

VSA Spotlight. March 2021: Gary Miller

[*San Juan Silver Stage* | March 2021 | Stacey Ryan, for [Valley Symphony Assoc.](#)]

It's unfair to cubbyhole Gary Miller as simply "a tuba player" in light of his musical knowledge, longevity, and harmonious influence on the Western Slope.

He is a founding member of the Montrose Community Band, Silverton Brass Band (he continues today as its only original member after 43 years), as well as the Great American Rocky Mountain Brass Band Festival, which marked its 38th year in 2019. Elected board chairman in its second year, 36 years later, he remains in that position.

"People are truly blown away by the quality of music performed." He and fellow Silverton Brass Band members organize and offer the festival to regional community as a labor of love. "We encourage people to attend this culturally special and unique event."

The VSA's principal tubist for over a quarter-century, Gary has also played with the Grand Junction Centennial Band and Thunder Mountain Band, and received invitations to play with the British Band of Western State College and Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra.

"'TubaChristmas' concerts are a real treat, but the most fun was playing with Montrose (and longtime VSA) clarinetist Larry Sims, Montrose Community Band director Carl Bivens (banjo), and Silverton xylophonist Dennis Kurtz in the Pot Roast Dixieland Band."

Born in Wyoming, raised in the Yampa Valley (NW Colorado), and educated in the Craig school system, Gary graduated from Moffat County High School in 1966. In high school, he started out on baritone but switched to tuba at the request of his director, Vern Davis (longtime member of the VSA chorus).

Gary joined the U.S. Navy and served aboard the nuclear submarine USS Flasher SSN 613 in the western Pacific. Afterward, he graduated from Electric Lineman School and worked for San Miguel Power

Association in the Silverton area. Gary has been a member of the Silverton Fire Department, San Juan County Search and Rescue, Ouray School Board, and served 18 years as Ouray County Coroner.

In addition to the Silverton festival, Gary has also taken part in the majority of the Lake City Stinger Community Band Concert Weekends, joining over a dozen VSA wind players and a multitude of Montrose Community Band members at the 2019 event. Both towns' stellar community band events annually lure musicians from across the country.

Alluding to the ties between the organizations and towns that, like their mining history, run deep, Gary explained that the Lake City Concert strategically runs the weekend immediately following the Silverton Festival every August, which attracts mostly professional brass players from coast-to-coast. "Stacking the events makes it easy to tempt these incredible brass musicians to stay on for another week and come up to stay and play in Lake City."

In fact, he loves playing in community bands so much that he spends his vacations zigzagging the country, playing in concerts along the route, with wife Terry and grandkids in tow. This past summer he performed with the Garden City (KS) Municipal Band, which, at 141 years old, is one of the longest-running such groups in the country. In between summer community band gigs, he and Terry continue to work on their golf games, play with grand kids, and travel in their RV enjoying our National Parks.