



Destiny Happens; The Cozy Interiors Side of Eagle River

Description

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Everybody has a habitat—that place where you spend most of your personal time being a person. As an Alaskan I have loved every habitat I have known since I left the family home in midtown Anchorage as a teen, because like everybody I mostly make my habitats into Cozy Interiors.

That means lots of books. Low music in the background nurtures my thinking. I like to drink coffee or vitamin water and nibble on snacks in my habitat. I like windows with sweeping vistas and plants—lots of plants—in my habitat. Whether austere or cluttered, my habitat is where I find comfort and reset my brain for life’s constant challenges.

Living on a boat in Juneau harbors was an austere habitat. I did that for five years in the mid-1980s. No clutter. Life had purpose. Walking up that steep low tide ramp from the floats to go someplace important, or doing the soft-shoe heading home to my cozy abode over a nearly flat high tide ramp, my habitat was personal. Keys attached until actually aboard. All paper in waterproof containers, especially books.

Cherished heat from the oil furnace once inside my sweet cocoon.



Golden Girl in Douglas Harbor

We adapt to our habitat and our habitat is adaptable to our lifestyle. As a person inclined to save things, my habitat has grown more prone to clutter since those austere years aboard that 24-ft sailboat. Now I try to sort, and organize, and clean, but my habits and my worldly interests have multiplied. Getting the right stuff in my habitat matters.

Fast forward: Living in a two-story home on one acre in Eagle River this last decade has reinforced the values I cherish. I've done the Anchorage thing before—now I only go there when I have to.

As a youth I remember Eagle River being a long way over a dangerous busy road on a low-power motorcycle and not much there to merit the drive. But in 2021 the qualities once experienced by living aboard in Juneau, and living above the expansive Eagle River Valley, are similar. The natural beauty, the unique abode, the sense of community and the peace found in controlling your own little place in the world, all add up.

Eye of the Storm

We all know something is coming. The stormfront from this China Pandemic isn't going to just pass and we all slap each other on the back and yuck it up for still being alive. No, what we are witnessing worldwide—as a result of what happened in Wuhan, China—is going to impact generations to come. But don't worry about a war with China under **Joe Biden** because China owns him.



The Alaska Department of Labor has documented the unprecedented nature of this pandemic's economic impact on Alaska, and from my home looking toward Anchorage I have to say I am happier to be here than there. Between me and Anchorage is **Joint-BaseElmendorf/Richardson** and I can often hear the sweet sound of freedom when our brave warriors are preparing with munitions for whatever protection America may require.

This is comforting in these troubled times.

But those military warriors can't help us with the **Municipality of Anchorage**. Somebody elected the people on the Assembly—except the appointed mayor of course—and we have to watch as they clown around making matters worse in the middle of a disaster. As an international crossroads we should be embarrassed since our airport is named for a guy who knew the goal of political gamesmanship is to serve the best interests of Alaska and Alaskans.



So here is our traditional Alaskan connection to China, according to Wikipedia:

Ted Stevens served in the [China-Burma-India theater](#) with the [Fourteenth Air Force](#) Transport Section, which supported the “[Flying Tigers](#)“, from 1944 to 1945. He and other pilots in the transport section flew [C-46](#) and [C-47 transport planes](#), often without escort, mostly in support of Chinese units fighting the Japanese. Stevens received the [Distinguished Flying Cross](#) for flying behind enemy lines, the [Air Medal](#), and the Yuan Hai Medal awarded by the [Chinese Nationalist government](#). He was discharged from the Army Air Forces in March 1946.



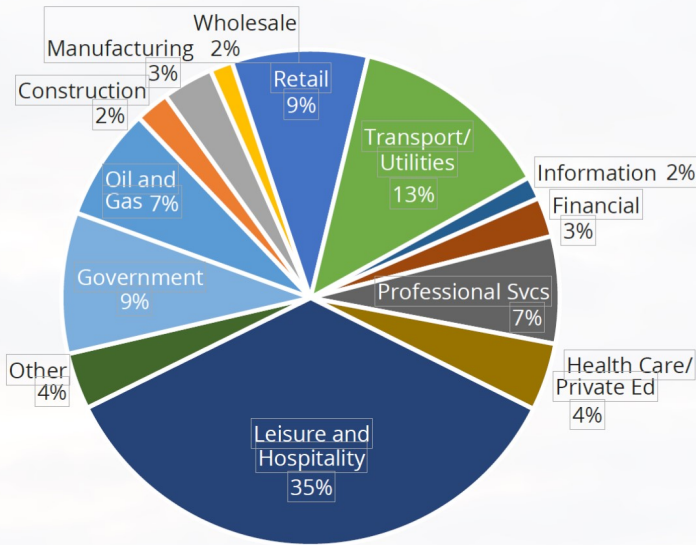
Sen. Ted Stevens

But Uncle Ted is gone and his replacement is an embarrassment to Alaskans who want Republicans elected as Republicans to the U.S. Senate to act like Republicans.

This adds to our collective insecurity as Alaska faces the coming storm. According to the **Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development** *Trends* publication, we have lost some 27,200 jobs—dropping to 2003 levels. Few of those are government jobs, they are mostly private sector jobs ? Leisure and Hospitality -9,600 ? Transportation, warehousing, and utilities -3,600, with hopes some of those will return.[1]

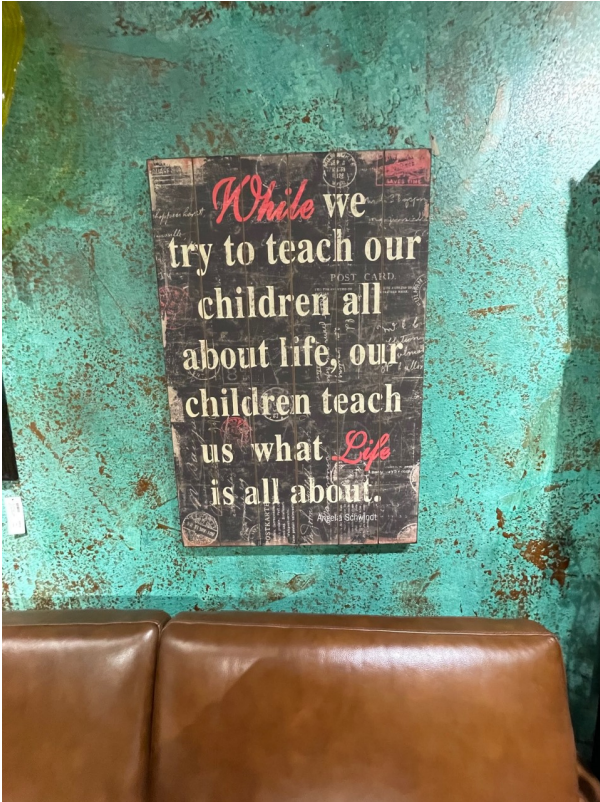
From *Trends*:

Where 2020's losses came from



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Fortunately we have been able to save the teacher and administrator jobs in 50+ of the lowest performing school districts in the nation and most public employees will likely make it to retirement to be able to go home and tell Alaska stories.



Some of us will remain in Alaska. Most who do will savor time spent someplace besides Anchorage. Eagle River/Chugiak ain't Anchorage.

An Eagle River Gem



*We started **Cozy Interiors** in 1989 as a small mom & pop flooring store in the AIH building. We had about 3,000 sq. feet, explained **Matt Hickey**, who sat together with wife **Melissa** on a comfy sofa to chat. The owner of AIH at the time, **Joel Boehm** who is deceased now, gave us a couple of months free rent. We had less than two grand. I went and got some free carpet from an old commercial building where they had put the wrong color down, and I glued it down in our new showroom. We did it the old-fashioned way.*



Melissa and Matt Hickey.

That's called bootstrapping a business. It's an American tradition to start with a dream and make it happen through grit and ingenuity.

The biggest struggle has been the fact you have 30 carpet stores in Anchorage and it was just us out here in Eagle River, continued Matt. Our challenge was to convince people to buy here in their own town when they are already driving to Anchorage to work. They didn't seem to understand that we could be price- and service-competitive in Eagle River even though we're only 10 miles away from Anchorage. The freight didn't make any difference!

Matt continued: *We fought that way of thinking for years, but what happened was we realized we had to do excellent work; we had the best installers, and the best products. The only way we could accomplish our goal was to have no bad word-of-mouth. In Anchorage the flooring stores can get bad word of-mouth and it doesn't affect them because there is so much business. We work really hard here in Eagle River to assure no bad word-of-mouth. We don't nickel-and-dime our installers; we get high quality workers and we pay them right away. They are like family. I think that was the smartest thing we ever did, still years later people shop with us instead of going to Anchorage.*



Cozy Interiors base is in flooring.

Cozy Interiors is a Shaw Design Center, able to get special pricing for quality Shaw flooring among their range of flooring, furniture and cabinetry suppliers. Melissa adds: *Eagle River has truly been a blessing to my family. Through hard work and a lot of memories made right here in this little town.*

But the years have brought change for Cozy Interiors.

When the big box stores came in, it became even more of a struggle, Matt continued. The box stores have been tough on retailers because they bring in one product and price it really cheap—called a leader—and customers assume everything in the store is cheap. It is manipulative and we don't get into those games here.

He continued: *As a matter-of-fact, our most successful years were when we had competition here. Two other flooring companies served Eagle River/Chugiak for a while and they both went out of business. But having more stores made the consumer stay in Eagle River for the same price. And once consumers made up their minds to shop here—because we had enough stores to look at—they ended up choosing us because of our customer service. Now the short drive between Anchorage and Eagle River is nothing.*



Some people are surprised to discover **Cozy Interiors**
!

We have as many coming here from Anchorage now as from Eagle River—and sometimes they walk down the stairway and say: “Why didn’t anybody ever tell me about this? This is like a big secret!”



We have been through all the ups and downs Alaska has to offer but with perseverance we are here

and thriving,” added Melissa. *We are the only place where you can stop in and get a kitchen remodel, flooring, area rugs, window shades and new furnishings all under one roof.*



Impact of the November 2019 Earthquake?

That hit us really hard, said Matt. But the increased damage to structures in Eagle River wasn't because construction is not as good here, that was a lie to try and put more building restrictions on this part of the Muni. Nobody had a Richter Scale here in Eagle River. Some people have said if they had a way to measure it it would have been 8.0.

The Hickeys spent tens of thousands of dollars returning their business to operational. Almost all of the sheetrock was off the walls on the stairway but the engineer who looked it over said the building was structurally fine. A lot of superficial damage required a lot of work. An entire wall caved in at the warehouse. The business suffered over \$100,000 in merchandise damage.



Every single thing you see on the counters was on the floor broken, said Melissa, you couldn't even walk through here.

How has the Covid Pandemic impacted your business?

It has been surprisingly good for us, Matt said. People who might normally be going on vacation and can't are looking around their homes and deciding to replace stuff. I don't want that to be the reason they are shopping—because of Covid—but that's what the effect has been.

Melissa: We started out small but have been able to continuously grow and handle setbacks thanks to the close knit, supportive community we live in. Eagle River does have some transient residents but we also have homesteaders that have spent their life here growing roots and managing challenges like the earthquake. We are proud to say we have also grown roots, too!

It may hit our business in the long run because of the imbalance it creates, continued Matt. We don't know what this year is going to be like. We could still be negatively impacted but we are staying positive and hoping we will come through it okay. We have been getting our shipments although a lot of orders are taking six months to get here when it normally takes two months. Our custom stuff like flooring and cabinetry is coming in pretty normal time.

Melissa: I've had a few sofas on order since March. Anything that comes out of California is difficult to get.

Matt: *This is what everybody is missing. All of these manufactures shut down—in every country—and laid everybody off. All those people went to different places, so guess what? Now they are hiring everybody back and having to re-train.*

Matt continued: *This is deeper than they ever thought it could be. Our government is so screwed up because these health care control freaks have destroyed our economy. It's going to take a lot more than six months to fix it. Training somebody to build cabinets, using those CNC Machines will take six months to a year for those skills.*

You have raised three kids, so what makes this area unique and why do we love to live here?

We believe in “full immersion” when it comes to community involvement at this business, continued Melissa. *Whether it's Peggy's Moose Chili at the Chugiak Eagle River Chamber of Commerce Merry Munch,[2] or fund raising for Heart to Heart PregnancyCenter, we are always trying to be involved and committed to this community.*

Matt added: *This is a traditional Christian community and it is still tight-knit. When we go to the store we can run into 10 people we know. There's a church on every corner, we have Baldy for hiking, and the Nature Center. The schools here are better than Anchorage, we have been very satisfied with how they helped our kids. They seem to have a different attitude here—even the teachers have a different attitude!*

We never got anything from the government for these disasters and we take care of each other out here. We have been blessed and I'm not worried about this pandemic: God's been good to us and he's going to take care of us. We know where we are going and it's all good.

To learn about other quality Eagle River/Chugiak Business go here:

Mike's Meats

<https://donnliston.net/2020/06/how-can-alaska-gain-food-security.html>

Eagle River Small Engine Repair

<https://donnliston.net/2020/11/the-wonder-of-small-engines-john.html>

References:

[1]Alaska Department of Labor, Trends January 2021

<https://labor.alaska.gov/trends/jan21.pdf>

[2]Chigiak Chamber of Commerce

<https://www.cer.org/merry-merchant-munch-winter-wonderland>



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