



Treasure Falls takes a break from falling when it freezes for the winter. The cascade, which gets its name from a treasure supposedly buried not far away, is easily viewable from U.S. Highway 160 on Wolf Creek Pass, between Wolf Creek Ski Area and Pagosa Springs. Although the ice at Ouray Ice Park looks like a frozen waterfall, it's a man-made ice-climbing venue, partly owned by the city and open to the public free of charge.

photos by **GUY SCHMICKLE & JOSHUA HARDIN**

MOLLY BROWN INVITES YOU TO *Tea*

story by MATT MASICH

photographs by JOSHUA HARDIN

PEOPLE WHO ATTEND Victorian tea at Denver's Molly Brown House learn a lot about the mansion's former occupant. But there's a lot to unlearn first.

For starters, visitors are informed that Molly Brown's name wasn't Molly Brown. The famously unsinkable survivor of the Titanic was named Margaret Tobin Brown. She was posthumously rechristened when the Broadway scribes writing a musical about her life decided "Margaret" was too hard to sing.

There are misconceptions about tea, too. When tea is served, some guests raise their pinkies to hold their cups in what they think is proper Victorian style – but isn't. Rather than being an affectation of the Victorian rich, the raised pinky is something people of the lower classes did to mock the dainty manners of high society.

Once the myths are dispelled, the fascinating portrait of the real Margaret "Maggie" Brown emerges. Born in Missouri to poor Irish immigrant parents, she moved to Leadville as a teenager and soon married mining engineer J.J. Brown. He wasn't rich when they wed, but that changed when J.J.'s engineering at the Little Jonny Mine led to the discovery of a huge gold seam. The Browns moved into their Denver mansion in 1894 and joined ranks of the elite.

Brown used her wealth and influence to help others. When she had rich friends over for tea, it was often a pretext for her to raise money for progressive causes. She was a driving force behind the creation of the Denver Dumb Friends League, one of the nation's first humane societies. She gathered funds to found St. Joseph's Hos-

pital and was a prominent suffragette.

After separating from her husband, Brown moved to the East Coast in 1910. She was traveling with friends in Egypt in 1912 when she received word that her infant grandson was terribly ill, prompting her to cut short her trip. She booked passage back to the United States on the first available ship – the Titanic.

When the massive ship struck an iceberg and sank on its maiden voyage, she was hailed for helping less fortunate survivors. While still aboard the rescue ship Carpathia, Brown cajoled her fellow first-class passengers into donating large sums of money for those who had been widowed and orphaned in the disaster. She used her newfound celebrity to draw attention to the suffrage movement and launched an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate. During World War I, she traveled to war-torn France to drive ambulances and organized rebuilding efforts when the fighting was over.

Brown's Titanic adventure remains the most indelible part of her story. Fans of

hers can learn more about what she did on that ill-fated voyage – as well as some fascinating anecdotes about a real-life couple who may have inspired the characters Jack and Rose in the film *Titanic* – at the Molly Brown House's "Scandal on the Titanic Tea" on April 23. To reserve a seat, call the Molly Brown House at (303) 832-4092. For those who prefer to recreate a Victorian tea in their own mansions, here are some of our favorite teatime recipes straight from the Molly Brown House.





KK rings the bell for last call at her barbecue stand. She welcomes guests of all kinds at her establishment, as long as they follow her rules. People can borrow hula hoops, or rent kayaks and tubes, at the Soggy Dollar.



KK'S House Rules

KK's BBQ at Rancho del Rio is a humble barbecue and burger stand, but it's known in these parts as "the Center of the Universe." KK's is almost as much of a draw as Rancho's river rafting, both because of its food and its colorful owner, the eponymous KK, who is so well known here that she feels no need for a last name.

Rancho is a spectacularly laid-back place, but that doesn't mean visitors can forget their manners at home. There is a certain code of conduct at KK's, which the proprietress is happy to enumerate in her own inimitable fashion:

- "You get one napkin, whether you need it or not."

- Never use your fingers to fish for pickles and onions. "I wish I had a nickel for every time people said, 'I only touched the top one.' You even get the hot-sy-totsy people doing it. Would you do that in a four-star restaurant?"
- Savor the meal. "I love it when you enjoy every taste and eat slowly."
- Turn off your cell phone. "That's sacrilegious at Rancho."
- Don't complain about the prices, or KK will tell you to "go across the street." Fun fact: There's nothing but sagebrush across the street.

RANCHO IS A ramshackle kind of place, but it has character to spare. And characters.

There's a certain breed of explorer who's more prone to get off the beaten path to get here, whether they stay the day, weekend – or several years.

River rats of every description find their way here: day-trippers, road-trippers, hippies, retirees who once prowled Denver's business district, party-hearty 20-somethings, families in RVs and a small army of canines.

Then there's KK's BBQ, aka, "the Center of the Universe," run by the eponymous KK, or "Karen with a K" – no last name necessary. She started her one-woman operation in 1988, moved it to Rancho in 1992 and has flipped thousands of burgers here in the rafting seasons since.

Alternately nicknamed as "a shady

place for sunny people" – true, it's home to some of Rancho's rare shade – and "a sunny place for shady people," KK's BBQ is best known as "the Center of the Universe" for a reason. KK seems to know everybody in these parts, and the people in her orbit seem to encompass the entire universe once you start talking to her. There are fewer degrees of separation every summer.

"Everybody says I'm blowing smoke with that," KK said of the nickname, "but just sit here for an afternoon and see."

The river might be the main attraction, but KK is a close second. Just watching her juggle her culinary duties, ringing bells, hugging friends, telling jokes and generally being herself is an experience in itself.

On the menu: jalapeño-bedecked Little Beauty cheeseburgers, spicy Italian sausages, sausage-topped burgers, veggie

burgers, "Olathe Sweet" sweet corn, beef ribs and phenomenal pies.

KK first came to the area to retire but set up a hamburger stand in nearby Bond for the 1988 Ride the Rockies bike race. "I always wanted a five-stool diner," she said.

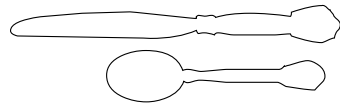
People liked having "a little McDonald's in their own backyard," so she kept it open after the race. She has moved her little wooden structure twice, to Wolcott circa 1990 and then to Rancho in 1992.

Closing in on 30 years in business, she said she has no plans to retire anytime soon. "I'm on to season No. 28," she said of 2016.

She said Gibson has "his own little world" at Rancho, "with a laundromat, grocery store, liquor store, and" – she grinned – "a four-star restaurant."

It's a throwback, she added. "I say it's probably one of the last unincorporated, primitive places in Eagle County to camp,

Tina Manzanares pours coffee and Donna Martin minds the counter at Davies' Chuck Wagon, diner No. 516 built by the Mountain View Diners Co. in 1957. The three-story cowboy who stands outside is of the same vintage. Davies' steak and eggs are legendary, cooked with lightning speed and sold at a decidedly retro price.



Davies' Chuck Wagon Diner

9495 W. COLFAX AVE., LAKEWOOD

Davies' Chuck Wagon Diner on West Colfax in Lakewood is a diner in the classical sense. While many people consider any greasy-spoon restaurant to be a diner, there's a traditionalist school of thought that says a true diner must be a prefabricated, stainless-steel restaurant designed to resemble a railroad dining car. The Chuck Wagon fits both definitions.

Built in New Jersey by the Mountain View Diners Co., it was shipped by rail to Colorado in 1957. The 46-ton structure was plopped on its foundation and opened for business soon thereafter. Prefabricated diners were widespread on the East Coast in the 1950s; the Chuck Wagon was one of the farthest west of its kind.

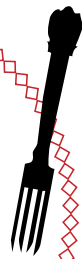
Even though the Chuck Wagon rolled off an assembly line as diner No. 516, its distinctive Western touches leave no room for mistaking it for diners Nos. 515 or 517. In front is a three-story neon sign of a cowboy chef. Crowning the entrance is a life-size fiber-glass horse. Some first-time patrons are drawn to the kitsch, but they become regulars thanks to the steak-and-egg breakfast, cooked to order in three minutes and priced at a decidedly retro sum.

Waitress Donna Martin minds the counter, which sometimes is adorned with flowers placed in a vase that looks suspiciously like one of the diner's plastic water cups. The bouquet is a gift from Veldkamp's Flowers just down the street

– the employees come in a few times a day. Martin has a ready stock of jokes and patter as she serves customers. “Here’s your liver and onions,” she’ll say, delivering a plate that clearly has neither of those things. “Actually, it’s a patty melt.”

The kitchen’s pass-through window looks directly onto the counter, so customers know the cooks as well as they do the waitresses. The cooks’ chatter – “That over-easy has no gravy, all right?” – is part of the ambience, blending in with the oldies on the jukebox.

The Chuck Wagon, a prefabricated diner, came here by rail in 1957.



Most days, Hugh McNulty can be found sitting at the counter. He started coming here for breakfast on his way to work as an attorney in Denver, taking a seat in the corner, listening in as a group of older men held their daily meet-up. He wanted to join them but worried the salt-of-the-earth crowd might reject him because of his fancy lawyer suit.

“Little by little, by dint of liberally over-tipping the waitresses, I had them let the guys know that I was not such a stiff as I looked,” McNulty said. Soon, the breakfast crew accepted him as one of their own. He became particularly close with Ray Voss, who once asked him, incredulously, “Why do you want to sit with us?”

McNulty, taken aback, replied, “What, you think I want to eat breakfast with lawyers?”

The old crew has dwindled in recent years. Voss became terminally ill with cancer. Before he died, McNulty used his legal training to draw up his will at no cost. McNulty still comes in all the time, though now that he’s retired, it’s usually at lunchtime. He always gets the special. “When the cook, Frank, sees my car turn in, he’ll start the order,” he said. “This is a special place.”



CROSSING MOUNTAIN PASSES

A colorful fall tour of Colorado's
highest and most scenic roads

FOLLOW OTTO'S ROUTE

In 1882, Otto Mears built the first road over the Dallas Divide near Ridgway in the San Juan Mountains. The incomparable views have changed little since then.

photo by JOSHUA HARDIN