Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and CPW for assistance. The result was a temporary placement of programmable signs during 2020 and 2021. Joyously, there was a noticeable reduction in wildlife-related accidents. At present Highway 74 is being considered for new innovative technology field trials. Ongoing talks with CPW and CDOT continue as measures to reduce wildlife killings take precedence over all. Christie and her team have partnered with many state and local wildlife agencies, law enforcement, road and highway agencies, non-profit groups and volunteers in effort to educate residents and visitors about wildlife.

Wild Aware is consistent in their endeavors and works to constantly expand their role as a wildlife information source in the community. An example of such is the Wildlife Watch at Evergreen Lake where, among other issues, information about calving and the annual rut of elk is provided. They also presented a program about wildlife road crossings at the Boulder International Film Festival and are working with Bear Aware Evergreen to address the high number of bear encounters in this area. Complementing all these accomplishments, Evergreen Sustainability Alliance became involved with their mission to foster local, sustainable solutions and zero waste events in Evergreen and surrounding communities.

In collaboration with CDOT, Wild Aware has also considered protected animal walkways. An example of this is an overpass in Empire, Colorado that accommodates bighorn sheep. Although Highway 74 is not currently a candidate for a crossing structure, Christie is committed to the concept. Nonetheless, Wild Aware has a list of accomplishments that is unparalleled. Among such is their quarterly webinar, with the next one occurring May 18; an all-inclusive and informative website; a bi-monthly newsletter; a social media presence on Nextdoor, Facebook and Instagram; welcome flyers for new residents and game camera studies of the Fillius Park underpass in Evergreen to photograph wildlife moving through the tunnel... to name only a few.

All these impressive accomplishments could not take place without a consistent and hearty desire to preserve and co-exist with the wildlife. This is the life Christie Greene exemplifies with tremendous enthusiasm. Last year Wild Aware became an official non-profit, acquiring their 501 (C)3 through the efforts of Christie and two others. Besides Christie who is the director, Vice President Mary Novaria, a writer, manages the Wild Aware newsletter and all social media. Amanda Keil-Kostecki, with her Masters in Science Education, sits as Secretary.

The work of Wild Aware is destined to become a greater part of our community. On March 30 the organization added several more volunteers during their Zoom training led by Britni LaRoux, executive director of Conifer Chamber and Wild Aware's new volunteer coordinator. Wildlife Watch, the newest venture for Wild Aware, brings together Evergreen Audubon Society and Denver Parks and Recreation to inform folks about our wildlife which surround Evergreen Lake. The offerings from this valuable non-profit are endless and can easily be followed through social media and their website wildaware.org. Please look them up, as the website lists all available information and even offers a chance to donate online. Christie Greene, wonder woman that she

is, will continue on this path as long as she is able. Volunteers are greatly needed and positions are always available. This is a call to all. Few organizations can compare with the overall commitment and ever-so-needed efforts accomplished through Wild Aware.