

CALLING DEAR DREWBIE

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Someone who brings out the best in everyone

By Tiernan Spencer

Drew Mikita moved to Summit County for the same reasons as the hero in his favorite teenage movie, *Aspen Extreme*. Mikita and the ultimate ski bum protagonist T.J. Burke wanted to get out of the Midwest, ski everyday to train for the Powder 8 and find the mountain girl of their dreams.

Mikita's life didn't bring him directly to alpine skiing glory, but his natural knack for making connections carved a career path for him in the high country before he even made plans to move here.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Growing up in Columbus, Ohio, Drew longed to live in a small town. Drew only made it as far as the Front Range on his first move to Colorado. During a visit to Breckenridge, Drew asked a stranger on the street for directions and it changed his life. In the time it took the kind woman to walk him to where he was going, she persuaded him to move to Breckenridge.

The woman, Stacy Smith, was a counselor in Summit County while Mikita had just received Master's in clinical counseling as well as in rehab counseling from Ohio State University. Smith believed in Drew the moment she met him, offering her



Drew Mikita, 34, of Breckenridge, has a contagious smile seen throughout the community.

supervision and office space for Mikita to start his own counseling practice. Mikita views Smith as an inspiration to why he became who he is today.

"I think about that chance encounter happening and how it shaped the course of my entire life," Mikita said.

FULL PLATE IN SUMMIT

Mikita was grateful to have Smith's office space for his startup counseling practice, but looking for full-time work, he called Colorado Mountain College campus CEO Dave Askeland and asked if they needed anyone to teach psychology. Mikita was turned down.

"Then the day before the semester, he calls me and says, 'Hey, can you still teach psychology?' I said, 'Can you get me a book?' and he said,

'Nope, you start tomorrow.' I said, 'Done.' I just showed up and I had never taught a class in my life, and I just kind of fell right into it," Mikita said.

Today, in addition to teaching ten classes a year at CMC, Mikita is a Licensed Professional Counselor working on his dissertation for a Ph.D. in sports psychology from the University of the Rockies, he organizes intramural sport teams and manages two websites: a mental health resource for students and a Breckenridge entertainment guide.

Writing a column for Summit Daily, one of Mikita's most recent gigs, has become a favorite. "Probably," he said, "because being a small town writer was also a goal of T.J. Burke," the ski bum hero in *Aspen*

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“Sometimes I like to lock myself away and be a curmudgeon, but I’m at my best when I’m connecting.”

Extreme that got Drew hooked on Rocky Mountains from the start. For Mikita, the column is just another way to connect with the community.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

As a man with an infectious charisma, people like to be near Mikita, and with his many Summit County hats, he has many chances to connect with people. Teaching psychology at CMC, Mikita often forms strong bonds with his students.

Mikita attributes his likability with CMC students to his genuine personality which is the same in and out of the classroom.

“I’m not scared to form relationships with students, and bond with them. I know how lonely this place can be. It can be really, really lonely. Having somebody that you can relate to and connect to, doesn’t matter if it’s a professor or a friend, a ticket taker or a scanner - we all need to connect. And I’m not scared to form those connections with students.”

It’s not uncommon for Mikita to be found helping his students through tough breakups, family struggles or personal barriers. For many

introverted students, Mikita becomes one of the best friends they have in Summit County.

CELEBRATING LOVE AND LIGHT

One former student stands out in Mikita’s mind as someone he felt closely connected with. Lauren Hoover had an invigorating spirit that could put a smile on anyone’s face. Hoover passed away in a tragic accident in March of 2016. After her funeral in her hometown of Colorado Springs, Mikita did not feel like he had complete closure.

In touch with her spirituality, Hoover had always wanted to go to Nepal. In May of 2016, Mikita and his wife, Molly, had the opportunity to participate in the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon. Fulfilling her dream, Mikita brought some of Lauren’s ashes to Nepal with him.

“[Nepal] is a very, very spiritual place,” Mikita said. “You form these bonds with people very quickly.”

At base camp, looking at the peak of Mount Everest, there is a spot where the people pay homage to the Mother of Mount Everest before they climb to the top. Here, Mikita mixed Hoover’s ashes

with Everest dirt, spoke about her to the people he became so close to during his trip, and lifted her spirit into the air which surrounds the tallest mountain in the world. “Lauren would have been stoked,” Mikita smiles.

KEEP CONNECTING

Sometimes connections can be made with people you will never meet. During the Everest Marathon, Mikita admits he added at least 20 minutes onto his time to add a rock to each cairn he passed by. Leaving behind positive energy for others to see is a different type of connection, but a way to unite nonetheless.

The most important thing to Mikita is to connect with people. Whether it’s with a student, a coworker, the community or even a stranger, Mikita said, one of the best skills to have is to be able to relate with one another. Creating any type of connection has the capacity to change someone’s outlook on life.

Mikita is a shining light in the lives of those who are so happy to have met him. He knows that you have the potential to do the same.

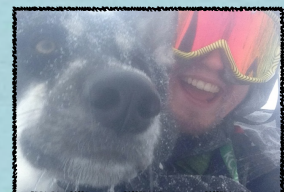
Testimonials from Mikita’s former students



NATHAN CORDERO Drew Mikita is not just a professor but an ambassador of life. His constant eagerness to learn reflects in his up-to-date style of teaching. He would lecture to us NOT as a superior but as a colleague sharing his beliefs. I enjoyed going to class where we could speak our mind while making it easy to keep it open. Drew is the man!



LAUREN WEIBERT Simply put, Drew is awesome! He’s a very warm person and makes you feel welcome. He likes to get to know people and that’s awesome in this day in age where people are glued to their phones and aren’t interested in mingling with others. He’s also a compassionate person too. Be like Drew. Be awesome.



MIKE CAREY Drew is passionate about teaching and living a healthy life. He is always very honest and straight forward. He isn’t afraid to get personal and share his own life experience as a learning experience.