



## James Daniel Devine

September 12, 1966 - July 22, 2022

Jim Devine, a big, lovable presence with an easy smile and fun-loving spirit, who built an unforgettable legacy of friendship, family and community, died on July 22 at his home in

Wibaux, Montana. He was 55. A Celebration of Jim's life will be held at 5:00 PM on Tuesday, August 16, 2022 at the Beaver Creek Brewery and Gem Theatre in Wibaux. Silha Funeral Home of Wibaux has been entrusted with the arrangements.

Born and raised in Southern California, Jim spent the last 30 years in Montana. Along the way, he seized every opportunity to pursue his passions and realize his dreams. And in doing so, crafted a remarkable life.

He met and married Sandra, the love of his life, and together they had a wonderful daughter, Jennifer. He built a thriving business, Beaver Creek Brewery, out of his passion for craft beer, wrote and performed songs as the leader of a professional rock 'n' roll band, played college baseball and, as a social worker, made a difference in the lives of troubled young people. And made so many friends.

When a rare, aggressive form of cancer came his way in 2019, he met it with the same resolve with which he lived — to find joy in every day and every person he met and see every unexpected challenge as a chance for another adventure.

He is survived by his wife, Sandra Ann (O'Connor) Devine, of Wibaux; their daughter, Jennifer Devine (Tyler Weil), of Studio City, California; his father, Bernard Keith Devine, of San Clemente, California; siblings Mike Devine (Merlita Mojares) of San Clemente, Denise Mandich (Nick Mandich) of Bishop, California, and John Devine (Pearl Barnes) of Dana Point, California.

In and around Montana, Jim was most well known as the proprietor of Beaver Creek Brewery, one of the first modern craft breweries to open in the state, in 2008. It started with a Christmas gift from his wife, a home brewing kit. Ten years later, "After having too many pints," Jim would say, he and former co-worker and fellow home brewer, Sandon Stinnett, decided to go into business. Eighteen months and 4,000 hours of labor and sweat equity later, they had renovated the old Helvik's grocery store in downtown Wibaux, built in 1914 and abandoned for more than 20 years, and created something from almost nothing. Only the walk-in cooler was functional.

"It took us eight months to get a plumber to come out," Jim recalled. "But we prevailed." Ultimately, Beaver Creek Brewery grew into a destination for tourists and craft beer enthusiasts from towns up and down Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota.

They came for the award-winning beer, but also for a visit with the big man behind the bar.

From that position, Jim would hold court, telling stories, singing songs, laughing and entertaining, the master of ceremonies and purveyor of good times. "That was his spot," said his wife, Sandra. "People wanted to see Jim there." Fourteen years later, the product of Jim Devine and Sandon Stinnett's entrepreneurship, craftsmanship and hard work continues to serve its customers, create jobs and tax revenue, and attract new visitors to downtown Wibaux.

In 2011, they took on the total renovation of an adjoining property, the old Gem Theatre, and reopened it the following year as a restaurant and music venue. Sandra created the menu and Jim programmed the concerts. It was

his musical playground. Music had always been a big part of Jim's life. He wrote and performed original songs back in his college days, and throughout the 1990s, he made bi-annual trips to Nashville to develop his craft as a songwriter and performer. In 1998, he won country music competitions in Dickinson and Miles City, performing original songs with "a winning combination of musical talent, stage presence, charisma, originality and musicianship," according to the Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette.

In 2013, Jim formed Mighty Big Jim and the Tallboys to be the Gem's house band. With a repertoire of original songs and covers of Tom Petty, Bruce Springsteen and other classic rock, they played a regular schedule of shows in Wibaux and gigs at festivals and concert venues across Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota and released albums in 2017 and 2019.

Jim continued to perform with the band throughout his debilitating illness and treatment until finally stepping away from the stage last year.

"We've lost our captain," Casey Malkuch, the band's lead guitarist, shared after Jim's death. "The world has lost an incredible human. Genuine people are hard to come by these days, and that is what he was."

Lively Times, Montana's online arts and entertainment guide, commented, "Big Jim's departure will leave a mighty large hole in Montana's musical landscape."

"He left us with a wealth of memories and music," wrote Casey. "Jim told me that, no matter what, the music has to continue on and live on through us, all of us. We, as a band, will continue, for Jim and for everyone."

James Daniel Devine was born on September 12, 1966, in Torrance,

California, the youngest child of Keith Devine, now 97 years old, formerly a pilot for American Airlines, and Billie Faye (Hopkins) Devine, who recently preceded Jim in death at 93.

He grew up in the beach community of San Clemente, California, where he played sports, rode dirt bikes and horses, and made childhood friendships that would last a lifetime. Tall and lanky, with a head of blond hair made white by the sun, he stood out on the local youth baseball fields as a power-hitting first baseman and pitcher. He grew to be 6-foot-6, and his talent and love of the game made him an all-league baseball player at San Clemente High School. "He was one of the greatest offensive players in San Clemente baseball history" said Dave Gellatly, Jim's high school teammate and the school's head baseball coach for the last 27 years. "And he was one of the best team players I've ever been around, as a player and a coach. His personal achievements didn't matter to him. Jimbo brought the team together."

Many of those teammates and childhood friends from San Clemente have remained a close, connected group through the four decades that followed and poured out their love and support for Jim during his fight with cancer. They spent time together in San Clemente, San Antonio, Phoenix and elsewhere, and when Jim could no longer travel, they went to him.

"It was amazing how all his friends rallied around," wrote John Devine, Jim's brother. "I've never seen anything like it."

Jim went on to play college baseball in California at Saddleback College, Cal State San Luis Obispo and Chico State University, where "Big Jim," as the school's newspaper called him, hit .288 with power for the Wildcats in 1989.

He brought his fun-loving spirit to Chico State baseball, too. The paper's May 3, 1989 game story opens, "When Chico State University first

baseman Jim Devine climbed up to the scorekeeper's box between games of Saturday's doubleheader at Roy Bohler Field and sang a rousing rendition of 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game,' it was a sign that game two against Cal State Hayward was going to get a little crazy. It did."

He earned a bachelor's degree in community services in 1989. Jim's baseball career ended after college, but his love for the game stayed strong throughout his life, highlighted by the 2002 World Series won by his California Angels and regular trips to spring training in Arizona with several of his former San Clemente teammates and lifelong friends.

His post-college adventures included a year on the road as a caddie for childhood friend and teammate, John Adams, on the Canadian Professional Golf Tour in 1992.

"People thought we'd wind up hating each other from spending so much time traveling and living together," Adams remembered. "We became closer than ever. It was the best summer of my life."

Afterwards, Jim spent time with his brother, Mike, in Livingston, Montana, and began pursuing his passion for music in earnest. It was there he first met Sandra O'Connor, in the coffee house she owned and operated. "He invited me to a songwriter's night in Bozeman," Sandra said. "We saw each other every single day after that." Eleven months later, on September 19, 1993, they were husband and wife. "We were just what each other was always looking for."

Jim worked off-and-on as a ranch hand and was considering a career in law enforcement when his father-in-law told him about a job opening at Home on the Range, a working ranch and home in Western North Dakota for children and teens who have experienced trauma and abuse. Jim took the job, and he and Sandra moved to Wibaux, where her parents were living.

He worked at Home on the Range for three years and found it very rewarding. "Years later," Sandra recalled, "young men would stop us and say, 'Hey Jim, do you remember me from the Home on the Range? I straightened my life out. Thank you.'"

He also worked with children with disabilities for DEAP (Developmental

Educational Assistance Program), a non-profit serving communities in Eastern Montana, and worked there for 13 years. "He loved that job," Sandra said.

"Jim always wanted to help people. To be of service."

The other great love of Jim's life was their daughter, Jennifer, born in 1995. Jim stayed home with their new baby in those early days, while Sandra worked in the restaurant business. He and Jennifer have been extremely close ever since, and "Missy" was a constant source of pride. "He was the most amazing father I could've ever asked for," said Jennifer.

As Jim's health declined earlier this year and his prognosis became final, he narrowed his focus on what mattered to him most: his friends and family. "He had a bucket list of sorts, of people he wanted to see before he left the world," wrote Nina Helvik, a nurse and close family friend who provided counsel and comfort. "He was able to travel a lot this spring and would return home each time with a full heart, lots of pictures and stories of not only his travels, but of the people and their relationship to him, and of what they meant to him. He had a close-knit group of lifelong friends that he made as a child in California. They meant the world to him."

He had many other close friendships with people from all around Montana. "I've never seen one person have so many good friends," Sandra remarked. "I think Jim loved life, and he made the most of his short time on this Earth," Nina continued.

"He loved people. He had so many friends, and they were a blessing to him." Above all, Jim loved his wife and daughter.

"We were best friends," said Sandra. "We never got tired of being with each other. Ever."

Jim's last big goal was to be there to walk Jennifer down the aisle at her wedding in June. It wasn't easy, but he did it. Like most things he set out to accomplish in his remarkable life.

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

AUG **16**. 5:00 PM (MT)

Beaver Creek Brewery/Gem Theater  
104 Orgain Ave. E  
Wibaux, MT 59353

# Tribute Wall



“ *James Daniel Devine*

December 07, 2022 at 04:10 PM



“ *I met Jim through DEAP and always thought of him as a gentle giant. His love and care for the children and their parents was evident.*

**VICKI FIX** - August 18, 2022 at 06:02 PM



“ *Sandra and jennifer im so sorry to read of your loss , seems like you all been thru alot . i always remember when i come to your ranch to get the minature calf for adding to my petting zoo ,jim would bring jennifer to the petting zoo and you also sandra ,sandras mom and dad were always so nice also , my thoughts , prayers and concerns to you all , jack osterhout , los ang , california*

**Jack Osterhout** - August 04, 2022 at 05:03 PM



“ *So sorry for your loss. Jim will be missed by everyone whose life he touched.*



**Diane Nelson** - July 29, 2022 at 01:30 AM

NB

“ 2 files added to the album *Mighty Big Jim*



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**Nicalaine Brown** - July 25, 2022 at 08:35 PM

DD

“ *Daryl & Betty Lou Dekaye lit a candle in memory of James Daniel Devine*



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**Daryl & Betty Lou Dekaye** - July 25, 2022 at 02:04 PM

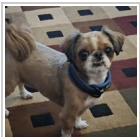
SS

“ *So sorry on Alls loss. Such a great gentleman*



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**Sue Schwindt** - July 25, 2022 at 11:12 AM



“ *Toni Goroski lit a candle in memory of James Daniel Devine*



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**Toni Goroski** - July 25, 2022 at 02:30 AM

BH

“ *Bob Herbst lit a candle in memory of James Daniel Devine*



Bob Herbst - July 25, 2022 at 12:07 AM

NB

“ *1 file added to the album Mighty Big Jim*



Nicalaine Brown - July 24, 2022 at 09:05 PM

GE

“ *Grace Koffler Evinrude lit a candle in memory of James Daniel Devine*



Grace Koffler Evinrude - July 24, 2022 at 08:41 AM

CH

“ *Carol Hanson lit a candle in memory of James Daniel Devine*



carol hanson - July 23, 2022 at 10:18 PM

NB

“ Jim was one of those guys who became family the first day we met him.

We met right when he & Sandy first opened Beaver Creek Brewery. Oh the fun we had together. He always gave me a huge catalog to sit on at the bar. When we hugged I came about to his belt buckle. He always got a chuckle out of that.

That grin. That voice. Those hugs.

Praying he is playing that guitar & singing his songs.

Oh how we will miss him.

John & Nikki Brown

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**Nicalaine Brown** - July 23, 2022 at 06:48 PM

NB

“ 2 files added to the album *Mighty Big Jim*



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**Nicalaine Brown** - July 23, 2022 at 06:41 PM

NB

*Our two sons and our other son Big Jim.*

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**Nicalaine Brown** - July 24, 2022 at 05:20 PM

RF

*The Beaver Creek brewery won't be the same without Jim Devine. I remember going to events in Billings years ago and I once treated to dinner at an Italian restaurant in Billings. We're all going to miss him very much.*

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**Richard Franks** - July 27, 2022 at 04:16 PM