

# Copenhagen finally found his 'chew'

In a time period of just over 10 years, Lee Copenhagen went from a pony-tailed young man accused of "malicious mischief" to a short-haired youth crime prevention officer who deals with mirror images of his former self.

The change is not as striking as it appears. Experience has simply taught Copenhagen how to strive for what he's always believed: improving situations that can be improved.

## A visit with Lee Copenhagen

The tall, amiable officer went to high school in California in the late 60s, early 70s. Open-minded, his parents "introduced (him) to everybody from preachers to ex-cons" and encouraged him to question ideas and thoughts.

"I did. I simply went 'further left' than they did," Copenhagen said. He was cited for trespassing after sit-ins and recalls "causing the school administration a lot of political grief."

Copenhagen was one of a group of boys at school who conducted rallies against the Vietnam War and anything else they thought was unjust or unfair.

When he gave his graduation speech, he tossed aside the copy the administration had approved. He spoke on the need to end the war, social issues, and the role his class must take in "changing things for the better."

He got a standing ovation from his class. The administration got a terrible headache, relieved only by the fact that Copenhagen was graduating.

He left home to live in a commune and go to school at Humboldt University. He attended one semester before deciding the school was so loosely structured it was a waste of his time.

Copenhagen then moved to Jackson the summer of 1973 to work on the Teton Village KOA construction crew. After a stint with the Teton Preschool, Larry Turner of Turner Electric told Copenhagen he would give him a job if he cut his hair.

"That's when I shifted from my hippy mode to my Western mode," Copenhagen said, grinning.

He worked a variety of mechanical/construction jobs and became friends with a group of high schoolers who formed a CB radio search-and-rescue club.



As youth crime prevention officer, Lee Copenhagen runs community service programs.

From there, he joined the sheriff's reserve force to be of more assistance. "I was very impressed at how well-prepared everyone was," he said. "I saw all the positive sides of being a cop."

His friends began calling him "Mr. Rent-a-Cop," but in spite of the ribbing, Copenhagen enrolled in the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy.

"It was a good time at the academy. There was a real push in the state for educated policemen who counselled instead of bashing heads," Copenhagen said. "I thought back to high school and remembered saying 'If change is going to occur, we have to do it.' I thought maybe I could make things better."

When he left the academy, things happened so fast that there was little time for political ideology. "One minute I was in the sheriff's reserve, the next I was in the academy, then I was wearing a badge and gun and working on July 4. They just needed bodies," Copenhagen said.

There was no open container law the summer of 1975, and the local law enforcement officers had their hands full over the holiday weekend, particularly after the bars closed.

"There were all these drunk people

millling around in their cars. They started to throw things and it looked like we could have a bad situation or a riot on our hands," Copenhagen said.

Thinking back to his days in California and Berkeley street scenes, Copenhagen deployed a trick used by California's finest: he re-routed traffic away from the downtown area, effectively dispersing the trouble.

Chief of Police Dick Hays gave Copenhagen a commendation for his work, strengthening his resolve to enter law enforcement as a career.

He enrolled at the University of Wyoming at Laramie in the fall of 1976 to pursue a law enforcement degree, and immediately began working for the campus police department as well.

Copenhagen disagreed with the department's policies, and after two years of working for it, quit. He came to Jackson over Christmas break of 1977. On New Year's Eve, he fell in love with Cathy, now his wife.

"The bug bit me hard. I don't think she even remembered my name," he recalls. He talked Cathy into writing him, and after coming up to visit "four or five times", the couple got married in April in a Laramie justice of the peace office. After the ceremony, they called their parents.

"Cathy had been more of a juvenile delinquent than me. Her parents couldn't believe she was marrying a cop," Copenhagen said.

There was little time for them to get to know one another better. Both went to school full time, and Copenhagen began working full time for the Albany County Sheriff Department.

He held the job for 11 months before "getting a gut full of it" and leaving. The force was filled with the "old guard" and Copenhagen was viewed as an unwelcome, liberal whippersnapper.

"I went out of my way to be fair to people, so I gained their respect. When someone I arrested would later buy me a beer in a bar, the rest of the guys wouldn't like me," he explained.

He and Cathy decided to take a break from law enforcement and became the resident supervisors for a foster home of seven juvenile delinquents. "We had to keep them out of trouble and get them to graduate from high school" — a tall order for a couple still going to school themselves.

Lee ended up dropping out of school for a semester to work with the kids. "They just needed someone to care about them enough. It takes a lot of

love," he said of the experience.

He also learned how far he could be pushed and a lot about his wife. "She's wonderful. She just amazes me sometimes," he said.

Five years after he started his degree, Copenhagen graduated from UW and moved back to Jackson. The sheriff reserve program was gone, but he was hired to run the ski registration program. When the snow melted away, so did his employment.

Cathy was pregnant with the Copenhagen's son, Ryan, and the couple was looking for a home.

"When Roger (Millward) offered me the jailer position, I took it," Lee said.

By his own admission, Copenhagen was "a lousy jailer." The jail was full all summer, and every weekend, Copenhagen would call a local justice up to get the drunks and other minor offenders out of the cells.

"I was nicknamed 'Captain Freedom,'" he said.

When Millward offered Copenhagen his old job of running the ski program, Copenhagen jumped on it, even though his future employment was put in jeopardy.

His job was secured this spring when he convinced the county commissioners of the need for a crime prevention officer, and he's been hopping ever since.

Copenhagen is the departments community service man, a job that suits his personality well. He runs programs on child safety, rape prevention, child identification, the jail, and the ski registration program, plus any other need community groups need filled.

The schedule brings out his "workaholic tendencies, which Cathy and Ryan work to balance. Copenhagen values his time at home and loves being a father. "I like watching him grow and bragging about him because he's the most perfect kid in the world."

Copenhagen's ponytail may be gone, but his commitment to making the world a little bit better is as strong as ever.

## Jackson artist honored

Jackson Artist Judy Sensintaffar placed third in the "other media" category for her work entitled "Inner View" at the Paintrock Valley Art Guild Show July 29.

The show, which was held in Hyattville, Wyoming, was limited to Wyoming artists.



THE JACKSON HOLE PONY CLUB RIDES AGAIN! Last week at the the National Know-down Competition in Lexington, Kentucky, competing against hundreds of children from around the country, Shannon Ewing, Cammie Lightner and Heidi Kenyon took top honors.