

PERSON

CWF names city
man as its outdoors
person of year

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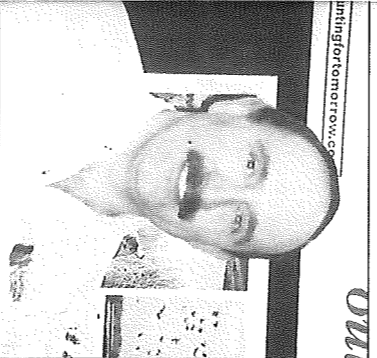
In the course of a regular day, most urbanites don't think about where their meat and poultry come from.

The supermarket, on a tidy little polystyrene tray, overwrapped with clear plastic, right?

If we decided to pursue our protein the way Robert (Bob) Gruszecki does, I'd bet most of us would opt for tofu.

Gruszecki, recently named outdoorsman of the year by the Canadian Wildlife Federation, is a passionate hunter and fisher who believes we modern humans have become too disconnected from our food and our hunter-gatherer roots.

The born-and-raised Calgary man won the award because he's worked tirelessly for the conservation of wildlife and habitat, meshing with the goals of the Canadian Wildlife Federation, said spokesperson Stephanie Bonner.



Calgary Herald Archive
Robert (Bob) Gruszecki

Properly called the Stan Hodgkiss Canadian Outdoorsperson of the Year and named for the CWF's founding president, the award was established in 1975 to recognize those who demonstrate an active commitment to conservation in Canada.

"(Gruszecki) was the driving force behind the creation of the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, which has become one of the most successful examples of conservation education delivery in North America, with a pool of volunteers over 500 people," Bonner wrote in an e-mail.

"Bob is considered the poster child for volunteer efforts," she added, listing the seven or so non-profit organizations he works with, including the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Gruszecki, 49, retired seven years ago as president of a division of the Loran Group of companies, owned by Calgary's wealthy Mannix family. (He has a business degree and spent more of his career in business management, but did a two-year stint with the Calgary Police Service in the early '80s.)

He and his wife Carla, also a

hunter, then sold their chunk of property overlooking Fish Creek Provincial Park (now the suburb of Evergreen Estates) and moved to a quarter section near Millarville. They wanted to raise their three teens, now 18, 20 and 22, in a setting as close to nature as possible.

They have horses and grow hay, but most of the property is bush, a haven for deer and other creatures.

The devoted family man is also a champion trap shooter. He's currently organizing the 2009 Canadian Trapshooting Championships, held in Calgary from July 1st to 5th.

Always a hunter, upon his retirement, Gruszecki began overseeing the operations of three charities that educate and certify hunters and advocate for the conservation of wild places in the province: the Conservation Education W.I.S.E. Foundation, the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association and the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation.

Between the three, they teach a would-be hunter everything he or she needs to know. For example, 250 women are signed up for a seminar in August — the largest of its kind in North America — to learn to how to get an animal from field to table.

The programs are run out of an office located in the community of Southwood.

For a non-hunting visitor, the office's collection of stuffed animals — bighorn sheep, bears, etc. — is a bit unnerving.

Why kill what you seek to conserve, I ask.

Hunting and conservation go hand in hand, according to Gruszecki, who hunts birds, deer, moose, sheep and has been to Africa five times hunting big game.

"Our conservation work is mostly education about how you interact with wildlife and how what you do has an effect on wildlife," he said.

"As wildlife is encroached and habitat lost . . . we need to teach man about how to coexist with wildlife. We also preserve lands and participate in land organization to help them set aside areas for multiple use."

As for hunting itself, he says "it's natural for man to be a predator and for man to live with the tradition, the heritage and the culture of being the hunter-gatherer."

Everything he kills is eaten (his freezer is full of the original free-range meat). Hides are made into gloves and moccasins.

Compared to the slaughterhouse experience of, say, cattle, he feels that hunting — done humanely, responsibly and legally — is more honourable and respectful of the animal.

And being in the wild, in pursuit of prey, is a heightened sensory experience he treasures, even if he doesn't bag something, either with gun or bow and arrow.

"That awareness is a wonderful connection to wildlife that I think makes my life better."

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OFFICIAL DEDICATION



Sam Switzer, right, carries the Torah during the official opening and dedication procession for the Montefiore Institute, the "Little Synagogue on the Prairie," at Heritage Park on Sunday. Originally built in 1916 to serve a colony of Jewish pioneer farmers, the synagogue was abandoned in the 1920s, then was a private home in Hanna. A \$1-million campaign has restored it and placed it at Heritage Park.

Synagogue honours Montefiore settlers

Large crowd celebrates grand opening

GRAEME MORTON
CALGARY HERALD

It is origins may have been humble, but the Montefiore Institute began the latest chapter of its life in grand style Sunday night.

An estimated crowd of about 2,000 people, including religious leaders and dignitaries, paraded through Heritage Park to mark the dedication and grand opening of the Little Synagogue on the Prairie, the newest addition at the historic park.

Walking to the infectious music of a klezmer band, the crowd took on a unbridled tone of joy and pride, marking a significant milestone in the Jewish history of southern Alberta.

City businessman and philanthropist Sam Switzer joined Lt.-Gov. Nor-

man Kwong in carrying the Torah into the restored synagogue, which was built in 1916 and served a colony of hardy Jewish farmers who came from Eastern Europe to southeastern Alberta.

Years of research and planning and more than \$1-million in donations transformed the synagogue from its former use as a private home in Hanna into the first Jewish house of worship to be housed in a Canadian historic park.

"This building shows just how important diversity has been to the development and success of Alberta," Kwong told the crowd.

"The values and ideals of the pioneers who built this synagogue are part of what makes the Jewish community special today."

Provincial Culture Minister Lindsay Blackett called the dedication ceremony an important cultural moment in Alberta's history.

"This province is made up of people from all around the world, and that makes us stronger," he said.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier noted 2009 marks the 120th anniversary of the arrival of the first Jewish family to Calgary and applauded the significant contributions the Jewish community has made to the city's growth.

"This is a spiritual place and an important piece of Alberta's history," he said.

Gerry Barron, president of the Calgary Jewish Community Council, called Sunday's event "an emotional and momentous day for the Jewish community."

"The Montefiore settlers had a very difficult time farming and yet they used their meagre resources to build this synagogue to celebrate the freedom of religion they had found in Canada. Today, it's wonderful to see this little building with our own eyes," Barron added.

Rabbis and representatives from all four Calgary synagogues joined forces in leading prayers.

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