

"Heart of Evergreen"

by Carole Lomond

The **Village atmosphere** of downtown "Main Street" is now in the process of being "updated." After 40 years of abandoning the Heart of Evergreen, an eclectic mix of restaurants, retail shops, galleries and offices are moving back to the historic "town" in unincorporated Jefferson County.

right: Evergreen Sign by Zuni Sign Company



The historic **Evergreen Hotel** has been rebuilt. A sophisticated restaurant/gallery at the traffic light, Soho and Evergreen Gallery, have introduced a new attitude. In 2002, the **Evergreen Chamber of Commerce** will move to Main Street, which provides central identity for 25,000 locals and attracts plenty of visitors.

Before the 1859 gold rush, Evergreen was part of a vast wilderness that belonged by treaty to the Ute and Arapahoe. The first White settlers were French fur traders and lumberjacks.

left: Lumberjacks toil on Main Street, circa 1860



The prospect of harvesting gold, silver, copper, elk and timber brought settlers through Bear Creek Valley in the 1860s. The first residents "did not agonize over ethical conflicts about the use of land and its resources," wrote the Sternbergs in their wonderful book, **Evergreen, Our Mountain Community**. "Wild game was for meat. Timber was for cutting—to burn, to prop up mine shafts, to build houses and barns" minerals beneath the ground were for digging out and selling. Meadows were for pasturing cattle or for plowing up to raise crops" if resources ran out, it was time to move on."

The earliest Evergreen structure was a bunkhouse for lumberjacks built by a Frenchman named **Mallett** in 1860. Sawmills cut millions of board feet every few miles along Bear Creek. The expanded bunkhouse, now named **St. Mark's**, is the oldest area building of continuous use.

right: Main Street in 1883 showing the white church that became the Little Bear Saloon

The vicinity of "Evergreen" was named in 1875 by **Dwight Wilmot** who settled there after teaching Lookout Mountain/Genesee children at the first Rockland School in 1873. "**The Post**" was Evergreen's first recorded general store and post office, established in 1877 by **Thomas** (Bergen Park) **Bergen's** son-in-law, **Amos Post**. **Zuni Sign Company** and **Evergreen Inn** now stand at that location.



It took three days to fetch supplies: one to reach Golden, Morrison or Denver, another to purchase or trade goods, and a third day to return. According to historian **Mary Helen Crain**, author of **Evergreen, Colorado**, early settlers gathered on Saturday at the general store. "As many as a dozen teams might be drawn up to the store—even a horse or two patiently waiting for its rider to fill his saddle bag. Saturday was a swap as well as shop day. A dozen eggs could be exchanged for a pound of coffee, a couple of pounds of fresh churned butter for five pounds of sugar. Even a load of lumber could be traded."



Evergreen Hotel, about 1910

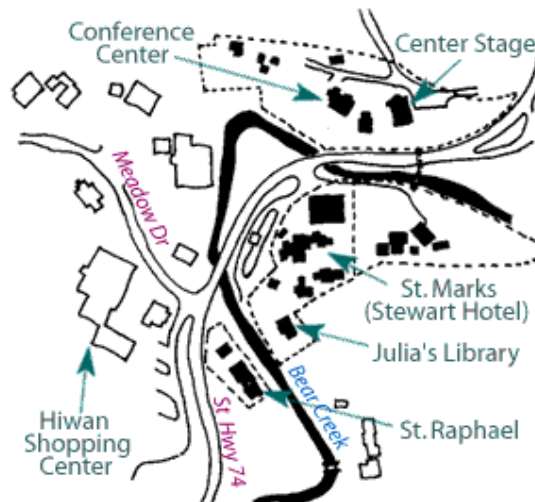
While settlers struggled to make ends meet, some of Colorado's wealthy and powerful visited to camp, hike, fish, picnic and paddle canoes. Colorado's second Territorial Governor, **John Evans**, and Governor **Sam Elbert** established summer colonies along Upper Bear Creek in Clear Creek County as early as 1868. "Main Street" Evergreen was the closest "town."

Evergreen's Historic District

The first settlement has been preserved as the "Evergreen Historic District" listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The first "Main Street" surrounds today's Episcopal Church of Transfiguration, north and south of Hwy 74, at today's Meadow Drive. The road followed Bear Creek around Sheep's Head Hill, past today Highland Haven Inn. (The hairpin curve caused so many accidents that State Highway 74 was cut through the Hill at Meadow Drive in 1958.)

In 1873, **Robert Stewart** purchased and expanded the original 1860 bunkhouse by attaching cabins moved from other locations. He catered to summer tourists as early as 1874. **Stewart's Hotel**

competed with homesteader **Jasper Babcock** who rented rustic summer cabins as early as 1884 and operated the Babcock Hotel and Tavern on the west side of Bear Creek. In 1880, Evergreen was listed as a small settlement of 100 full-time residents. A reliable Bear Creek stage coach service from Morrison to Evergreen was established for summer tourists in 1890.



left: St. Mark's, circa 1874

The village was nearly destroyed on July 24, 1896 by a flood that took out seven of nine bridges crossing Bear Creek from Evergreen to Morrison where tributaries gather to enter the plains. In 1897, the historic district began to support the Episcopal Summer Conference.

After camping along Bear Creek in the 1890s, wealthy Civil War widow, Mary **Neosho Williams**, and her physician daughter, **Josepha "Dr. Jo,"** acquired land with a log structure. They hired master carpenter Jock Spence to expand the structure for summer visits of extended family. After Dr. Jo married an Episcopal priest, **Canon Charles Winfred Douglas** in 1896, the homestead was expanded with more buildings and house tents for "**Camp Neosho**" (now preserved by JeffCo Open Space as The Hiwan Homestead).

Canon Douglas achieved worldwide acclaim for his religious musical transcriptions and compositions. Beginning in 1898, Episcopalians came to Evergreen from across the country to enjoy a summer retreat and liturgical music seminars. The **Evergreen Church Music Conference** thrived every summer until 1996 when it was moved to Winter Park.

In 1897, the **Babcock Hotel & Tavern** became **St. Raphael's Retreat**. **Stewart's Hotel** became **St. Mark's Mission Church of the Transfiguration** in 1899. The hotel sheltered Conference participants and the dining room became a chapel on Sundays.

The 23 historic buildings on seven-acres became "**Evergreen Conference Historic District**" when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The buildings on the "lower campus" (south and west of Bear Creek) surrounding the **Episcopal Church of Transfiguration** (built in 1964) continue to be utilized by the diocese.

St. Mark's has been a bunkhouse, hotel, dormitory, church and vicarage, the Evergreen Players' "**Little Log Theater**," and offices for the **Colorado Philharmonic Orchestra**, **University of the Wilderness** and today's Church. The Historic Preservation Board of the Church of Transfiguration applied for and received grants totaling \$350,000 since 1993 to restore and preserve St. Mark's. The Bell Tower was built by **Jock Spence** in 1911 and was restored by Army Corps of Engineer volunteers in 1979.



Dr. Frederick Bancroft purchased 2400 acres of land from Evergreen to Kittredge for a summer home and ranch in 1871. The summer home, guest house and outbuildings were donated to the Conference in 1923. The buildings housed the Episcopal Bishop, instructors and attendees. The **Bancroft House** now shelters the **Evergreen Christian Outreach** for area church volunteers to provide short-term assistance for people in difficult circumstances.

left: "The Post" circa 1915, is said now to be the Evergreen Inn

Miss Julia Brewster Douglas, sister of Canon Douglas, retired in Evergreen after a lengthy Newark teaching career. She rented a Main Street store front to establish **Evergreen's first "public" library** in 1917. Jock Spence constructed a stone building for her library above St. Mark's in 1921. By 1923, Miss Julia had gathered 4,000 books. By 1935, there were 12,000 volumes in her library.

After Miss Julia died at the age of 81 in 1936, the **Sisters of St. Mary** (who lived at St. Raphael's house), continued to operate the library until 1943 when **Olive King** cared for it at her home. JeffCo built Evergreen's first government-funded public library at the junction of Buffalo Park Road and Highway 73 in 1952. It was replaced by a much larger facility in 1992. The 1952 building is now utilized by JeffCo, including Sheriff Deputies.

The Historic District Upper Campus continues to serve the community. **The Hart House**, built north and above Bear Creek in 1920, became the Evergreen Conference Center when the **Attachment Center** purchased it in 1993. The Conference Center is utilized today for community events, retreats, seminars, family reunions, wedding receptions and organizational meetings. Rooms at the historic **Williams Lodge** dormitory, have been elegantly renovated for overnight guests.

In 1989, the **Evergreen Chorale** purchased the historic Meeting House, designed for conference worship, pageants and classes. It is today's "**Center Stage**" for performances of the Evergreen Chorale, Evergreen Players, Children's Chorale and visiting performing groups.

Evergreen Lake becomes Denver's "Crown Jewel"

It was inevitable for an area as enchanting as Bear Creek Canyon to become irresistible once discovered. In 1901, the Denver Republican reported Fourth of July fireworks for five to six miles along Lower and Upper Bear Creek.

The summer colonies of Denver's elite helped convince city voters to approve a tax to create a **Mountain Park System** in 1912. Denver businessmen explored JeffCo's foothills in 1910 and 1911 and turned their recommendations over to the son of **Frederick Law Olmsted** (see: [Historical Perspective](#)) in 1912. The Evergreen area was featured often by Denver newspapers and the Municipal Facts magazine. A Rocky Mountain News headline reported "Bear Creek Fast Becoming One of Denver's Great Show Places." Resorts were "springing up" and "handsome homes" were being built.

Roads built by Denver to the park system in Jefferson County from 1914-1920 attracted so many visitors that the original beauty of the area seemed threatened. The non-profit Mountain Parks Protective Association was formed in 1925 to manage Evergreen's fluctuating population, from 500 year-round to 5,000 during the summer. The MPPA was funded by homeowner and business "members" (until the JeffCo Sheriff established a satellite headquarters in Evergreen in 1974).

Harry Sidles, a wealthy auto dealer from Nebraska, built a summer home along Bear Creek for his family in 1914. He purchased a 500-cabin plat in 1916 and built the glamorous **Troutdale-in-the-Pines** resort in 1920. Sidles built a golf course on 17 acres and clubhouse (designed by J.J. Benedict, serving today as Keys on the Green restaurant) in 1924. Sidles encouraged Denver to purchase the **Dedisse Ranch** for its Mountain Park system for Evergreen Lake and Dedisse Park.

Olmsted's 1914 mountain parks master plan did not include the Evergreen Dam and Lake. It was proposed by Denver's manager of improvements, **Charles Vail**, who worked with the municipal water staff to plan a dam and lake for recreation—fishing, boating, ice skating and golf. The intent was to make Bear Creek Canyon "one of the outstanding tourist resorts in the Front Range" within a mile of the **Troutdale Hotel**."

Evergreen Lake covers some of the land homesteaded by **Julius and Mary Ann Dedisse** who migrated from Nancy, France in the early 1860s. The lush meadow of wild flowers and native grasses produced 150 tons of hay each season. Evergreeners competed with teams from Golden, Idaho Springs and the Troutdale staff on a baseball field in the meadow.

Denver acquired most of the 420-acre **Jerome** (son of Julius) **Dedisse Ranch** by condemnation in 1919. After the dam was constructed to form the lake in 1928, Sidles deeded the golf course to Denver with the contingency that it always remain a golf course. The Dedisse family retained a two-acre site that became **Lakepoint Center**.



right: Ice Carnival at Evergreen, circa 1939

The original sod-roofed log Lakehouse was constructed in 1932-33 by the Civil Conservation Corps. The first **Evergreen Ice Carnival** was organized in 1939.

Electricity from the dam (and later water treatment for residential taps) was managed by **Colorado Central Power** until 1962 when **Public Service Company** acquired the facilities. A long and complex series of negotiations ended with acquisition of water treatment facilities by **Evergreen Metropolitan District**. The dam was strengthened in 1980. From 1986 to 1990, 640,000 cubic feet of sediment was dredged from the lake to provide 880-acre feet of water storage.

Denver leased the property to Evergreen Metro District who leased it to **Evergreen Parks and Recreation** in 1982. Jefferson County Open Space funded nearly half of the \$1 million planning and construction costs for the new **Lakehouse** in 1992 for EPRD to own and manage on land leased from Denver. EPRD has developed a wonderful trail around the lake. Today's state/county plan for Hwy 73/74 improvements (at the light) includes extending the trail under the intersection bridge for pedestrians to enter "Main Street."

Evergreen Lake is the "Crown Jewel" of **Denver's Mountain Park** system and the most appreciated land use by locals. As drivers descend Evergreen Parkway toward Main Street, the lake sublimely introduces the "Heart of Evergreen."

Eddie Ott's by the Lake

Today's **Lakepoint Shopping Center** replaced a glamorous restaurant built by **Eddie Ott** in 1938. The popular night spot with a view of Evergreen Lake attracted locals and visitors to dance to big bands, including **Tommy Dorsey** and **Lawrence Welk**. There was a weekly Cowboy Night, monthly Western hoe-downs, annual parades and other events that flourished until Eddie enlisted to serve the military in World War II.

According to historian **Betty Moynihan**, Eddie Ott's fit Arthur Chapman's description of the Real West: "Where there is more of singing and less of sighing. Where there is more of giving and less of buying, And a man makes friends without half trying." When Eddie returned after the war, he became the manager of **Mount Vernon Country Club**.

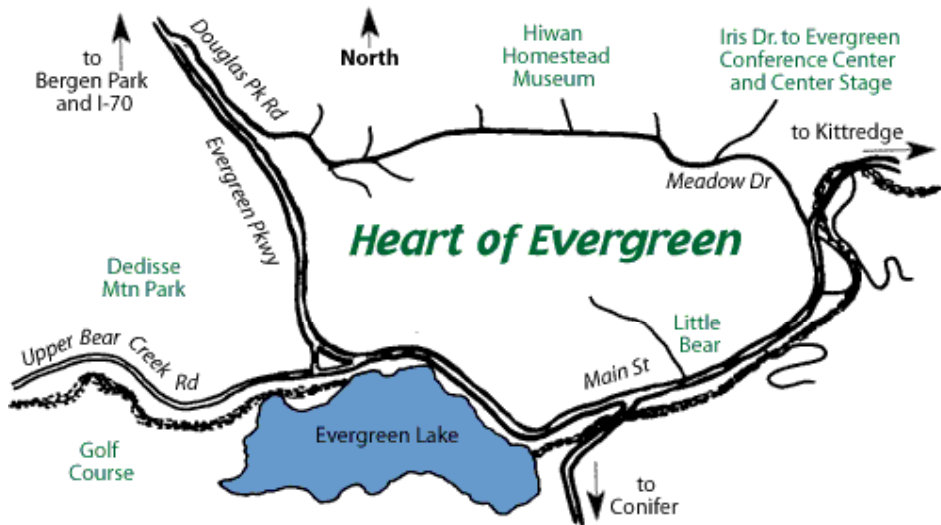
Some of the restaurants that filled Eddie Ott's space after 1944 were: **Big Bear, James Gang, Waterworks, Lakeshore Inn, Evergreen-by-the-Lake** and **Million Dollar Cactus Rose**. The medical **Lakepoint Center** was built at this site in 1977. It was upgraded and expanded in 1986 for retail stores and offices. Many psychotherapists continue to office on the upper levels.

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Evergreen "Main Street" – An Eclectic Mix of Historic, Remodeled and New

Fire swept through seven business structures and four homes on November 10, 1926. First discovered at 3:45 a.m. in the E.R. Riel Mercantile Store, the telephone operator notified every Evergreen resident who formed a bucket brigade from Bear Creek. A stiff breeze fanned the flames that destroyed J.J. Baxter pharmacy, a butcher shop, barber shop, restaurant, four residences and two vacant buildings owned by John Ross of Morrison.



In response to the devastation, Denver city and regional planner and architect S.R. DeBoer designed a "Main Street" business district appropriate for Evergreen's mountain setting. But the frontier-culture land owners refused to cooperate. Most of the buildings were independently replaced in 1927.

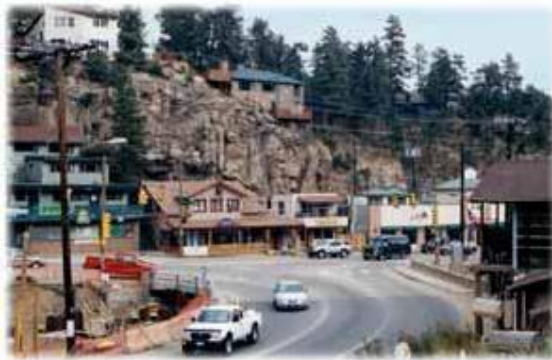


left: proposed "Heart of Evergreen" Illustration by architect S.R. DeBoer, 1927

The new "fire-proof" Riel Supply Co. building, originally Luther's 1896 General Store, later housed a grocery store, Evergreen Trading Post, and other enterprises, including the Round-Up Grill in the 1990s. The Trust recently helped renovate the building with business owners of Evergreen Gallery and SOHO Evergreen.

Much of the downtown is owned today by Ross-Lewis Trust, which is managed by attorney Leo Bradley. The Trust replaced Evergreen Transfer & Storage with the community's first bank, Evergreen State Bank in 1959. Several changes in bank ownership ended in 1981 when locals took control of Evergreen National Bank.

Below the dam and east of the water works was the Liston Lodge, a popular hotel for tourists. Dr. Hunt's office and a movie theatre of the 1940s gave way to a Wellness Center in the 1970s. It was remodeled for shops and offices and named Bear Creek Mall in the 80s. Most of the "mall," Davidson Insurance and Sheppard Real Estate were recently removed to make way for 74/73 intersection improvements.



left: Evergreen's Hiway 73/74 Intersection

The store fronts on the east side of County Highway 73 and south of State Highway 74 have been utilized for a variety of shops and offices, including a U.S. Post Office during the 1940s. Two art galleries, an antique store, log home builder and web designers now utilize this two-story historic building. Lee Shortt has operated Lee's Barber Shop at the same street level store front for 34 years.

The Evergreen Plaza, above the intersection and south of SH 74, is a 3-story, shopping & office "village" built in the 1950s, accessed off Plettner Lane. With faith that intersection improvements and a pedestrian trail under the bridge will preserve a "village" atmosphere, owners of Alpine Pastries recently relocated there from the Safeway Center north of Main. Today's Baskin Robbins replaced a Conoco station north of the creek in 1985.

Evergreen's downtown "anchor"

The primary social, economic and cultural building of Evergreen's Main Street is now known as the famous (some say infamous) saloon, the Little Bear. The core building was initially an Episcopal Church named St. Mark's-in-the-Wilderness, constructed near Evergreen's Cemetery in 1875. The building was deeded to a Methodist Church that moved it to the present location in the 1890s.

right: the Little Bear Saloon today



Legend says the most lucrative point-of-sale for bootleggers during Prohibition (1919-33) was behind the Little Bear when it was Prince McCracken's Drugstore and the Round Up Dance Hall and later the Red Ram. Some of the original church structure is said to remain at the rear of the Little Bear building.

Since 1971, the Little Bear business has been owned and operated by Ken Jeronimus. The building is owned by Ross Grimes who has operated the Evergreen Crafters since 1948 (in one of the many buildings owned by the Ross-Lewis Trust). The Evergreen Hotel historically housed residents and tourists, employees of the Hamilton Rustic Tea Room, "a certain group of Ladies," an antique store and other assorted enterprises. Ken and Judy Jeronimus rebuilt the Evergreen Hotel in 1998. The Ice House Bar & Coffee Shop offers a smoke-free environment with elegant historic ambiance.

right: Mule Deer at St. Mark's today



A few hundred feet above the Little Bear, off Douglas Park Road, was the Trail Movie Theatre that operated from the 1940s until an electronic games parlor took over in the 1970s and the Coal Mine Dragon restaurant. In the mid 1990s, the interior of the building was gutted and rebuilt to become the Thuy Hoa restaurant. Chef Hoa provides exquisite French-inspired food of Vietnam. Restored movie theatre seats are available just inside the front door.

Evergreen's Parking Lot

The central parking area along Bear Creek was first built in the 1940s for Evergreen's Thrifty Market. Community volunteers built the first firehouse in the middle of the parking area in 1950. When Evergreen Food King replaced the Thrifty in 1965, the firehouse was moved to the Episcopal diocese to house participants of the Evergreen Conference. It has been affectionately called "Holy Smoke" ever since.

Today's Lauren Brooks interior design store replaced the Rockin' I Western Wear store. The building was the first Public Service office that was renovated when the utility company relocated in north evergreen in 1986. The supermarket building was converted to retail store fronts and a restaurant, now Rapids Bar & Grill, that offers creekside dining.

Further east along the north bank of Bear Creek, Creekside Cellars Winery and Deli recently replaced the original Olde's Texaco, established in 1921. Herman Olde's Texaco is the oldest family business in Evergreen. He played violin at weddings and dances at Prince McCracken's Dance Hall and allowed local families to "charge" gas and oil until during the winter until tourism profits began to flow during the summer. He also sold sportswear, shoes and workcloths at the site. His sons and grandsons now operate the business near Bryant Drive off Evergreen Parkway.

Residential Growth

In 1941, the WPA Colorado Guide Book described Evergreen as "the center of a region of hotels, resorts and summer residences. The town is built along the narrow, tree-fringed canyon, and the highway constitutes its only street."

By 1944, there were 177 party-line telephones operating for an estimated year round Evergreen population of 500. Long-timer Hal Davidson remembers the small town telephone service. "I'd ring the girls on the switchboard and tell them where I'd be for lunch in case anyone needed to reach me." The first Evergreen Rodeo Parade marched down Main Street in 1947. Davidson helped establish the fire district in 1949. Ross Grimes was the primary founder of the water and sanitation district in 1950.

As more people moved to Evergreen, shop owners and chains began to abandon Main Street for new facilities at Meadow Drive and in North Evergreen.

Hiwan Village Shopping Center at Meadow Drive and Hwy 74 was established in 1958 after the state straightened Highway 74 by cutting through Sheep's Head Hill. The U.S. Post Office and Evergreen's first Safeway Supermarket were built there in 1961. When Safeway and the Post Office relocated in north Evergreen in 1973, the supermarket was converted to two floors of offices and retail.

*right: Rodeo Parade and Festivities
on Main Street*



Today's Hardware store business on Meadow Drive began in the historic red "Hammond Hardware" building on Main Street, west of the telephone building. When built in 1924, it was the "Evergreen Transfer" for freight hauled to Evergreen from Denver. The company also sold lumber, feed, ice, coal and hardware items.

In 1941, Paul Hammond purchased the business and moved it to the Hereford Showplace Barn built by Darst Buchanan in 1948. The red "Hardware" building on Main was recently purchased by Ken Jeronimous who recently rebuilt the Evergreen Hotel and owns the Little Bear business.

Ted and Kise La Montagne purchased The Hardware Store in 1976 and renovated an adjacent bunkhouse for retail kitchenware and home accessories named Mountain Home. Both businesses continue to thrive within the historic buildings by providing "small-town" personal service and prices that are competitive with the big box chain stores.

The 3-story, Showbarn Plaza building was constructed in 1972. Different restaurants have always occupied the main floor, from "My Friends" to today's Rib Crib Sports Lounge owned by Evergreen native Troy Tyus. The bar seats 55 and non-smoking dining room seats 60.



left: Ice Skating on frozen Evergreen Lake

Hiwan Homestead Museum and Heritage Grove

Camp Neosho, the Williams/Douglas family compound, was purchased in 1938 by Texas entrepreneur Darst Buchanan who named it Hiwan Homestead. In 1974, the Jefferson County Historical Society, as part of its campaign to persuade the County to purchase the site as an historical museum, applied for and received designation with National Register of Historic Places. JeffCo Open Space purchased the Homestead in 1976 and later acquired "Heritage Grove" for outdoor exhibits and events.

*at right: Hiwan Homestead
Museum circa 1972*

JCHS has a contract agreement with the County to accept the responsibility for the programs and collections of the museum. The collaboration of a government jurisdictions with the non-profit corporation has resulted in a lively and vital interpretation of Colorado heritage.

Excellent exhibits and events, an ongoing education program with JeffCo Schools, and tours of the property are managed by Open Space staff and JCHS volunteers. For current events, call 303-674-6262.



The Evergreen "Community"

The unincorporated Evergreen area received the federal 80439 zip code in 1963. "Main Street" is the geographic center of the vast Evergreen Fire Protection District territory of 140 square miles and 78 square miles of Evergreen Parks and Recreation District. The eclectic mix of downtown historic and remodeled retail, restaurant and office buildings are blessed by a tradition of hardworking community volunteers that serve over 150 organizations.

Heart of Evergreen improvements demonstrate how citizens manage their "community" without city government. The Evergreen Metro District and Evergreen Parks & Recreation District (Colorado Special Districts) established a park below the dam and placed a sculpture to honor Ross Grimes in the 1990s. Evergreen Garden Club (founded in 1960s) volunteers designed, planted and continuously maintain gardens below the dam. Evergreen Naturalists Audubon Society volunteers provide monthly educational lectures and monitor the area in support of healthy flora and fauna.

Volunteers formed Art for the Mountain Community in 1995 to display original sculpture in the "Heart of Evergreen." The art remains on display for one year, when new exhibits are selected. After "The Foreman", a sculpture of a cowboy carrying a newborn calf was displayed at the Hiwan Homestead Museum, community donations acquired the bronze sculpture to remain at the site.

*"The Foreman" sculpture
at the Hiwan Homestead Museum*



This community service tradition has guided the transformation from a remote glamorous hideaway to today's funky Main Street of an upscale residential area. Most locals are satisfied with Colorado Special Districts, Denver Mountain Parks, JeffCo Open Space and other Jefferson County services for basic "government." They would rather depend on volunteer neighbors than pay higher taxes for more layers of potentially unresponsive government. The Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce campaign captures the community spirit: "Everything's in Evergreen."

History sources: Ruth Brookfield, "Church of the Transfiguration" 1899-1999; Mary Helen Crain, "Evergreen, Colorado" 1969; Connie Fahnestock, "From Camp Neosho to the Hiwan Homestead" 1985; Barbara & Gene Sternberg, "Evergreen, Our Mountain Community" 1987; "Evergreen Historic District" application for National Register of Historic Places, 1979; "Historic Evergreen Downtown Walking Tour" Canyon Courier, 1999; "Tourism in Evergreen; Where Have All the Tourists Gone" by Vanita Cosper, Historically Jeffco, published by the JeffCo Historical Commission 1994; "The Evergreen Lake" Denver Municipal Facts, Sept/Oct 1925