

Drury

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The engine on Drury's 2008 Crown Victoria is probably still warm when I arrive that fall evening at his motel off Market Street NE. He drives to all his celebrity appearances — refusing to fly since 9/11 because security would make him remove his boots — and a gig in Kanab, Utah, is in his rear view mirror.

He typically travels alone, the 1,121-mile drive from Kanab to Salem taking 16 hours, 53 minutes. He often flies in his assistant, Karen Lindsey from Ohio, to take care of any details.

Some of his posse, a group of more than 1,600 loyal admirers in a Facebook fan club, are staying at the motel, too. They posted a sign for him, "Welcome Home to Salem, Boss."

He always requests a ground floor smoking room. He has a bum hip and pesky sciatic nerve, and he's been smoking since he was 8.

He tells me how one Fourth of July his father gave him a cigarette to light the fireworks, and he took one puff, then another. He used to steal cigarettes from his dad until he got caught.

On the table in the motel room are a carton of Pall Mall Reds, a box of 5-hour energy shots, a 12-pack of Coca-Cola, and a tin of Altoids — fuel from the road trip.

He sips a cup of coffee and smokes a cigarette while we talk more about his life as a celebrity.

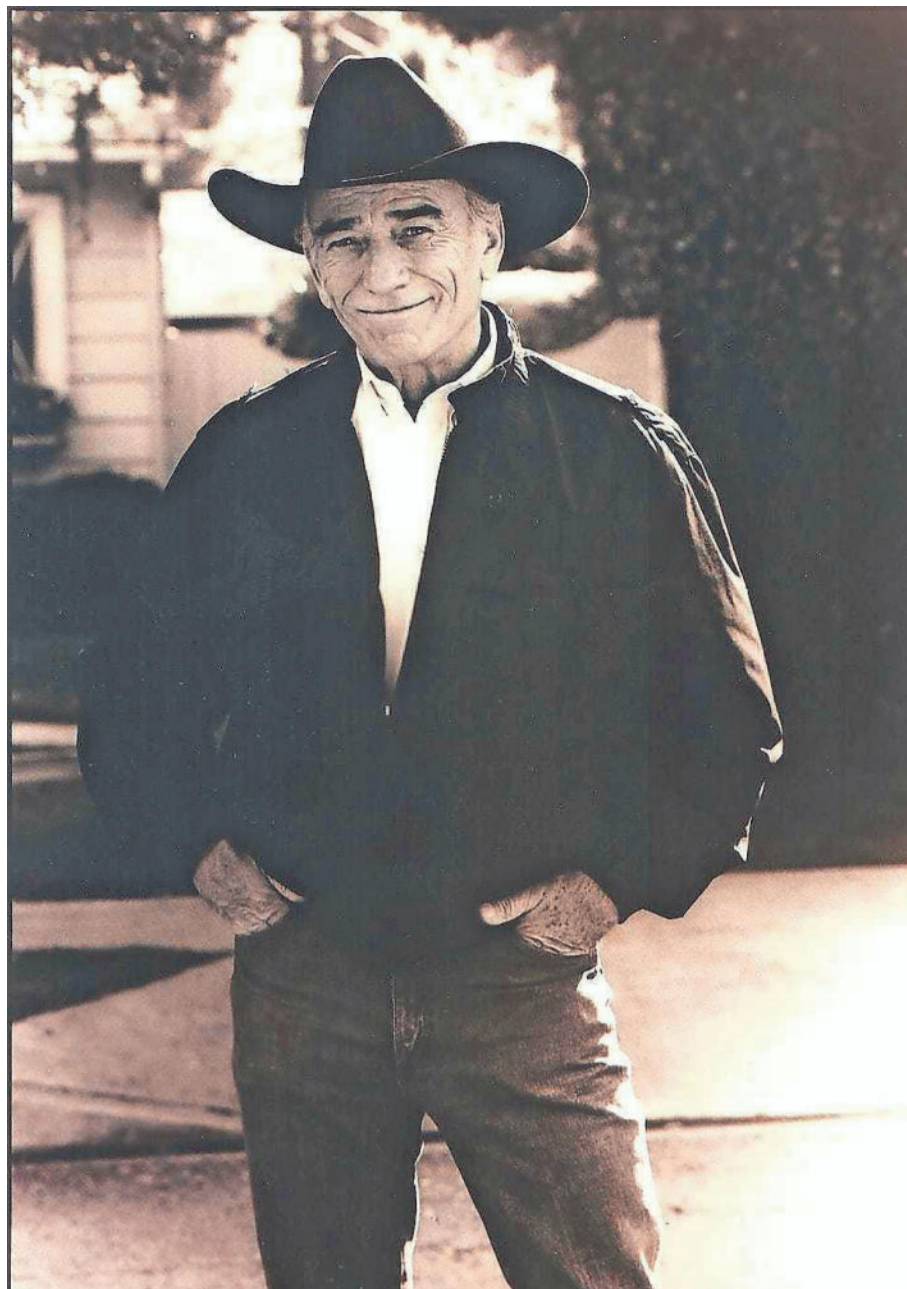
He loves meeting and talking with people who remember "The Virginian." The best part is when he hears from grandfathers who say their grandkids watch the show without being asked or told.

"That's really been a boost to my ego and makes my heart sing," Drury says, the cigarette dancing between his lips as he talks.

But it's the hat I can't take my eye off. Drury seldom goes out in public without one similar to the one worn by the ranch foreman he played. He tells me he has more than 50 black cowboy hats and always wears one while making appearances at western events, festivals and autograph shows.

He gives me a run-down on how the state fair appearances will go. He'll take the stage for a half-hour presentation, making sure to talk about growing up in Salem, the family ranch, and the TV series that made him a household name, then open it up for questions.

After the presentation, he'll be avail-



Salem native James Drury, star of popular western TV series "The Virginian," still wears that trademark black hat. COURTESY OF THEVIRGINIAN.NET

able for photographs and autographs. He'll stand up and take a photo with everyone who wants one, free of charge. An 8x10 glossy with his signature is 20 bucks. His handler brings a collection of more than 50 to choose from.

On this trip, he brings with him a stack of childhood snapshots that he shares with me in the motel room, but certainly not for print. He points out "Gray Bob," his horse, and him leading kids on horseback during a birthday party.

He's 3, maybe 4, in another one, wearing some sort of flower costume and a sour look on his face.

"There's no way anyone can use this," he says, quickly moving on to the next one of him as a teenager, from a distance, relieving himself in the ocean. He jokes he could sell that one as an exclusive to the National Enquirer.

Four months earlier, my column about his Salem roots had published in the Statesman Journal. I reported how much he'd love to visit sometime, maybe even for an official appearance. He hadn't been back since his mother, Beatrice, died in 1992.

Drury was so serious about returning to Salem he disclosed what seemed to be modest travel demands, which I also

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James Drury over the phone

reported that April in 2014 — a \$2,000 appearance fee, 50 cents a mile and, last but not least, ground floor accommodations at a motel.

By mid-August, not coincidentally, I hear the Oregon State Fair is wooing Drury. I call his Houston home, and he confirms it's true. In fact, we talk the same day he receives the final contract to sign, booking him to appear on four consecutive days of the fair.

"I'm excited," he tells me by phone. "I haven't been back to Oregon for at least 20 years, maybe more. I love Oregon so much."

We arrange to meet in person when he gets to town.

Fast forward a couple weeks, and we're sitting in that motel room, him sporting that black hat and those snazzy ostrich boots. He's charismatic from head to toe, just like the cowboy he played on TV. In case you're not up on "The Virginian" trivia, his character never had a name in 249 official episodes.

Drury is much less mysterious, though, as evidenced by our casual conversation.

To be honest, I didn't have a lot of questions for him, having exhausted most of my list during previous phone interviews. I was there for less than an hour, not wanting to overstay my welcome and knowing he probably needed rest after the long drive.

His adoring fans would want him to be fresh. They would be expecting the gallant cowboy who rode into their living rooms on a white Appaloosa and captured their hearts.

Drury would ride in on a red scooter that fall at the state fairgrounds, because of a hitch in his giddy-up, but he would not disappoint. Hundreds posed for pictures with him and purchased autographs that first day, and he was as genuine as he was entertaining.

On behalf of Salem, thank you for the memories, Mr. Drury.

Capi Lynn is the Statesman Journal's news columnist. Her column taps into the heart of this community — its people, history and issues. She has worked for 31 years and counting at this newspaper.

Logging

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Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

They singled out multiple sales in Southern Oregon, offered by the Bureau of Land Management, as examples of projects that should be halted amid the crisis because the public couldn't sufficiently weigh-in during orders to "stay home, save lives," issued by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

"The Interior Department should be focusing during this public health crisis on helping communities in Oregon and nationwide to respond, as opposed to jamming through unrelated policies and proposals without key public input," Wyden told the Statesman Journal.

BLM officials told the Statesman Journal they're committed to getting public input and evaluating on a case by case how to best do that, information officer Sarah Bennett said.

George Sexton, of the environmental group KS Wild in Ashland, said BLM was telling the public to stay home but the timber industry to continue busi-

ness as usual.

"The rules that apply to all of us don't seem to apply to the BLM old-growth timber agenda," he said. "The BLM is encouraging timber purchasers to go to the field to assess timber and bring bids to the office. They require hard copies of protests to be signed and delivered to them. All of which precludes staying at home," he said.

Bennett said BLM was taking measures to limit the number of people at timber auctions and in the field, keeping strong social distancing measures and moving to a "sealed bid" process this month. But, she said, timber sales are expected to continue.

She added that BLM has kept land open to recreation whenever possible.

"Timber sales are a strong vehicle to propel the local economy with good paying jobs, which is very important in these uncertain times," she said.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter, photographer and videographer in Oregon for 12 years. Urness can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.



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