

## Under one roof

### Nonprofits did well with old federal building

February 25, 2007

Two Durango nonprofits have joined forces to buy the old federal building on Camino del Rio. In doing so they have not only found a space for themselves, but for several other organizations as well. The combination is a good one.

The Durango Adult Education Center and Southwest Conservation Corps went together to pay restaurateur Jean-Pierre Bleger \$4.875 million for the building. The sale was finalized Feb. 9, and as part of the deal Bleger and his family will donate \$400,000 to the nonprofits.

Both organizations will relocate to their new building, the education center from its present home in the old Mason School at Fourth Avenue and 12th Street and the conservation corps from its space in the Durango Tech Center. They will be joined in their new location by offices of Pueblo Community College, the University of Denver and Fort Lewis College.

Those organizations may see some increased efficiencies in that most are now leasing more space than they need simply because of what had been available. Their offices will now be better sized to their needs.

Rents, however, are not expected to be lower overall. The real advantages come in terms of enhanced stability, greater coordination among the various organizations and the cooperation made possible by having such a fertile mix of educational groups under one roof.

It will be a full-spectrum educational center. The Southwest Conservation Center puts young people to work doing jobs such as erosion control, tree planting, trail building and exotic plant removal. The Durango Adult Education Center offers continuing education, including general equivalency degrees. Fort Lewis, of course, is a publicly owned, four-year liberal arts college, while DU is a private university offering advanced degrees.

Working together, those institutions can complement each other. And how better to work together than to work side by side?

With a building of their own, the conservation corps and education center can also focus their efforts on their missions without worrying what might happen to the building they rent. Their tenants, too, can rest easily knowing that their landlords want them - not just for their rent, but for their complementary goals as well. In Durango's commercial real estate market that certainty has great value, and comes only with ownership.

For its part, the community gets the benefit of more and better continuing education. That has to translate into better careers, increased opportunities and an overall better Durango.

---

*Contents copyright ©, the Durango Herald. All rights reserved.*

## Loans allow nonprofits to buy building

Low-interest federal assistance may finance education center

March 4, 2007

By **Chuck Slothower** | *Herald Staff Writer*

Harry Bruell, executive director of the Southwest Conservation Corps, has said that it is almost impossible for most nonprofits to buy commercial property in Durango. So how did the conservation corps, along with the Durango Adult Education Center, purchase the \$4.875 million former federal building from restaurateur Jean-Pierre Bleger?

The short answer: loans.

After forming a nonprofit called the Southwest Institute for Education and Conservation, the Durango groups closed the sale Feb. 9 with the help of a \$4.5 million bridge loan through First National Bank of Durango, said Paulette Church, director of the Adult Education Center.

The groups have qualified for a low-interest direct loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development program and hope to use that for permanent financing, Church said. They are waiting to learn how much they will get.

Church and others envision a regional education center in the 42,593-square-foot building at 701 Camino del Rio. In addition to the Adult Education Center and conservation corps, the building will bring together Pueblo Community College and the University of Denver - already tenants - and Fort Lewis College.

The Fort Lewis office will ease students' transition from PCC or help them complete a general educational development test, or GED, Church said. The University of Denver will continue to offer its master's program in social work in the building.

Onsite child care also will be provided, Church said, and the groups will share conference rooms, Internet access and copy machines.

"It's important to know that the heart of this is these organizations coming together so they're working together for students and our community," Church said. "It's bigger than the building."

[Click here to send an email to the author](#)

---

Contents copyright ©, the Durango Herald. All rights reserved.

## Nonprofits dish out \$4.8M for building

Restaurateur sells former federal space

February 20, 2007

By **Chuck Slothower** | *Herald Staff Writer*

A pair of Durango nonprofits has completed the purchase of the former federal building at 701 Camino del Rio from restaurateur Jean-Pierre Bleger.

The Durango Adult Education Center and Southwest Conservation Corps paid \$4.875 million for the building, where they intend to create a regional education center. The sale was completed Feb. 9.

Bleger, owner of Jean-Pierre Bakery and Tea Room at Main Avenue and College Drive, purchased the building for \$2.8 million in 2002.

The adult education center will move into the building from its offices at Fourth Avenue and 12th Street, and the conservation corps will move from its office at 120 Rock Point Drive in west Durango.

For the conservation corps, the move presents several advantages, said Executive Director Harry Bruell.

"It's almost impossible for most nonprofits to buy something in Durango," Bruell said. "This gives us some permanent stability for our organization."

The adult-education center and conservation corps formed a nonprofit called the Southwest Institute for Education and Conservation to purchase the 42,593-square-foot building.

They will share it with several other educators, including Pueblo Community College and the University of Denver.

"Many of these organizations have been paying for space that they don't use all the time," Bruell said. "By sharing space in this building, it's going to be more cost-effective for all of us."

The proximity of so many educational groups also will create "synergy," he said.

The Southwest Conservation Corps employs mostly young people in fuels reduction, erosion control, tree planting, trail building, fencing and exotic-plant removal.

The Durango Adult Education Center provides continuing-education services, including aid in obtaining a general-equivalency degree. A representative could not be reached for comment Monday.

As part of the sale, Bleger; his wife, Rebecca; and their three children will donate \$400,000 to the nonprofits to show support for continuing education.

"It's a good thing to do for people who want to go back to school," said Bleger.

A longtime investor in local commercial properties, Bleger said he was working on a \$10 million commercial investment but declined to talk specifics because the deal had not been finalized.

Since his Winble Corp. completed Chapter 11 bankruptcy procedures, Bleger has formed a company called Bourbonneux to serve as a vehicle for future investments.

"It's the life of a business person," Bleger said. "Sometimes it goes up and sometimes it goes down, but this year is looking up."

[Click here to send an email to the author](#)

---

Contents copyright ©, the Durango Herald. All rights reserved.

## Two education organizations grow into federal building

November 25, 2006

By Dale Rodebaugh | *Herald Staff Writer*

The Durango Adult Education Center and the Southwest Conservation Corps, which prepare clients for higher education and the job market, intend to create a regional education center in the building they're buying on Camino del Rio.



JERRY McBRIDE/Herald

Paulette Church, executive director of the Durango Adult Education Center, stands in front of the old federal building at 701 Camino del Rio on Friday.

"We'll begin phasing in late next spring," Paulette Church, director of adult education, said Friday of plans to move into the former federal building at 701 Camino del Rio.

Adult education officials, who now lease space at the Mason Center and five classrooms at Park Elementary School to accommodate their students, began looking for new quarters four years ago, Church said. The conservation corps began its search three years ago.

Now, the organizations expect their purchase of the former federal building to close in January. Under the agreement, the Winble Corporation will return \$425,000 of the \$4.925 million purchase price, Church said. The property has 160 parking spaces.

Pueblo Community College, which leases one-third of the building's 42,000 square feet, will remain a tenant - as will the University of Denver - in what will be named the Durango Regional Learning Center, Church said.

San Juan Basin Technical College plans to move to the new education center from its present location in the Centennial Center. The college is based in Cortez with a Durango branch.

State agencies - the Division of Water Resources and the Division of Minerals and Geology - are scheduled to remain in the building until their leases expire, Church said. At that time, space needs for educational organizations will be evaluated, she said.

Church was hired in 1999 to lead adult education in Durango. She arrived from Waldorf College, a small, private institution in Forest City, Iowa, where she was a professor and director of its Academic Achievement Center.

A regional education center could create a lifelong learning continuum - from grade school through college, Church said. She explained:

The Durango Adult Education Center helps 750 adults a year get their General Equivalency (high school) Degree, master English or become proficient in fields such as computer technology.

The organization also mentors parents, helping them prepare for unfamiliar situations such as a parent-teacher conference.

As part of adult education, the center provides child care for about 125 children a year - children of the adults studying there.

The Southwest Conservation Corps trains and employs teenagers and young adults in conservation projects and fire suppression - education that can lead to federal or state forest jobs.

Last year, the agency employed 300 young people, ages 14 to 25 - twice as many as the year before.

National statistics reveal the importance of having general-equivalency education, advanced education and supporting services in close proximity, Church said.

In Alamosa, where Trinidad Junior College is next door to Adams State College or where a GED program is on a college campus, 95 percent of GED recipients enroll in college.

Where advanced education is not readily available, only 60 percent of adults who get their GED continue their education, she said.

In addition to evaluating current interest in leasing space in the Durango Regional Learning Center - the University of Denver wants

to offer more than its graduate program in social work - adult education officials are discussing with Adams State College the possibility of offering a range of graduate programs in Durango, Church said.

The center will offer day, night and weekend child care as part of its parent support, she said. Forty students drop out of Pueblo Community College annually for lack of child care, she said.

*daler@durangoherald.com*

---

*Contents copyright ©, the Durango Herald. All rights reserved.*