

# The Taos Hum

In our regular column, Tania Casselle introduces us to the people who make Taos hum. This month we hear stories from the high fliers behind two very Taos events in October—the Storytelling Festival and the Balloon Rally.

story by **TANIA CASSELLE**

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## Dori Vinella

Dori Vinella is at the literary hub of Taos as Executive Director of the Society of the Muse of the Southwest—more pithily known as SOMOS. Vinella herself doesn't write, despite encouragement from author friends to record stories of her life in Taos and back in her L.A. days, where high school classmates included Natalie Wood. "I'm the oldest Valley Girl, I might add!" says Vinella.

Instead, she's an ally for many Taos writers, including those who frequented the still-legendary Dori's Bakery & Cafe, which she ran for 24 years until closing its doors in 1997. "At Dori's I was called the muse," says Vinella. Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way*, first dubbed her with the nickname, but literary luminaries such as Natalie Goldberg and John Nichols also wrote at Dori's, which was located in the building that now houses The Dragonfly Cafe and Bakery. Fans of Nichols used to go in looking for him, even as he wrote quietly away at a table. "They'd come up to the counter and say, 'Does John still come here?' And he'd be sitting in the corner." Vinella would reply that indeed he did. "And they'd say, 'What time?' And I'd say, 'You never know!'"

All kinds of artsy types hung out at Dori's. One Sunday, Michael d'Abo from the band Manfred Mann was playing piano at the cafe. "All of a sudden I hear him go into the theme from *The Godfather*," says Vinella. "I look out and see Robert Duvall walking up. Duvall said, 'Can we get him to play a tango?' and he danced the tango with a lady guest. It was when he was filming *Lonesome Dove* in Angel Fire and before we knew he was a tango dancer."

The cafe's specialty, Hash Brown Heaven ("our claim to fame"), features in a new SOMOS cookbook by local writers, and Vinella still stretches her culinary muscles creating flavors for Seasons of Taos, her retail business that sells gourmet seasonings online and in stores.

Vinella moved to Taos more than 40 years ago "to have a better life ... and we got it. This is paradise." And although her travel bug has taken her all over the globe, she's always home to spend Christmas Eve at Taos Pueblo. "That's my Christmas. I love it."

*SOMOS presents the Taos Storytelling Festival, October 19-20, and the SOMOS Storied Recipes cookbook launch at Hotel La Fonda on Taos Plaza, October 5 at 7 p.m. Details at [www.somostaos.org](http://www.somostaos.org). Find Dori Vinella's seasonings at [www.seasonsoftaos.com](http://www.seasonsoftaos.com).*

## Ed Smith

Hot air balloon pilot Ed Smith is one pretty contented guy. "I have the best job in the state!" he says. "I dare anybody to try to come up with a better job than mine." His Pueblo Balloon Company takes people soaring above the Rio Grande Gorge—and floating down below the rim too—and he reports that many visitors cite the experience as the highlight of their vacation. "It's the coolest flight in the country," says Smith. "It's breathtaking. They're all quite shocked that we actually go into the gorge, not just over it."

Smith traveled widely before moving to Taos in 2003. "My dad was in the Army, I was in the Air Force, then I did computer and network consulting and that also kept me moving. Then I dropped out of the rat race, moved to Taos, and I get high every morning!" He'd only intended to stay a few years, but as he puts it, "What could I do anywhere else and be as happy?"

When he's back on the ground, Smith likes riding motorcycles, especially around the Enchanted Circle, and working on his cars, including a rare 1986 Pontiac NASCAR Aerocoupe. "Only a thousand were built. You'll see me around town in it; it's a silver car like you've never seen before."

Smith is also vice president of the October Taos Mountain Balloon Rally, and his favorite moments are during the morning mass ascensions. Although the rally's scale is much smaller than Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, it's a picturesque sight to behold, with the balloons drifting against the backdrop of Taos Mountain. "The Balloon Rally should be just part of your trip to Taos," says Smith. "You should come here to do other things: the Pueblo, llama trekking, horseback riding, whitewater rafting, hiking, art galleries, shopping. What I said about dropping out of the rat race is true. When you come here, it's like the whole world just goes away."

*The Taos Mountain Balloon Rally takes to the skies October 26-28. For more info, go to [www.taosballoonrally.com](http://www.taosballoonrally.com). Pueblo Balloon Company, at [www.puebloballoon.com](http://www.puebloballoon.com), is the official balloon ride provider at the rally.*

