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Raynes named Hometown Hero

Town recognizes birder, columnist, curmudgeon as exemplary citizen.

By Noah Brenner

Jackson's best-known bird expert is also its latest Hometown Hero.

The Jackson Town Council lauded Bert Raynes with his latest honor Monday night at its regular council meeting.

"I, Mark Barron, Mayor of the Town of Jackson, on behalf of the Town Council and the entire Jackson community do hereby sincerely thank Mr. Bert Raynes for generously giving of his time, energy and tireless humor to educate and comfort the community, and for helping to make Jackson Hole a better place to live," Barron said, reading a proclamation at the meeting. "Because of him Jackson is a better place."

Raynes also received a letter of praise from U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi.

"The knowledge you share about the great outdoors has enabled you to make a difference in so many ways throughout our state and our nation," Enzi said. "Wyoming is proud to claim you as our own."

Raynes was overwhelmed when presented with the award to a standing ovation from friends and admirers who had packed the council chambers for the event.

"All I can say is I wish Meg were here," he said of his wife who passed away last year. "I would like a hand for her."



NEWS&GUIDE FILE PHOTO

Bert Raynes can add yet another award to his list of accolades after receiving his latest honor Monday from the Jackson Town Council, which credited him as a Hometown Hero.

The room erupted again. "Thank you very much," he said "I appreciate everybody, and you are all rascals."

Though many people knew of plans to honor Raynes, he himself had been surprised by the award.

Friends had tricked Raynes into coming to the meeting, saying that he needed to support a vague request from the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance. Once there, he was prodded once more to go into the council chambers and he began to suspect something was afoot, he said.

"I would have worn a better shirt had I known," he said in an interview. "I'm not even sure I shaved yesterday."

Raynes said he was "absolutely flabbergasted" by the number of well-wishers.

"The whole thing was nice," Raynes said. "I just was not prepared emotionally."

Bert and Meg took their first vacation to Jackson Hole in the early 1950s. They returned for a yearly sojourn each fall, and in 1972 the couple retired permanently to the valley. The pair began the Jackson Hole Bird Club in 1976. Shortly after, with Bert writing and Meg editing, Bert began his "Far Afield" column in the

Jackson Hole News, which still brings the observations of Raynes, and other valley residents who take the time to look outside, to readers each week.

With Bert writing and

Meg editing, the couple wrote five books about the valley, including three birding guides. In 2001, he was honored with the Rungius Medal by the National Museum of Wildlife Art for his commitment to conservation. Bert also has a bench, and Meg a grove of cottonwoods, dedicated in their honor on the National Elk Refuge. Both are members of the Wyoming Outdoor Hall of Fame.

Raynes said his latest honor was one of the most important.

"I guess it means I have tried to be a good citizen and contribute to my community and maybe Meg and I actually have," he said. "It gives me great pleasure to think that."