

Parks Receive Preservation Awards

By Kathy Jordan

This year two area parks will receive the Historic Preservation Award from the Grand Junction Historic Preservation Board.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Colorado Historical Society celebrate Archaeology Historic Preservation during the month of May as Historic Preservation Month, and these awards are given in connection with this celebration.

The City of Grand Junction Parks and Recreation Department and the Rocket Park Neighborhood are receiving the award for their preservation of the rocket and Saturn playground equipment at Rocket Park. The two space-themed playground pieces have been in the park since the 1960s, when it opened as Melrose Park, and thus the community came to refer to it simply as Rocket Park. In October 2009, the Grand Junction City Council officially renamed the area Rocket Park. Parks and Recreation staff gave the retired rocket and Saturn a fresh coat of paint and relocated the pieces to the northeastern corner of the park. The rocket is high off the ground and tilted as though it is being launched into space.

Mesa County is receiving the award for the creation of Long Park. The 40-acre property was donated to Mesa County by the late Dr. William James Long, DMV, who died in September 2000. Long had stipulated in his will that the land must become a park by 2010 or the property would be sold and the money would go to scholarship funds. Not only has the county developed this land into a beautiful park, county officials did not destroy the original log house that Long's parents built in the 1940s from logs cut on Grand Mesa. The original Long home is now used as a small events center.

In 2001 the county received the preservation award for the restoration of the Mesa County Court House, built in 1922 in the 500 block of Rood Avenue. That said, I wanted to again acknowledge the county for the preservation work on this project, because there is no greener building than one already built.

The court house was designed by Eugene Groves and built at a cost of about \$293,000. The building is one of only a few grand examples of 1920s architecture which remain in Grand Junction

In 1997, then-Mesa County Commissioner Jim Baughman attended a conference on historic court houses, returning to Grand Junction with enthusiastic ideas for the restoration of the court house. It took little to convince his two fellow commissioners, Doralyn Genova and Kathy Hall, to get the restoration started.

In December 1998, stabilization got under way with repair and sealing of the exterior. Seventeen pieces of decorative limestone on the upper cornice were replaced with limestone from a quarry near Bloomington, Ind., where the original stone had been cut. The restoration project began in 2000.

In March 2002, the beautiful brass doors were unlocked at a public unveiling. The “front brass doors” had been locked as a security measure after a defendant had taken hostages in the courthouse. The only entrance for several years was from a side door.

The final cost was approximately \$4.6 million.

The original courtroom is now the commissioners’ hearing room, but that doesn’t stop the imagination from conjuring up a vision of say, the “Big Kid” Eames murder trial in 1939.

The interior of the building looks much as it was originally designed, with elegant gold trim, decorative moldings and woodwork gracing the walls above the granite wainscoting, highlighted by brass and dark woods. The original terrazzo floor completes this elegant public building that can hold its own with any of its contemporaries.

Reportedly the third floor was originally used as a dormitory area for sequestered jurors, one side for men, the other for women. In the restoration, the original skylights were once again exposed and now make for a well-lighted area for offices for the county commissioners and some administrators.

So if you haven’t been in the grand building, walk up those front steps, open one of those brass doors, and go in and take a look at one of the handsomest period buildings you have ever seen.