

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

Rob Merrill was a passionate man who loved the river

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By Jeannette Boner

Valley angler to be remembered Saturday.



Simply said, Rob Merrill died last Wednesday doing what he loved.

“When he was a little boy, he fell in love with fishing. I took him fishing everyday. To be a guide, that’s what he wanted. He wanted to be a part of the river,” said his father Robert Merrill, Sr.

Rob Merrill was 49 years old when he died last Wednesday guiding others on the waters of the Snake River along the South Fork. When his boat capsized, a rescue and then a recovery involving more than 50 people and four emergency crews from surrounding counties worked to find the man that Teton Valley knew as a consummate fly fishing professional, but above all, called a friend.

“As much as I hurt, he truly loved the river and at least he died doing what he wanted to do,” Merrill, Sr. said on Tuesday morning from his home in Oregon. “He was born to do what he did.”

Rob guided all over the world, always finding his home again along the banks of these local rivers. Known for his passion and unwavering commitment to the art and the sport of fly fishing, those that knew him well knew that he also worked to protect these local resources, going as far as to petition the state of Idaho, indulging anyone, from the rookie angler, to the seasoned pro to consider a fly-fishing only designation on the Teton River. And those that knew him perhaps only as the manager of the Three River Ranch Fly Shop in Driggs, quickly learned that Rob was an easy and eager friend, a man who simply and without pretense wanted to share what he so intimately loved: the rivers.

“He made friends with everyone,” said Marlilyn Nolan, his partner of 15 years. “And it’s amazing, all these people that cared about him. “I’m getting calls from Alaska, New Zealand, Russia. He had a lot of friends. He was a kind man and always worried about others before himself.”

Rob guided the world, beat cancer, and was a beloved son, brother, uncle and friend whose love for the water and the feel of the line began with his family. His father recalls a younger Rob along the docks of the bay in California and then at his grandparent’s home in Oregon, a place along the Rogue River, a place that planted a lifelong seed.

“When we were living in California, we would take the kids fishing in the bay near San Francisco. I used to fix their poles, and Rob couldn’t catch a damn thing,” Merrill, Sr. said remembering the oldest of his three sons.

Rob eventually did hook success pursuing a professional career as a guide that began in Alaska. His leap to Teton Valley started in the Jack Dennis shop in Jackson. Ironically, Rob was hired as a ski pro who spent most of his time in the fly shop.

“We worked in that shop everyday and you become like family,” said long time friend and fellow guide, Jeff Currier. “He was the best guy to have around. With Rob, you could ask two questions about fishing, and you would be there for four hours. He would bring out maps, and talk about the details of the rivers. For him, it wasn’t about customer relationships; you would walk out of there friends for life with Rob. He treated everyone the same, and that is not easy to do. It came from his heart and I have a huge respect for that.” He worked as a guide for Teton Valley Lodge before landing with Three River Ranch, guiding and managing the shop along Little Avenue in Driggs.

“Rob Merrill was an enthusiastic and positive person that touched many lives in our valley,” said Brain Berry, owner and an outfitter with Teton Valley Lodge, on Friday. “I first came to know Rob when he came to work for my family as a guide in 1997. Since that time he has been a friend to our family and all the guides at the lodge. Rob had a deep love and passion for the Teton River and the trout that call it home.”

Douglas Gibson, the head guide at Three Rivers Ranch and 36-year guiding veteran echoed the same on Monday. “Rob was a passionate man who loved these rivers.”

This Saturday, Sept. 11, a celebration of Rob’s life has been planned at the Timberline Bar and Grill in Victor. The event will bring Rob’s family, friends and neighbors together starting at 6:30 p.m. to remember and toast a man whose impact on Teton Valley is yet to be fully realized. Food will be provided and all are welcome to attend.

A memorial fund has also been established for Rob at the Wells Fargo Bank in both Driggs and in Jackson.

“I was very, very proud of Rob,” said Merrill, Sr. who was also speaking on behalf

of Rob's mother, Renate. "He was my big 'ol bear who would always say, 'I'm glad you're here, I want to show you my river.' I couldn't be prouder of him than if he were the president of the United States. I can't say enough of how much he will be missed."