



RANCH

Junior Gallegos

**GALLEGOS RANCH,
ARBOLES, COLORADO**

You can't help but wonder at the pink adobe church that stands adjacent to the Gallegos Ranch house. When Junior Gallegos, clad in a flannel shirt, blue jeans and a blue vest, emerges from the house, you ask him why such a large church is located in a valley that boasts just three houses. He explains that, a few generations ago, this valley was home to dozens of families, but many continued to lose money and had to give up their land. As he looks around the fields and rolling hills, dotted with cows in the distance, on the property his grandfather bought over a century ago, it is clear that the Gallegos family isn't going anywhere – they're as fixed to the land as the foundation of the church.

LAND MATTERS

Withstanding Trying Times, Preserving Family Heritage

The Gallegos Ranch sits in the Piedra Valley, which gets its name from the Spanish word for “rock.” It’s a fitting word. Like a rock, the ranch has weathered some pretty rough times. But it has survived for five generations.

“Every day that I go out to work on the land is a tribute to my grandfather and his dreams of making a better life for his family,” says Junior Gallegos.

Although the Gallegos family lineage is somewhat of a mystery, Junior suspects that his ancestors came from Spain. Junior’s grandfather, Rubio Gallegos, came to Colorado from Espanola, New Mexico, in 1890 when he was 10 years old. He was working as a servant for the Candelarias, a long-time Colorado ranching family. When he was 15, the Candelarias gave him 1,500 sheep, and Rubio set out to start a ranch of his own. He fell in love with the Piedra Valley and bought a piece of land there.

As the years went by, Rubio bought more pieces of land, but ended up losing a lot of property during the Great Depression; only the original parcel that he had bought with his sheep-herding earnings remained. But, little by little, Rubio saved his money and began to buy back the lost pieces of land during the 1930s and 40s. By the time Junior’s father, Juan Francisco, took over the ranch in 1941, the property had grown to about 4,800 acres.

“I always knew that I would eventually take over the ranch,” says Junior. “As so many ranchers say, it’s in my blood.”

When Junior and his wife, Florian, married, she went with him to take the sheep up to the high country for the summer. Because sheep wander and must be watched 24 hours a day, they made their bed on the hillside, and that’s where they slept for several months.

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A Colorado Landmark

PIEDRA PARADA – "CHIMNEY ROCK"

Driving to the Gallegos Ranch from Pagosa Springs, one spots a striking rock formation that resembles a chimney perched atop a house. This landmark is what the Spaniards, when first exploring the land in 1776, called "La Piedra Parada"—"the Standing Rock." Now, it is known simply as Chimney Rock. The area around Chimney Rock contains the remains of prehistoric villages built by ancestors of the Pueblo tribe. It has been theorized that the Puebloans used the rock formation's pinnacles to observe astronomical events called "lunar standstills," when the moon could be seen rising between Chimney Rock's two vertical spires.

"I knew then that I was lucky to have found a woman who would put up with such a rugged lifestyle," says Junior.

When Junior's father passed away in 1965, he decided that sheep required too much maintenance, so he traded them in for cattle.

"Cattle require a lot less care – once we calf and brand them in the spring, they go out to pasture in the summer, and we don't have to watch them all the time like we did with the sheep," says Junior. "After we switched to herding cattle, our lives became much freer."

Although cattle ranching may be easier, is it not very profitable, Junior explains. The money that the Gallegoses get from selling beef sometimes doesn't make ends meet. There have been times Junior was forced to take part-time jobs on the side, working on construction or at a sawmill.

"When my mother died in 2003, we realized that she did not make a trust to secure the future of the ranch," says Junior. "For the land to be transferred from my mother's name to ours, I had to pay the U.S. government around \$2 million in taxes. Although we were rich in land, none of it came out to cash in our wallets. We didn't have the money to pay the government to keep the land, and we were afraid that we'd lose it."

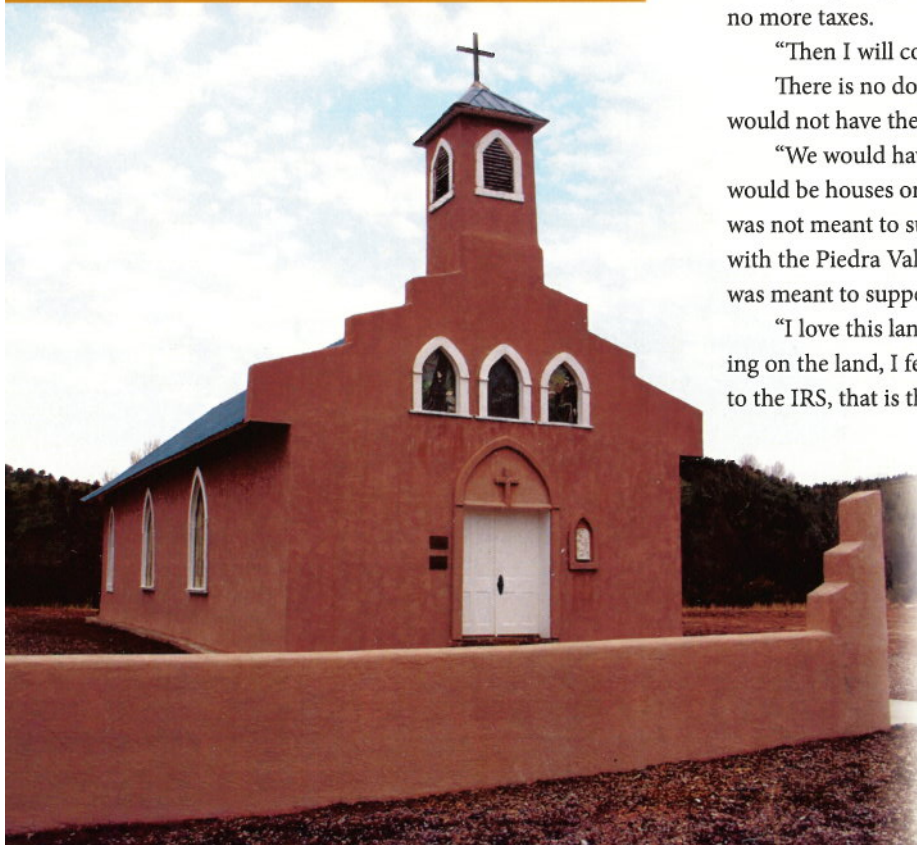
Junior learned about the conservation easement tax credit program from a fellow rancher who had been in the same predicament and had used the easements to get out of debt. By establishing an easement with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and gaining tax credits from the state and federal government, the Gallegos family found the means to pay off the taxes. This spring, they will get the last tax credit from the IRS and will finally owe no more taxes.

"Then I will consider myself a free man," says Junior.

There is no doubt in Junior's mind that, without these tax credits, they would not have the ranch all.

"We would have been forced to sell the land to developers, and there would be houses or factories on this beautiful land," says Junior. "This land was not meant to support development. When my grandfather fell in love with the Piedra Valley over one hundred years ago, he knew that this land was meant to support ranching."

"I love this land, and I love the way of life it brings. When I'm out working on the land, I feel like I am my own boss and, next to paying off my debt to the IRS, that is the most freeing feeling in the world."



Colorado Cattlemen's
Agricultural Land Trust

PROTECTING OPEN SPACE BY
PRESERVING AGRICULTURE

