

BizWest

» WELLS A last look across the NoCo real estate market	25
» EDITORIAL Front Range Rail worth considering	30
» WOOD What's behind Lightning's collapse?	30
» TAYER Taking on headwinds	31

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL OF THE BOULDER VALLEY AND NORTHERN COLORADO

VOLUME 43 | ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 1-15, 2024

ECONOMIC FORECAST

2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

Colorado economy resilient in face of headwinds.
PAGE 14

JOHNSTOWN

Development continues apace

Numerous outside companies find community open for business. **PAGE 4**

NONPROFITS

Downtown Partnership welcomes chief

Bettina Swigger takes over as DBP's new executive director. **PAGE 6**

FOOD AND DRINK

Pinocchio's shifts location in Greeley

Longmont restaurateurs to expand into ex-Greeley Chophouse space. **PAGE 8**

BANKING

New leaders steering FNBO's local presence

Ewert, Wahl and Schwebach affect key positions in local markets. **PAGE 16**

BizWest is an independent, locally owned business journal.

Upcoming BizWest Networking Events

BOOK of Lists

LAUNCH PARTY



Book of Lists Launch Party featuring Most-Influential Business Leaders
February 21, 2024
Candlelight Dinner Playhouse, Johnstown

For more information or to register, go to BizWest.com and click on Events

BW READERS' GUIDE

CONTACT US

Advertising

Contact Jeff Nuttall for information on advertising, event sponsorship, custom publishing, or for a copy of our editorial calendar: jnuttall@bizwest.com or 970-232-3131.

■ P.O. Box 270810, Fort Collins, CO 80524
970-221-5400



Volume 43: Issue 1 January 1-15, 2024

Copyright 2024.
BizWest Media LLC.

Reproduction or use of editorial or graphic content without written permission is prohibited. BizWest (USPS 18522, ISSN 23345721) is published monthly by BizWest Media, LLC, a Colorado LLC, P.O. Box 270810, Fort Collins, CO 80527. Publishers are Jeff Nuttall and Chris Wood. Call (970) 232-3143 to subscribe. Periodicals postage is paid at Boulder, CO and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send change of address notices to: BizWest Media LLC, P.O. Box 270810, Fort Collins, CO 80527.

Circulation: Bruce Dennis 303-630-1953 | 970-232-3143
bdennis@bizwest.com

IN PRINT

Subscribe

Subscribe to BizWest, change your subscription or ask questions by calling 303-630-1953 or 970-232-3143. Get the award-winning BizWest print edition and all of our annual directories, including the Book of Lists. Visit <https://bizwest.com/login/?loginAction=subscribe>

Upcoming lists & directories

■ **February 2024:** Book of Lists

Custom Publications

BizWest Media's Custom-Publication Division can deliver turnkey publications to celebrate your company's anniversary, highlight new products or services, or for any other purpose. Contact Natalie Petersen, 970-286-7717, npetersen@bizwest.com.

Reprints

See an article in BizWest that you want framed or mounted on a plaque? Want to highlight your company's position on one of our ranked lists? Call 970-232-3143 to order.

Tips/press releases

Submit news tips or press releases to news@bizwest.com.

ONLINE & DIGITAL

BizWest.com

Our website breaking business news from the Boulder Valley and Northern Colorado, as well as content from our print edition and digital replicas of all our publications.

Social media

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bizwestmedia>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/bizwestmedia>
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/bizwest>



E-newsletters

Follow breaking business news in the Boulder Valley, Northern Colorado or statewide with BizWest's daily e-newsletters. Or get weekly or biweekly recaps in the region's key sectors with more than a dozen industry newsletters.

■ **Morning Report:** A daily email aggregation of the top business-news headlines from around Colorado.

■ **Business Daily** – The day's top business news from Boulder, Broomfield, Larimer and Weld counties, delivered right to your inbox.

■ **People on the Move** — Sent on Saturdays.

■ **BizWest Sunday** is sent out weekly, with an in-depth look at issues and trends in the region.

Register for these and more industry newsletters at <http://bit.ly/bizwestnewsletters>.

Digital Services

Need help with SEO, search-engine marketing, content marketing or some other digital requirement? Contact Jeff Nuttall in the BizWest Digital Services Department at jnuttall@bizwest.com.

EVENTS & NETWORKING

BizWest produces a variety of business conferences, networking events and award programs throughout the year, both in the Boulder Valley and Northern Colorado. Visit our website at www.bizwest.com/events to submit award nominations or to register.

■ Book of Lists Launch Party featuring Most-Influential Business Leaders

February 21, 2024

Candlelight Dinner Playhouse, Johnstown

CORRECTION

A comment by Kendra Johnson, director of benefits solutions for the insurance broker Flood and Peterson in Northern Colorado, in last month's health insurance rate report may have been confusing because of how it was juxtapositioned next to a comment from another insurance broker. It should have said:

"Johnson said that employers with self-funded plans can be hit hard by coverage of the diet drugs. 'It can cost \$1,100 to \$1,200 per month to be on those drugs,' she said. On the flip side, however, 'when people are losing weight, their comorbidities are going down, which could save money later on ... that's to be determined,' she said."

5 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR BUSINESS WITH SOLAR

Namaste Solar has helped businesses from all different industries and verticals invest in on-site solar. Whether you are a top public university, outdoor gear retailer, or local dog toy manufacturer, most property owners can benefit from solar in these five ways:

1. IMPROVE BOTTOM LINE VIA TAX BENEFITS

At least half of your investment in solar is recouped through tax credits and depreciation, allowing solar to often deliver a double-digit internal rate of return (IRR). Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, the federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC) is back up to 30%, plus additional bonus credits if eligible.

2. REDUCE UTILITY EXPENSES

The money you pay to the utility company can be used to purchase a three-decade solar asset that provides long-term benefits to your company. Even owners of triple-net (NNN) leased properties can recoup their investment while also offering energy savings to their tenants.

3. GENERATE POSITIVE CASH FLOW

Colorado's Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) program allows businesses to implement solar with little money out of pocket (100% loan-to-cost), enabling projects to be cash-flow positive from year one after recouping the tax benefits. Building owners can bundle the cost of a new roof, solar PV system, LEDs, and HVAC upgrades into one fixed-interest loan with terms up to 25 years. The loan structure removes risk for property owners, as the non-recourse financing is tied to the property via a special tax assessment which then transfers to the next owner if the property is sold.

4. BRAND REPUTATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

Commercial solar sets businesses apart from the competition and provides real estate investors with a more sophisticated tenant class with internal sustainability initiatives. Solar helps increase occupancy and base rates, meet corporate sustainability goals, comply with regulations (such as Energize Denver), and retain quality employees and tenants.

5. INCREASE PROPERTY VALUE

Some utilities will also purchase the renewable energy credits (RECs) generated by your system. A 200kW solar system in Xcel Energy territory will generate approximately \$11,000 in annual income for 20 years, directly increasing your property's Net Operating Income (NOI).

TO SUM IT UP

On-site commercial solar electricity is cheaper than utility-based electricity over time. As utility rates continue to rise, so does the value of your solar system's energy. For those seeking to achieve environmental, social, and governance goals, solar offers quantifiable environmental benefits. It also increases the marketability of your property, giving you an edge in today's hyper-competitive market while generating an attractive return on investment.



Charles Metz is a commercial solar project developer at Namaste Solar. Namaste Solar's purpose is to transform energy and transform business. The company's experienced solar developers will help you understand your project goals, timelines, and milestones. Verify their extensive commercial experience. Charles.Metz@namastesolar.com



Visit NamasteSolar.com to learn more

INVESTED IN THIS COMMUNITY.

Here at Verus Bank of Commerce, we believe a community bank is worth nothing more and nothing less than it's relationships: relationships with clients, employees, shareholders and the community. Thank you for the opportunity to earn your business and your relationship!

NEIGHBOR
FRIEND
FAMILY



VERUS Bank of Commerce

3700 S College Ave Unit 102 Fort Collins, CO 80525
970-204-1010 www.verusboc.com

Member
FDIC



Truth: Stranger than fiction



*Editor's note:
This is the
first in a five-
part series
of columns
detailing*

*notable news stories from the past
51 years, leading up to the author's
retirement.*

By Ken Amundson

kamundson@bizwest.com

Working as a journalist offers one primary motivation: The opportunity to find and tell the truth, especially when others don't want it told. Sometimes, that truth is stranger than fiction — which by itself offers a catnip that helped to propel a career that included tens of thousands of stories. This one, however, which occurred early in my career, stands as the movie poster to the genre.

It was 1975. I was a full-time student at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota (Southwest Minnesota State University now). I also was working full-time as a reporter for the local community daily, the Independent.

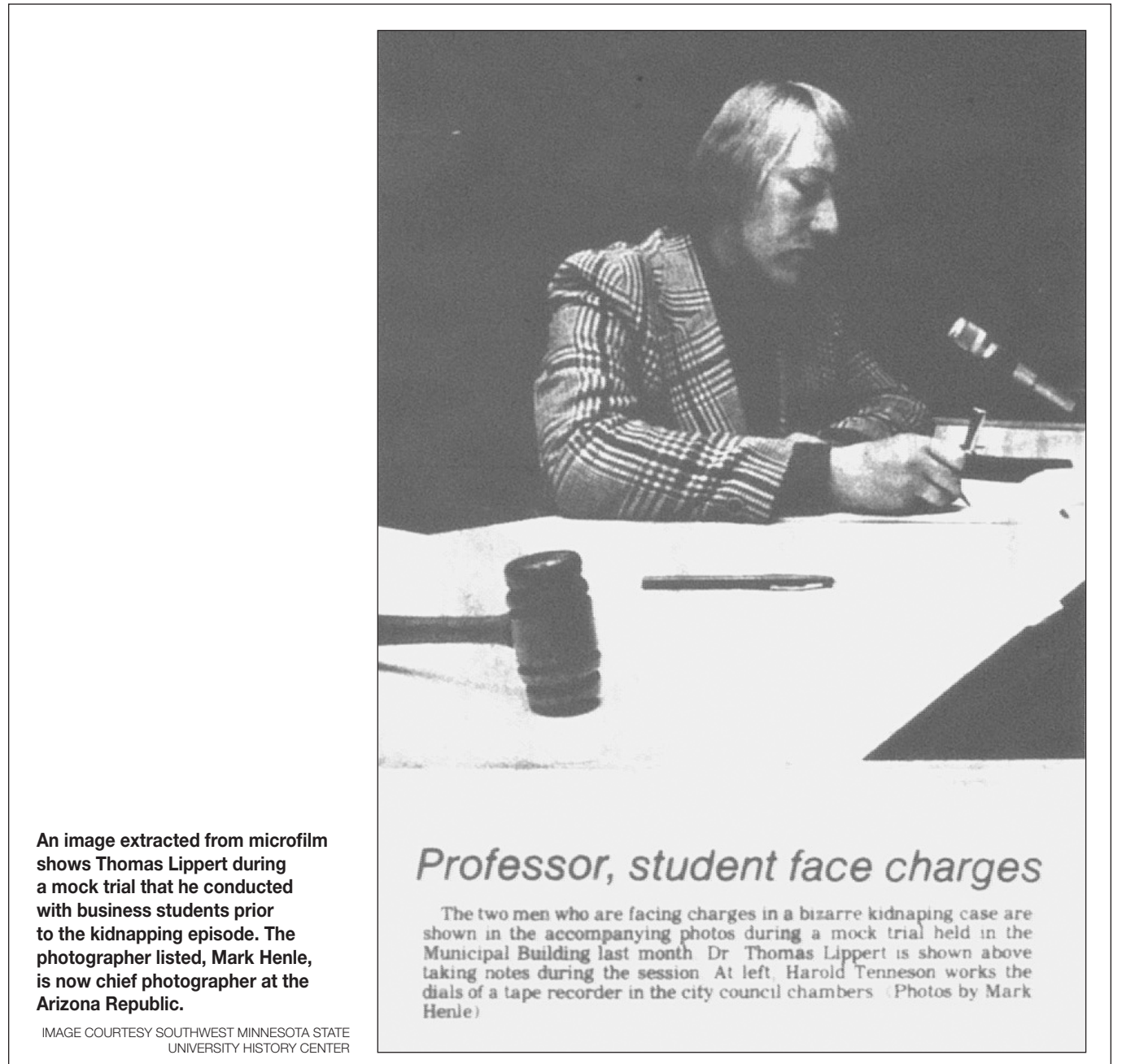
I had been on campus, studying. The city desk finally found me and told me that the FBI had arrived on campus and freed a young woman who had been kidnapped. I was to go after the story.

As the story unfolded, and I didn't write all of it, a college law professor, Thomas Lippert, and a student, Ross Tenneson, had traveled to Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, where they forced a female student into their car, forced her to drink Wild Turkey whiskey until she passed out, then drove her back to Minnesota.

They took her to the basement of Lippert's parents home in New Ulm, Minnesota. With his parents upstairs, they proceeded to attempt to brainwash her into thinking that she loved Lippert. They placed her in a black, wooden box fitted with electrical connections. They showed her pictures of men and shocked her. Then they showed her pictures of Lippert, and didn't.

At some point, they moved her to the Marshall campus. She was seen on campus by herself, not always in Lippert's company. She and Lippert lived in the same apartment complex as me, although I don't have any memory of seeing her there.

Lippert hired famed defense attorney F. Lee Bailey after his arrest. Bailey, those with long memories will recall, handled many high-profile cases around the country in the 1970s and beyond, the last significant one being on the defense team for O.J. Simpson.



An image extracted from microfilm shows Thomas Lippert during a mock trial that he conducted with business students prior to the kidnapping episode. The photographer listed, Mark Henle, is now chief photographer at the Arizona Republic.

IMAGE COURTESY SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY HISTORY CENTER

Professor, student face charges

The two men who are facing charges in a bizarre kidnaping case are shown in the accompanying photos during a mock trial held in the Municipal Building last month. Dr. Thomas Lippert is shown above taking notes during the session. At left, Harold Tenneson works the dials of a tape recorder in the city council chambers. (Photos by Mark Henle)

At the time of this story, however, Bailey also was representing Patty Hearst, the granddaughter of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. Hearst herself had been kidnapped by the United Federated Forces of the Symbionese Liberation Army, a fanatical, far-left terrorist organization known for robbing banks, among other crimes. Hearst came to identify with her kidnapers and was photographed as a participant in one of the bank robberies.

Bank robbery and kidnapping are both federal crimes, and with Bailey on board, the Lippert case and the Hearst case became intertwined.

In Hearst's trial, which began in January 1976, Bailey used the then novel Stockholm Syndrome to defend his client. The syndrome was first coined in 1973 after a Swedish bank robbery in which some of the hostages came to identify with their captors. It is a somewhat rare psychological condition but has popped up in criminal cases. Hearst was convicted but later pardoned by President Bill Clinton.

The shoe was on the other foot with Lippert. Federal prosecutors attempted to use the Stockholm Syndrome to explain why Lippert's victim was seen wandering free around campus.

With the cases conflicting, and with prosecutors more interested in convicting Hearst than Lippert, they plea bargained an outcome to Lippert.

Before sentencing, Lippert married a disabled woman he had met at the college — Southwest State was one of a couple of colleges in the nation at the time that was largely accessible to disabled students and thus attracted numerous students, many of them Vietnam vets, who could benefit from that. He pleaded with the judge to release him so he could take care of his wife.

Lippert was sentenced to six years but was released after two. Tenneson received four years probation.

I was not able to cover the trial, but I did a couple of years later travel to Fort Wayne, where the federal courthouse is located, and read the case file.

I lost track of Lippert at that point. I knew he had been admitted to a mental health facility but little more.

Along came the internet, and I began a search for him. It didn't take long. I found a short obituary in the Salt Lake Tribune indicating that he had died of alcohol-related conditions in July 1999 at age 49.

End of story, I thought.
But it wasn't.

Early in the morning of Jan. 10, 2014, as I was preparing breakfast while listening to the news, CBS reported about a Texas woman who had been exploring her genealogy and had completed a DNA test. She was shocked to learn that she had none of her father's DNA.

Upon questioning her parents, she discovered that they had had trouble conceiving and had sought help from Reproductive Medical Technologies Inc. — a fertility clinic. In Salt Lake City.

There, a technician named Thomas Lippert had worked from 1988 until the mid-'90s, although he had donated sperm to the clinic a few years earlier than that.

As it turned out, he had been substituting his sperm for that of fathers passing through the clinic, and also sharing his sperm with a fertility clinic in Minnesota.

An investigation determined that he had fathered hundreds of children in Utah and Minnesota — so many that the Utah clinic shut down and attempted to alert patients that the likelihood was great that they could encounter half siblings in their romantic encounters.

End of the story? I guess we'll see.

Destination: Johnstown

Johnstown development activity reflects community that's open for business.

KEN AMUNDSON / BIZWEST

The new Buc-ees fueling station will include 120 pumps under the awning but half the revenue from the operation will come from food sales.

By Ken Amundson and Lucas High
news@bizwest.com

JOHNSTOWN — An economic measure to help gauge construction activity in a community such as Johnstown might be the number of yellow-line John Deere or Caterpillar earth movers at work on any given day.

While it may not be true, it seems like a typical traveler in the community is never out of sight of such construction equipment, as development after development works to turn vacant land into houses and commercial buildings.

Take, for example, the Colorado Highway 60 corridor. On the west side of the interchange, a massive Buc-ee's convenience store and fueling station is taking shape. On the east side, no more than a half-mile from Buc-ee's, is the heart of the Ledge Rock development that will include Missouri-based Woods Supermarket's first venture into Colorado, a Murdoch's Ranch and Home Supply store, and other retail.

The development map for the community marks development after development, from Encore north of U.S. Highway 34 down through the 2534 development, Iron Horse, The Ridge, Revere, Welty Ridge, Ledge Rock and more — about eight miles in all, much of it adjacent or near to Interstate 25, aka Colorado's Main Street. Numerous residential developments also are underway, some of which will contain "neighborhood commercial," said Sarah Crosthwaite, economic development director for the town.

The developers responsible for these projects come from near and far — Colorado-based McWhinney Real Estate Services Inc. has one, but others hail from California, Texas, Kansas and Arizona.

"The amount of outside capital investment into the community is amazing," Crosthwaite said. "It shows that Johnstown has a good reputation for working with developers."

Indeed, the relative ease that developers face in building projects in Johnstown has been a factor. Diane Seele, who served as city clerk for Johnstown from 1990 until she retired in 2022, noted that the community's growth began incrementally and picked up speed as time went on. First, it was a development near downtown, but things accelerated when the community annexed land at the southeast corner of I-25 and Highway 34, called 2534, where the Scheels All Sports store operates from a 250,000-square-foot retail space in the Johnstown Plaza.

Seele described how the community of 1,500 people when she arrived there in 1987 grew to its size of 18,636.

"We had a grocery store, Hays Market, forever. It wanted to expand, so the town annexed Johnstown Center at the edge of downtown," she said. In the mid-'90s, some commercial expansion began but "then we kind of sat dormant for a bit."

Department-head meetings at city hall, she said, consisted of about five people. A planner who was working in the community saw the opportunity and persuaded the town to annex to

the north to capitalize on the growth happening nearby in Loveland's Centerra.

"We had a proactive board at that time, but we didn't have a lot of money. We could offer time — we could get properties through the process quickly," she said.

That thread — relative ease for developers — has run through all the developments, and is remarked upon by those seeking to do business with the town.

Josh Smith, director of operations for Buc-ee's, the Texas-based convenience store operator, said the "city has been wonderful to work with, and the county, too.

"Life's too short to do business with a community that doesn't want you," Smith said, quoting the company's founder, Arch "Beaver" Alpin.

Buc-ee's to open early 2024

While access to the Buc-ee's site just west of the I-25/Colorado 60 interchange is still restricted, there's no shortage of workers or equipment getting things ready for a mid-March opening. On a Wednesday before Christmas, workers were pouring concrete, laying asphalt, completing the weather cover over the apron that will contain 120 gas pumps, and completing the Lone Star markings above entrances.

Buc-ee's is, after all, based in Texas, where things are larger than life. The Johnstown store will be among the company's largest at 74,000 square feet. It has another of that size in Sevierville, Tennessee.

"It's a family-oriented travel center," Smith said. "It's not conducive to 18-wheeler traffic," he said. Truck traffic will continue to be served at Johnson's Corner to the north or Love's Travel Stop to the south at the Berthoud interchange.

The Johnstown store will be the company's 49th, with four more stores planned in 2024, Smith said. None of those four will be in Colorado, although the company is looking for other Centennial State opportunities.

The store does not have a sit-down restaurant but does sell a lot of food. "About 50% of our business is in food service," he said. The store caters to travelers who will stop for fuel, buy food or other convenience items and head back out on the road.

The company has begun to advertise a mass-hiring event that will occur Jan. 23-27 at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Loveland. On those dates, people who have applied and have been screened over the telephone will be interviewed in person and hired.

Pay for positions at Buc-ee's will be \$18 to \$33 per hour for 40-hour-per-week jobs, Smith said.

"We'll hire 250-300 employees, about 90% full time," he said. He expects the remaining part-time positions will go to students, weekend workers and others.

Jobs will include cashiers, warehousing — "it's like big box retail, stocking shelves," he said — food service workers such as people slicing and selling barbecued brisket, and retail associates selling clothing or

hunting gear.

“It’s all on track,” Smith said.

Commercial/residential mixed uses

Many of the developments underway in Johnstown combine both commercial and residential, Crosthwaite said. Encore on 34 is an example.

Arizona-based Caliber Services LLC is the developer behind this 453-acre site north of U.S. Highway 34 and east of Centerra. The company plans 900 single-family homes, 560 apartments and 880,000 square feet of commercial space.

“Final layout will be determined by the market,” Crosthwaite said. Commercial space will be along Highway 34, and the most northern part of the development will include a private high school, she said.

The development could include light industrial or employment-related businesses. The developer hopes to get agreements finalized in 2024 and may break ground as soon as summer, she said.

Across the road from Encore, adjacent to the 2534 retail development, is McWhinney’s Iron Horse, an industrial park that unlike many in the region includes outside yard space for those companies that have storage needs that don’t require cover.

“There are some great users there, great employers,” Crosthwaite said. A building constructed on speculation is fully leased, she said. The company has about 80 acres remaining to be developed in Iron Horse.

Also in that vicinity, just west of Iron Horse, is a United Properties Development LLC project on 16.76 acres called Trade@2534. The flex industrial site most recently picked up a Kroger Co. fulfillment center, which the King Soopers grocer uses for home-delivery services.

Caliber, the Arizona company, is also developing another parcel, this one 159 acres to start, called The Ridge. It’s located at I-25 and Weld County Road 18. At buildout, it will include residential with a diversity of housing types, and it includes space slated for commercial use along I-25.

“With them (Caliber) having two great projects, we’re excited about this moving forward. General agreements need to be voted on by the council,” Crosthwaite said.

Caliber, which entered the Johnstown development scene only about a half-decade ago, has other ambitious plans for the town.

“We have about 750 acres in six different projects” in various stages of the planning, permitting and development process, Caliber chief development officer Roy Bade said. “We have pretty much every project type — everything from schools to single-family (homes), single-family (homes) for rent, multi-family, office, industrial, medical, retail and hospitality. We’re really touching almost every kind of real estate asset there is.”

Regarding Caliber’s long-term portfolio projections, Bade said, “In the big picture, once these all have the vertical development, there will be



KEN AMUNDSON / BIZWEST

Woods Supermarket will open early this year, the Missouri grocer’s first foray into Colorado.

more than \$1 billion in new development in Johnstown.”

The company’s residential communities could bring about 8,000 to 10,000 new residents to the town.

Texas-based 4 Star Development & Brokerage plans a residential development called Revere North; it does include commercial elements, but details of that await a commercial partner for 4 Star, which specializes in residential only, Crosthwaite said. Between 30 and 50 acres of Revere North will be set aside for commercial development.

Welty Ridge, being developed by Platte Land and Water, includes the Buc-ee’s project. The remainder of Welty Ridge is likely to see commercial, light industrial and some residential.

Platte Land and Water also has another parcel of particular interest to Johnstown. It’s a 160-acre parcel, annexed into the town, that the city is calling its future North Downtown. It’s north on Weld County Road 17.

“Tons of projects are coming for downtown,” Crosthwaite said. That’s noted in the town’s strategic plan, which was just updated and included for town board review last month.

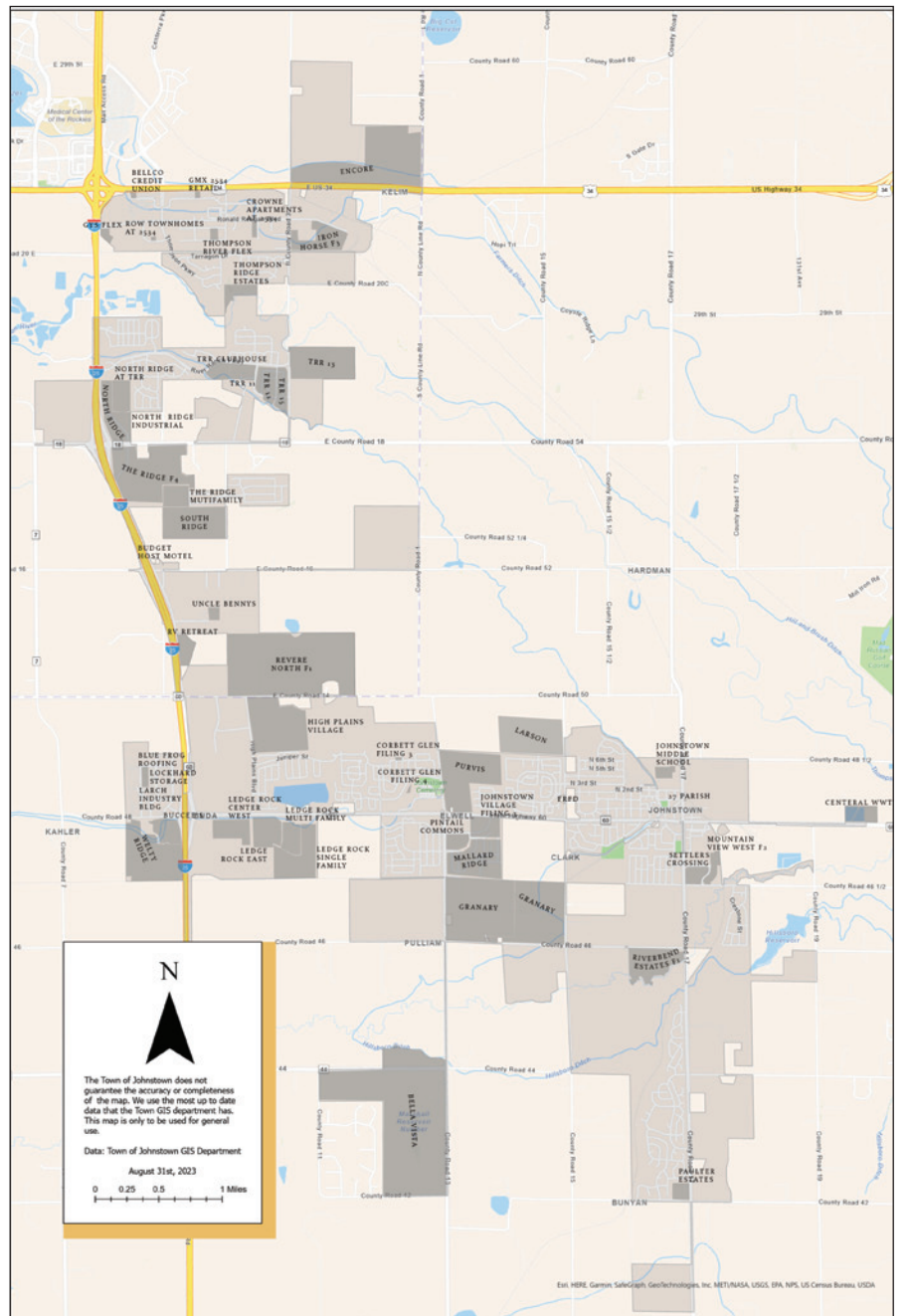
Among the strategies noted in the plan are “driving development to expand the downtown corridor.” In the short-term — up to three years according to the plan — the town wants to create a downtown master plan, complete a financial improvement study for the downtown to support the vision for its expansion, and guide expansion in a creative way.

“The biggest thing is that we want to assure that it (the expansion) adds amenities and is an extension of the historic corridor,” Crosthwaite said. It needs to be “pedestrian-friendly” and have elements that “activate it both day and night,” she said.

While not downtown, the Ledge Rock Center between downtown and Interstate 25 offers the community another retail opportunity. It includes six buildings in its first phase, including Woods Supermarket, Murdoch’s Ranch and Home Supply, and a retail center that will include business condos or rental units. A Sports Clips “coming soon” sign hangs in the window of one of them.

Kansas-based Carson Development Inc. is producing Ledge Rock, which will include 750,000 square feet of commercial space.

Woods Supermarket, a Missouri-based grocer making its foray into the



COURTESY TOWN OF JOHNSTOWN

The Johnstown development map show multiple parcels underway from U.S. 34 in the north to a considerable distance south of the traditional downtown.

state at Johnstown, will open in 2024. The store will be 85,000 square feet. Woods has been around Missouri for decades; the Johnstown store will be its 11th and its first outside of its home state. About 150 workers will be hired to staff the store, which as of late December was largely shelled in but did not have exterior elevations completed.

Crosthwaite said the town put more than \$8 million into improvements at the Highway 60 gateway.

Other residential developments that include some commercial elements include the Vista Commons neighborhood north of Ledge Rock, Massey Farms and Settlers Crossing, she said.

“We’re excited about Northern Colorado,” Caliber’s Bade said. “We

find it to be a very strong market for a lot of reasons, most of them relate to quality of life.”

By and large, developers have found Johnstown residents, its government officials and staffers, and its economic development community to be open for business.

“In Johnstown, they’re incredibly open to getting together and meeting with them. They’ve had a fair amount of turnover (in its planning and development office) and I think that’s one of the things that’s difficult ... but it’s part of being one the fastest growing communities in the state,” Bade said. “You’re going to have some growing pains, but overall, their receptiveness to development and to developers exceeds what we’ve seen in other regions.”

BW NONPROFITS



COURTESY DOWNTOWN BOULDER FOUNDATION

Downtown Boulder's Pearl Street Mall.

New Downtown Boulder Partnership leader hits Pearl Street running

By Lucas High
lhigh@bizwest.com

While Boulder and San Luis Obispo, California, certainly have some things in common — they're both picturesque, outdoorsy college towns with charming downtown districts, technology-centric economies and plenty of cultural cache — the weather certainly is not among those similarities.

"I've been really happy to see two snowfalls already," Bettina Swigger, Downtown Boulder Partnership's new executive director who joined the organization from a similar organization in the California city, told BizWest in December during her second week on the job. "... I'm in winter, so that's new!"

Not a complete newbie to the Centennial State's wintertime wonders, Swigger is a Colorado College graduate who worked for Colorado Springs nonprofit groups for a decade before heading west.



COURTESY DOWNTOWN BOULDER FOUNDATION

Bettina Swigger, Downtown Boulder Partnership's new executive director.

"It was super exciting to get here during the height of the holiday shopping season," she said. "My first impression of Boulder in this season is that it's so beautiful with all of the lights that Downtown Boulder Partnership has put up, the different displays throughout the Pearl Street Mall, the Lights of December Parade."

The holiday season is not only a beautiful time in downtown Boulder, but also a busy one for those tasked with making sure the neighborhood puts its best foot forward for its residents and guests.

"I'm drinking from a firehouse, as they say. But I'm thirsty," Swigger said. "... I've been steadily caffeinating myself throughout the community, meeting a lot of people for coffee appointments from members of Boulder City Council, city staff, business owners. That's been really great — there's a very collaborative energy here."

Please see **Partnership**, page 7

NONPROFIT COALITION



Estes' nonprofit center: 'Baby sister' with big role

By Dallas Heltzell
dheltzell@bizwest.com

ESTES PARK—More than 70 charitable and other nonprofit organizations make their home in Estes Park.

Given that Estes' estimated 2021 population was 5,880, that's one nonprofit for every 84 permanent residents of the tourism-dependent mountain village.

"There are about 109 in total that are either located in Estes or in service to it," said Caitlin "Cato" Kraft, executive director of the Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center. "Compare that with Weld County, which has a population of 325,000 but 318 nonprofits. We have 109."

Why have so many such groups sprung up and gravitated to such a small town? For Kraft, there are several easy answers.

"We're geographically isolated, with a lack of traditional government services, so there's a natural inclination of people to do good," she said. "Also, we have the oldest population in the state; we average 63.7 years old. For Larimer County as a whole, it's 36, so we're almost double that age. We have a ton of retirees, college-educated people who finally accomplished their lifelong dream of moving to the mountains and now they want to give back."

Estes' nonprofit resource center was founded 21 years ago," she said, "started by community members who saw the extreme growth of nonprofits in the Estes Valley and that they needed a centralized repository of nonprofits to help them meet their localized education, compliance and resource needs. The organization was created out of the need for a renewal and a refresh to support the nonprofit industry of Estes Park.

"We're almost like a chamber of commerce for nonprofits," said Kraft, who was a BizWest Northern Colorado 40 Under Forty honoree in 2022 and a BizWest Women of Dis-



COURTESY ESTES PARK NONPROFIT RESOURCE CENTER

Caitlin "Cato" Kraft, executive director of the Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center



inction nominee in 2023. "There's not many micro-community-driven nonprofit resource centers like ours. If the Colorado Nonprofit Association had a baby sister and she ran away to the mountains, that would be us."

The center's intense focus on being "local" comes from the fact that negotiating the winding roads to get, as Estes Park residents say, "down valley" to resources in Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, Denver or other locations along the Front

Range urban corridor can be a formidable and time-consuming chore, especially in inclement weather.

"That's why we work to provide training up here," Kraft said, "so people don't have to use their time to get down to Fort Collins or Denver, or on their computers when they could be doing other things."

The center provides such services as a Better Business Bureau accreditation program and training in grant writing, marketing and board governance. It operates a grant-seeking database and a lending library, conducts monthly networking events and convenes separate meetings by sector.

It also offers a six-week workshop in diversity, equity and inclusion because, according to its website, the "Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center stands against racism and harassment in every form. We believe an inclusive community is a strong community. We believe in working to make Estes Park a community where individuals of all ethnicities,

identities and cultures can live, work and play safely without fear of discrimination or harassment."

"We're also matchmakers," she said. "We help to connect volunteers with nonprofits that need them. Because we have such close ties, we can connect those local voices and nonprofit resources together."

"Nonprofits touch every single person in this community, either through volunteerism, philanthropy or being a recipient."

That philanthropy piece looks a bit different in Estes Park, she said, because "nonprofits are the only sector that tourism doesn't directly benefit."

The center's response is the fledgling "Giving Guest Program," in which customers at businesses catering to tourists can round up their purchases at the point of sale. "This way, a lot of people who love to visit Estes year after year can support the ecosystem," Kraft said.

So far, Trendz on the Park downtown and the Mountain Shop on east U.S. Highway 34 are participating in the roundup program, and two others label some of their offerings to indicate that part of the purchase price will benefit nonprofits. She said she hopes lodging guests would also be willing to contribute \$1 to \$2 extra in addition to their nightly room rates.

The center's main annual fundraiser is the Nonprofit Prom. This year's event will be held from 6:30 until 10 p.m. Jan. 20 at the Stanley Hotel. Tickets are on sale for \$50 each through Jan. 12 or \$65 thereafter, which includes what Kraft called a "procrastinator fee."

The hotel is offering a \$99 room deal for prom attendees, Kraft said, making it "a nice thing for our down-valley friends."

Kraft sees the work of nonprofits as no less important in Estes Park than it is in Larimer County cities along the Interstate 25 urban corridor.

Partnership, from 6

Swigger took over leadership of DBP, which promotes civic engagement and economic development efforts in Boulder's core district, from previous executive director Chip (yes, just Chip), who left the organization this summer.

Chip, a Colorado Springs native who adopted the one-name moniker decades ago, joined downtown Boulder in the fall of 2019 from a similar role in Santa Cruz, California, less than 200 miles up the Pacific coast from San Luis Obispo. He backtracked west in June to be closer to family and to begin a new job as a vice president with Block By Block, a company that helps city leaders manage downtown spaces.

"I've been really pleased to see how extraordinary the team here is," Swigger said. "When you're coming from outside, sometimes you don't know what you're walking into, but this is just such a supportive team of people who have been working here for a long time."

Swigger said her career "has really been rooted in supporting entrepreneurs, small businesses and creative industries."

Shoppers, diners, residents and business site-selectors have so many options for where they live, work, play and spend hard-earned dollars, so it's critical for neighborhoods like downtown Boulder to offer unique experiences, she said. "My work has always been focused on what kind of experience a person

is having every step of the way — the experience you're having when you park your car or ride your bike, walking through an area and seeing how well-lit it is, how easy it is to navigate."

Positive experiences "are what make people return," Swigger said. "... The more we can do to make the experience interesting, welcoming and fun, the better. I'm a big fan of surprise and delight," which downtown Boulder offers in abundance.

While downtown Boulder has long been and is poised to remain a vibrant hub, the district is not without its challenges such as homelessness, commercial real estate vacancies and housing affordability.

Community organizations such

as Downtown Boulder Partnership, Swigger said, have an important role to play in ensuring the district's future is sustainable and attainable for residents and visitors of all stripes.

Swigger arrived in downtown Boulder with skin already in the game.

"I'm excited to be not just working for the Downtown Boulder Partnership, but to be a downtown resident," she said. "... I was also a downtown San Luis Obispo resident. It was so helpful for helping me understand the different seasons, the day and the night. Downtowns don't stop. They're not a business that closes its doors at a certain time, it's a 24-hour environment. I'm really thrilled to be here (in downtown Boulder) and see it from all different angles."

BW RESTAURANTS

Pinocchio's finds prime spot for steakhouse

By Dallas Heltzell

dheltzell@bizwest.com

GREELEY – The founder of Pinocchio's Incredible Italian restaurants plans to open a steakhouse in downtown Greeley early next year.

Pinocchio's Prime will fill the nearly 3,000-square-foot space at 804 Eighth St. that had been home to the venerable Greeley Chophouse until August 2022.

"Our space in Greeley is pretty small, about 60 seats, and we've almost outgrown it," said Annie Velazquez, who started Pinocchio's 20 years ago on Main Street in Longmont and opened at 905 16th St. in Greeley last May. "There's actually a vacant building next door, but we can't get hold of anybody about expanding there."

Velazquez said she heard some of her customers chatting about the Chophouse space being available, "and they said, 'Oh my god, that would be amazing if you could move there. But it had been my dream to open a steakhouse. I thought maybe we could do Pinocchio's there and do the steakhouse in the spot we're in, but people said a prime rib house would need more space."

"We were just starting the Pinocchio's in Greeley and had our hands full, but after two or three months we had our staff set, so we thought maybe we could do the steakhouse."

And with that, she said, "all of the doors opened."

As part of preparing the new venture, Velazquez is selling the Greeley location as a franchise to one of her employees. She worked with Travis Gilmore about leasing the Chophouse space for the steakhouse, finalized the details about a month ago, then asked him if she could spread the word.

"That night when we came to work, everybody knew about it," she said.

The Chophouse owner "didn't take anything," Velazquez said. "All the furniture and kitchen equipment is there, so it makes an easy transition. We'll just paint and put up some different pictures. The bar seats about 12. I think they imported it from somewhere. It's just beautiful!"

Pinocchio's Prime will have 120 seats, double the space of the Pinocchio's location in Greeley. "Actually, it feels like more than double," Velazquez said. About a quarter of those seats are in a private dining room.

She's shooting for a January opening and definitely wants to be in business by Valentine's Day. "We're having to get a new liquor license," she said. "We may open before we get it, depending on demand. We've had people say, 'Just open!'"

Velazquez said opening a steakhouse will bring back memories of



Pinocchio's Incredible Italian opened in May at 905 16th St. Its other location is at 210 Ken Pratt Blvd. in Longmont. A Loveland location is closed for renovation.

CHRISTOPHER WOOD/BIZWEST



The Greeley Chophouse signage is still up at 804 Eighth St., but the location will soon be home to Pinocchio's Prime.

CHRISTOPHER WOOD/BIZWEST

her college days at Michigan State University and working at a restaurant called Mountain Jack's in East Lansing that featured prime rib. She had been cooking at a fraternity house on the MSU campus and then started a catering company out of the frat's kitchen.

She moved to Colorado in 1989 and opened a Sweet Tomatoes location in Lafayette and Portobello's in Longmont before founding the first Pinocchio's in 2003.

At the new Pinocchio's Prime, the menu will feature prime rib, both for lunch and dinner. Pinocchio's Prime also will offer three cuts of steak: a New York strip, a ribeye and a filet. They will come with one side order, but always included will be a salad for

the table. "It's a little like a mini-salad bar, with the salad in the middle and toppings around it," she said. "It just makes it a better experience to have salad with your dinner."

"We don't want to do a la carte. We don't want people to have to pay \$50 for a steak and then \$10 for a baked potato so it's so expensive you only go there on special occasions."

Other entrees will include chicken teriyaki, fettuccine Alfredo, hamburgers and a few vegetarian options.

"There will be more sandwiches at lunch," she said – plus something a little special to her.

"A while back, I opened a place in Firestone called the Sloppy Dog. We had hot dogs with a sloppy-Joe top-

ping," Velazquez said. "So at Pinocchio's Prime, we'll have our version of a Sloppy Joe, but we'll call it the Untidy Joseph. My partner, Cecil, named it."

"We'll also make all our own desserts."

For her beef selections, she'll look to Greeley-based Aspen Ridge, which processes its meat at JBS.

"We really want to focus on local because these people work in the area, so wouldn't it be nice for them to come in with their kids and say 'This place serves our beef.'"

Velazquez praised Aspen Ridge because "they're very good with their cows. No hormones; this is very clean beef. They're fed really well, and they have a program of humane treatment. He walked me through how they're born, how they get to stay with their mothers, get out into the pastures and learn to be a cow."

"They have an emblem we can put on our menu. Unfortunately, you have to slaughter cows to get beef, but their program feels like the most humane way."

Besides, she said, "we want to support the local people around us. Greeley's big into beef, and how would we explain bringing cattle in from Oklahoma just to save a little money?"

Does she worry that University of Colorado football coach Deion "Coach Prime" Sanders will sue her for copyright infringement because she's named her new place Pinocchio's Prime?

"I hope not," Velazquez said. "I hope he'll come in and eat."



Is it possible to drive my business forward—securely?

EVOLVING CYBERSECURITY THREATS

In 2022, generative artificial intelligence (AI) went mainstream, and everyday people had easier access to create AI text, images, video, and more. And while AI can be a supportive tool, there are also reasons to be wary—largely when it's used to create threats targeted against individuals and businesses. Previously, bad actors needed coding, writing, and design skills to launch an intrusion attempt. But readily available AI tools can create more sophisticated attacks, lowering the barriers of entry for threats.

Companies should prioritize thoroughly reviewing their current security postures, implementing employee training initiatives, and securing guidance from a managed security service provider (MSSP). Comcast Business has the technologies and resources to help businesses protect themselves against cyberthreats. Security solutions such as Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) provide real-time feedback on unfolding threats at the network edge. And applying Zero Trust Network Access (ZTNA) and Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) allows for continuous monitoring of activities within your network.

Contact us today to learn more about Comcast Business' managed security services, and let us help mitigate the challenge of keeping up with the rapid evolution in cybersecurity threats.

Visit business.comcast.com/enterprise to learn more.



Generative AI is enabling cybercriminals to scale attacks in terms of speed, volume, and variety.

BW ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT


COURTESY BIFF

The Boulder Theatre is one of the roughly half-dozen venues hosting events for the Boulder International Film Festival.

BIFF to celebrate 20 years

Boulder International Film Festival announces the return of Adventure Film Festival

By Lucas High
lhigh@bizwest.com

BOULDER — The Boulder International Film Festival will return in March 2024 with a celebration of two decades of community support and the return of the Adventure Film Pavilion.

“This year is our 20th anniversary, so we’re really excited about that,” BIFF director Kathy Beeck said. “We’re going to be doing some extra things, and a theme this year is a thank-you to the community. It’s been 20 years of wonderful films, parties, workshops and all kinds of fun stuff.”

Four days of movie screenings, parties, concerts, culinary competitions with local chefs, filmmaker meet-and-greets and other events are spread across more than half-dozen Boulder venues and will kick off on Feb. 29, 2024.

“It’s such a clichéd phrase, but we really do have something for everyone,” Beeck said.

In honor of BIFF’s 20 years, the 2024 event will include screenings of audience favorites from past festivals. “One of the reasons why film is so powerful is that there are some films you just don’t ever forget,” Beeck said. “We have so many of those from over the years.”

Organizers expect that the festival, which typically features between about 60 and 80 films, will draw about 20,000 attendees. “We had a few years where (attendance) dipped during COVID, but we found that last year at BIFF 2023 we’d recovered from that and reached 90% of our level from 2020,” Beeck said. “We’re really happy about that — people are definitely coming back.”


The 2024 festival will not only celebrate BIFF’s 20-year history, but also the legacy of the Boulder Adventure Film Festival, an outdoor and adventure sports and recreation-centric event founded in 2004 by the late Jonny Copp.

Copp died in a 2009 avalanche on a climbing expedition in China, but his festival lived on for years.

“We would cooperate with them,” Beeck said of the Boulder Adventure Film Festival organizers. “... We just loved working with them ... but they went away about four years ago.”

BIFF is bringing the Boulder Adventure Film Festival back in 2024 with the Adventure Film Pavilion at Grace Commons Church, which will host a series of events and screenings of films that could feature anything from climbing to skiing to skateboarding.

“The bottom line is great storytelling,” Beeck said. “... We hope that we’re taking Jonny’s spirit forward with us.”

A photograph of Robert Plick, a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a dark blue blazer over a brown sweater and a dark cap. He is holding a basketball in his right hand, which is in the foreground. The background consists of blue metal lockers in a locker room setting.

I THOUGHT I WAS
INVINCIBLE.
I PROVED MYSELF
RIGHT.

Robert Plick
Survivor

Having faced three bouts of cancer, chemotherapy-induced heart failure and COVID-19 with immeasurable grit, Robert Plick is one very inspiring survivor.

Read Robert's story at uchealth.org/stories.

uchealth

LIVE EXTRAORDINARY

BW BREWING


COURTESY BIGSBY'S FOLLY

An artist's rendering of the exterior of the planned Bigsby's Folly Winery & Restaurant in Superior.

Bigsby's Folly plans Superior expansion

By Lucas High
lhigh@bizwest.com

SUPERIOR — First it was COVID-19 in 2020. Then, in 2021, it was the Marshall Fire.

Some business operators would have abandoned expansion plans, but not Marla Yetka and Chad Yetka, the couple who co-founded Bigsby's Folly Winery & Restaurant in Denver's River North (RiNo) neighborhood in 2017.

"About a year or two after we opened, we knew the concept was viable and we wanted to reproduce it in other areas," Marla Yetka told BizWest. "But we wanted the second location to be close enough to the first so that we could really be there and have the owner present."

After an exhaustive search for sites all along the Front Range, the Yetkas found a location in central Superior, where the Downtown Superior development would soon sprout, and "we just kind of fell in love with it," she said. The "lack of event venues and good wineries and bars" presented an opportunity for Bigsby's to fill a niche in the community that had plans to build hundreds of homes and thousands of square feet of office space near the Yetkas' target site at the corner of Coal Creek Drive and Marshall Road.

The couple was on the verge of signing a lease when the pandemic struck. "Obviously everything halted," Yetka said. "We weren't even sure we were



MARLA YETKA



CHAD YETKA

going to make it through with our current business."

The crew from Bigsby's Folly, named after the Yetka's late, beloved golden retriever, and their would-be landlord in Superior "all agreed to get through COVID and see what happens," Yetka said.

Fast-forward to late 2021. The Yetkas and the Downtown Superior development team were putting the pandemic in the rearview mirror when the Marshall Fire ripped through eastern Boulder County.

"Had we been vertical at that point, we would have been gone," Yetka said.

The Bigsby's Folly team regrouped for a few months. In the meantime, Downtown Superior master developer RC Superior LLC, or Ranch Capital, sold the site of the planned Superior winery to Carmel Partners, a multi-family real estate development and investment firm that was not interested in building a food and drink facility and leasing it the Yetkas.

The couple, who sold their dream home in Denver's Washington Park

neighborhood to launch the RiNo Bigsby's, decided to buy the land and build a second winery themselves.

"When we did our first designs around 2019, the cost to do the project was \$5.5 million," Marla Yetka said. Costs have since ballooned and the project budget is now upwards of \$7.5 million.

While the Yetkas were able to secure some small business loans with relatively reasonable terms, "it's just a lot more cost prohibitive than it would have been two or three years ago."

Superior town officials have stepped up with tax incentives worth as much \$1 million over a period of about a decade. Louisville, which could benefit from an economic boost just over its municipal border, will soon consider a measure that would help the Yetkas realize some of those tax benefits in a shorter period of time.

"The mayor and the town council (in Superior) have just been bending over backwards to welcome us and get the project built there," Yetka said. "They really want locally owned businesses rather than chains. They want really good-quality tenants."

When the Yetkas established the original Bigsby's in a 7,000-square-foot warehouse built in the 1800s the couple was in their 50s and new to the hospitality industry. Marla Yetka spent her career in marketing and her husband has a diverse resume that includes jobs in engineering, business

development, energy and real estate.

"We'd never really been satisfied working for other people and big corporations, so we decided to try something on our own," Marla Yetka said.

The couple loved Napa Valley, California and its wines, she said, and thought, "Why can't we do the same thing for wine that brew pubs have done for beer?"

They found a contract winemaker in California to produce about 80% of Bigsby's output, with the remainder crafted locally with grapes flown in from the Napa Valley.

The Bigsby's concept, which includes a full-service kitchen and bar, caters to walk-in guests as well as events. "Private events make up about 60% of our business," Yetka said. "We do a lot of weddings, corporate events, engagement parties. We do more than 500 events a year."

The Bigsby's team expects that their successful concept in Denver will translate well in Superior, where they plan to build a facility with 5,000 square feet on the ground floor and 2,000-square-foot rooftop patio with views of the Flatirons.

Yetka said the hope is to break ground in June 2024 with an opening targeted for "no later than March of 2025."

The Superior outpost is likely to employ between 35 and 50 workers, with "nobody, even in the kitchen, making under \$35 an hour," she said.

ALLO MEANS BUSINESS

**24/7 Threat Monitoring.
Expert Technical Support.
Streamlined Communications.**
ALLO has a solution for that.

Protect your business and increase productivity with ALLO Business Solutions. Get the same reliability you trust from ALLO's internet in affordable cybersecurity and tech solutions.

GET ALLO

ALLO Business

Next Gen Firewall
Comprehensive cybersecurity and enterprise security solutions that protect your business 24/7

Microsoft Teams Voice
Everything your team needs in one place. Use Microsoft Teams as your phone system and have one stop for calls, documents and calendars

Managed Service Provider
Cybersecurity and IT support managed by experts, designed to fit your business needs

From productivity to peace of mind, ALLO has a solution for that.

ALLO Means **Business**. Get ALLO Now.

Visit AlloFiber.com/Business/Firewall

Call 531.600.7510



BW ECONOMIC FORECAST



LUCAS HIGH/BIZWEST

Real Capital Solutions CEO Marcel Arsenault moderated a real estate panel discussion at the Colorado Business Economic Outlook Forum held in December in Denver.

Economists: Colorado economy resilient in face of headwinds

By Lucas High

lhigh@bizwest.com

A year ago, many experts thought the Colorado economy would be contracting right now.

However, despite persistent headwinds and nagging concerns, the Centennial state is poised for growth, albeit modest, heading into 2024, University of Colorado economists said at the Colorado Business Economic Outlook Forum held in December in Denver.

The Colorado Business Economic Outlook, released annually by CU for the past 59 years, projects that the state will add 41,900 jobs in 2024, a 1.4% increase over the 2023 worker total.

“The employment growth has been impressive” given challenges such as inflation, high interest rates and the tight labor market, said Rich Wobbekind, faculty director and senior economist at the Business Research Division at CU’s Leeds School of Business. But growth, he said, is certainly slowing as compared to the post-pandemic recovery period.

“This has been an incredibly impressive recovery” over the past several years since the economy bottomed out during the brief COVID-19 recession, Wobbekind said.

But despite the temperate optimism, experts are hardly cheering. “At best, these are definitely mixed signals,” Wobbekind said of the data and insights gathered to write the Colorado Business Economic Outlook report.

Inflation, while down year-over-year, continues to outpace the nation in Colorado’s population centers along the Front Range. “Prices for all items in the Denver-Aurora-Lakewood region rose 5.4% in September, down from 7.7% in September 2022,” according to the report.

All eyes will be on the Federal Reserve in 2024, as “the health of the economy will be intrinsically linked with the Federal Funds interest rate,” the report said, a rate that has been raised time and again in recent years in an effort to tame inflation.

“Retail sales declined 0.1% in October, the first decline since March,” according to the outlook, a concerning portent for the overall health of the economy.

Part of the reason why Colorado’s job-growth figures aren’t better heading into 2024 is that the state simply doesn’t have the bodies to fill open positions.

“It’s a conundrum that we all need to talk about,” Colorado State Demographer Elizabeth Garner said. There is a need for more workers, but many factors — housing affordability topping the list — make Colorado a challenging place for workers to relocate.

Still, “job growth drives net migration,” she said, and the workers who do come to Colorado are most likely to settle along the Front Range, where most of the available positions are located.

Real estate

The COVID-19 pandemic and its related increase in employees work-

ing from home continued to impact the commercial real estate market — particularly in areas with high concentrations of office workers such as downtown Boulder — in 2023. That trend is expected to continue through 2024.

“Related to the shift to work remotely, the behavioral change is having disruptive impacts on central business districts, commercial real estate occupancy, and real estate valuations,” according to CU’s 2024 Colorado Business Economic Outlook, which cites a statistic from commercial brokerage CBRE claiming that “office vacancy rates hit a 30-year high” in the second quarter of 2023.

While office users who have largely remained in work-from-home or hybrid mode, leaving their workplaces underutilized, life-sciences companies are champing at the bit for additional square footage in the Boulder Valley and Northern Colorado, markets that have rapidly become one of the industry’s leading regions.

Interest-rate increases have dampened both development and transactional activity across commercial and residential real estate subsectors.

“The health of (the real estate) sector will continue to be directly linked to monetary and fiscal policy actions until market volatility and interest rates subside,” CU economists predicted in the outlook report.

Each time the Federal Reserve ratchets up interest rates by even a fraction of a percentage point, prospective homebuyers often must account for hundreds of dollars added

to their would-be monthly mortgage payments, resulting in many opting to remain on the sidelines.

Homebuilders — and increasingly sellers of existing properties — are turning to incentives such as interest-rate buydowns to coax buyers back into the game.

Agriculture

“Most of the U.S. is seeing declining optimism about farm income due to higher input costs and lower crop prices,” according to the 2024 Colorado Business Economic Outlook report.

The U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, according to the report, expects farm income nationwide to contract by 23% in 2023. The income decline among Colorado farmers is projected at 21%, “a bit better than the national average, because most of the state’s agricultural income comes from beef cattle, a segment that remains strong, offsetting higher input costs and lower income from government programs.”

Net farm income for 2023 is estimated at \$1.7 billion statewide. That figure, CU economists project, is expected to grow to \$1.97 billion in 2024.

Oil and gas

While Weld County remains Colorado’s leading oil-producing area, the overall energy sector tumbled significantly in 2023.

“Colorado’s total oil and gas production is looking to end 2023 with a value of nearly \$16 billion—37.5% lower than in 2022,” according to the

CU outlook report. “The lower production value is primarily a reflection of the significantly lower (59%) average natural gas prices in 2023 as Colorado’s production output has marginally decreased.”

Colorado oil producers hit a high-water mark in 2019, producing 192 million barrels before roughly 20% annual decreases in production in 2020 and 2021, the report said. Production saw “modest rebounds in 2022 and 2023. For 2023, the production output is estimated to be 6% higher than the output of 2021, at around 164 million barrels. In 2024, Colorado is expected to have a similar level of production.”

Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector “struggled in 2023 both nationally and regionally,” according to the 2024 Colorado Business Economic Outlook report. “In 2023, products sensitive to interest rates and building activity such as furniture, electronics and appliances, and nonmetallic minerals, have been dealing with slowing demand. Additionally, computer and electronic products manufacturers in the state have also struggled. In 2023, employment decreased by an estimated 500 jobs.”

However, the tide may turn in 2024. “Over the next year, positive employment drivers are expected to coalesce for most of the state’s subsectors and will help many companies begin to shake off the initial negative impacts of rapidly rising interest rates on spending and investment,” the report said. “Federal investment and incentives will boost employment in industries that support aerospace and defense.”

Cannabis

While Colorado has been a leader in the cannabis space since the nation’s first recreational dispensaries opened in 2014, sales slowed a bit in 2023.

The Colorado Department of Revenue projected in December that 2023 sales would only slightly eclipse \$1.5 billion. That would be down more than 10% from 2022, when sales were \$1.77 billion and about 40% off from Colorado’s record-setting \$2.2 billion in pot sales the year prior.

“When industries mature, it gets a little bit harder to be profitable. I think we’ve seen some of the marijuana tourism wane a bit as other states have legalized,” Brian Lewandowski, executive director of the Business Research Division at the Leeds School of Business, said in a prepared statement. But, he said, there are still opportunities for a more-efficient cannabis industry.

According to CU, “this is the first year of decline since 2014” and “market growth is expected to remain constrained in Colorado in 2024.”

Through September 2023, Boulder and Larimer County were both among Colorado’s top five counties for cannabis sales, the economic forecast report said.

Aerospace

The Centennial State has the nation’s second-largest aerospace industry, according to the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, and the Boulder Valley is one of the industry’s major hubs within the state, to small start-ups such as space-construction company ThinkOrbital Inc. and major players including Ball Aerospace & Technologies Corp., Sierra Space Corp. and Maxar Technologies Inc. (NYSE: MAXR).

“More than 500 companies and suppliers provide space-related products and services in the state,” according to a recent report from the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. Coupled with a highly robust and ever-

growing cluster of smaller aerospace businesses, this collection of programs, missions and assets make Colorado the best place to lead, defend, and innovate in aerospace.

The region’s education institutions such as the University of Colorado Boulder play a critical role in aerospace-workforce development.

“Colorado has the nation’s second most highly educated workforce, and our universities and research centers are leading the charge to educate the next generation of aerospace talent,” according to the Metro Denver EDC. “The University of Colorado Boulder receives more NASA funding than any other public university and is a leader in training astronauts and providing a pipeline of qualified aerospace workers.”

Leisure and hospitality

One of the hardest-hit sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic, Colorado’s leisure and hospitality industry has bounced back with aplomb over the past few years.

“In 2022, Colorado’s leisure and hospitality industry employed 338,300 people, up 10.7% from the previous year,” according to CU’s economic forecast.

“Growth in 2023 is estimated at 3.8%, or 12,700 jobs. Growth is expected to slow further.”

Despite the recovery, wages in the sector still lag other industries with mean hourly wages of “about \$21 per hour compared to a mean of \$34 per hour for all occupations in Colorado,” the report said.



COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE SERVICES, WORLDWIDE

Providing 20 years of
Commercial Real Estate
Services

Local Knowledge.
Global Reach.

NAI Affinity | NAI Global
325+ offices
5,800 professionals
\$20B in transactions
1.1B sf managed
How can we help you?

naiaffinity.com
970-663-3150



BW BANKING & FINANCE


Nathan Ewert

COURTESY FNBO

New leaders steering FNBO's local presence



Gretchen Wahl

COURTESY FNBO



John Schwebach

COURTESY FNBO

By BizWest Staff
news@bizwest.com

Three executives at First National Bank of Omaha, which does business as FNBO, have been promoted to new leadership roles, affecting key positions in the Boulder-Broomfield and Northern Colorado markets.

Nathan Ewert, formerly regional vice president, has been promoted to senior vice president; Gretchen Wahl, who had been named community manager for the Boulder market in 2020, has been named regional vice president for Colorado, Wyoming and western Nebraska; and John Schwebach has been named director, community banking for Boulder and Broomfield counties.

Locally, FNBO has branches in Boulder, Brighton, Broomfield, Erie, Greeley, Johnstown and Longmont.

"These three leaders demonstrate the kind of professionalism and attention to customer service that truly makes FNBO a great place to work and do business," David Cota, executive vice president for FNBO, said in a written statement. "It was natural to fill these roles with the great talent we have in Colorado, and we look forward to their continuing leadership."

Ewert will oversee the Individual Segment for FNBO across its eight-state footprint, which includes driving the planning, strategy and execution for the retail banking, mortgage, small-business and wealth-management areas.

"Nathan's proven initiative makes him an exceptional senior leader for FNBO, and we're excited to have this enterprise-wide role be based in Colorado," Cota said. "His genuine dedication to the success and growth of the bank and to intelligent financial

management will serve our individual segment extremely well.”

Ewert holds a bachelor’s degree in business from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and a master’s degree from Loyola University in Chicago. He has served as a board member of the Northern Colorado Legislative Alliance and the government affairs committee of the board of directors of the Colorado Bankers Association. He was elected to chair that board in 2020. He came to FNBO in 2019 after nine years as president for consumer banking at Adams Bank and Trust in Colorado and Nebraska.

In her new role as regional vice president, Wahl will oversee a multi-state region.

“Gretchen fosters deep relationships in the regions she serves, and we are excited to see her continued career success as our region leader in Colorado, Wyoming and western Nebraska,” said Dave Warren, senior vice president.

Wahl has more than 25 years of banking experience with FNBO and other financial institutions. She holds a bachelor of science degree in management from Penn State University and completed the Stonier Graduate School of Banking through the American Bankers Association.

Before coming to FNBO, Wahl had

been senior vice president at MidFirst Bankin Boulder for nearly three years. Her roles have included 17 years as senior vice president at Wells Fargo in Boulder as well as stints as senior vice president and commercial banking manager in Boulder for First National Denver, and as a business banker for JPMorgan Chase.

In addition to her economic-development roles, she has served as board member and past president of Via Mobility Services; board member for Impact on Education; board member and past president of YWCA of Boulder and Broomfield Counties; board member and treasurer for Mental Health Partners; and member of Naturally Boulder.

In 2021, Ewert nominated Wahl to be honored as one of BizWest’s Notable Women in Banking and Finance, calling her an accomplished, progressive and results-oriented banking executive, as well as a dedicated community liaison, with a personal commitment to growing relationships inside and outside of the bank.

As FNBO’s new director for community banking, Schwebach will manage FNBO’s relationship managers and will focus on growing FNBO’s business in Boulder and Broomfield counties. He joined FNBO in March 2020 after 17 years in banking with

other institutions within the Colorado Front Range markets, including a dozen years as vice president for commercial banking at Adams Bank and Trust.

“John has been an outstanding leader at FNBO, and I am excited for him to move into this new chapter in his career,” Warren said. “For John, it’s all about getting to know his clients through day-to-day interactions and in turn, delivering a level of service and support that takes the stress out of financial management. As the son of small business owners, John is dedicated to seeing that commercial clients receive the financial products and support they need to watch their businesses survive and thrive. I look forward to him supporting his regional managers in the same way.”

Schwebach holds a bachelor of science degree in economics from South Dakota State University and specializes in commercial and industrial banking as well as commercial real estate.

First National Bank of Omaha was founded in 1857 by brothers Herman and Augustus Kountze. It was among the first banks to issue credit cards, long before most other banks did, and the first U.S. company to use fuel-cell technology as its primary power source.

Program Manager (PM-MS) in Fort Collins, CO w/ telecommuting permitted to lead multiple projects for turbine control systems of high complexity & risk with multiple sub-projects. Reqs BS+4 yrs exp. \$95,306 - \$142,958/year.

Mail resumes to:

Woodward, Inc.

Attn: Cassie Powell

1081 Woodward Way
Fort Collins, CO
80524

Must ref title & code.

Homegrown leaders helping grow our community.

Proud sponsor of BizWest Economic Forecast

<p>Fort Collins JFK Pkwy 3711 John F. Kennedy Parkway Fort Collins, CO 80525 970-206-4585</p>	<p>Greeley 5202 W 20th St Greeley, CO 80634 970-515-7070</p>
<p>Fort Collins S College Ave 151 S. College Ave., Ste 5 Fort Collins, CO 80524 970-226-1080</p>	<p>Loveland 3800 E 15th St Loveland, CO 80538 970-624-0550</p>

firstinterstate.com
Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender.

First Interstate Bank
Built for you.

Audit. Tax. Consulting. Wealth Management.

plantemoran.com/colorado

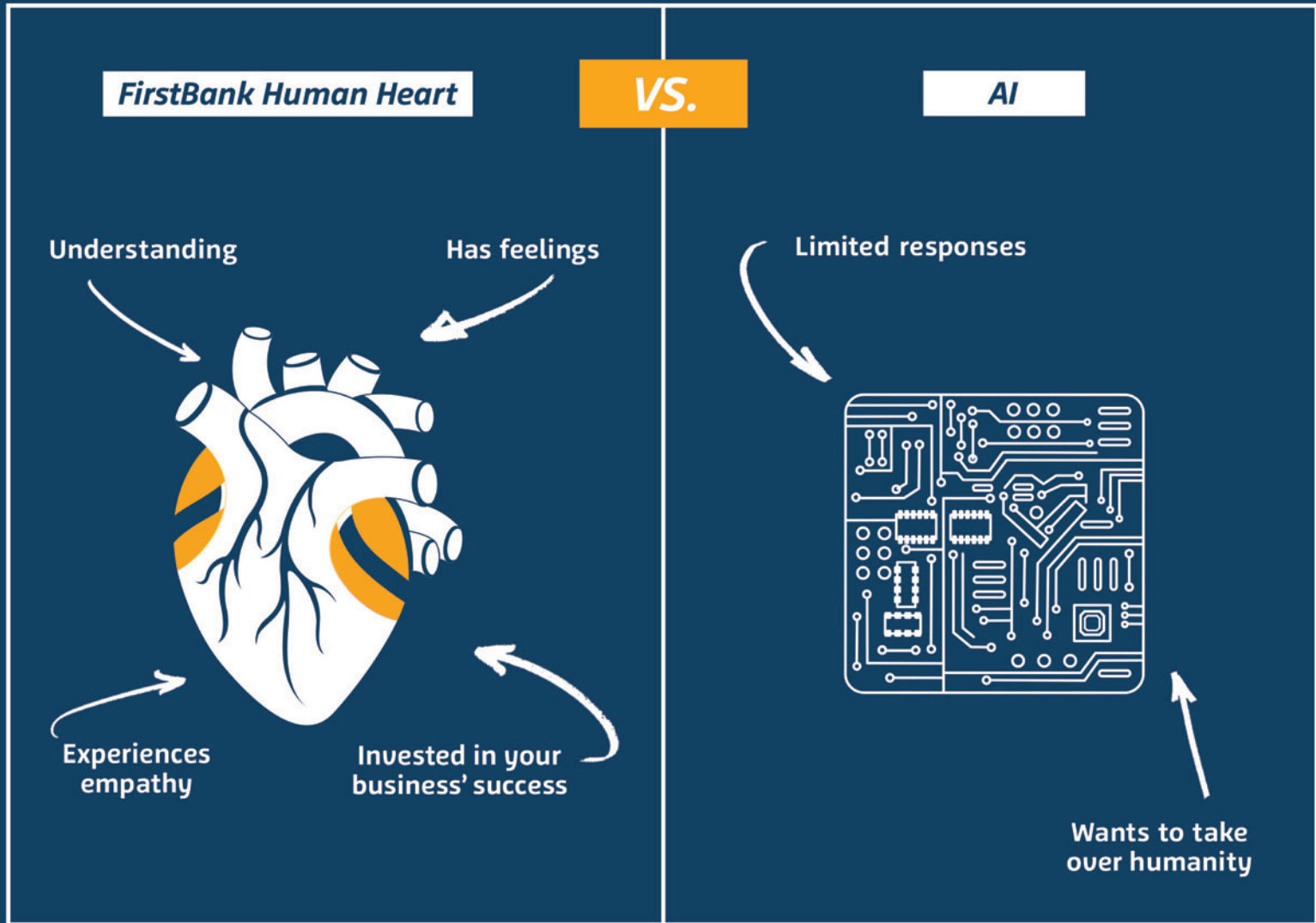
Client-focused since 1924.

Plante Moran is a proud sponsor of the 2024 BizWest Northern Colorado Economic Forecast.

One of the largest accounting and consulting firms in Colorado, our staff deliver on the commitments we set on day one. And with 100 years of experience behind us, our Colorado clients trust us with their continued growth and success.

Chris Otto | 970-282-5403 | chris.otto@plantemoran.com

efirstbank.com/business
800.964.3444
Member FDIC



Give your business banking
a personal touch.

business banking for good



Office downturn poses challenge for banks

By Lucas High
lhigh@bizwest.com

It might take another year or two for the office real estate market to crater, but investors are making preparations to pounce on deals as soon as it does.

While there are opportunities ahead for savvy deal-makers, the ongoing woes are creating a challenge for landlords and bankers, experts said during a panel discussion at the Colorado Business Economic Outlook Forum held in December in Denver.

Participants included Real Capital Solutions CEO Marcel Arsenault, Koelbel & Co. chief operating officer Carl Koelbel, Quarterra city president Chris Gillies and U.S. Bank senior vice president James Payne.

“Office is a four-letter word now,” Arsenault said, but that subsector of the commercial real estate market could offer prime buying opportunities in the next couple of years.

The subcategory, excluding flex space aimed at biotechnology tenants, represents a pain point for leaseholders who need less space after the COVID-19 pandemic and a shift toward a work-from-home culture, for landlords who are dealing with



COURTESY REAL CAPITAL SOLUTIONS

Real Capital Solutions CEO Marcel Arsenault moderated a real estate panel discussion at the Colorado Business Economic Outlook Forum held in December in Denver.

skyhigh vacancy rates and for bankers who face increased delinquency and foreclosure risk on office loans.

“Some of the largest players in the world are saying, ‘I’m out. Here you go,

lender, here are our keys,” Payne said.

WeWork Inc. (NYSE: WE) is an example of just such a player. The co-working giant, which in November filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in New Jersey, is trying to wriggle out of dozens of leases around the country, including several in Denver, where the company was once one of the city’s largest leaseholders. WeWork’s Boulder space at 2755 Canyon Blvd. does not feature on WeWork’s list of leases that it hopes the court will give it permission to reject.

“We’re seeing office buildings that are effectively worth the land price,” Koelbel said, because it has become so expensive to recruit new tenants. “There’s no off-ramp for a lot of these office buildings” and some will have to be demolished or repurposed.

A downturn in the economy, however, could have a silver lining for office landlords, Koelbel said. A recession could reverse recent trends in the worker-employer power dynamic and allow companies to demand a return to office.

“Our bet is that over the medium-to-long-term that office will come back,” he said.

In this high-interest rate environ-

ment, “it’s become really challenging” for commercial real estate firms, especially those with significant office portfolios, to get favorable loans from banks, Koelbel said. Bankers, he said, are even asking would-be borrowers to move deposits into the institution in order to get loan approvals.

The financial sector was taken off guard in early 2023 with the failure of several high-profile institutions, including Silicon Valley Bank. “It’s unfortunate what happened in the spring,” Payne said, and the industry is still feeling “some ripple effects from those bank failures.” However, “I don’t think we’re going to see widespread bank failures.”

Unlike the Great Recession of 2008, a downturn in the near future likely won’t disproportionately impact the financial and commercial real estate sectors.

“We’re OK on our leverage,” Payne said, and U.S. Bank loans related to office real estate are a relatively small asset class.

Additionally, interest-rate cuts, if they come in the early part of 2024, could help buttress the commercial real estate industry from a severe downturn, he said.

WE'LL HELP BUILD, OR EVEN REBUILD, YOUR BUSINESS.

Douglass & Jason Barrow | Co-owners, Luna Gourmet Coffee & Tea Company

At FMS Bank, we don't just help your business get started. We work with you along the way through the ups and downs, standing by you to take advantage of every opportunity and handle every challenge that comes your way.

Sound like a bank you'd love to work with? If so, let's talk (over a cup of Boyer's Coffee, of course).

fmsbank.com/bizwest

 **FMS Bank**®

Fort Morgan, CO (970) 867-3319

Greeley, CO (970) 673-4501

Member
FDIC
EQUAL
LENDER



Serving our communities for **50 years** and counting

See how we're working toward a noncarbon future and giving you the power.



Explore your energy: prpa.org/future



LIST

Law Firms

Ranked by number of attorneys

Rank	Company name	Address	Attorneys Partners Employees	Associates Paralegals Offices in region	Firm Specialties	Managing partner National headquarters Year founded	ABOUT THE LIST
1	Holland & Hart LLP www.hollandhart.com	1800 Broadway, Suite 300 Boulder, CO 80302 303-473-2700	59 26 130	17 4 1	Intellectual property, real estate, corporate, business litigation & employment services to technology, food, beverage, consumer products, construction and development & financial industry clients	Kylie Crandall Denver, CO 1947	Area surveyed includes Boulder, Broomfield, Larimer and Weld counties. All numbers are regional.
2	Berg Hill Greenleaf & Ruscitti LLP www.bhgrlaw.com	1712 Pearl St. Boulder, CO 80302 303-402-1600	53 26 101	20 14 1	Alternative dispute resolution, appeals, business, construction, criminal, environment, government, litigation, real estate, trusts and estates, trademarks, mergers and acquisitions	Kathleen Alt Boulder, CO 2001	
3	Caplan and Earnest LLC www.celaw.com	3107 Iris Ave., Suite 100 Boulder, CO 80301 303-443-8010	37 18 64	12 14 1	Education, health care, litigation, estate planning, immigration, small business, corporate, family law, and real estate.	Elizabeth Friel Boulder, CO 1969	¹ Formerly Ritsema & Lyon PC
4	Hutchinson Black and Cook LLC www.hbcbooulder.com	921 Walnut St., Suite 200 Boulder, CO 80302 303-442-6514	30 14 45	5 10 1	Corporate transactions and intellectual-property work, complex commercial and personal injury litigation, real estate development and leasing, estate planning and employment law.	Justin Konrad Boulder, CO 1891	² Formerly: Winters, Hellerich & Hughes LLC
5	Lyons Gaddis www.lyonsgaddis.com	515 Kimbark St., Second Floor Longmont, CO 80501 303-776-9900	29 14 50	26 11 2	Water, real estate, land use, development, oil & gas, education, special districts, government, employment, family, litigation, personal injury, business, taxation, estate planning/probate.	Scott Holwick, Madeline Wallace-Gross, & Jeff Rose Longmont, CO 1972	RESEARCHED BY BIZWEST
6	Ciancio Ciancio Brown PC www.colo-law.com	4 Garden Center, Suite L2 Broomfield, CO 80020 303-451-0300	24 7 42	10 12 1	Litigation law firm focusing on family law, high-asset divorce, custody, mediation, employment and business, liquor licensing, death and personal injury, probate, and criminal law.	Loren M. Brown Denver, CO 1972	
7	Coan, Payton & Payne, LLC www.cp2law.com	103 W. Mountain Ave., Suite 200 Fort Collins, CO 80524 970-225-6700	15 10 27	5 8 2	Banking, bankruptcy & reorganizations, business/corporate, creditors' rights, commercial litigation, employment, estate planning, IT, IP, land use/zoning, M&A, oil & gas, real estate and tax.	G. Brent Coan Fort Collins, CO 2013	
8	Vranesh and Raisch LLP www.vrlaw.com	5303 Spine Road, Suite 202 Boulder, CO 80301 303-443-6151	12 12 15	3 0 1	Water rights, environmental, real estate, special districts, litigation.	Stuart Corbrodige Boulder, CO 1978	
9	Otis & Bedingfield LLC www.nocoattorneys.com	2725 Rocky Mountain Ave Suite 300 Loveland, CO 80538 970-330-6700	11 7 21	3 6 2	Real estate, business, estate planning, environmental, oil and gas, tax, commercial litigation, agriculture, probate and trust litigation and appeals.	Fred Otis, Tim Brynteson, John Kolanz, Lia Szasz, Corey Moore Loveland, CO 2010	
10	Lawrence Custer Grasmick Jones & Donovan, LLP www.lcwaterlaw.com	5245 Ronald Reagan Blvd., Suite 1 Johnstown, CO 80534-6435 970-622-8181	9 4 14	4 2 1	Water rights law.	Ryan M. Donovan Johnstown 2010	
11	Koenig, Oelsner, Taylor, Schoenfeld & Gaddis PC www.kofirm.com	2745 Broadway Boulder, CO 80304 (303) 872-7002	9 5 11	4 1 1	Mergers and acquisitions, securities, venture capital, private equity investments, credit finance, technology and commercial transactions, data privacy and general business matters.	Jon Taylor Denver 2003	
12	Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP www.faegredrinker.com	1470 Walnut St., Suite 300 Boulder, CO 80302 303-447-7700	8 5 14	1 1 1	We specialize in corporate, emerging companies & venture capital, construction & real estate litigation, environmental litigation and compliance, business litigation, investment management and energy.	John Marcil 2002	

AN ADVERTISING FEATURE OF BIZWEST



ThoughtLeaders

BUSINESS ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS

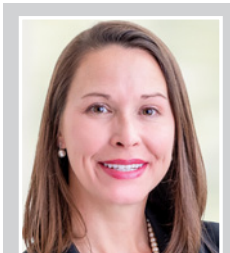
LAW

Scratching The Surface On The Seller-Financing Option

With interest rates on the rise, buyers in many markets are having second thoughts about making purchases that involve traditional financing. These concerns have led to an increase in the number of sellers electing to "carry the note" for their buyer, essentially acting as the lender in the sale of their property or asset, utilizing a Seller-Financing option.

With Seller Financing, also known as "Owner Financing", the same person or entity selling a piece of property also provides the funding of the loan for the buyer. In addition to the use of Seller Financing for real estate, this financing option can also be used for the purchase and sale of equipment, stock certificates, or membership interest in a company.

The Seller Financing structure can be a



Stacey L. Shea, Esq.
Otis & Bedingfield, LLC

beneficial option for both buyers and sellers. Seller Financing transactions generally close in less time than traditional bank loans and can have certain tax benefits. However, Seller Financing can carry potential risks that should be carefully considered before entering into any agreement.

When contemplating the use of Seller Financing in a real estate transaction, the seller must first be eligible to be a lender under current state and federal laws. This is particularly important when dealing with the sale and purchase of residential real estate. Use of a buyer/borrower's primary residence as collateral for a loan triggers state and federal laws intended to protect consumers from unsavory and predatory lending practices. These laws control who can lend money to a buyer/borrower, as well as what types of disclosures need to be provided.

Once a determination has been made that a Seller is eligible to legally act as the lender in the transaction, the focus shifts to the terms of the loan and their enforceability. The terms will need to be properly and consistently documented to

ensure that each party is aware of their respective rights and obligations under the applicable loan document. While there are many loan document templates available online that can serve as excellent references, these templates should in no way be the last stop before the closing of a Seller Financing transaction. Inexperienced and uninformed users of these templates commonly make critical errors that can have a negative impact on the rights of one or both parties.

If you are considering a transaction that involves Seller Financing, either as the buyer or seller, both parties should consult with attorneys experienced in these types of transactions.


OTIS & BEDINGFIELD, LLC
WWW.NOCOATTORNEYS.COM

Stacey L. Shea, Esq.
Otis & Bedingfield, LLC
2725 Rocky Mountain Avenue, Suite 300
Loveland, CO 80538

Thank you to our 2023 Sponsors!



PRESENTING SPONSOR



STAR SPONSORS










LIGHT SPONSORS

















PUBLICATION SPONSORS










REALITIESFORCHILDREN.COM

COAN, PAYTON & PAYNE, LLC
included in the
2024 Edition of Best Law Firms.





cp2law.com
DENVER | FORT COLLINS | GREELEY

WHY JOIN THE BOULDER CHAMBER?

When you begin your membership, a vibrant and dedicated community of professionals will be ready to collaborate and achieve meaningful goals for your business and the community!

AMPLIFY YOUR BUSINESS GOALS IN 2024 WITH RESOURCES AND EVENTS THAT

BUILD YOUR NETWORK



SUSTAIN ECONOMIC VITALITY



DRIVE BUSINESS POLICY





Your work makes a difference. Join over 1,200 **BOULDER CHAMBER** member organizations and **begin your membership journey today!**

BW LIST Law Firms

Ranked by number of attorneys

Rank	Company name	Address	Attorneys Partners Employees	Associates Paralegals Offices in region	Firm Specialties	Managing partner National headquarters Year founded	ABOUT THE LIST
13	Howard O. Bernstein PC www.bernsteinattorney.com	1111 Pearl St., Suite 203 Boulder, CO 80302 303-494-3321	7 1 12	6 3 1	Small business, employment, copyright, entertainment, estate planning, international, civil litigation, real estate, taxation, tax controversies, tax planning, probate, securities.	Howard Bernstein Boulder 1994	
14	Ritsema Law¹ www.ritsemalaw.com	2629 Redwing Road, Suite 330 Fort Collins, CO 80526 970-204-9053	6 2 13	4 4 1	Workers' compensation defense.	Andrew Bantham Denver, CO 1993	
15	Cline Williams Wright Johnson & Oldfather LLP www.clinewilliams.com	221 E. Mountain Avenue, Suite 240 Fort Collins, CO 80524 970-221-2637	5 2 7	2 2 1	Full-service firm with 60 lawyers in Lincoln, Omaha, Aurora, Neb.; and Fort Collins and Holyoke, Colo.	Kevin J. Schneider Lincoln, NE 1857	
16	LaszloLaw www.laszlolaw.com	2595 Canyon Blvd., Suite 210 Boulder, CO 80302 303-926-0410	3 2 4	1 1 1	Liquor law, liquor licensing, hospitality, restaurants and bars, Civil and complex commercial litigation; trademarks; business organization	Theodore E Laszlo, Jr. Boulder 2001	
17	Wolfe, Van Ackern & Stephenson LLP www.nocolawoffice.com	1008 Centre Ave. Fort Collins, CO 80526 970-493-8787	2 2 6	0 2 1	Business, trust and estate planning and administration, real estate, licensing, contracts, tax, alcohol regulation and distribution, trademarks and intellectual property.	Cheryl Lee Van Ackern Fort Collins, CO 1971	
18	Winters, Hughes & Laue, LLC² www.wintershellerichugheslaw.com	5587 W. 19th Street, Suite 101 Greeley, CO 80634 970-352-4805	2 2 5	0 2 1	Estate planning, probate, oil and gas leases.	William W. Hughes Greeley 2004	
19	Miller & Harrison LLC www.millerandharrison.com	2305 Broadway Boulder, CO 80304 303-449-2830	2 2 3	0 1 1	Criminal defense, DUI, assaults, drug offenses, personal injury actions for injured persons, civil litigation, business litigation.	David B. Harrison Boulder, CO 1983	
20	Herms & Cullers, LLC www.hhlawoffice.com	3600 S. College Ave., Suite 204 Fort Collins, CO 80525 970-498-9999	2 2 3	0 1 1	Business, Employment Law, Construction Law, Real Estate, Civil Litigation	2015	
21	Goff & Goff www.goff-law.com	6800 N. 79th Street, Suite 206 Niwot, CO 80503 303-415-9688	2 2 0	0 0 1	Bankruptcy, family law and probate	1997	
22	Malman Law Firm LLC www.malmanlawfirm.com	2580 E Harmony Rd Suite 201 Ft. Collins, CO 80528 303-594-8861	1 1 1	0 1 1	Personal Injury	Jerry Malman 2000	
23	Robinson Bailey PC https://robinsonbailey.com	7100 E Belleview Ave, Suite 101 Greenwood Village, CO 80111 303-442-6036	1 1 1	0 1 2	Estate planning, wills, trusts, probate, business organizations, real estate, water rights, local government	Jennifer R. Bailey 1985	
24	Houtchens Law Firm LLC www.houtchens.com	801 Eighth St., Suite 220J Greeley, CO 80631 970-353-9195	1 1 1	0 0 1	Estate planning & administration, real estate, business, commercial transactions, landlord/tenant.	Brandon Houtchens Greeley, CO 1911	
25	Blue Dot Advocates PBC www.bluedotlaw.com	320 E. Vine Drive, #316 Fort Collins, CO 80524 303-402-9284	1 1 1	0 0 1	Corporate, formation and securities law specifically geared towards impact investors, family funds, and social entrepreneurs.	Bruce Campbell Denver, CO 2004	

AN ADVERTISING FEATURE OF BIZWEST



BW ThoughtLeaders

BUSINESS ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS

LAW

We've Got the POWR...Act [Part 1]

Effective August 7, 2023, the Protecting Opportunities and Workers' Rights Act, also known as the POWR Act, took effect in the State of Colorado. We know it's officially 2024, but this Act resulted in some big changes to Colorado's employment law and how the law governs employment discrimination practices and claims, nondisclosure agreements, and employer recordkeeping, and we want to share our significant takeaways with you. Given the significance of the Act, this will be a two-part series beginning with a dive into claims.

BHGR
EMPLOYMENT
LAW
GROUP

Employment Discriminations and Unfair Work Practices and Claims:

- "Harassment" is now defined as unwelcome conduct directed at an individual or group in, or

perceived to be in, a protected class, where the conduct is subjectively offensive to the individual and objectively offensive to members of the same protected class as the individual. Harassment constitutes the basis for a charge under CADA.

- Individuals no longer need to prove the creation of a hostile work environment by an employer to assert a harassment claim.

- Individuals no longer need to prove "severe" or "pervasive conduct" to establish a discriminatory or unfair employment practice.

- Marital status is now a protected class.

- Previously, an employer could legally discriminate against a disabled individual if the disability had a significant impact on the job and the employer could not accommodate the disability even if the individual was otherwise qualified for the job. POWR changes this exception. Employers may no longer assert that the individual's disability has a significant impact on the job as a rationale for a discriminatory

practice. The exception is now limited to situations in which there is no reasonable accommodation that would allow the individual to satisfy the essential functions of the job.

- If an individual meets the requirements for asserting a harassment claim, a supervisor may assert an affirmative defense to the claim, but only if the employer has a program in place designed to prevent and deter harassment and protect employees from harassment, takes prompt and reasonable action to investigate and act on claims under the program, and notifies its employees of the existence of program; but can prove the claimant failed to take advantage of the program.



BERG HILL
GREENLEAF RUSCITTI...

BHGR Law Employment Group
Boulder, Co 1712 Pearl Street 80302
Denver, Co 1525 17Th Street 80202
bhgrlaw.com • (303) 402-1600
Boulder | Denver | Cheyenne | Irvine | San Diego

BW REAL DEALS



COURTESY STANLEY HOTEL

The Stanley Hotel in Estes Park will be sold to an Arizona nonprofit organization. The deal is expected to spur the completion of the Stanley Film Center, seen here in an artist's rendering.

Stanley Hotel sale could spur expansion

By Lucas High
lhigh@bizwest.com

The impending sale of the Stanley Hotel, which has etched its foreboding silhouette into movie, literature and horror genre history as the inspiration for Stephen King's "The Shining" novel, could help facilitate a major expansion that aims to boost the iconic Estes Park lodge's guest room total by more than 40%.

In addition to funding the completion of the long-awaited Stanley Film Center, the sale by long-time owner Grand Heritage Hotel Group to Arizona-based nonprofit Community Finance Corp., is expected to allow the 116-year-old, 140-room Stanley to add "a three-story expansion, consisting of approximately 86,000 square feet and approximately 58 additional guest rooms, to be connected to and be a part of the main hotel building," according to a document from Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority, a government body involved in the somewhat unorthodox financing model the buyer and seller are using for the sale.

The acquisition by CFC, expected to close in a month or so, will help spur the "construction and equipping of The Stanley Film Center, consisting of a two-story building with approximately 64,735 square feet, to include an approximately 864-seat outdoor amphitheater with a fire capacity of 1,200 including (standing room-only capacity), an event center, a film

museum, a sound stage, and related amenities, to be constructed adjacent to the main hotel building and connected to the concert Hall," the CECFA document said.

The Stanley Film Center — which, according to its website "will be the permanent home for film, fun and the horror genre" and will highlight the key role that Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining" film adaptation has played in horror history — is a \$40 million project that began in 2015 with a jumpstart in the form of millions of dollars in state tourism tax incentives.

Development of the museum and interactive film center, which has received several more public financing boosts over the years, has been hampered by construction delays, cost increases and the COVID-19 pandemic, which essentially shut down the hospitality industry for several months in 2020.

Grand Heritage Hotel Group owner John Cullen told the Estes Park Trail Gazette in December that his company has secured a 25-year agreement with CFC to manage and operate the Stanley, which is perched near the entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. Cullen, who has owned the property for 28 years, does not anticipate that any staffing changes will be necessary after the Stanley's new owners take over.

Community Finance Corp. will take ownership of the Stanley by way of a \$475 million bond issuance from CECFA.

The CECFA "is the official state issuer of tax-exempt bonds for capital projects furthering the missions of educational and cultural organizations," according to the authority's website. "... CECFA helps educational and cultural nonprofits borrow money for capital projects at lower interest rates than they could obtain through traditional bank financing."

Cullen, during an update report he provided to the Colorado Economic Development Commission in December, "shared that the entire Stanley property and its revenues will be used as collateral and repayment for the issuance of a bond by the Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority," an OEDIT spokesperson told BizWest in an email. "The proceeds of the bond will be used by the Arizona-based nonprofit Community Finance Corporation to purchase the property, retire existing debt, fund the construction of the Stanley Film Center buildings, which is the Regional Tourism Act project, and provide upgrades to modernize the property and support increased visitation over time."

Before the sale closes, CECFA, which collected public comment on the proposed Stanley deal in December, must make a "determination that the structure of and parties to the transaction will lessen the burdens of government," CECFA executive director Mark Heller said in an email. That determination is expected to occur in late January.

PROPERTYLINE

\$10M sale paves way for Loveland freight facility

A \$10 million sale of approximately 26.5 acres of undeveloped land near Northern Colorado Regional Airport will be the site of a freight-transfer facility for Old Dominion Freight Line Inc., one of the largest North American "less-than-truckload" motor carriers.

Cushman & Wakefield announced the sale of the industrial-zoned site, located at Airpark North Second Subdivision, Lots 1 through 6, Block 2. Although the announcement did not include the purchase price, public records put it at \$10 million.

"We transport freight that doesn't require a full trailer," said Patrick Budd, Old Dominion's manager of communications. "We have 257 locations, and we've invested a lot in our service-center locations over the years."

As presented at a neighborhood meeting in October, the plans submitted by Commerce City-based Old Dominion (Nasdaq: ODFL) was for a 48,428-square-foot, 104-door facility at the northwest corner of Rockwell Avenue and Rickenbacker Road. However, city planner Troy Bliss told BizWest that the current plan calls for around 47,000 square feet "and more like 100 doors at this point."

Medical Center of the Rockies launches \$280M expansion

UCHealth officially broke ground in December on a major expansion project at Medical Center of the Rockies in Loveland that is designed to help meet the growing health care needs of Northern Colorado.

The project includes a new tower that will be built on the north side of the hospital, the creation of a cancer center, an expanded emergency department and additional imaging and cardiac spaces.

When complete, the \$280 million project will increase the hospital's bed capacity from 191 to 287 with room to grow up to 323 beds. Staffing will grow as well; UCHealth expects to hire more than 250 employees before the expansion opens.

The Feed leases 75K square feet of warehouse space in Broomfield

Sports nutrition e-commerce platform The Feed.com Inc. recently leased 75,292 square feet of warehouse space at 11715 W. 112th Ave. in Broomfield's Verve Commerce Center.

The Feed plans to move in during the first quarter of 2024, according to a representative for Jones Lang LaSalle Inc. (NYSE: JLL), the brokerage that represented Verve's developer SunCap Property Group and landlord Nuveen Real Estate.

The recently built, two-building campus totals nearly 284,000 square feet of warehouse, distribution and industrial space. Of that, 208,592 square feet are still available for lease, according to JLL.

Casting a last look across the NoCo real estate market

As we approach the end of 2023, the Northern Colorado real estate market enters the new year as a dynamic and evolving landscape. Among the influential actors shaping local real estate are housing market trends, economics, and shifting buyer-seller dynamics. Let's take a closer look:

1. Market trends: Creative incentives define the year

This year's notable trend in the Northern Colorado real estate market is the creativity that builders and sellers are showing with their incentive packages for buyers. For instance, builders have leveraged buy-down incentives and forward commitments on funds, allowing them to offer lower interest rates to buyers. Additionally, extensive seller concessions – ranging from lot premiums to upgraded finishes – have become more prevalent. In the resale market, sellers are embracing buyer-friendly approaches, offering interest rate buy-downs rather than strict price reductions to attract potential buyers.

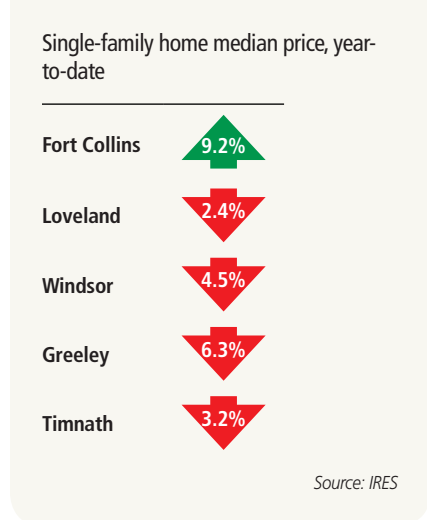


RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE
BRANDON WELLS

ditions, the overall trend remains positive.

4. Pricing: Hyperlocal analysis amidst stability

Median prices for single-family homes across the region have held relatively flat in 2023. However, a hyperlocal analysis reveals some areas are experiencing downward pressure on prices due to heightened competition for a limited pool of buyers.



5. Interest rates: A rollercoaster ride impacting market dynamics

Interest rates have been a significant storyline in 2023, rising above 8 percent in the third quarter, causing a slowdown in buying activity. Seller concessions, particularly interest rate buy-downs, have been instrumental in enticing both builders and sellers. As rates have dropped into the high 6-percent range in the fourth quarter, we should see positive impacts from the convergence of higher inventory and greater buyer interest.

6. Demographic shifts: Continuity in attraction

Northern Colorado continues to hold strong appeal for a diverse demographic pool. No notable shifts have been observed in the region's quality of life, robust economic position, and family-friendly environment, all of which attract residents from various backgrounds.

7. New developments: Thriving communities and economic growth

The region continues to thrive with new developments, ranging from robust commercial infrastructure growth to highly desirable residential communities, such as RainDance in Windsor. The sense of community remains strong, with outlying areas contributing to economic development and overall growth.

8. Challenges and opportunities: Adapting to growth

The long-awaited I-25 expansion – and new land use codes – aim to increase density and tackle affordability challenges, showcasing a commitment to adapting to the region's growth.

Year-over-year data for New Listings, November 2022 to November 2023

	2022	2023	% Change
Fort Collins	2,270	2,087	8.1%
Loveland	1,668	1,284	23%
Windsor	1,276	1,161	9.0%
Greeley	1,753	1,225	30.0%
Timnath	228	249	9.2%

Source: IRES

Year-over-year data for Homes Sold, November 2022 to November 2023

	2022	2023	% Change
Fort Collins	1,821	1,527	16.0%
Loveland	1,364	1,062	23%
Windsor	1,036	861	16.9%
Greeley	1,503	963	35.9%
Timnath	182	170	6.6%

Source: IRES

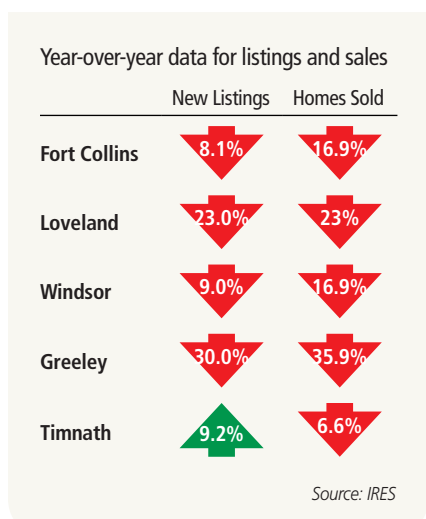
As we conclude 2023, Northern Colorado stands as a strong epicenter for growth. Economic prosperity – and a vibrant real estate market – position the region as a desirable location for residents and businesses. With a positive outlook for the future, Northern Colorado continues to showcase resilience and adaptability in the face of changing market dynamics.

Brandon Wells is president of The Group Inc. Real Estate, founded in Fort Collins in 1976 with six locations in Northern Colorado. He can be reached at bwells@thegroupinc.com or 970-430-6463.

Year-over-year data for Single Family Home Median Price, November 2022 to November 2023

	2022	2023	% Change
Fort Collins	\$615,000	\$622,000	1.1%
Loveland	\$538,042	\$525,000	2.4%
Windsor	\$560,077	\$535,003	4.5%
Greeley	\$448,000	\$420,000	6.3%
Timnath	\$735,000	\$711,323	3.2%

Source: IRES



3. Local economy: Post-pandemic recovery and employment growth

Northern Colorado's economy has maintained its post-pandemic recovery, marked by steady employment growth. Between October 2022 and October 2023, Larimer County added 3,857 employed individuals while Weld County added 769. Although the pace of employment growth has slowed due to tighter economic con-

You earned it. Now show it off.

Frame your BizWest story in a Reprint Keepsake Package today!

BizWest

CONTACT BRUCE TO GET STARTED
bdennis@bizwest.com

BW ECONOWATCH

Leeds Business Confidence Index

The Leeds Business Confidence Index for the first quarter of 2024 was up nearly two points from the last period of 2023 and reflects the most optimism since 2022.

	Q4 2022	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023	Q4 2023	Quarterly Change	Annual Change
State Economy	40.0	41.8	46.4	44.9	45.5	↑	↑
National Economy	30.7	34.4	37.1	39.3	40.2	↑	↑
Industry Sales	42.2	40.9	50.4	48.0	48.2	↑	↑
Industry Profits	41.7	39.7	47.6	45.7	44.9	↓	↑
Industry Hiring	43.3	42.1	46.7	43.7	41.8	↓	↓
Capital Expenditures	40.8	39.7	42.4	43.1	40.9	↓	↑
LBCU	39.8	39.8	45.1	44.1	43.6	↓	↑

Source: University Colorado Boulder, Leeds School of Business

THE TICKER

Boulder Chamber hires new VP of economic vitality

BOULDER — The Boulder Chamber of Commerce has hired Joseph E. Hovancak as the organization's new vice president of economic vitality.

Hovancak most recently served as executive director of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance and spearheaded the Prosperity Partnership, an economic initiative addressing resiliency, racial equity, entrepreneurship and economic mobility in Fort Lauderdale/Broward County.

"The Boulder Chamber was fortunate to attract top talent for its vice president of economic vitality role, but Joe stood out in his wealth of experience and proven track record in supporting business and economic success," Boulder Chamber president and CEO John Tayer said in a written statement. "Joe also brings an appreciation for the need to understand unique industry needs and develop solutions that address their greatest challenges while capitalizing on promising opportunities. Couple that with an infectious energy, and we know Joe will be a strong leader for the Boulder Chamber and our community's economic vitality efforts."

"I am honored to join the incredible team at the Boulder Chamber and inspired by the Chamber's remarkable ability to create a positive impact on our economy and community," Hovancak said. "The Boulder Chamber's active engagement in supporting the success of our businesses, advocating for policies that promote a strong economy, and providing innovative economic vitality programming are truly positioning Boulder as a global innovation capital."

Unemployment rate remains level for November

Colorado maintained its 3.3% unemployment rate for November, neither increasing or decreasing from October, according to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment's monthly update.

The CDLE draws its monthly data from two surveys: a survey of households and a survey of employers. The unemployment rate number is drawn from the survey of households. The number of unemployed individuals grew by 1,900 over the same time period to 107,900. The national unemployment rate decreased two-tenths of a percentage point to 3.7% from October to November, the CDLE reported.

The unemployment rate for Larimer and Boulder counties was 2.8% in November. Broomfield had a 3.2% unemployment rate, and Weld County matched the state rate at 3.3%.

The CDLE's employer survey showed that employers shed 700 nonfarm jobs from October to November to a total of 2.9 million jobs. Private sector jobs decreased by 2,100 but government employers added 1,400 jobs.

The previously reported October estimates were revised down to 2.9 million jobs, the CDLE said.

Over the past year, since November 2022, nonfarm payroll jobs increased 31,100; the private sector grew by 11,700 and government added 19,400 jobs. Leisure and hospitality added the most jobs over the past year with about 16,800 additions. Also increasing were professional and business services, 9,200 jobs, and educational and health services, 6,300 jobs.

Biz leaders confidence up as recession fears wane

By Lucas High
lhigh@bizwest.com

BOULDER — Colorado business leaders are feeling more optimistic about the economy and less worried about an impending recession, a recent University of Colorado Boulder survey shows.

The Leeds Business Confidence Index for the first quarter of 2024 was up nearly two points from the last period of 2023 and reflects the most optimism since 2022.

The index figure heading into the first quarter was 45.3. An LBCU score — which is based on impressions of the state economy, national economy, industry sales, industry profits, indus-

try hiring and capital expenditures — of 50 is neutral.

"Optimism for the state economy continues to increase, reaching its highest level since 2022," CU economists said in their quarterly confidence report. "There is less consensus on reasons for the outlook, but fears of a recession are no longer prevalent."

Many of the 196 business leaders who responded to CU's survey conducted from Dec. 1, 2023 through Dec. 20, 2023 pointed to high interest rates and continued inflation as nagging concerns heading into the new year.

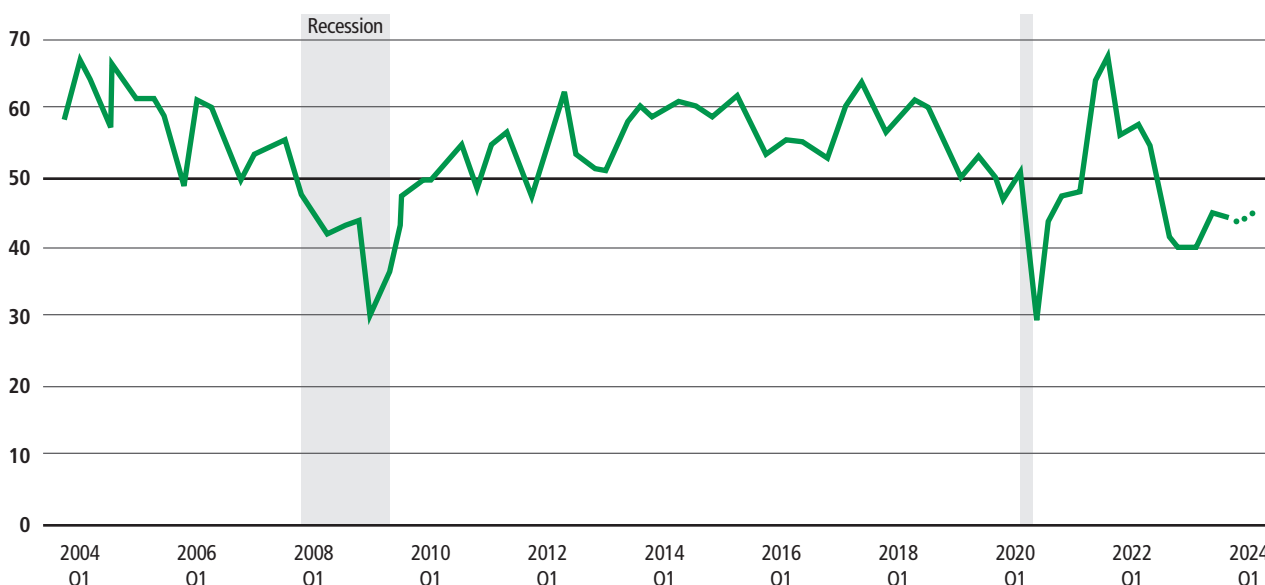
"There has been a noticeable shift in the way respondents described the reasons for their sentiment," Brian Lewandowski, executive director of

CU's Business Research Division said in a prepared statement. "Many people were less targeted in their responses, and while inflation and interest rates were still noted by some as economic headwinds, others expressed optimism about improving prices and rates."

Looking beyond the first quarter, optimism increased for Colorado business leaders. The LBCU for the second quarter of 2024 was 49.6, still mildly pessimistic but much more positive than recent index scores from 2023.

"Compared to previous quarters, comments about a recession only made up 5% of answers, with some of those answers focused on decreased fear of a recession," the report said.

Index (50=Neutral)



Source: University Colorado Boulder, Leeds School of Business

Moving Fort Collins Forward!

Thank You

The Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce would like to extend our gratitude to those involved with our 2023 Campaign and helping us exceed our fundraising goals.

Co-Chairs



Deb Kelly,
Independent Financial



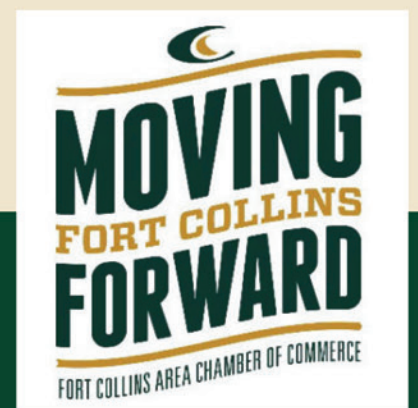
Mat Dinsmore,
Wilbur's Total Beverage

Teams

- Brinkman Partners
- Elevations Credit Union
- FNBO
- Flood and Peterson
- Health Sector Partnership
- Independent Financial/
Wilbur's Total Beverage
- Markley Motors
- Red Carpet Ambassadors
- UCHealth

Official Campaign Sponsor

WILBUR'S
TOTAL BEVERAGE
WINE & SPIRITS



BW STARTUPS



COURTESY THINKORBITAL

An artist's rendering of ThinkOrbital technology deployed in low-Earth orbit.

ThinkOrbital lands in Boulder

By Lucas High

lhigh@bizwest.com

BOULDER — It wouldn't make much sense to build Coors Field in Nebraska and then lug it to Denver just in time for the Rockies' opening day game. Yet, that's essentially the approach humanity has taken toward structures in space: build them on the ground and launch them fully assembled into orbit.

ThinkOrbital Inc., a space-construction and infrastructure technology company that recently established its headquarters in Boulder, is trying something new.

"We believe that for humanity to have a true footing in space, you need to be able to commercialize space," ThinkOrbital CEO Sebastian Asprella told BizWest. "You need to be able to build an economy, and to build an economy you first need to industrialize it. You can't industrialize without scale, and you can't achieve scale unless you can construct in space."

The company is developing tools and techniques for in-space manufacturing processes such as cutting and welding, but ThinkOrbital's long-term goal is to build ThinkPlatforms. "These platforms, which are configured for a single launch and assembled autonomously in orbit, can support multiple space missions, including in-space manufacturing, satellite servicing, space debris processing and storage, a variety of military missions, pharmaceutical development and even tourism," according to the Colorado Office of Economic Development and Inter-

national Trade, which helped lure the company to Colorado and supported its efforts to secure a tax-incentives package from the Colorado Economic Development Commission.

Asprella, who co-founded ThinkOrbital with retired U.S. Air Force Colonel and president Lee Rosen and Vojtech Holub, the company's chief information officer who holds a Ph.D. in engineering, said the company was launched as a "bit of passion project" in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic by a group of "aerospace nerds."

The company, which has won grants and contracts from the state, NASA and the U.S. Department of Defense and recently raised a \$3.5 million seed round, selected Colorado over Florida for its headquarters because of Colorado's strong aerospace industry and workforce, Asprella said.

"Colorado companies are at the forefront of the commercialization of space. By selecting Colorado for its headquarters, ThinkOrbital will join them in creating good jobs for Coloradans and ensuring that our strong economy continues to include this important and growing sector," OEDIT executive director Eve Lieberman said in a prepared statement.

Because ThinkOrbital is "focusing on research and development, the ecosystem in Colorado was more suitable," he said. But "heavy manufacturing might be more suitable elsewhere," so when ThinkOrbital's technology is ready to be built, the company may establish a factory in another part of the country.

ThinkOrbital first set up shop in offices at Tycho Station, an aerospace-centric startup hub in Lafayette.

"We started to grow very rapidly," and the company's leaders began looking for a larger headquarters, Asprella said, and soon decided the offices at 5721 Arapahoe Ave. in east Boulder fit their needs.

"The Boulder Chamber is excited to welcome ThinkOrbital to our rich aerospace industry cluster, further expanding the dimensions of innovation in activity that Boulder businesses are advancing in space exploration and operations," Boulder Chamber CEO John Tayer said in an email to BizWest. "The all-star team that ThinkOrbital has assembled reflects the character of scientific curiosity, technical expertise, and entrepreneurial mindset that I expect will fit comfortably and thrive in Boulder's economic ecosystem."

The ThinkOrbital team of seven employees and four contractors is working out of 3,800 square feet in the new Arapahoe Avenue headquarters, which space for offices, warehousing, machining and testing

While the company just celebrated its ribbon-cutting in late 2023, "I feel we might outgrow this (new headquarters) quite rapidly," Asprella said.

The company plans to raise a seed round in 2024 that will fund ThinkOrbital's efforts to turn its research into products and services that can eventually be brought to market within the next few years.

"We think that this has the potential to be very profitable," Asprella said.

STARTINGLINE

Boulder company receives Gates grant

BOULDER — VitriVax Inc., a Boulder company that is developing vaccine technology, has received a \$5 million, two-year grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The grant will help the company to further develop its proprietary single shot, thermostabilization vaccine technology, called Atomic Layering Thermostable Antigen and Adjuvant, or ALTA, and begin the development of pilot-scale manufacturing capacity, the company said in a press statement. As part of the grant, the company will study the ALTA mechanism of action using model antigens, such as those targeting HIV.

The technology, when perfected, will help protect against thermal and chemical degradation of the vaccine and enable controlled release, incorporating prime doses and additional booster doses in a single-shot administration.

"The project will focus on formulation development, preclinical studies, and the development of Good Manufacturing Practice protocols to support future regulatory submissions," the company said.

"VitriVax, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is taking an important step forward in establishing its vaccine technology," Romulo Colindres, CEO of VitriVax, said in a written statement. "We are honored by the foundation's support of our efforts to advance equitable access to vaccines around the world." The funding from the Gates foundation is the second infusion of cash this year. VitriVax received a \$29 million five-year contract from the U.S. Department of Defense to develop a single-injection, thermostable vaccine for melioidosis and glanders, serious and sometimes fatal infectious diseases.

Fresh Tracks struggles to shutdown

BOULDER — Management with embattled drug maker Fresh Tracks Therapeutics Inc. (Nasdaq: FRTX), who have spent weeks trying to drum up support for a plan that would see the company dissolved and liquidated, now say they don't think they have enough shareholder backing for that plan.

The company, which said that it has the support of only 46.91% of voting shareholders, intends to seek judicial dissolution, a rare process sometimes called the "corporate death penalty" in which a court forces a company out of business.

"After conducting an aggressive stockholder outreach strategy over four different special meeting dates, we have concluded that Fresh Tracks is unlikely to secure enough stockholder participation to approve the dissolution and plan of dissolution at the current special meeting because of how many shares of common stock have traded since the record date," Fresh Tracks CEO Albert Marchio said in a prepared statement. "As a result, the board of directors of Fresh Tracks has decided to hold a new special meeting on Feb. 15, 2024, for all stockholders of record as of Jan. 11, 2024. We will provide additional information regarding the planned special meeting over the coming weeks."

Fresh Tracks, which laid off nearly all its workers this fall and was later booted from the Nasdaq stock exchange, has been in cost-cutting mode for months as management urged shareholders to approve its dissolution plan.



REAL CONNECTIONS. REAL INSIGHTS.

A morning of inspiration & knowledge.

▶ 2024 ADVANCE LONGMONT ECONOMIC SUMMIT ◀

Tuesday, February 27th, 2024 • 8am-12pm • Longmont Museum

SAVE THE DATE!
Follow Updates &
Register At:
longmont.org/summit

COME HUNGRY

Breakfast will be served. And so will a generous serving of key insights that will guide you through 2024 and beyond.

What to expect:

- State of Industry Report
- Artificial Intelligence Primer and Essential Insights for Businesses
- Economic Overview and Forecast
- Discussions on Longmont Key Industries and Regional Insights
- Networking with the Brightest Minds in Business



PLATINUM SPONSOR:

GOLD SPONSORS:

MEDIA PARTNER:



PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



Longmont.org | 303.651.0128 | longmontedp@longmont.org

BW COMMENTARY

Rail proposal for Front Range worth considering

It's too early to endorse efforts to bring passenger rail service to the Front Range, but initial plans to launch service from Fort Collins to Pueblo are intriguing.

Far too much remains uncertain about the effort, which could cost \$2.8 billion just for a starter system, but the project's recent selection for the federal Corridor Identification and Development Program — with \$500,000 in seed money — is a good beginning.

Front Range Passenger Rail would use the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway freight line in Northern Colorado, and the Consolidated Mainline south of Denver. That's far less expensive than laying entirely new tracks for passenger service.

Inclusion of the project in the federal Corridor Identification and Development Program means that the project is in the running for additional federal funding. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law included \$66 billion in funding for passenger rail development.

Front Range Passenger Rail recently gave initial approval to a proposed route for the service, taking in communities such as Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, Boulder and beyond.

While the proposed route does not run through Weld County — part of which is in the passenger rail district — it does include many of the population centers along the Front Range.

And it could have the ancillary benefit of finally addressing rail service from Westminster through Boulder to Longmont, which was promised in the Fastracks project undertaken by the Regional Transportation District.

But RTD ran out of money to complete that portion of Fastracks any time soon. Still, given that Front Range Passenger Rail — to be operated by Amtrak — would use the same BNSF line, it's possible that RTD could piggyback on the Front Range rail project.

Much remains unknown, however. Under consideration is a tax within the Front Range Passenger Rail district, which encompasses counties along the Interstate 25 corridor. The magnitude of the proposed tax — and the timing — remain uncertain. Any tax would require approval from voters within the district, with one option being to have the question on the November 2024 ballot.

How big of a tax would we be looking at? What role could RTD potentially play, and what funds could it bring to bear? How does the Front Range Passenger Rail address concerns from Greeley and Weld County about being left out of the proposed route?

And, given cost overruns for Fastracks — and for most public-infrastructure projects, it's unclear whether the project could come in under budget.

All of these questions, and more, remain to be answered. But it's a step in the right direction that the idea is being explored.

What's behind Lightning's collapse?

Failure reflects clean-tech sector's growing pains

Failure of Lightning eMotors Inc. in Loveland reflects broader growing pains for the clean-tech industry globally.

Lightning, which early in 2023 employed about 270 workers at the Forge campus in Loveland, did not oppose appointment of a receiver in Larimer County District Court in December, with its assets to be sold after it defaulted on loans, including \$100 million worth of convertible notes held by Wilmington Trust NA.

Lightning converted internal-combustion-engine vehicles to electric for fleet operations such as shuttle buses, delivery vehicles, school buses and passenger vans. The company was founded more than a decade ago and was riding high after going public in 2021 in a merger with a special-purpose acquisition company — essentially a publicly traded shell company formed to raise capital for companies seeking an easier path to going public.

The deal at the time valued Lightning at \$823 million.

Lightning emerged on the New York Stock Exchange, with a promise of heady growth.

But reality quickly set in. A variety of issues negatively affected the company's ability to function, including supply-chain disruptions, and the company sought opportunities to raise funds in 2022 and 2023.

Lightning's struggles negatively affected its stock price, with the NYSE threatening — and eventually acting — to delist the company because of its low stock price and inadequate capitalization. That delisting also harmed the company's ability to raise additional capital.

Lightning's central issue was its inability

to obtain batteries that it required for its vehicle conversions. One of its major suppliers — Proterra Inc. — filed for bankruptcy protection, and Lightning sued another battery supplier — Romeo Systems Inc. — for allegedly violating a contract to provide batteries to Lightning.

Battery companies have struggled due to slowness in rollout of federal tax benefits, dampening investment. Supply of critical components and metals used in production of batteries exacerbated the problem.

Ramping up a still-nascent electric-vehicle industry requires enormous capital. For Lightning, gross revenue continued to climb in recent years, according to a legal filing, from \$9.2 million in 2020 to \$25 million in 2022, and \$24.4 million through Sept. 30, 2023.

But negative net operating income soared, from negative \$13.76 million in 2020 to \$51.2 million in 2021, \$73 million in 2022 and \$91 million through September 2023.

Its cash position, which had improved from \$460,000 in 2020 to \$168.5 million in 2021, deteriorated quickly, falling to \$56 million in 2022 and just \$6 million as of Sept. 30, 2023.

Lightning is not the only EV company to struggle. Tesla North, a news website for the EV industry, in December listed a dozen EV companies potentially struggling with cash flow.

And a 2022 article on IndustryWeek, "Failures and Consolidation of Startup EV Companies on the Horizon," predicted the trend, stating that "efficiency will be vital as EV companies look set for an extended period of consolidation and shakeout like the one combustion engine car manufacturers went through roughly a century ago. For those looking to last, it's about staying in the game as long as possible and keeping available financial options."

Lightning hoped to be among the survivors. Unfortunately for the company, it ran out of time — and money.

Christopher Wood can be reached at 303-630-1942 or cwood@bizwest.com.



PUBLISHER'S NOTEBOOK
CHRISTOPHER WOOD

BIZWEST MEDIA LLC

Copyright © 2024.

BizWest Media LLC. Reproduction or use of editorial or graphic content without written permission is prohibited.

Publisher

JEFF NUTTALL
jnuttall@bizwest.com
970-232-3131 | 303-630-1955

Audience Development Director

BRUCE DENNIS
bdennis@bizwest.com
303-630-1953 | 970-232-3143

Publisher & Editor

CHRISTOPHER WOOD
cwood@bizwest.com
303-630-1942 | 970-232-3133

Marketing and Sales Lead

NATALIE PETERSEN
npetersen@bizwest.com

BizWest

BOULDER VALLEY • NORTHERN COLORADO

Controller

DIANE CRISPIN
dcrispin@bizwest.com
970-232-3151 | 303-630-1963

VOLUME 43, ISSUE 1

Fort Collins Office
P.O. Box 270810, Fort Collins, CO 80527



Tayer: Taking on headwinds

BOULDER—I was playing disc golf with a friend the other day—a favorite pastime, not typically enjoyed over the winter holiday break—when we joked about blaming every poor shot on the strong “headwind,” even if there were other factors at play. I tended to use the excuse most frequently when missing a makeable putt, knowing that overcoming the challenging headwind was really a factor of my failure to line-up the shot and release a determined throw at the basket chains.



**BOULDER'S
BUSINESS CENTER**
JOHN TAYER

Therein lies an analogy to our work on behalf of business and community interests at the Boulder Chamber: In the face of headwinds, determine your best shot and make a resolute throw toward your target. Here are a few examples:

Homelessness

It doesn't take long for just about every conversation regarding the state of affairs in Boulder to land on concerns about the homeless population in our community. There is always a genuine interest in helping those who find themselves without a place to call home, coupled with

fears about personal safety and criminal activity. When conversation turns to solutions amidst the complexity of challenges, though, the headwinds often feel paralyzing. Choosing to take action, Boulder Chamber spelled-out its proposed best shot in the Homeless Solutions Policy Framework. The framework balances enforcement and support services, with an ultimate focus on permanent housing options. Since there may not be a single perfect recipe for success to such a complex challenge, we will always be open to evidence of a better direction.

Yet, we are resolute in our steps forward. We called for a day-services center, and we now stand in support of Boulder's partnership with the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless to provide that facility. At the same time, the Boulder Chamber is making its own investment in additional staffing resources to address business concerns in this area with the policy framework as our target.

Office vacancy

With office vacancy rates in certain areas of town hovering at 30% and predictions that those numbers may run higher with the termination of sublease arrangements, we need to act now to stand against these headwinds.

It matters because so much of what makes Boulder special depends

on the inflow of workers who traditionally filled those empty offices. They keep our beloved restaurants and retailers humming and they fill the tax coffers that fund our prized community amenities.

It will take creativity and collaboration in responding to a challenge that is new to a generation more accustomed to the competitive tussle for open office space. The Boulder Chamber will be working with the Boulder Planning Department to secure greater flexibility in building uses. What was once a large office might find more tenants interested in smaller units, serve as co-working space or may be conducive to a housing retrofit.

Rising commercial property tax rates, which impact the rents our businesses pay and are a barrier to closing lease deals, will also be in our crosshairs.

I am certain additional creative solutions will arise from our direct conversation with commercial property owners and local businesses, and we intend to seek priority attention to them in the 2024 Boulder City Council agenda.

Workforce mobility

One of the lasting impacts of COVID has been increased traffic congestion.

A combination of various factors, including reduced RTD service and

disrupted work schedules, may be responsible for these headwinds. It's a trend we need to tackle because, as one restaurant owner noted, his employees drive past many other restaurants and businesses looking for employees before they ever get to Boulder. He will lose those employees if their commute doesn't improve.

With Boulder Transportation Connections, Boulder's independent local and regional transportation organization, housed at the Boulder Chamber, we're taking our shot at targeted solutions to these mobility challenges.

As one example, BTC spearheaded a partnership with RTD, Boulder County and the City of Boulder that will pilot a new on-demand shuttle service for Gunbarrel, providing a convenient connection from regional bus service to local businesses.

We're also proud that our advocacy has contributed to critical funding for improvements along the Diagonal highway.

Yes, the headwinds can be rough, but . . . let's line up our best shots and send them flying toward our target, and positive outcomes, in 2024!

John Tayer is president and CEO of the Boulder Chamber of Commerce. He can be reached at 303-442-1044, ext 110 or john.tayer@boulderchamber.com.

Event Calendar

PROMOTE YOUR EVENT TO PROFESSIONALS IN THE BOULDER VALLEY AND NORTHERN COLORADO

- FIND ALL LOCAL BUSINESS EVENTS & HAPPENINGS
- SUBMIT EVENT FOR FREE!

SCAN TODAY
TO SUBMIT
YOUR EVENT!



BizWest
The Business Journal of the
Boulder Valley and Northern Colorado

BWEVENTS

EST
·
1978

THERE'S

ONLY

ONE

FEELING LIKE BUILDING
SOMETHING OF YOUR OWN



**Bank of
Colorado**

THERE'S ONLY ONE

There's only one Colorado, and there's only one business like yours. For generations, we've helped local businesses grow and shape their financial futures. We can't wait to help you build yours.

BANKOFCOLORADO.COM

 MEMBER FDIC