

The Ultimate Nugget

Project: PCJ2

By Mary A. Kopco, Foundation Executive Director



Potato Creek Johnny Nugget (left) and Icebox Nugget (right) are displayed on the placer gold used to create the PCJ2.

The Clock Shop and Adams Museum have partnered to create a unique piece of history: the Potato Creek Johnny 2 gold nugget (PCJ2). This one-of-a-kind nugget will be auctioned on September 22, 2012 to benefit Deadwood History's Adams Museum and the Wounded Warrior Project.

The PCJ2 is a solid gold nugget melding the mold and gold of the South Dakota Black Hills' two largest gold nuggets in existence today. The placer gold taken from the site of the recently discovered Icebox Nugget was poured into a mold made from the famous Potato Creek Johnny Nugget to create a completely new piece of history: the PCJ2.

Potato Creek Johnny's gold nugget is considered the single-most valuable artifact of Black Hills history in existence. In 1929, Potato Creek Johnny found the nugget in a creek in Spearfish Canyon. He sold the leg-shaped piece, weighing 7.346 troy ounces, to pioneer businessman W.E. Adams in 1934, who then donated the nugget to the new Deadwood museum named in his honor. Stored in a bank vault, the original nugget is rarely shown; instead ceramic replicas are used for display. Both Johnny and his nugget became Deadwood legends. In 2011, the gold piece was appraised at \$500,000.

The Icebox Nugget was discovered in 2010 by Charlie Ward and Byron Janis of the Icebox Mining Company. The 5.27 troy ounce Icebox Nugget was bought by The Clock Shop owners Chris and Trevor Johnson. The father-and-son team also purchased 10.35 ounces of placer gold found in the area where the nugget was discovered. The Clock Shop has generously donated this gold to form the PCJ2.

Representatives of the two nuggets first met in April 2011, when the Potato Creek Johnny and Icebox Nuggets were displayed together in Rapid City for a limited-time viewing. Thanks to the enthusiastic reception of the large crowd at the event, The Clock Shop and the Adams Museum arranged to show the nuggets together again in July at the Adams Museum. As throngs of visitors gathered to witness these two unique pieces of history, Chris and Trevor Johnson proposed a novel fund-raising concept—to create the PCJ2 and then auction it as a benefit for the Adams Museum.

While Chris Johnson was in the process of putting together a proposal about the PCJ2, he met military veteran and Wounded Warrior Justin Shellhammer—a man who added an

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unexpected dimension to the project. Shellhammer's story began after his enlistment in the U.S. Army, training in the military police, and deployment to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom. On April 5, 2005, when walking in the front of a group of soldiers, Shellhammer spotted a mortar round on the ground. *Imagine extending your arm in a gesture to warn the soldiers behind you and feeling the impact of another person bumping you, pushing you slightly off balance. Consider regaining your balance and stepping on a buried, active land mine with your left foot.*

Like many unfortunate soldiers, Shellhammer's leg was amputated at Walter Reed Medical Center. But unlike most amputees, only a month later, Justin Shellhammer ran two miles—and the following September, he ran in a 4-1/2K race to benefit the families of firefighters and policemen killed on September 11, 2001. Shellhammer attributes this determined spirit, along with his sense of humor, to assistance from the Wounded Warrior Project.

After hearing Justin Shellhammer's remarkable story of bravery, Chris and Trevor Johnson expanded their fundraising idea to add the Wounded Warrior Project as a beneficiary along with the Adams Museum. They titled the project: **Preserve our History—Secure our Future.**

The Clock Shop and the Adams Museum enlisted the assistance of Black Hills Bronze, the area's only fine art foundry, to create the wholly new PCJ2. The multi-step casting process has been recorded by Mediaworks to document its technical and industrial aspects by following the gold as it was refined, core-sampled, weighed and assayed by experts from Rapid Precious Metals and the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. Then, the team visited Black Hills Bronze to watch the molding of the original nugget; they taped the mold filling with wax, and the wax's trip through the ceramic shell department. The lost-wax casting process was completed on May 23, 2012 when the molten gold—the placer gold taken from the Icebox Nugget site—was poured into the ceramic shell during a once-in-a-lifetime celebration at the foundry. The mold was then destroyed; thereby forever ensuring the uniqueness of the PCJ2 nugget.

The PCJ2 auction will take place on Saturday, September 22, 2012, at Deadwood Mountain Grand. Rick and Margi Olesen with Dakota Plains Auctions will host the online and live auction. The Olesens are donating their services with all proceeds benefitting the Adams Museum and Wounded Warrior Project.

Using funds raised by auctioning the PCJ2, the Adams Museum will construct a highly-secure space to exhibit the original Potato Creek Johnny gold nugget. The remaining funds will increase the organization's operating endowment.

The Wounded Warrior Project has a mission to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded warriors in this nation's history, with programs uniquely structured to nurture the mind and body, and encourage economic empowerment and engagement. Under each of these areas, the Wounded Warrior Project offers a variety of programs to meet a range of needs. All Wounded Warrior Project programs are free. To participate, warriors must have incurred service-connected wounds, injuries or illnesses on or after September 11, 2001.

Project contributors to date are: The Clock Shop, Adams Museum/Deadwood History, Inc., Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission, Black Hills Bronze, Dakota Plains Auctions, Mediaworks, Rapid Precious Metals, South Dakota Arts Council, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Spore Creative and TDG Communications.