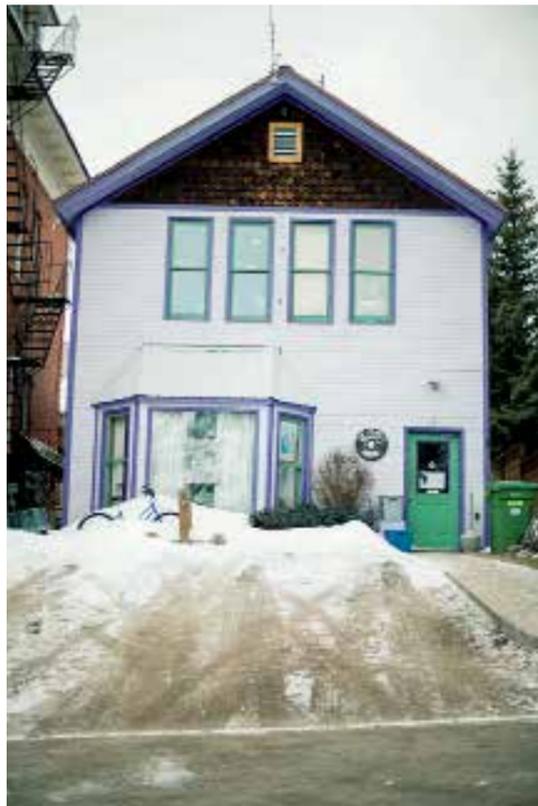


From this little purple Victorian on Pine Street, KOTO Radio has been rocking Telluride, CO since 1975.



KOTO

THE VOICE OF TELLURIDE

Words: Kelley McMillan Photos: Alex Witkowicz

IT WAS THE NIGHT Mike Tyson bit Evander Holyfield's ear: June 28, 1997. I was 18, living in Telluride and surrounded by music. A friend was DJing at Telluride's local radio station KOTO and he'd invited me to the studio. I ran my fingers along the rows of thousands of records, plucked Stevie Wonder's *Fullingness' First Finale* from the stacks and cranked "Boogie on Reggae Woman." Back in Las Vegas, Tyson was DQ'ed and a full-on melee erupted in the ring, but in Telluride the song's smooth synthesizer bass line and funky harmonics reverberated off the studio's walls, out the windows and all around town. We were getting down that night.

Fifteen years later, restaurants, bars and residents have come and gone, a Patagonia store has sprouted on Telluride's main drag and Mountain Village continues its

death march across the beautiful mesas above town, but not much has changed at KOTO. Since 1975, just three years after lifts started spinning, it has been the beating heart of this community, espousing the ideals and quirky, independent spirit that helped define modern-day, post-mining Telluride.

From a purple Victorian on Pine Street, a roster of volunteer DJs dispatches local news, NPR, emergency broadcasts and music. On Tuesday nights, Joshie G spins reggae beats, keeping the torch burning for the radio show that Rasta Stevie started back in the '80s. "There's NoMan's Land" on Saturday mornings, a slot hosted by the former town marshal, Norman Squier. In between music, there's "Car Pool" ("Need a ride to Grand Junction today. One person. Call 555-3456"), "Lost and Found," and

"Trash or Treasure," where you might be able to snap up a secondhand trampoline that someone is about to throw away.

In the early 1970s, Telluride was a washed-up mining town and hippies were beginning to filter in. It was Jerry Greene and Jim Bedford who had the dream to launch a community radio station. A year earlier, Jim, who was already living in Telluride, called Jerry and asked him to come to town and help get KOTO off the ground. "The way I saw it, Telluride was a serviced town—except it needed a radio station," says Jerry, aka "Nordic Commando Radio." "Radio is invaluable for communication in a small mountain town."

"When they launched the station, there was no cable, no radio," says Suzanne Cheavens, aka "Electric Angel," who joined KOTO in 1986 and is now its music director.

David Oyster, dispensing pearls via his blandly named show—wait for it—"Rocky Mountain Oyster."



KOTO Radio—as classic as vinyl.



"You could get maybe one TV channel, so creating a news and information hub really helped cement the fabric of what Telluride is today. Jim and Jerry understood that something like a radio station could really knit the community together."

And from the get-go, KOTO aimed to bring people together, keep them informed, broaden cultural and intellectual horizons and offer the public a platform to express their views. "The idea of community radio was that anybody could be on the air. It was designed to give people a voice," Greene says.

But back in 1975, Telluride was a ski town just getting started, and the same people who launched KOTO also laid the foundation of the kind of place Telluride would become. They opened restaurants, launched festivals and infused the town with a freewheeling and independent spirit disseminated through 89.3/91.7 FM on the radio dial. Greene later opened one of the town's most enduring eating institutions, Baked in Telluride. Jim, aka "BF Deal," was instrumental in getting the Telluride Film Festival off the ground. KOTO now hosts

the town's end-of-season party, saving it when other entities felt it had gotten too rowdy. KOTO runs the bluegrass festival beer booth—what would the bluegrass festival be without the beer booth—and the station has brought Bob Dylan, Pretty Lights and Phish to town. Taj Mahal, James Taylor and David Scools from Widespread Panic have all been guests in the studio.

After I moved away from Telluride in 1998, and then again in 2007, I started volunteering at the beer booth during bluegrass. My first go at the taps was in 2008, and I soon learned that it's not so much work as helping to get the party rolling, while earning a free ticket to the show and helping support KOTO. Besides a few full-time staffers, all of KOTO's DJs are volunteers, and the station is funded by grants, on-air fundraisers and efforts like the beer booth. KOTO depends on these events to stay alive because another one of its founding principles was it had to be listener supported—free from commercials and non-underwritten, which meant it would be unfettered by any outside interests. Anybody could say anything. It also meant

KOTO had to rely on its listeners to survive. It still does, which makes it one of only a handful of radio stations in the country that gets by this way.

There's a biannual ski swap and a summer concert called the Doodah—this year's headliner was Ziggy Marley. In just eight hours of on-air fundraising, KOTO raised \$38,000—this from a town that has only 2,400 fulltime residents. "That's a testament to this community," says Janice Zink, aka "Jumpin' Jan," who organizes all of KOTO's events and moved to Telluride in 1978 when she realized she could ski and host her own radio show. "A testament to Telluride and the spirit of this town."

At KOTO, anybody can be part of the community and have a voice—including me. That summer night in 1997, I spun records late into the evening: Peter Tosh, Parliament, Johnny Cash. I gave shout outs "to all my cowboys and cowgirls." It was like MCing the biggest party in town—the dishwashers at the old Roma, the boys making sushi at Hongas, the folks driving home to Sawpit all tuned in. Everyone always is—KOTO is the soundtrack of Telluride. §

Zudnik was a natural on both the social and ski scenes. From this first chair ride at Telluride, CO, with his owner Scott Kennett for Greg Stump's *Maltese Flamingo*, Zudnik was hooked on ripping bumps under the lifts. "He loved high-speed quads the best," Kennett says. "He still hiked for his turns in the off-season, but he really loved riding the easy way up the mountain." Photo: Bruce Benedict



SKIING'S CANINE CASANOVA

Words: Kelley McMillan

AFTER A SHOOT IN MAMMOTH, CA, in 1984, a broke photographer offered mogul-masher Scott Kennett a half-Alaskan malamute, half-tundra wolf puppy in lieu of cash. Kennett snapped him up and during the drive back to Telluride cemented a bond destined for stardom. "I fed him a little piece of a Jack in the Box burger, and he put his head on my lap and it's been there ever since."

Only a year later, that puppy—dubbed "Zudnik" by Kennett—howled his way onto the ski movie scene, when he made his debut in Greg Stump's *Time Waits for the Snowman*. With his cameo in *Time Waits* Zudnik shot to fame, later starring in *Maltese Flamingo*, *The Blizzard of Aahs* and several other films. But, says Kennett proudly, "His best work was *The Good, The Bad, the Gnarly*."

In no time, his bad-boy fame eclipsed that of Lassie, Spuds MacKenzie and many pro skiers, including, at times, even his owner. Zudnik's blazing blue eyes graced countless magazine pages, and appeared in more than ten movies and 30 ski shows. He canoodled with movie stars, politicians and ski glitterati. "Hands down, he was the most famous dog in skiing ever. With the body of work he did, nobody can even come close," Kennett says proudly, sitting in the living room of his home in Ridgeway, CO, watching highlights from Zudnik's career.

A testament to his celebrity, Zudnik was the only dog, Kennett claims, to visit the Colorado governor's mansion after former governor Roy Romer extended him an invitation to dinner. Zudnik also escaped an attempted kidnapping by a street bum in Denver. From the high class to street dwellers, everybody wanted a piece of Zudnik. He even helped Kennett bring the babes home.

But like many young stars, Zudnik's private life was a bit more colorful. He once got cozy with Darryl Hannah at a black-tie event, and lady canines countrywide loved him—he sired more than 63 puppies. He enjoyed fine food and free beer. "Zudnik would know that on Tuesday nights this restaurant in town, the Powder House, would do prime ribs, and so every Tuesday night, like clockwork, Zudnik would be at the back door getting a free prime rib," Kennett says.

He'd hit the bars in Telluride on his own. "He'd paw at the bar and the bartenders would serve him beer. He was a lush for beer," Kennett says, although he refused to drink Corona. "His favorite bar was O'Bannon's, though he liked the Moon and the Last Dollar, but they were sort of dicks to him at the Last Dollar."

Like the young Glen Plake, Zudnik eschewed manners and politeness—at a Warren Miller screening at the Paramount in Denver,

after partaking in a beer tasting in the VIP room with some local attorneys, Zudnik trotted out on stage, lifted a leg and peed on the curtain. The crowd howled.

But Zudnik paid the price for his wild ways. He ended up in more than 10 dog pounds from Breckenridge to Lake Placid. He broke out of some of them, too. One time, he busted free from the Telluride dog pound—and immediately headed to a party.

"At the party, everybody was talking about, 'Oh man, Zudnik got busted, he's in jail,' Kennett says. "Then Zudnik took his paw and put it on the door, and went BOOM, opened the door and walked in to the party. Everybody cheered and high fived."

Apparently, Zudnik didn't like to be locked up. On two occasions, he escaped from his pen in the cargo hold of an airplane. "One time he got loose and was scratching and biting at the wires under the pilot's feet. He was a strong dog. He'd take his paws and rip the gate right off his cage." The pilot called Kennett up to the front and Zudnik was put on the next flight.

In the early '90s, Zudnik landed on doggy death row for running a bull elk out onto a highway. A police car hit the elk and killed it, and Zudnik was hauled off to the pound and sentenced to death. His case made the *National Enquirer*, the front page of the *Denver Post*—"Movie Star Faces Death Penalty"—and appeared on the popular television show, *A Current Affair*. Even Maury Povich loved Zudnik.

"San Miguel County court received more letters than any other court case in their history, saying, 'If you put that dog to sleep, you will never see my tourist dollar again,'" Kennett says. And Zudnik was saved.

Kennett gets teary-eyed talking about Zudnik, who now lies in the field behind his house.

When Kennett's not watching his old film clips or scheming up DVD series, he's trying to find a way to carry on Zudnik's lineage. As it stands, there's only one direct descendant left, Zudnik's great, great grandson Ivan, who is nine years old and lives with an aging Catholic priest in Norwood, about 45 minutes away.

"Ivan needs to breed. Time is running out. If we could find a malamute, malamute-wolf, husky, husky-wolf female, we could hook Ivan up," Kennett says. He turns back to the TV for a moment and watches Zudnik bound through some super-light San Juan powder in Telluride's Bear Creek. Then he asks, "Can you preserve dog sperm?" §