

Routt County hosts two recipients of state preservation awards

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Community members attend the opening and dedication of the new YVEA headquarters in downtown Steamboat Springs in 1956. The renovated historic building recently won a Colorado Preservation Inc. State Honor award.

Courtesy Photo

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Routt County was well represented at Colorado Preservation Inc. State Honor Awards this week.

The Colorado Cattleman's Land Trust, which was founded in Routt County in 1995, and the former Yampa Valley Electric Association building, at 910 Yampa St., took home State Honor Awards from the state preservation organization.

Only four awards were granted at the ceremony Monday.

Former Yampa Valley Electric Association Building

The former Yampa Valley Electric Association building downtown served the cooperative from 1956 to 2014. Now, you can grab a beer where utility trucks once parked and visit with realtors where co-op members once paid their electric bills.

Blue Sage Ventures purchased the building in 2015 and took on the task of renovating the historic building.

The building was built in 1956 by W.L. Pierce and designed by architect Eugene Sternberg. Sternberg designed an addition to the building in 1964, and the easternmost part of the building was added, designed by a different architect in the 1974.

The former YVEA building is listed on the city's historic register and is within the Downtown Steamboat National Historic District. It earned its place on the city's registry for several reasons.

In celebration of National Historic Preservation Month, local organizations will host “The Power of Heritage and Place with Dana Crawford.” Crawford developed and preserved Larimer Square, Union Station, the Oxford Hotel and many other projects across the state. She earned the Governor’s Citizenship Medal, the highest honor bestowed upon Colorado residents for their contributions to the vitality of our state.

What: “The Power of Heritage and Place with Dana Crawford.”

When: 5:30 to 7 p.m. Monday

Where: The Chief Theater, 813 Lincoln Ave.

It was YVEA’s first building as the then 15-year old co-op worked to get rural Colorado and Wyoming on the grid; YVEA had office spaces in the courthouse and a hotel before the building on Yampa Street.

The architecture is significant too, an example of Sternberg’s international style, and one of a cluster of buildings he designed in Steamboat Springs. Sternberg frequently designed buildings for the public sector and at discounted rates.

“You think about his midcentury modern or his international style, what did this building, with the stacked bond brick and the glass that rolls all the way to the soffit and the butterfly roof, what did that look like in 1956 compared to everything else that was in town? It had to be pretty radical. A radical departure from western store fronts,” Blue Sage Managing Principal Stephen Shelesky said.

Shelesky said they used Sternberg’s original designs and historic, black-and-white photos to work to match colors to make it look much like what it looked like in the ’50s and ’60s. The glass and frames of the ribbon windows — the panes that stretch horizontally across the building’s 10th Street face — were saved and rebuilt with new wood.

“It will be a vibrant stretch on Yampa Street, and it’s pretty unique to be able to control an entire block and actually curate a whole block with retailers,” Shelesky said.

He said it’s rewarding to see the old building now used as a public gathering spot — Mountain Tap Brewery’s patio emerged from what was once a truck court.

Shelesky said winning the award makes the project, and all the detailed work that went in to renovating the building worthwhile.

“Some of these buildings are important, and they may not look important to a lot of people, initially, but as you really dig in and study them, it’s part of the culture and part of the local history and heritage, and we ought to be careful with those assets — and I’m a developer saying that,” he said.

Colorado Cattleman’s Land Trust

The Colorado Cattleman’s Land Trust evolved out of the efforts of Routt County ranchers to conserve the Elk River Valley. Today, it’s a statewide effort affiliated with the Colorado Cattleman’s Association that aims to conserve working landscapes for the benefit of future generations.

Executive Director Erik Glenn prefers to think of the group’s work as conservation, instead of preservation.

“We’re so much more than cows and land,” said rancher Jay Fetcher, who helped found the Cattleman’s Land Trust in 1995. “We are preservation. We are preservation of families on these places. We’re preservation of historic buildings.”

“And of stories,” Glenn added.

“And stories,” Fetcher agreed.

In 1995, North Routt County ranchers sought conservation easements to protect land on the valley floor from development.

“They didn’t want our staff, when we monitor easements, to measure how high the fences were,” Fetcher said. “All our easements wanted to do was protect the land from condos and golf courses.”

Today, the Cattleman’s Land Trust holds 35,000 acres of Routt County land and more than 550,000 acres statewide in conservation easements.

Now, the organization is looking to the future, navigating how outdoor recreation and agriculture can work together.

Glenn said easements will ensure these lands remain in agriculture, but now they’re thinking about new problems.

“If we want to maintain those families on the land and stewarding the land — and they have, in some cases, 120 years of history of how that land works, which you can’t teach in a classroom — then we have to come up with new tools,” Glenn said.

Amid warmer, drier years and an increasing concern for the amount of carbon people are releasing into the atmosphere, the Cattleman’s Land Trust is working on new projects that pay farmers and ranchers for the benefits agriculture provides in mitigating that impact. This includes projects where organizations hoping to offset their carbon footprint pay farmers to leave land in wetland

habitats or keeping native vegetation in the ground.

“Our hope is that we can expand that and influence how those markets are developed, so they can work for producers and generate the benefits that society needs it to generate,” Glenn said.

Winning the award, Glenn said, recognizes the efforts of those who laid the foundation of the Cattleman’s Land Trust and the landowners who are continuing to work to “keep Colorado a great place to live.”

“For me, it is recognizing the vision of Jay (Fetcher) and Bill Fales and Kirk Hanna and Reeves Brown — the ones who kind of initially started it,” he said. “It validates that, but it also recognizes the staff that have helped the landowners achieve their conservation goals. That’s what most important, because you don’t do this work without the landowners.”

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