**Case 30 ElkMountain Hotel**

**History of ElkMountain Hotel**

When Peter Thieriot first saw ElkMountain Hotel, it looked like the proverbial money pit, an endless hole into which renovation funds could be thrown. Peter’s lawyers strongly advised him to walk away and forget any thought of buying and remodeling this 1905 hotel in ElkMountain, Wyoming.

Yet its history, its tranquil location in a beautiful grove of cottonwoods, the Old West appearance of the town of ElkMountain, and the natural charm of the hotel and its proximity to Peter’s buffalo ranch served as a magnet, and in 2000 Peter became owner and renovator of ElkMountain Hotel.

The Garden Spot Pavilion had sat on the grounds of the hotel for decades and attracted big names such as Louis Armstrong, TexBeneke, Tommy Dorsey, and Les Brown, all popular with crowds in the 1940s and 1950s. Old-timers said, “You didn’t have to know how to dance at the Pavilion, the floor would do it for you.” Sure enough, the floor moved to the rhythm of the band and the crowd.

**Peter Thieriot Renovates ElkMountain Hotel**

Wyoming winters and time took the Pavilion, but Peter believes he can bring it back with modern construction and a special spring floor so once again “you won’t need to know dancing to dance real good.”

“We stripped the hotel and then built it back again room by room” said Trey Webb, the front-desk clerk and head waiter. Nine layers of wallpaper were removed from the dining room, but a large enough chunk of each remained to frame them and place them in the dining room.

Trey exemplifies the spirit and drive of Wyoming people that helped draw Peter to ElkMountain from San Francisco. Trey, a high school senior, is headed to the University of Wyoming on a rodeo scholarship to study biology and eventually become a doctor. An expert in “bull dogging and calf roping,” Trey knows horses and he knows people. He and other high school kids from the area find part-time employment at the hotel. Their native “Western personalities” and desire to help others makes them popular with guests. They also display a genuine affection for the hotel and pride in its renaissance.

It’s easy for employees and guests to love the place because the restoration built warmth and coziness into the twelve guest rooms, the parlor, and the dining room. Peter developed an attic on the third floor into a conference room to host meetings of sixteen people around a table with ample wall space for flip-chart pages temporarily held with masking tape, so common to meetings of this size.

Prior to renovations, the hotel served as a watering hole for a sometimes rough bunch of characters from the Medicine Bow area. Ten years before Peter bought the hotel, two of the rowdies took their argument to the hotel’s parking lot where they settled it the old-fashioned way with six-shooters. Fortunately, neither of those would-be Wyatt Earps could aim straight, and the sheriff arrived before lead could accidentally find its mark.

Rowdies have been replaced by less colorful, middle-aged professional couples. “A few of the old customers returned looking for a beer and some action after renovations but when they spotted the wine and cheese, the Lexus and Lincoln cars in the parking lot, and heard English spoken without cussin’ every other word, they promptly left and never returned,” said Peter.

“Half this country loves what we did to this hotel and the other half has a different opinion.” That was confirmed by a ranch family in McFadden 30 miles east who placed themselves squarely in the “love” section. Their opinion was that the renovated hotel added much to the community.

There is no fear that guests accustomed to fine dining when traveling and dining out at home will have to settle for less at ElkMountain Hotel. The menu was designed to “combine a touch of flair, a hint of the Old West, and a big pinch of professionalism.” With buffalo and caribou on the menu, there is more than a hint of the Old West. With a good selection of California and imported wines, seafood-based appetizers, and desserts such as crème brulée, compliments, not complaints, are most often heard.

The unanimous opinion of guests is that the hotel was renovated with style. The area on which the hotel sits had once been a stagecoach station for the Overland Trail. Although that building is gone, the Victorian style of the original 1905 building has been enhanced. The original embossed tin ceilings were cleaned and repainted, and the exterior asbestos shingles that used to hide the natural beauty were removed to expose the original cedar lap siding. Peter knew the hotel could be restored to this level of quality.

**Susan and Arthur Havers Purchase the Hotel**

Arthur and Susan Prescott Havers purchased the hotel in 2007. Susan was a marketing consultant in San Francisco, but had a culinary background. She had owned and managed a restaurant and catering company in Belgium and earned a Grand Diplome from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. Arthur was vice president of international development for E-Trade. It was their dream to open a business together, and although they had this dream for many years they were not able to find the right project. While searching the Internet, Arthur came across the ElkMountain Hotel. The historic hotel aroused their curiosity. Although the hotel was not for sale they contacted Peter, who also had a residence in San Francisco, to see if he would be interested in selling it. In February of 2006, they went to ElkMountain to see the hotel and the region. They found the people to be friendly, with a sense of humor. In addition to the people they enjoyed the wide open spaces. A year later the Havers were owners of ElkMountain Hotel.

Susan’s culinary background enabled the restaurant to be turned into a “hidden gem” and customers who discovered it, encouraged people driving across I-80 to take the four-mile drive off the Interstate highway to ElkMountain Hotel. The Havers used their marketing and culinary skills to create special dinners that pair food with wine, beer, or whiskey. They also created special events such as the Paranormal Dinner Party. According to the hotel’s Web site, “The event is limited to a maximum of 5 couples. They will be the only guests in the hotel and should be prepared to stay up till 1 a.m. helping track down shadows and bumps in the night. Package price is $250 per couple inclusive of room & dinner but excludes taxes and gratuities.” Employees of the hotel swear it has a friendly ghost, and perhaps the guests at the dinner will find it.

Friendly or not, ghosts don’t pay bills. That requires live paying guests, and getting more of those, particularly in the low season, requires marketing. Positive word of mouth can’t be beat, but it takes marketing to get enough of those mouths talking.

Peter Thieriot had the vision to renovate the ElkMountain Resort; the Havers used marketing skills and Susan’s culinary skills to turn the hotel into a destination. However a town of 200 people cannot create the demand necessary to support. ElkMountain needs to be a destination for people in nearby towns and a place for organizations to hold events and retreats.

Updated November 2011 Sources accessed 11/20/21011; “ElkMountain, Wyoming,” *MuniNetGuide,*<http://www.muninetguide.com/states/wyoming/elk-mountain/>; Jackie Borchardt, “ElkMountain Hotel offers serenity, escape,” [*trib.com*](http://trib.com/) (March 27, 2011), <http://trib.com/business/article_46602367-c87f-5f72-857b-3867c8734ae2.html>; “Historic ElkMountain Hotel Finding an International fFavor,” *Rawlins Daily Times*, undated <http://www.elkmountainhotel.com/attachments/RawlinsDaily.pdf>; ElkMountain Hotel Web site; [www.elkmountainhotel.com](http://www.elkmountainhotel.com/).

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