



## Fine Alpine treasures and more cowbell, too

WORDS GEOFF HANSON | IMAGE BARTON GLASSER

You've heard of putting the cart before the horse. In the case of Mary Dawn DeBriae, it was a case of putting the collar before the dog.

The year was 2001 and DeBriae knew she wanted a Bernese Mountain Dog, a large, shaggy, tri-colored dog, known for its calm disposition. She had lived in Munich for five years and had developed a love for the Swiss, Austrian and Italian Alps, where the breed originated.

DeBriae traveled to Switzerland and to her disappointment none of the breeders with whom she spoke had any litters available. In anticipation of eventually finding the dog of her dreams, DeBriae purchased a beautiful handcrafted Swiss dog collar made out of leather and brass.

"During that trip in 2001, I was at a bar in the Alps, and I struck up a conversation with an elderly man," DeBriae said. "I told him I was looking for a Bernese Mountain Dog, and he responded, 'You have to name him Schlappi.'" The word means laid back, with a relaxed temperament.

DeBriae returned to San Francisco, where she was working in the technology sector, with a collar and a name. All she needed was the dog. It wasn't long before she found her canine soul mate in the form of a male Bernese she named Schlappi Schauss. Not only did he wear the collar, Schlappi Schauss wore it so well that countless dog lovers approached DeBriae about the collars and inquired where could get they get one for their own dogs.

And so, in 2002, Schauss's Alpen Schatz (Alpen Schatz means Alpine Treasures) was born. DeBriae became the sole U.S. distributor of the Swiss Mountain Dog Collars, which have been handcrafted by the same family in a remote region of the Swiss Alps for almost 300 years.

DeBriae initially worked as a distributor out of her home in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she attended dog shows, and sold her treasures to retailers and online customers. She soon added dozens of other handicrafts from the Alps to her fledgling portfolio including Alpine Dog Kegs, Swiss Cow Bells, Alpine Jewelry, Austrian table linens, Italian silk scarves, German Alpine hats, Lederhosen and Dirndl's to name a few.

In 2003, DeBriae decided she wanted to open a brick and mortar store and went looking for the right place.

"I went to ski towns all over the west," DeBriae said. "I went to many ski resorts including Aspen, Vail, and Jackson Hole. When I came to Telluride in December 2003 I immediately knew it was the right place. It reminded me of the Alps – the box canon, striking mountains, the gondola. I went back to the Bay Area, put my house on the market and moved to Telluride in February 2004."

The Alpen Schatz Boutique opened its doors on Noel Night in December of 2004 and will celebrate 10 years in December.

Alpen Schatz is a staple in Telluride's annual 4th of July Parade. DeBriae began marching in 2004 and has won first place several times. Her parade posse includes up to 30 dogs, which include several different breeds of Swiss dogs and up to 30 kids and adults dressed up in traditional Swiss/German outfits.

Her Swiss cowbells are regarded as some of the best in the world. Telluride Ski Resort owner, Chuck Horning, rings an Alpen Schatz bell to commemorate the beginning of his annual winter chili cook off on the ski mountain at Gorrone Ranch each year. However, the cowbells travel far beyond the Telluride canyon.

Every January, members of the New York Stock Exchange attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. For the past 10 years, they have ordered up to 50 Alpen Schatz cowbells to ring at the opening ceremonies. The meeting brings together business, political, and civil rights leaders from all over the world.

"I created Alpen Schatz out of my love of European Alpine culture and lifestyle and my desire to make it available in North America," DeBriae said. "There's no better place to celebrate than here in Telluride, Colorado."

Please visit the Alpen Schatz website at: [alpenschatz.com](http://alpenschatz.com) ■



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