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# GIVING BACK

Nonprofits wield positive economic, social influence in Montana communities

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ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE

# GIVING BACK

## Nonprofits wield positive economic, social influence in Montana communities

STORY BY KAYLEE WALDEN | BUSINESS JOURNAL EDITOR

FROM BRIDGER BOWL ski area to the Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture, nonprofits are an important part of the Bozeman community and its culture.

Although the social benefits and human capital generated by nonprofit services are somewhat unquantifiable, their economic contribution, especially in Gallatin County, continues to grow. Not only do nonprofits contribute to a sense of community solidarity, they have a significant fiscal impact and help boost the local economy.

In 2014, nonprofit community impact, combined with philanthropic impact in Gallatin County, had \$1.1 billion in gross economic output.

According to the latest Nonprofit Sector Report conducted by the Montana Nonprofit Association, over 30 percent of residents volunteer or contribute to nonprofits on some level, ranking them 16th among the 50 states and Washington, D.C.

“Montana has more nonprofits per capita than any other state besides Vermont. We have a nonprofit sector and a large volunteer base that represents the societal agreement of how we’re going to solve problems—nonprofits pick up where the government leaves off,” said Mary Peterson, the executive director of Bozeman Eagle Mount, who has worked in the nonprofit sector locally for the past 30 years.

Eagle Mount provides year round recreational therapy for disabled people and cancer patients in Bozeman and the surrounding area.

Data from the Corporation for National and Community Service shows that one volunteer hour in Montana is the equivalent to approximately \$19 worth of paid work. Eagle Mount, one of Bozeman’s largest nonprofits, had 1,979 volunteers, for a total of 30,001 volunteer hours in the 2014 fiscal year.

Northern Rocky Mountain Economic Development District has conducted hundreds of organi-

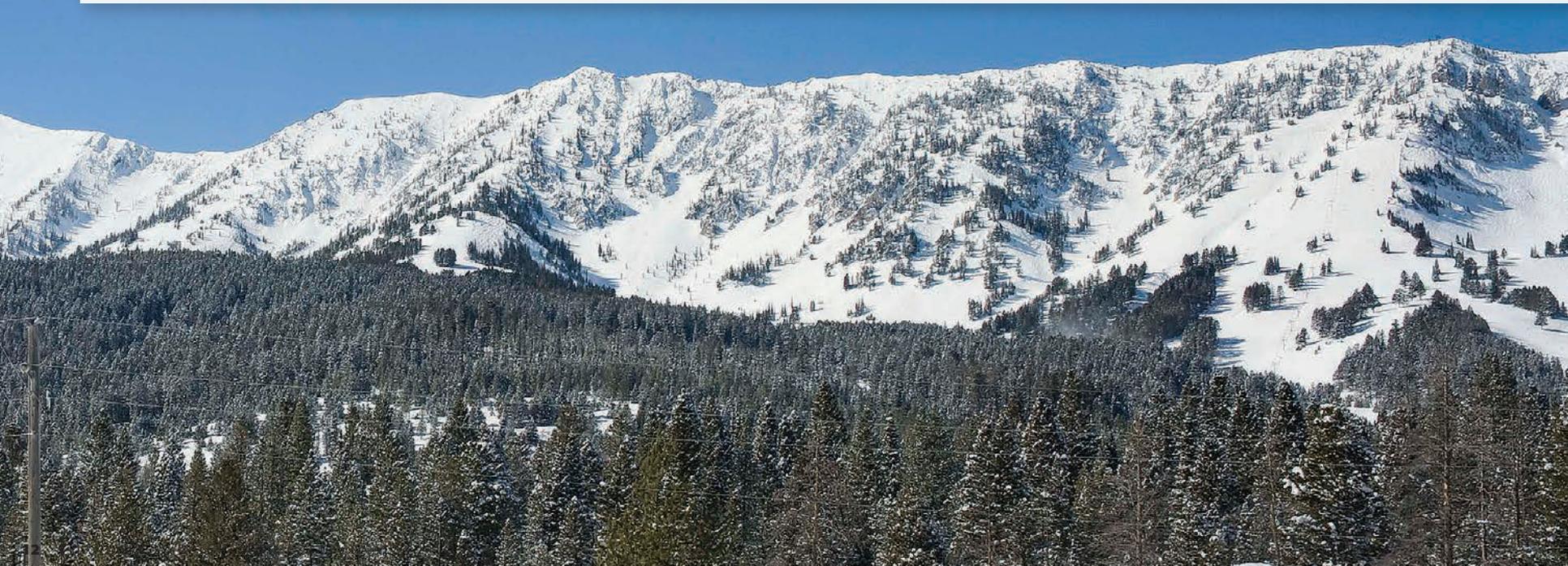
zation-specific economic impact reports, including one for Bozeman Eagle Mount. In 2014, the nonprofit’s gross economic output totaled \$5.2 million.

Gross economic output denotes the total monetary value attached to the services produced by a nonprofit in a specific area. While 81 percent of operating nonprofits in Montana have budgets of less than \$100,000, they generate \$179 million in total labor income in Gallatin County alone.

“There’s a huge partnership between the paid sector and nonprofits,” said Peterson.

“We have so much volunteer labor per year that our output alone has a pretty significant impact on the local economy. The numbers were unexpectedly high. We’re happy to know that we have a direct effect on the community that supports us,” Peterson continued.

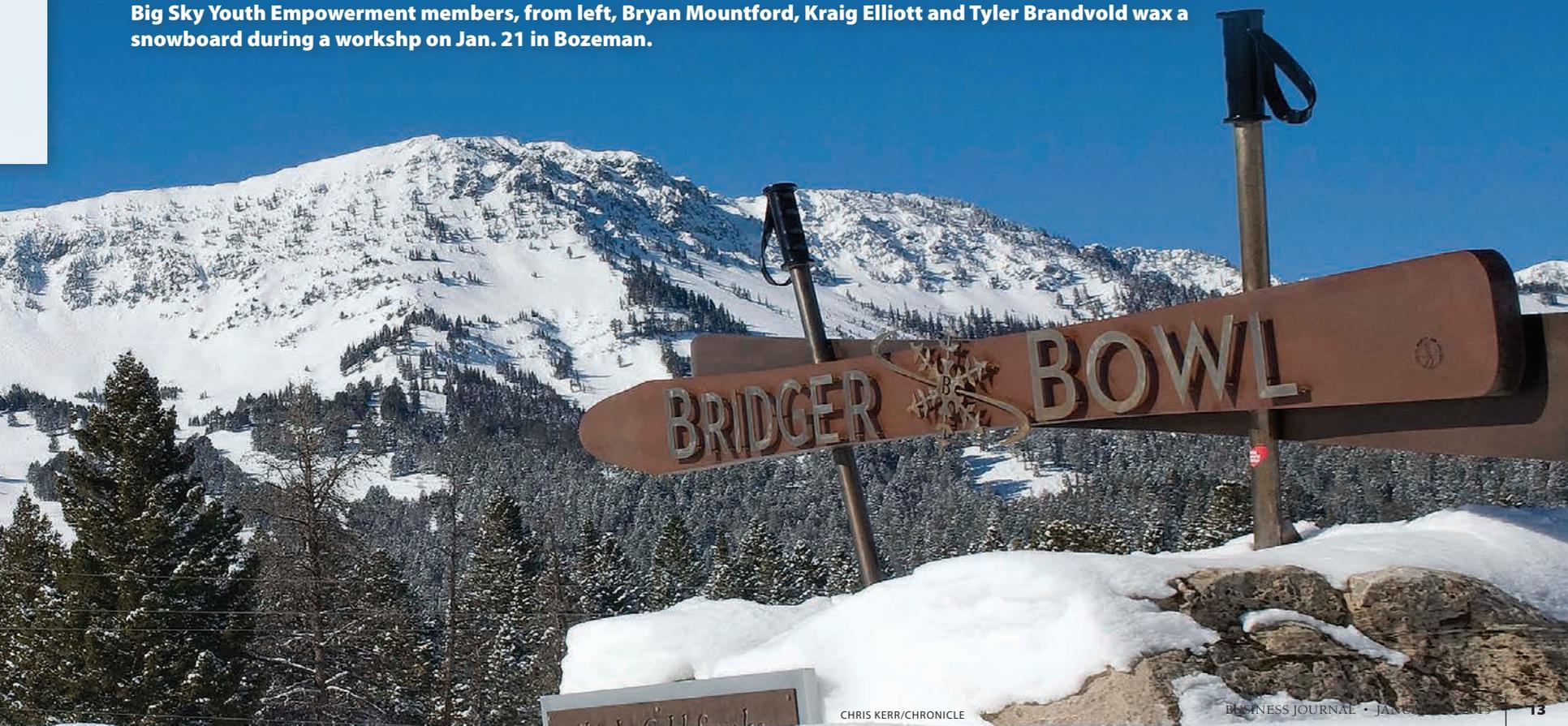
In addition to the economic impact, both local and national nonprofits also have the power to enact social change and generate human capital.





**Big Sky Youth Empowerment members, from left, Bryan Mountford, Kraig Elliott and Tyler Brandvold wax a snowboard during a workshop on Jan. 21 in Bozeman.**

ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE



CHRIS KERR/CHRONICLE

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“Nonprofits provide care, education and a healthy experience for both volunteers and participants,” said Peterson. “There’s a lot of research emerging to suggest that recreational therapy programs like Eagle Mount and Big Sky Youth Empowerment save the health system and taxpayers money.

“Physical exercise combined with friendship from volunteers boosts participants’ health and wellbeing. People who are physically active are more likely to be employed and less likely to have mental disorders,” Peterson continued.

Pete MacFadyen, founder and executive director of Big Sky Youth Empowerment, echoed this sentiment. In the 2014 fiscal year, 60 volunteers with BYEP logged a total of over 8,900 hours.

BYEP uses a similar approach to recreational therapy as Eagle Mount, but its services focus on at-risk and underprivileged youth to provide them with counseling, employment opportunities and tools for success after high school, so that they have a better chance at becoming productive members of the community.

**“It’s hard to quantify what a contributing member of the community is, but through our lens, we’re aiming to help kids graduate from high school and gain employment. We’re working with kids that might otherwise potentially drop out or even end up in jail, which would produce a financial burden in the community rather than a benefit.”**

— **Pete MacFadyen**, Big Sky Youth Empowerment

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or even end up in jail, which would produce a financial burden in the community rather than a benefit,” explained MacFadyen. “When someone is gainfully employed, they’re contributing much more to the local economy.”

Tenth-grade participants spend a summer focused on volunteering, working in the community for a total of 60 hours. This winter, several BYEP participants will be providing free ski and snowboard waxing to thank locals for their contributions and to learn customer service skills.

Older participants in BYEP, as part of their program curriculum, have to do a service project themselves, helping out with other nonprofits around Bozeman, including Gallatin Valley Land Trust, Heart of the Valley and Eagle Mount.

“There’s a lot of good energy in our nonprofit sector, Bozeman and statewide,” said Peterson. “Montanans are willing to roll up sleeves for what they believe in, and as it turns out, nonprofits give even more back to the community than I would have imagined.”

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