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**SPECIAL
REPORT:
TOURISM**
**Saratoga boasts
deluxe destination**

New guest ranch
sets the bar high
for service, luxury

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HOSPITALITY & TOURISM

Brush Creek Ranch & Spa opens in Saratoga

New guest ranch tempts visitors with Western luxury

By MJ Clark
Business Report Editor

SARATOGA – There’s an old joke that many people want TV character Ben Cartwright’s life, but nobody wants his day job. At the newly opened Brush Creek Ranch, guests can experience a postcard version of “Bonanza” that would make Mr. Cartwright jealous.

This brand-new historic guest ranch opens this spring on 13,000 acres set between Saratoga and the Medicine Bow National Forest. Brush Creek Ranch is a blend of old and new, done so skillfully that the line between the century-old working cattle ranch and the top-of-the-line guest ranch and spa is invisible.

The new 38,000-square-foot Trail Head Lodge is a log and timber frame structure set into a hillside overlooking the Platte River Valley. Inside, 28-foot ceilings and two huge fireplaces provide a lofty setting for a wine cellar, exhibition kitchen, dining and a lounge area.

Outside, the lodge’s rough wood siding carefully stained in multiple colors to match the look of weathered barn wood;

and metal roof with a patina of rust make it look as if the structure has been there forever. And that’s the point.

Historic buildings from the original ranch have been restored and are scattered around the grounds. The cabins that once housed the ranch foreman and ranch owners have been stabilized and renovated and are now luxury accommodations for families.

Nine new (but faux weathered) log cabin residences have been built nearby, close enough for easy access to the lodge’s spa yet far enough for privacy and solitude.

The original barn’s hayloft is now a Cowboy Chapel that converts into a dance hall. Downstairs, the area that used to house horses and tack has become storage for the mountain bikes, cross-country skis and other outdoor equipment available to guests.

Don’t worry about the horses being evicted from the barn – they have a new place to live: in cushy stalls alongside the new 28,000-square-foot equestrian center just over the hill and out of sight and scent of the ranch’s living areas.

Done the White way

Brush Creek Ranch was conceived by hotel management entrepreneur Bruce White, whose Indiana-based White Lodging company has 25 years of experience in mid- to large-scale hotels.



MJ Clark, Wyoming Business Report

NOT THE PONDEROSA – While Brush Creek Ranch & Spa shares a ranching heritage with the TV show, the similarities stop there. Brush Creek offers deluxe digs for families and corporations for whom the experience is worth the price.

“Bruce and his wife Beth have a passion for the West,” explained Mike Williams, the executive vice president and COO of Brush Creek Ranch. “They looked for land in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah, but fell in love with Brush Creek. They like the diversity of terrain, the great surrounding community and the fact that Saratoga has a workable airport that allows them to visit frequently.”

The Whites bought the property in December of 2008. The plan was at first to utilize the property as a family sanctu-

ary and as a place to hold charity functions for the Bruce and Beth White Family Foundation.

However, Bruce realized that the ranch offered the opportunity to “share this magnificent land with those who would truly appreciate its culture and heritage,” so Brush Creek Ranch & Spa was born.

“We wanted to create a Western getaway that utilized our vast experience in the industry while striking a perfect balance between wholesome recreation,

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The people who helped create Brush Creek Ranch

Consultants:

RMT Architects - Avon, Colo.
Holland & Hart, LLP - Cheyenne & Denver
Inberg-Miller Engineers - Cheyenne
KRM Consultants, Inc. - Vail, Colo.
Rocky Mountain Environmental Co - Berthoud, Colo.
Simeone Deary Design Group - Chicago

Artisans:

Kevin O'Brian - Saratoga
Kevin Clarke - Delta Colo.
Vail Manufacturing - Avon, Colo.

Ranch Historian:

Dick Perue - Saratoga

Contractor/Sub-contractors:

DeJulio Construction Corp. - Silverthorne, Colo.
(General Contractor)
Patterson Electric Co. - Silverthorne, Colo.
Ranger Plumbing & Heating - Silverthorne, Colo.
Black Diamond Drilling - Highland Ranch, Colo.
Rod's Backhoe Service - Saratoga, Wyo.
Western States Fire Protection - Black Hawk, S.D.
Custom Log Homes, Inc - Stevensville, Mont.
JW Masonry - Edwards, Colo.
SSADA LLC Painting - Edwards, Colo.

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economic sustainability, environmental stewardship and preservation of the culture of the West," Bruce White explained in a company release.

After that, things moved quickly. The Whites built and renovated everything in just 23 months. "The construction downturn was great for us," Williams said. "We were able to put 140 contractors and craftsmen to work for us very quickly." (See sidebar for a list of the companies involved with construction.)

The cost of construction was not disclosed, but, as spokeswoman Courtney Lis explained, "Bruce White worked to create his vision of the ranch without strict budget constraints, but was unwilling to undermine the quality of the project from construction to amenities to finishes."

The finishes are all top-notch, from in-floor heat in the bath, to granite countertops, to moss rock fireplaces to original artwork in the common areas to leather flooring in what the staff refers to as "The Man Cave" - a 12-year-old

scotch and bearskin rug retreat officially known as the Cattle Baron's Library.

The price to stay at Brush Creek ranges from \$720 a night for a room in the lodge during off-peak times (fall and spring) to \$6,600 a night for a three-bedroom log cabin residence during peak seasons (summer and Christmas).

The term "all inclusive" is taken literally at Brush Creek - every meal (including fine wines and liquor) and every activity at the ranch is included. The only exceptions are the spa treatments.

Not just for high rollers

Through the Beth and Bruce White Foundation, the ranch also will be home to a special Kids Camp, giving inner-city children the opportunity to experience the West.

Twenty campers will be invited to "rough it" for two-week stays in a camp on the property with 10 platform tents and a bathhouse, with access to a challenge course and other activities led by a pair of educators from Chicago's Latin School.

In addition to the foundation's works, the Whites have put about 3,000 acres of

the ranch under a conservation easement to help keep their corner of Wyoming as wild as possible.

The meet market

In addition to hosting family vacations and destination weddings, the ranch is expected to attract "exclusive, high-end, Fortune 250 corporations looking to recognize performance and build togetherness," Williams explained. The facility can easily handle multiple meetings, with a variety of meeting spaces and food and beverage options. Also available are activities ranging from the 10-station sporting clays shooting course at one end of the ranch to the six miles of private water for trout fishing at the other.

Last fall, a California couple visited the ranch to see if it would be a good fit for their corporation's retreat. Brad Craft, a Xerox distributor, told the Business Report that he was looking for "a communal environment, a place where we can celebrate wins, forge new relationships and get to know each other."

After two days of sampling the ranch's many offerings, Craft and his wife hugged staff members goodbye and promised to bring their group back to Brush Creek this summer.

Williams explained that Brush Creek can hold events for up to 125 people. The meeting and event spaces encompass a total of 9,000 square feet and include multiple boardrooms and flexible indoor and outdoor space, including walk-out decks and patios. Each meeting space is highly secure, offering all necessary technical amenities including an on-site audio-visual technician and WiFi.

Although the Ranch has a live-in staff of 45 to 50 during peak times, the association with White Lodging makes staffing

this remote location a lot easier. In addition to providing a formalized training program for all staff members, the group has a large pool of trained employees nearby (from 19 hotels in Colorado and five hotels in Utah).

Additional staff can come in to help with larger events, "a very elastic staffing mode," that allows the ranch to "go very lean," as Williams puts it.

Brush Creek Ranch's competition includes a handful of other Western destination ranches, such as Montana's Paws Up, Triple Creek and The Ranch at Rock Creek, and Three Forks Ranch in Savery, Wyo.

"Those ranches have done a great job of announcing this market segment [luxury ranches] to the public," Williams said.

The appeal of working to establish Brush Creek as opposed to the other White Lodging properties (which include Marriott and Hilton hotels) was that "there is no brand here," Williams said. "It's very exciting, very pure in that we are creating an entire destination. This allows us to exercise the ability to figure out the right way to do something from the ground up."

Williams explained that Brush Creek Ranch's appeal is both to corporations looking for team-building experiences, and to vacationers looking to make memories.

"The lodge and spa at Brush Creek Ranch is a place where people find a different once-in-a-lifetime adventure every day and share them with others over a glass of wine around the campfire at night," he said.

The ranch will host its grand opening in June.

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