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Featuring Community Members: Sylvia Heinz



As part of UA Land Office's interest in community outreach, we will be featuring short profiles on community members and organizations. This week we spoke with Sylvia Heinz of Mud Bay Lumber Company. If you are interested in being featured, please reach out anytime.

Sylvia Heinz, small business owner committed to her community

Sylvia Heinz's outlook is driven by family, community and respect for others. Whether through daily conversation, how she and her husband manage their sustainable business practices, or how they interact with friends and neighbors, Sylvia navigates life with these core values.

When she and her husband Chad bought land to build a house, they decided to buy a mill. "In retrospect, it just seemed like the natural thing to do, and part of the cost of building our own home. I love working with wood and with trees, and the process of milling trees into lumber feels like butchering a moose to me, just part of local community life in Alaska."

People starting asking for boards and their business Mud Bay Lumber Company began to grow organically. That was five years ago. Then in 2016 Sylvia and Chad were part of the Path-to-Prosperty program where she realized the deeper social, economic and environmental value of her business. "It became more than just a side project, it felt like something we could put our hearts into."

Today Sylvia and Chad have two small children who are growing up in the business. Although it is difficult to have space away from work, Sylvia wouldn't have it any other way. "I'm lucky that my kids are surrounded by trees, wood, subsistence activities. We can be part of the timber industry and the community as a family."

Although Sylvia spent some time in Haines growing up, her own career background was not in natural resources. In fact, she was groomed to be a professional musician, playing the bassoon. But after an injury at age eighteen, she moved to Haines, searching for more practical skills and discovered a love of cabinet making. She credits her focus, determination and detail-oriented mindset as a musician as part of her success with Mud Bay Lumber Company.

Sylvia is proud to run Mud Bay Lumber Company with her husband, and yet she is equally aware that she is a woman entrepreneur. "Sometimes it feels that as a mom, anything else I do is a hobby but the truth is that I am supporting my family. That's no hobby."

As the children grow, Sylvia is hoping to head up the secondary manufacturing operation, such as flooring and paneling, which would require a dry kiln. In addition, she hopes to continue with cabinet making and other value-added products.

Regardless of how the future shapes up, Sylvia wants to grow her business in a way that best supports the community. And she likes to have conversations about community building. The UA Haines timber sale is just one way for her to talk more with others about economic development, sustainability, and opportunities for people, no matter their background, opinions, or ideas.

“It’s no secret that Haines is known for people with strong opinions but it’s interesting to me that the local timber industry is supported by people for a variety of different reasons. I feel like our business is uniquely positioned to open up dialog between people, and I like that because community is an important value to me and Mud Bay Lumber Company ... ultimately, everyone can benefit from knowing each other’s needs.”

Recently Sylvia started the Haines Timber Alliance to bring people together in the industry. Last fall she worked with the Takshanuk Watershed Council and Department of Forestry on a small event she is hoping to do again in the near future.

“I want to bring people together and create a format for communication, brainstorming, and increasing efficiency. I’d like to build stronger relationships so that others can better understand the timber industry. The way I see it is that if one of us succeeds, then we all do.”

Thank you

At the UA Land Office, we feel the same way. We are also interested in being good neighbors—making Alaska a place where people can live and work. Thanks for talking with us, Sylvia!