



The Evergreen Legacy Fund

by Stephen Knapp

The men and women who pioneered Evergreen left us a legacy of thoughtfully preserved natural landscapes, enduring Western charm, and pedestrian problems aplenty.

Even now, folks choosing to leave the buckboard in the barn face desperate sprints across busy traffic lanes, precarious crosswalks, and gritty miles of razor-thin, rain-canyoned dirt shoulder. How many times have you knit your glowering brow and humphed, “They should do something about that.”?

Well, you can un-knit any time, because “They” are doing something about that. And boy, have They been busy. The Evergreen Lake Connector? They did that. The new-and-improved Bergen Park Crosswalk? That’s They, too. They created the River Walk on lower Meadow Drive, and helped drive the curb-to-curb paving of Main Street. And They are just warming up.

Working almost entirely behind the curtain, They are the men and women administering the nonprofit Evergreen Legacy Fund (ELF)—good friends and neighbors donating their considerable time, talents and treasure to make the mountain area more foot-friendly and bicycle-benign.

“We’re not trying to change the character, the look, the heart, of Evergreen,” says ELF board member Brenda Cumming, RN, owner of Medical Aesthetics in Bergen Park. “We’re trying to make it better. Safer. Nicer.” And one corner, one curb, one connection at a time, They are doing exactly that.

“We want this to be the best town it can be without changing what we love about it.”

To appreciate how much effort goes into something as simple as white stripes on pavement, consider that, officially at least, Evergreen is a rural community, which means that Jefferson County isn’t legally obliged to fund amenities for the ambulatory. In 2012, the Downtown Evergreen Economic District (DEED) expanded its brief to include the whole of Evergreen, identified 48 locations treacherous to tread, and sallied forth as the



Evergreen Legacy Fund, a quiet but capable crew on a mission to privately pay for needed public upgrades. Except that Ed and Eileen Q. Evergreen could show up at Road & Bridge with a million dollars in a pillowcase and the county wouldn’t necessarily turn a shovel, because civilians typically don’t have the legal stature to petition the county for all that road work. In 2020, ELF persuaded the county commissioners to create the bureaucratically acceptable Evergreen Local Improvement District (ELID) for the specific purpose of financing 17 local infrastructure projects of particular priority. To hear They tell it, it wasn’t all that tough a sell.

“Everybody comes to the county asking for money,” says Eric Gill, ELF board mem-

ber and owner of Bear Paw Property Management on Main Street. “We weren’t asking for money. We were offering to pay for everything we wanted. That made it kind of hard to say no,” Gill smiles.

As intended and agreed, ELF pays the cost of construction, while the county performs the work and assumes responsibility for maintenance. Project timetables depend entirely upon Jeffco Road & Bridge, because the county will undertake each during the course of regular road maintenance operations, meaning the multi-use path from Evergreen Library to the Downtown stoplight will take shape at the same time that improvements to that stretch of County Road 73 do—a sensible approach that will also minimize any disruptions that ELID

Evergreen Legacy Fund Timeline

- 2010** Formation of Downtown Evergreen Economic District
- 2012** Formation of the Evergreen Legacy Fund by the Downtown Evergreen Economic District
- 2013** Bear Creek floods

2014



Evergreen Trails Master Plan is launched

Downtown Evergreen Economic District finalizes the Evergreen Trails Master Plan with Jefferson County

2015



ELF prepares design and renderings of the Lake North Trail

2016



For more information go to:
evergreenlegacyfund.org/elf-timeline

improvements might entail. Although a firm schedule has not yet been released, inflexible statutory maintenance requirements suggest that all 17 will be firmly under foot within the next 10 years. ELF has good reason to be hopeful and good things to say about the county's commitment to the cause.

"Jeffco has been an unbelievably great partner," Gill says. "It's worked with us every step of the way."

Along with CR 73 improvements, ELF expenditures on the immediate horizon include a new crosswalk at Buffalo Park Road and Hatch Drive, improved pedestrian access to Wilmot Elementary School, and a joint effort by ELF and the Evergreen Park & Recreation District to complete the North Evergreen Activity Trail. Also coming soon to a neighborhood near you are a multi-use surface connecting Evergreen High School with CR 73, a crosswalk and 1,200-foot sidewalk on Olive Road uniting Buffalo Park Road with Wulf Recreation Center, and safer and more convenient pedestrian access along Bergen Parkway. Looking down the trail a stretch, Evergreen residents can also expect to enjoy a more walkable Meadow Drive, a thousand feet of sidewalk adjacent to Evergreen Lake, paved shoulders and striping between the Elk's Lodge and Center Stage, and a new and wider bridge at Forest Hill.

While accessibility is Job One, the Legacy Fund supplied flood relief when Bear Creek jumped its banks, funded the Evergreen Trails Master Plan, commissioned murals for some of our most trafficked locations, and helped fund Leadership Evergreen's drinking fountain Downtown for the refreshment of tourists and townies alike. And, without spending a dime, ELF coaxed the Colorado Department of Transportation into effecting a few upgrades along Highway 74, including installing the Christ the King pedestrian light, improving the parking lot and crossing at Upper Bear Creek Road, and crafting a humble but handy parking area at the far east end of Main Street.

"It was mostly just a matter of getting them to look at it," Gill explains. "Once they actually saw the problem, they went ahead and fixed it."

By the time everything on its current to-do list is complete, ELF will have spent something in the neighborhood of \$3.5 million. That's a lot of scratch for a small mountain-area nonprofit, but many little makes much. ELF's bedrock funding source is a purely voluntary 1 percent donation collected by participating businesses all over town, a reliable mechanism that, together with direct donations and a major fundraiser, brought in about \$120,000 last year. And before you point out that it'll take 30 years to balance the books at that rate, understand that They parlay those cash contributions into GOCO grants, CDOT Main Street grants, Safe Routes to Schools grants and Transportation Alternatives Program grants, meaning that every dollar They take in yields up to 4 dollars worth of happier hiking and better biking. And, as Gill is disposed to mention, the more donations ELF receives, the sooner it can put Evergreen on its proper footing.

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"Everything starts with community donations," Cumming explains. "But not many people know who ELF is."

Indeed, who are They?

They are the organization's board of directors, composed of Cumming, Gill, Bob Cardwell, Alexa Cowaley, Dean Dalvit, Linda Kirkpatrick, Jim Pisula and Sharon Wood.



They are more than 90 donors, including a dozen local businesses collecting 1 percent on purchases or providing direct monthly or yearly contributions, and dozens of community-minded citizens, good neighbors all, pledging sustained financial support.

They are the indispensable cadre of civic-spirited professionals donating their technical skills and administrative know-how to get good ideas off of the drafting board and onto the streets.

And, if you conduct commerce locally, you're probably They, too, even if you don't know it. Should you wish to provide support more consciously, arranging an annual contribution or bequest will help ELF ensure a more accessible mountain area for generations to come. Whether you can give a little or a lot, be assured that your tax-deductible donation is an investment in a better Evergreen, because They want the same thing you do.

"We want this to be the best town it can be without changing what we love about it," Gill says.



It's a long way from better to best, and for that reason ELF has no plans to fold up its tent when its present wish-list is granted. Evergreen's non-motorized map will still feature plenty of risky rides and white-knuckle walks, and our community will still be full of forward-looking folks who'd like to leave the mountain area better, safer, nicer than they found it.

"The Legacy Fund is exactly that," Cumming says. "The people who come after us—our kids and grandkids—are the ones who will benefit most."

To learn more about the Evergreen Legacy Fund, visit EvergreenLegacyFund.org.

