

# The people behind The Nugget...

## Pete Rathbun

Pete Rathbun often wears a T-shirt that reads:  
 “Let’s eat grandma.”  
 “Let’s eat, grandma.”  
 Commas save lives!

The man takes his commas seriously — which is a good thing for a proofreader.

Rathbun has spent the past 12 years at his desk at *The Nugget* on Mondays, “pouring red ink all over a small-town newspaper.”

He says, “I just enjoy being involved in putting a little bit of final polish on what’s already a quality publication.”

Pete believes in standards — even in an Internet world where people aren’t even aware of a difference between “then” and “than.”

“Language is important, and accuracy in language is important,” he says. “It’s how we communicate. Grammar and punctuation make you accurate.” He says he agrees with the author of the best-selling book “Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach To Punctuation” that “most all punctuation is about pace and timing, which

promotes clarity.”

That said, he’s the first to note “that even a proofreader needs a proofreader.”

No matter how fine the sieve, something’s bound to slip through.

*Nugget* editor Jim Cornelius finds the backstop Rathbun provides invaluable.

“I’m a lousy proofreader,” Cornelius said. “I tend to read what ‘should’ be on the page rather than what actually is on the page, so I tend to miss punctuation errors. Bad grammar jumps out, but I can be a bit punctuation-blind. Pete flags that stuff. I also rely on him sometimes to turn an editorial eye on something I’ve written. He’s got a good ear for tone. And he’s also a hoot to work with.”

Rathbun’s particular punctuation pet peeves are over-capitalization and misplaced apostrophes. Seeing Sister’s instead of Sisters is sure to elicit a menacing growl. He also decries the over-use of commas, “even though I think there’s a place for an Oxford comma here and there.”

Rathbun earned his interest in written language the

old-fashioned way: as a reader.

“I’m a lifelong voracious reader,” he said with a chuckle. “And I had more time to read after I dropped out of high school.”

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He’s quick to note that proofreading isn’t the same thing as reading for content.

“My job is to find the mistakes,” he said. “Even though I read literally every word in the newspaper, don’t ask what’s in there; I may not be able to tell you.”

Rathbun is “an electrician by trade” and has been a wildland firefighter, a ranch hand, and a sailor. Currently



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Pete Rathbun — the man with the red pen.

and for the past 11 years he has served as operations and IT director for Sisters Folk Festival. He’s also the sound engineer for the band The Anvil Blasters and handles sound for several events in Sisters.

He has also freelanced his proofreading skills to several local authors for their books.

“I like to have diversity in what I do, and the jobs that I have are challenging,” he said. “The work I do for *The*

*Nugget* takes three or four hours a week, so it’s not like I spend all my time filling up paper with red ink. Probably, if it was a larger paper, I wouldn’t want to do it.”

In addition to his multitude of gigs, Rathbun likes to fly radio-controlled aircraft and he enjoys hiking and shooting.

“Occasionally, I get the chance to go fishing,” he says.

Fish don’t care about commas, capitals and apostrophes.

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