



State grant funds plan for Ewing Mesa event center

April 2, 2017

One of the things that we get kind of excited about at La Plata County is leveraging partnerships to benefit our community. We do this all the time: Energy Impact Grants from the state help pay for road improvement projects. We work with the county's municipalities and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe to jointly address planning and infrastructure issues. We partner with state, federal and local agencies to respond to disasters and emergencies. And the latest example of partnerships in action for La Plata County is nothing but fun: Thanks to an incredibly generous land donation from Marc and Jane Katz, who recently purchased 1,850 acres on Ewing Mesa, coupled with grant to the Conservation Trust Fund, which Colorado Lottery money supports, the county has just kicked off a master planning process for a multi-event center on the iconic mesa on Durango's southeastern edge.

This is a big deal for us at La Plata County, because for more than a decade we have known that our fairgrounds – beloved as they are – are just not large enough to accommodate the growing demand for community facilities, especially for equestrian-related uses. The parking lot is no fun for trailers. The arenas aren't sufficient to hold the many different events the community would like to host, and the buildings are aging rapidly.

Thanks to the Katz family, who donated 200 acres for the county to someday use to build a multi-event center, we now have the luxury of space and a perfect location to someday house our fairgrounds. The Conservation Trust Fund made the situation even brighter by awarding La Plata County \$250,000 to pay for the master plan. This is money that the state says must be used to acquire, develop or maintain parks, open space or recreation sites.

We have just begun this exciting project, and had our first meeting in March with the consultants who will craft the master plan for the multi-event center. DHM Design is a local landscape architecture and planning firm that is heading up the project, building on the values and priorities that the county and the Katz family have developed for the mesa. These include:

1. ***Providing educational, recreational, cultural, and civic opportunities for people of all ages*** through the access to trails for hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders and provision of venues for myriad community events and activities.
2. ***Support for agricultural interests***, through support of the 4-H program and related activities, as our agrarian heritage is an important part of the history of La Plata County.

3. ***Business attraction, enhancement and retention***, as the project will not only serve residents of La Plata County but will also attract visitors as well, which will benefit existing businesses and potentially provide opportunities for new businesses to thrive.
4. ***Enhanced cultural, tourism and environmental attractions***, as the new facilities will enable La Plata County to host events that we are currently unable to accommodate at our existing fairgrounds.

The planning process has several rounds of public input built in, and we definitely want to hear from all of you about your priorities and ideas for this future multi-event center. On April 20, we will host several sessions throughout the day, and an open house in the evening. Stay tuned for details on these meetings and other ways to get involved in this long-term community project! This is the first important step in what will surely be a years-long effort to develop a dynamic event center on Ewing Mesa. Please get involved!

Please feel free to contact any of the commissioners with questions, comments or concerns. Call our office at (970) 382-6219 or email us: I can be reached at julie.westendorff@co.laplata.co.us; Vice Chair Gwen Lachelt at gwen.lachelt@co.laplata.co.us, and Commissioner Brad Blake at brad.blake@co.laplata.co.us.

Julie Westendorff is chair of the La Plata County Board of Commissioners. Reach her at (970) 382-6219.