

# Snowmasstodon.com aims to put Snowmass in the spotlight

## Longtime village worker launches grassroots marketing effort to build off fossil discoveries

**Scott Condon**  
Aspen Correspondent

As Snowmass Village officials ponder how to capitalize on the discovery of Columbian mammoths and American mastodons at Ziegler Reservoir, a longtime employee there has launched a grassroots marketing effort to put the town in the spotlight.

Jack Rafferty said he believes Snowmass Village needs to act fast while regional interest in the archeological discoveries is hot rather than wait around until a perfect plan is devised.

"Snowmass has been struggling for a year-round identity for as long as I've been around," said the 35-year resident of the Roaring Fork Valley. "This is the marketing edge Snowmass has been looking for, for a long time."

He wasted no time launching an effort to draw attention to Snowmass Village — and make a little money as well. Rafferty

secured the [www.snowmasstodon.com](http://www.snowmasstodon.com) domain name as well as some similar ones within two days of the mid-October discoveries at the reservoir.

The name for the website was a natural: Snowmass — Snowmasstodon.

"I was just playing with names before they really put a name on it," he said.

The website is a combination promotional site for the village and its mountain culture, pictures and information about the field discoveries and the dig activities undertaken by the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, and an online store. Rafferty is rushing to offer merchandise like embroidered hats, T-shirts and hoodies that feature the Snowmasstodon sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"Obviously I'm trying to take some financial advantage of it," Rafferty acknowledged.

But he is equally interested in

promoting the village. Rafferty is owner of Thotics Shops, which he operates in the Aspen Sports shop at Snowmass. He makes custom orthotics for ski boots, athletic footwear and regular walking shoes. He has lived in Snowmass Village off and on during his years in the valley and has worked there since the 1979-80 ski season.

"I've always considered it my home," he said.

The website includes numerous references to the world-class skiing and other activities in the mountains. Rafferty said there is broad potential to plug the village, its businesses and services as the website develops.

The site has been up for just over a week and had received more than 400 hits by Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the Snowmass Village Town Council, at its Dec. 6 meeting, plans to discuss formation of a task force that could be charged with raising funds and

brainstorming on how best to exhibit the discoveries.

The first bones were discovered by construction workers in mid-October while scraping dirt as part of the reservoir's expansion. Scientists and volunteers who came to the site made new discoveries every day until work at the dig site stopped for the winter on Monday. Dr. Kirk Johnson, museum vice president of research and collections and chief curator, told the council Monday that at least 503 bones have been removed from the site. The discoveries include the bones of four mammoths, eight mastodons, two Ice Age deer, several Ice Age bison and a giant ground sloth, he said.

Questions remain on how and where replicas of the bones will be displayed. Rafferty said there is a grassroots discussion among residents and workers in the village about what should occur long-term at the fossil site. The

Snowmass Water and Sanitation District plans to build an earthen dam next year so the reservoir can be filled. The project is needed to give the town a water supply in drought years and ease the need to draw from Snowmass Creek when it is running low, according to water and sanitation district officials.

Rafferty said he understands the importance of water in the arid West, but isn't sure its storage and use should trump such a unique archeological site. He wants the scientists to have ample opportunity to search for other bones of creatures that were preserved at the ancient lake. Snowmass Village tourism would get a long-term boost if a trail was developed from the town to the site, with some type of interpretative, educational signs overlooking the work site.

"The feedback I've already gotten is 'they can't just put the plug in and fill the water back up,'" Rafferty said.