



Nine Nights a Week

BY TIM KELLER

RED RIVER'S REMARKABLY VIBRANT MUSIC SCENE SELDOM SLEEPS IN SUMMER.

TIM KELLER, JEN JUDGE

HONKY-TONKIN' Top: Mike Addington and Two Dollar Horse at the Motherlode Saloon, with Kelley Mickwee. Above: At the Love Lost Saloon.



THE HILLS ARE ALIVE Clockwise from top left: Working that Texas style with the fun boots and bag. Playing horseshoes with the fellas. Main Street slices through the Red River Valley. Nashville hit songwriter Richard Leigh, performing last summer at the chairlift-accessed Tip Restaurant.

The day's last rays slant through a corner window open to the mountain air, casting golden light that makes Mike Addington's red Gibson Dove guitar glow as it fills the Lost Love Saloon with one swinging tune after another. The barroom is packed with fans, old and new, flushed with the excitement of hearing a low-key Lyle Lovett singing in the corner of a small-town joint. During "Don't Be Cruel" he flings a guitar solo under a wall clock of Elvis, whose hips swivel with each second. "Bubbles in My Beer" gets a jazzy solo worthy of Willie Nelson. Given the modest scale of the venue, the level of talent may be unexpected, but it's not at all unusual: Addington does this every evening, all summer (and for much of the rest of year, too, for that matter).

Red River's surprisingly vibrant music scene drew Addington from California 10 years ago. He's settled into the saloon adjoining Texas Red's Steakhouse, where owner Steve Heglund's contented smile is just one indication that he's this small mountain town's most ardent music fan. As Addington puts a closing tag on his own song, "Horizon and Main," Heglund marvels, "Mike's got just one album, but he has 300 songs you've never heard."

Addington is the current standard-bearer of a long-running local tradition: For 50 years, a steady stream of singer-songwriters has had at least one foot planted in this northern New Mexico resort town. Most have come from Lubbock, Dallas, and Austin. As Michael Martin Murphey, one of the most stalwart among them, says, "Once you've spent any time here, it's hard to get it out of your blood."

Nestled at 8,650 feet in the narrow Red River Valley, downtown Red River is one mile long and two blocks wide. Five hundred residents support an economy built on making visitors happy with its climate, abundant outdoor activities, and music culture. While the Red River Ski Area attracts a winter-sports crowd (for some reason, the town goes all out for Mardi Gras), summer is high season for entertainment and festivals (see "Need to Know," p. 33). Addington says the town practically sells itself: "All we need are billboards in Amarillo that say, 'Red River: Bring a Sweater.'" Summer temperatures average 75 degrees in the afternoon and 40 at night.

Summer recreation includes fishing, rafting, camping, and traversing 138 miles of high-mountain trails by foot, horse, mountain bike, ATV, or Jeep; everything but feet are readily available for rent from the town's many outfitters. All those daytime sports have a governing effect on the nightlife. "It never gets as wild here as in Texas," Murphey says, "because everybody wants to be up at six in the morning to go fishing." And yet the musicians and audiences keep coming. For that, Murphey credits local music and hospitality impresario Heglund, owner of Texas Red's, the Lodge at Red River, the Love Lost, and the Motherlode Saloon. "None of us would be here if it wasn't for Steve."

Heglund originally came up from Albuquerque to ski. He was 26 in 1973, a fan who loved Cream, Clapton, and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. "None of that was here in Red River," he says. "Instead, there was Bill and Bonnie Hearne every night at the Alpine Lodge. 'Tommy Hancock and the Supernatural Family Band played where Bull o' the Woods is now,'" Murphey continues,

"and the Outpost was going strong: You'd go into this little room, and the music was phenomenal."

Heglund's friend Rick Fowler picks up the origin story. "In 1965, I was playing music in Dallas with Ray Wiley Hubbard and Wayne Kidd. We were students at Adamson High School." Their classmates included singer-songwriters B. W. Stevenson and Larry Groce, now host of NPR's Mountain Stage. Murphey had recently graduated, and the guitar-slinging Vaughan brothers, Jimmie and Stevie Ray, were growing up nearby.

"There was an ad in the Dallas paper for a summer job playing music in Red River," Fowler says. "Ray and Wayne and I came up and played as Three Faces West. During the day, we drove Jeep tours. When the summer ended, we never left. The next summer, we opened the Outpost as our own little venue, fashioning it after the Rubaiyat, a Dallas folk-music club and coffee bar. We were still underage. We had a cover charge to come in and listen to music. People said we were crazy—no alcohol, and a cover charge—but we had lines going down Main Street."

They sold out two shows a night, closing by ten. Word reached Texas, and soon the Outpost had brand-name guest artists, including Murphey. Willis Alan Ramsey and Jerry Jeff Walker both stayed an entire summer. "We kinda brought the Texas music scene up here," Fowler says. "Everyone was happy to get away from the heat."

By the time Heglund arrived in 1973, Austin's "outlaw" music scene was exploding. The Armadillo World Headquarters hosted newly arrived singer-songwriters, including Murphey, Walker, and Willie Nelson. The interface of cowboys and longhaired musicians produced conflicts in both Austin and Red River. When Ray Wiley Hubbard walked across Main Street to buy beer one night at the D-Bar-D in Red River, he was hassled. But he got the last word, penning the classic anthem "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother." Today, the cowboys and musicians buy each other drinks.

Eventually, Hubbard left (though he returns for festivals and special events). "I discovered beer and electricity, and moved back to Dallas," Fowler recalls him saying. But Fowler stayed, playing music in Red River for 45 years and counting. So has Wayne Kidd, who, for more than three decades, has been a pastor of music at Faith Mountain Fellowship Church, whose tall, white steeple rises across the street from Texas Red's. "We started working opposite sides of the street," Fowler says.

In 1975, Heglund bought the D-Bar-D, renamed it the Motherlode Saloon, and started booking a steady succession of Texas acts. "One night in 1978, Rusty Wier canceled at the last minute," he recalls. "Bill Hearne suggested Michael Martin Murphey as a replacement. I'd never met him, but 'Wildfire' had made him a

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JEN JUDGE (3), TIM KELLER (VALLEY)

national star. He'd just moved to Taos, but I reached him at an Albuquerque music store at seven o'clock. At ten, he carried his guitar onto the Motherlode stage in front of 400 people." Heglund and Murphey have been friends ever since.

Murphey was no stranger to Red River—he'd been coming since 1950. "My parents brought us up here fishing and camping, beginning when I was five years old," he says.

He kept his house and office in Taos but built a cabin above Red River. "I could've flown to Montana for the same thing—escaping to another world—but I could drive here in 40 minutes. This is the best place to have your morning coffee, play your banjo on the porch, and write a song. We have the best mountain mornings—in a place conducive to creativity." One of his songs, "The Land of Enchantment," became New Mexico's official state ballad.

Though marriage moved him to a Wisconsin ranch, he still spends summers in Red River. An avid student of the American West, Murphey hopes someday to house his 4,000-volume library in town. "To me, this is the capital of the West," he says. "Red River's history is the history of the West. Every important Westerner you've ever read about was here at one time or another—the Apache, trappers, gunfighters, lawmen, ranchers, cowboys. Until they built Fort Union, the early Santa Fe Trail came just west of Red River."

Trappers arrived in the early 1800s and were followed between the 1860s and the 1920s by prospectors mining for gold, silver, and copper.

"Red River became a resort that served the cowboys from the area ranches, including the CS and the UU Bar near Cimarrón," Murphey says. "There were more than a dozen saloons. Gambling was illegal, but Red River was so isolated that no one could catch them."

The transition to vacation retreat began in the 1920s, when Texans and Oklahomans started converting abandoned miners' cabins into summer houses.

Murphey's boyhood summers were spent above 10,000 feet at the Lazy H Guest Ranch, built as a mining camp in 1895. He and his Texas musician-friends stayed in the cabins during the '60s and '70s, when they would perform in Red River. Heglund bought the site two years ago, collaborating with Murphey to develop the Rocking 3M Chuckwagon Amphitheater, a beautiful concert venue. Last summer, they inaugurated their chuckwagon dinner-and-concert series with a couple of shows each week. Murphey's in

heaven. "I'll be doing these chuckwagon shows every summer until I die here," he says. Last year, when he convened a 40th-anniversary gathering of his original Austin band, the Cosmic Cowboy Concert took place in Red River. And, for the first time in two decades, he's released an album of all original material called *Red River Drifter*. Its breezy melodies perfectly express the lyrical joys of a man reveling in love and the country life of the mountains.

At Texas Red's, Addington explains that there's more to the Red River scene than a Texas takeover; as Murphey's album title makes clear, it's a dialogue. "There is a northern New Mexico sound," he says. "Michael Hearne, South by Southwest, and Bill Hearne are good examples. It's songwriter-focused, and there's more bluegrass in it than honky-tonk." He cites the Riffers, as well as Don Richmond, who's produced many northern New Mexico albums, including Addington's *Horizon and Main*. "Chuck Pyle's songs are part of it, too," Addington says of the Coloradan. "Everyone up here does his songs, especially 'The Other Side of the Hill.'"

As Addington's wrapping things up in the corner of the Lost Love, I ask Heglund about his little empire. "Texas Red's is the main focus," he says. What about the Lost Love, the Lodge upstairs, and the Motherlode next door? Almost bashfully, he allows, "We house a lot of musicians." Austin-based musician Jana Pochop, who grew up in New Mexico, says, "Steve is the patron saint of traveling musicians. He'll give you a gig, a bed, and food—and you don't have to leave the building."

Indeed, Heglund's enterprises appear to exist more for love than for profit. "For me, it's all about the music," he says. "It moves my soul. It makes me feel good."

"In 40 years of playing, I've never worked for a better club owner than Steve," Addington tells me later. "He loves music, and he brings in great bands."

So, as summer extends through the luxuriously lazy days of August, that's why you'll find Addington at the Love Lost Saloon, seven nights a week. And when there isn't a touring band playing the larger Motherlode Saloon on a Friday or Saturday night, Addington walks next door to front his dance band, Two Dollar Horse.

"Seven nights at the Love Lost, and two at the Motherlode," he says. "That's nine nights a week." ❖

Once a touring songwriter himself, **Tim Keller** played Texas Red's January 27–28, 1989. He keeps his music, writing, and photography up-to-date at timkellerarts.com.



JEN JUDGE, TIM KELLER (2)



MAKING THE SCENE
Clockwise from top left: Applause for Mike Addington at the Love Lost Saloon. Michael Martin Murphey (center) at his Rocking 3M Chuckwagon Concert Amphitheater above Red River, flanked by his son, Nashville songwriter and producer Ryan Murphey (left), and partner Steve Heglund. Texas troubadour Robert Earl Keen performing at the Bull o' the Woods Saloon.

NEED TO KNOW | RED RIVER SUMMER SOUNDS

REDRIVER.ORG IS A GO-TO REFERENCE FOR ENTERTAINMENT, EVENTS, RECREATION, LODGING, DINING, AND MORE.

Bull o' the Woods Saloon hosts great local acts like Hwy. 38 Hounddogs and Ry Taylor, plus touring artists like Robert Earl Keen. 401 E. Main St.; (575) 754-2593

Cowboy Evening atop Bobcat Pass is a 22-year tradition combining a Dutch-oven rib-eye dinner with cowboy poetry and Western music every summer Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday through Labor Day weekend. Performers have included Michael Martin Murphey, Syd Masters, and host Henry Lewis. (575) 754-2769; bobcatpass.com

Larry Joe Taylor's Hot Chili Days, Cool Mountain Nights The 18th annual festival takes place Aug. 14–16 and features music at venues all around town, plus three Saturday cook-offs. (254) 968-8505; larryjoetaylor.com/red_river.htm

Michael Martin Murphey's Rocking 3M Chuckwagon Stage Shows twice weekly through Aug. 30. *Red River Drifter* is available through michaelmartinmurphey.com. 178 Bitter Creek Rd.; (800) 915-6343 or (575) 754-6280

Mike Addington plays all summer at the Love Lost Saloon and the Motherlode Saloon. His outstanding *Horizon and Main* album is available through mikeaddington.com. Watch for a new album this fall.

The 2nd Annual Red River Dulcimer Festival offers workshops and concerts that feature mountain and hammer dulcimers as well as sacred harp singing. Aug. 1–3, Red River Community House. 116 E. Main St.; (575) 754-3364; redrivercommunityhouse.org

2nd Annual Red River Bluegrass Days: Top bluegrass and old-timey bands in concerts and jams, Sept. 11–14, Red River Community House. 116 E. Main St.; (575) 754-2349; redrivercommunityhouse.org

Texas Red's/Lodge at Red River/ Motherlode Saloon/Love Lost Saloon Steve Heglund's dining, entertainment, and hospitality compound is in the heart of town. You can't miss it, and you wouldn't want to. 400 E. Main St.; (575) 754-2922; texasredssteakhouse.com