

## Hangout IN HOPE BEAR CARVES OUT PIZZERIA FROM ICE HOUSE

SHERYL VAN DER LEUN



pin of Sandpoint's counterculture," Bear is often remembered as the owner of the iconic Little Bear Trading Co. that operated from 1991 to 2003 on First Avenue in Sandpoint.

Going back a little further, his first major adventure with sole proprietorship was the Little Bear Tipi Pole Co., based in Libby, Mont. What started as a part-time job in college – crafting authentic tipi poles from lodgepole pine – became a passion and thriving business. It also established Bear as one of the foremost



BILLIE JEAN PLASTER

Bear, above, took the old building, far right, and renovated it into the Old Ice House Pizzeria, a restaurant and memoir all in one.

**I**t's not hard to imagine that the funky two-story building next to Hope's City Hall actually *was* an ice house in the early 1900s, when paddle wheelers ruled Lake Pend Oreille and Hope, population 83, was a bustling Wild West railroad town. It's been said that Butch Cassidy frequented these parts in those days.

What *is* hard to imagine, is that less than five years ago it was a boarded-up, falling-apart, for-all-intents-and-purposes abandoned building stuffed to the rafters with what looked like decades' worth of garage sale finds. But current owner/proprietor Bear – yes, just Bear – had a vision.

"I've heard it was once a general store, a meat locker and even a jail. But when I was trying to come up with a name, I found a crudely drawn map of Hope that showed an ice house right next to City Hall," Bear said, as he tossed and stretched freshly made pizza dough.

The previous owners had contemplated turning the building into a bottled water company or a fish processing plant. When Bear bought it, he found plans drawn up by local architect Royal Shields Jr.

Bear hired Shields to refine the concepts into his vision for the pizzeria. The initial remodel evolved over the next 18 months into the eclectic and popular hangout the pizzeria is today, starting with the main floor that opened in 2001.

The renovation continued, and in 2003 the pizzeria expanded to include the upstairs dining area, game room and outside deck with stunning views of Lake Pend Oreille and the the Green Monarchs looking south.

Looking at the facade, you'll find signs, literally, that point the way to Bear's many colorful past lives. Once hailed as the "... entrepreneurial king-



authorities on Native American culture.

In addition to supplying poles to tipi-making companies, he sold them to state parks and other government agencies, Six Flags Amusement Park in Texas and the Smithsonian Institute.

At the peak of his pole-making days, *Mountain Man* magazine (January 1987) wrote, "He (Bear) is both a good businessman and has the physical ability and skill to cut and peel a pole in less time than it takes others to just cut down the tree."

"Remember *Dances with Wolves*?" Bear asks. "I was with the production company for six months and supervised the construction of the tipi sets on location in South Dakota. My dogs and I even had small roles in the movie."

Bear's lifelong credo has been, "Working for the love of it." Today, he even grows many of the ingredients for his New York-style pizza nearby at Bearview Gardens, where Bear spends much of his time when not tossing dough.

Besides the great menu and laid-back "funkitude," you can often catch live music. And baklava, if you're lucky. Yes, the counterculture vibe is definitely alive and well behind and around the pizza counter at the Old Ice House Pizzeria.

*Live music frequently; call (208) 264-5555.*

—Sheryl Van der Leun