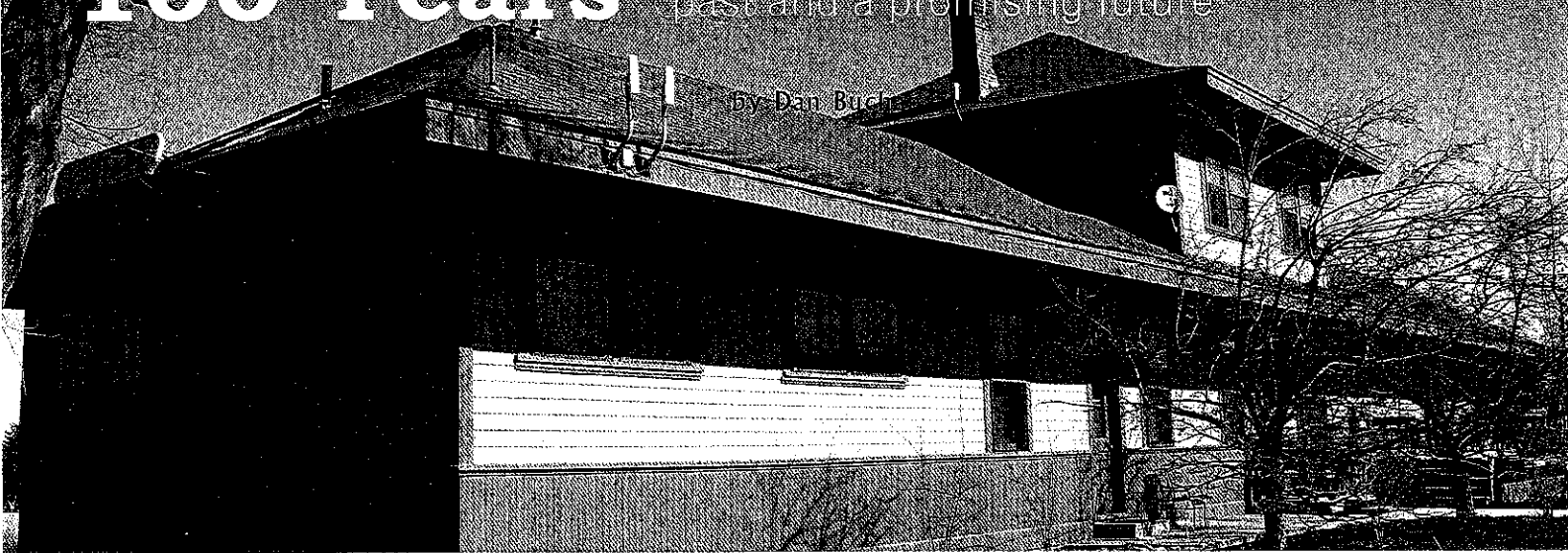


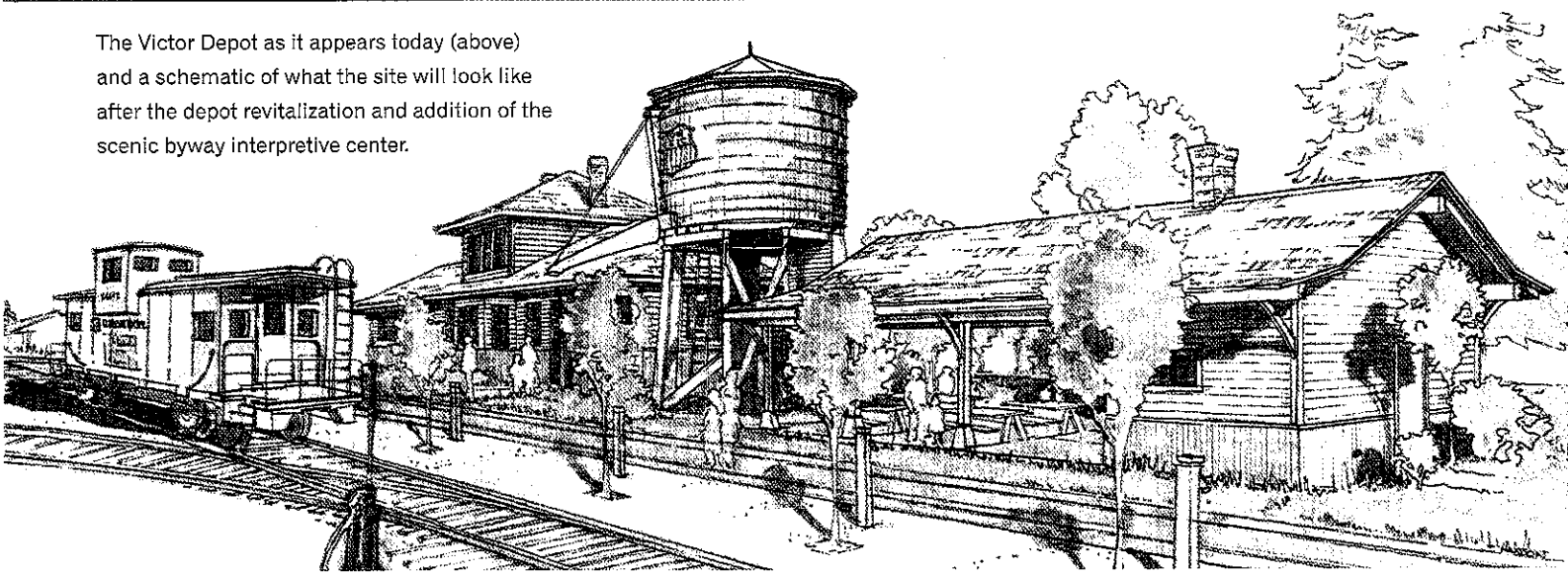
The First and Next 100 Years

Victor Railroad Depot has a storied past and a promising future

By Dan Bucher



The Victor Depot as it appears today (above) and a schematic of what the site will look like after the depot revitalization and addition of the scenic byway interpretive center.



1913: Victor Depot constructed; first train into Victor

1916-1955: Jackson Hole cattle ranchers drive cattle over Teton Pass to Victor railhead

1917: First sled-dog race train from Victor for races between Ashton and West Yellowstone

1926: Dude Ranch Association created, generating significant passenger increases through Victor

1928: Expansion of passenger waiting room with larger restrooms and showers

Victor Depot's 100th birthday in 2013 is worthy of celebrating for the significant way the structure has served the community during its first one hundred years, as well as for the exciting plans in store for its future.

From 1913 through 2013, this crown jewel of Teton Valley architecture has served as a railroad depot, office and light industrial space, and residential apartments. Entering its second century, the depot will become the cornerstone of a revitalized downtown district that will preserve the city's unique cultural history, provide space for community uses, and support economic growth and development.

Origins

By the early years of the twentieth century, thousands of communities throughout the U.S. had benefited from the arrival of the railroad. Its capacity to move people and goods faster, farther, and more efficiently than a horse, previously the fastest means of transportation, promised greater prosperity and an easier life.

Victor wanted in, as did surrounding communities. They got their wish in 1905, when the Union Pacific Railroad (U.P.)—inspired by a trip to Yellowstone National Park taken by its then CEO, E.H. Harriman—created a subsidiary railroad named the Yellowstone Park Railroad Company. Included in the new railroad's plans was a rail line from Idaho Falls to West Yellowstone, as well as a connecting branch line from Ashton to Victor.

Victor's dreams were almost dashed when the railroad announced, after arriving in Driggs in 1912, that there wasn't the need to build farther south. As an incentive, funds were gathered by citizens on

both sides of Teton Pass, including a reported 25 percent match from Jackson Hole residents. This supported the purchase of land for the railroad's right-of-way between Driggs and Victor. The extra funds tipped the scales for completion to Victor—though in fact the rails may have been laid anyway, as the railroad's original 1905 charter showed that was the ultimate plan.

1913–1981

The last spikes were driven on what became known as the Teton Valley Branch, and the first train steamed into Victor on July 1, 1913. Construction of the Victor Railroad Depot followed shortly thereafter,

using lumber brought in from the outside. By this time the Yellowstone Park Railroad Company had been dissolved, and the Oregon Short Line, another subsidiary of the U.P., was the owner, operator, and builder.

The railroad depot became the hub of the community; the central location into and out of which the majority of personal travel, commercial shipping, and news and information from around the world occurred.

The depot's design catered to these multiple needs. It included a passenger waiting room and restrooms at the south end for travelers, and a freight room at the north end for shipments. The depot agent, in charge of all activity there, lived upstairs with his family in a 500-square-foot apartment, and performed his duties from an office located in the center of the first floor.

Total railroad mileage in the U.S. peaked in 1916, and then began to decline. But Victor and the surrounding communities were just getting started enjoying their expanded access to the outside world.

Victor's dreams were almost dashed when the railroad announced there wasn't the need to build farther south.

PHOTOS: TOP, STAFF; ILLUSTRATION, MEGHAN HANSON

1930s–1940s: Valley residents flagged down trains to ride between Victor and Driggs for 10 cents; Union Pacific Railroad advertised Teton/Yellowstone Park packages through Victor

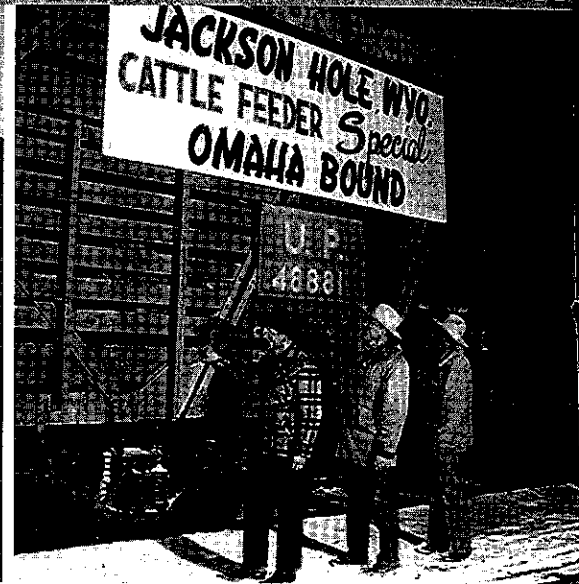
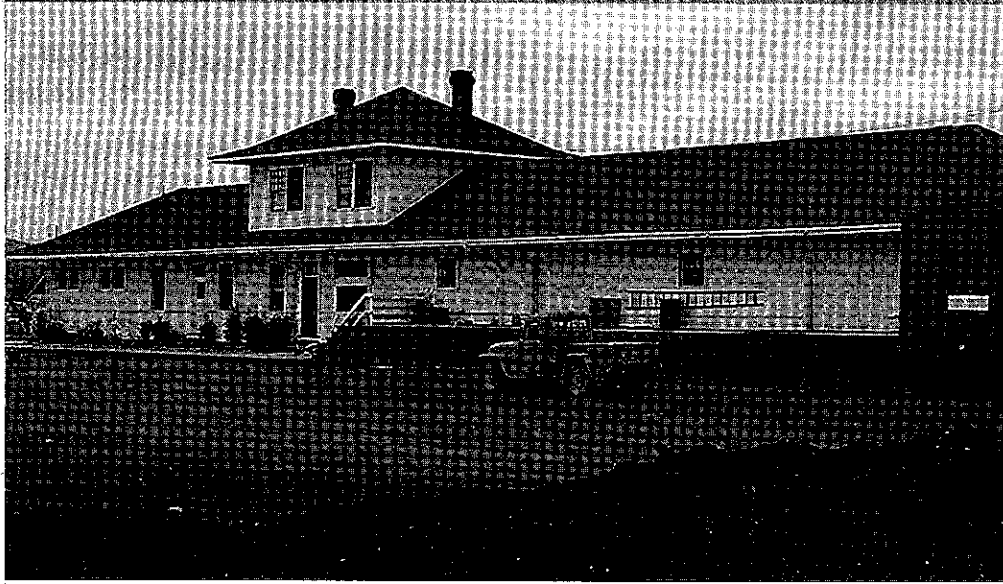
1938: First Ski Train to Victor from Pocatello and Idaho Falls

1940s: Dartmouth College Ski Club in New Hampshire travels to ski on Victor Ski Hill

1959: 50,000-gallon steam engine water storage tank and tower decommissioned

1960: Teton and Driggs depots closed; consolidated into Victor Depot

Teton Valley Transportation



During its heyday, the depot served thousands of travelers, including locals moving up and down the line and to points beyond, skiers bound for the Victor Ski Hill, Jackson Hole dude ranch guests, and tourists visiting from around the world on trains named the *Yellowstone Special*, the *Northwest Special*, and the *Park Special*.

Shipments into Victor included all types of products purchased by families and churches directly or for sale at local businesses, including groceries, hardware, clothing, fuel, farm machinery, construction materials, and even hay during times of drought. Though infrequent, gargantuan pieces of equipment would arrive, such as the six boilers weighing eight tons apiece destined for the Jackson Lake Dam, and cables for the first lifts at Teton Village.

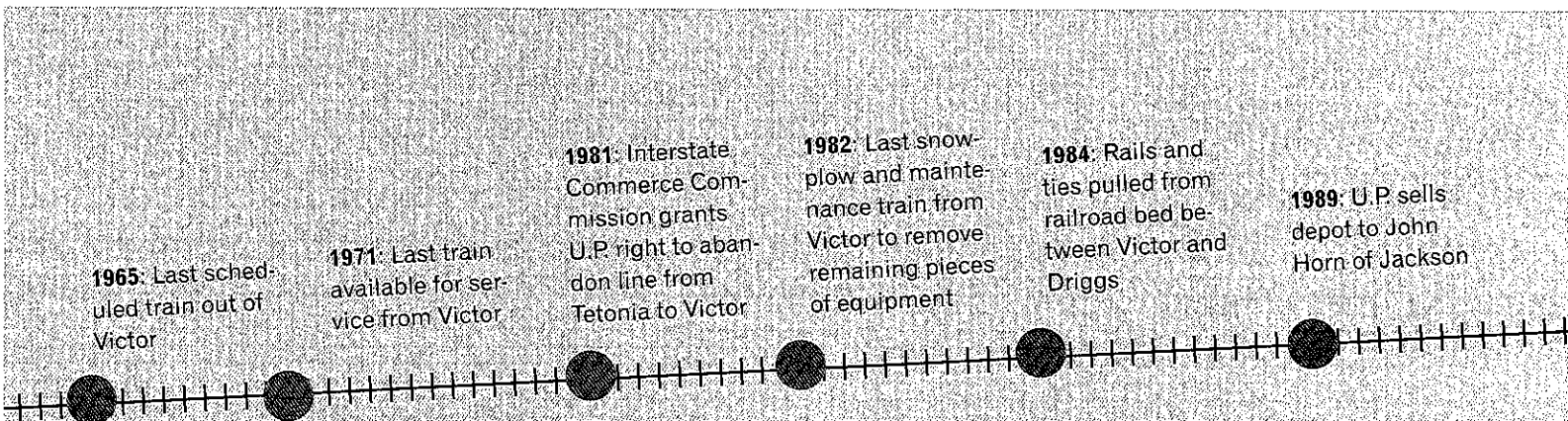
Shipments out included sheep from Teton Valley and cattle from Jackson Hole ranchers, who drove their herds over Teton Pass and stored them in stock pens northwest of the depot. Outbound shipments also in-

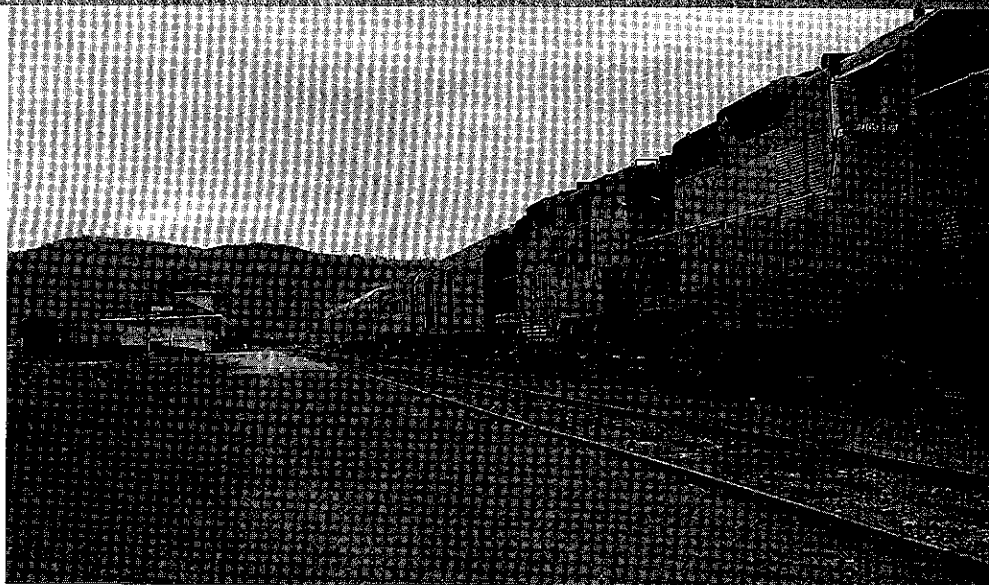
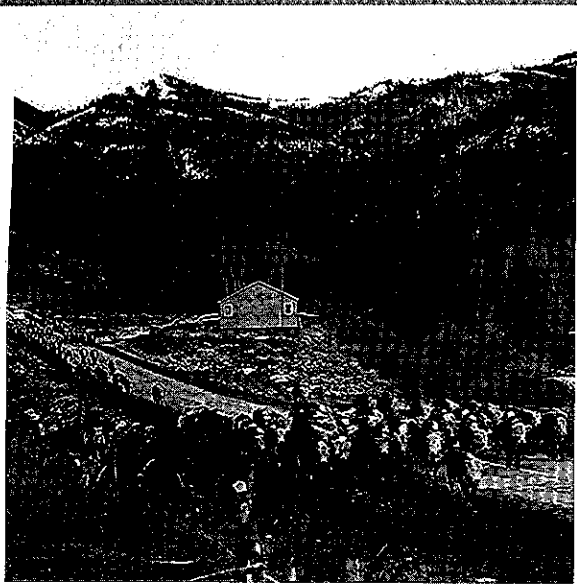
cluded some of the freshest and tastiest peas available in North America, grown in Teton Valley, as well as limestone, lumber, sheep's wool, horses, and cream.

Until the 1950s, mail, newspapers, and magazines were the primary means for staying in touch with national and global happenings, and most of these were brought in by train. For urgent messages, the depot agent could send a Western Union telegram.

Demand for the railroad's services declined in the 1950s, as travelers and shippers began to prefer the convenience and speed of automobiles, trucks, and airplanes. As a way to cut costs and try to remain competitive, the railroad consolidated the Teton and Driggs depots into the Victor Depot in 1960 and reduced the number of scheduled passenger and freight trains. Still, there were not enough local users to keep the line profitable. So, in 1981, the U.P. applied to the Interstate Commerce Commission for the right to abandon the rail line between Victor and Teton. The abandonment was granted.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF E.O. GIBSON/WY4.ORG; COURTESY OF JHSM





From left to right: The depot circa 1960s; outbound shipments from Victor included Jackson Hole cattle and sheep raised in Teton Valley; cattle were driven in herds from Jackson over Teton Pass and stored temporarily in stock pens located near the depot; passenger and freight trains made regular runs into and out of Victor until the mid-1960s.

The Late Twentieth Century

The depot sat vacant for much of the 1980s, until listed for sale by the railroad in 1989. It quickly received multiple offers, including a winning bid from John Horn of Jackson. So began a period of post-railroad, private ownership that continued with the sale to Jim Wurth of Wilson in 1992 and then to John Wasson of Wilson in 1998. Each of these owners appreciated the depot's charms, kept it in a state of good repair, and tried to optimize the return on their investment with its highest and best use.

Perhaps the most notable event during this period of private ownership was the achievement of getting the Victor Railroad Depot formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Occurring on April

27, 1995, the listing came as a result of the efforts of then-owner Jim Wurth. Jim renovated it from office and light industrial space to five apartments in 1993, but continued to work tirelessly, investing tens of thousands of additional dollars to meet the requirements necessary to finally attain National Register designation. In so doing, Jim helped the community recognize what a valuable resource it had. This was exactly in keeping with the spirit of the Historic Places program, which is to support efforts to identify and protect America's significant cultural resources. The depot remains the only building in Victor on the list, and one of only five structures or sites listed in Teton County, Idaho.

Nevertheless, even with such a designation—unless government monies are involved—any private property owner can essentially still do whatever they want with a listed property, including tearing it down.

But the possibility of such a dire outcome for the Victor Depot has been eliminated, thanks to the vision and efforts of Victor's leaders, past and present,

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF JHSM; COURTESY OF E.O. GIBSON/WY4.ORG

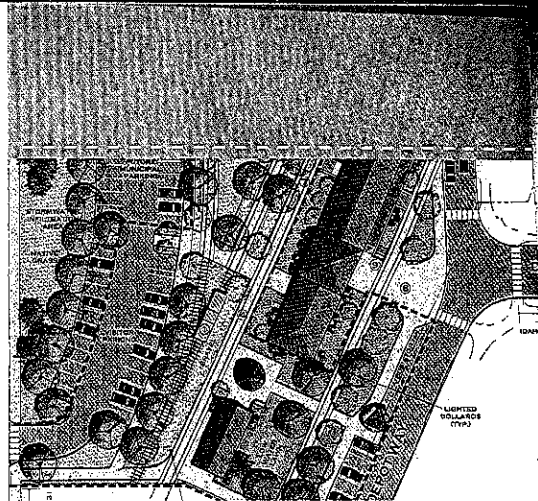
1992: Horn sells depot to Jim Wurth of Wilson; Wurth converts space into five apartments

1995: Wurth earns depot designation on National Register of Historic Places

1997: Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation lays asphalt for rail-trail from Victor to Driggs

1998: Wurth sells depot to John Wasson of Wilson

2011: City of Victor purchases depot from Wasson



and certain citizens. Former mayor Don Thompson supported the creation of an economic development fund for the type of city center the depot could become. Another former mayor, Scott Fitzgerald, subsequently saw the potential for the economic development that City ownership of the depot could provide. Current city planner Bill Knight envisioned cultural preservation and practical uses. And Envision Victor, the landmark visioning tool involving hundreds of citizens, made its mark by identifying as one of its shared "Heart & Soul" values the preservation and recognition of the community's cultural history.

Into the Future

These visions and values began to take a more tangible form when depot owner John Wasson and the City of Victor began to discuss a sale. Their plan included the City getting the depot and the adjacent one-acre lot to the west, while John would split off and retain a portion of the lot to the south.

They agreed on a sale price of \$416,000, and in July 2011 the City formally took title to the two prize proper-

ILLUSTRATION: HARMONY DESIGN AND ENGINEERING

2012: Exterior side-boards and trim painted using official Union Pacific depot colors

Aerial schematic of the planned depot-and-interpretive-center complex.

ties. Funding for the purchase included \$200,000 in the economic development fund started by Mayor Thompson. The difference is being paid back to the City from tenant rental income.

Purchasing the depot in itself was adequate reason to celebrate, but having the foresight to purchase the adjacent lot at the same time was an act of genius. The lot will provide a place to expand the preservation and interpretation of community history, while setting the stage for increased economic development—through the creation of a scenic byway interpretive center constructed next to the depot.

Hats off to Victor, for restored depots have been energizing and revitalizing downtown districts throughout the U.S. for decades. The depot and adjacent interpretive center will provide a tangible connection between the past and present, while providing a foundation for future growth. As a result of the vision and hard work of many, the future is looking very promising for the City of Victor. **TV**

To read a continuation of this story, which includes an in-depth explanation of the future plans for the Victor Depot, go online to www.LifeInTheTetons.com/Teton-Valley-Magazine.

2013: Victor Depot's 100th birthday; projected restoration of original outside loading dock; proposed groundbreaking for scenic byway interpretive center

The First and Next 100 Years

Editor's Note: As promised on page 45 of the Summer 2013 edition of Teton Valley Magazine, this is a continuation of the story that ends on that page.

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DAN BUCHAN



INTO THE FUTURE

The scenic byway interpretive center was the brainchild of Victor city planner Bill Knight. His planning experience gave him first-hand knowledge of the National Scenic Byways Program, which dovetails perfectly with Victor's location. As the depot is adjacent to the 69-mile-long Teton Scenic Byway, which runs from Ashton through Teton Valley to Swan Valley, Knight recognized the opportunity to take advantage of the Byway Program's mission: To provide resources to byway communities, such as Victor, to support unique travel experiences for tourists and to enhance local quality of life.

Working with other City leaders, Knight spearheaded development of the interpretive center concept and initial designs, and followed it up with an application for a grant to the Byways Program. The grant was tactfully presented, illustrating the multiple benefits to locals and tourists, and approved for \$383,000 in May 2012.

The mostly open-air interpretive center will cover the entire space between the depot and Beryl Street. Features will include a cooking and picnic pavilion, public restrooms, parking, and various interpretive plaques and displays highlighting the community's history. References to agricultural and early settlers' experiences will be included, though the emphasis will be on the railroad, including how it linked towns along the west slope of the Tetons before there were good roads—just as the Teton Scenic Byway does now.

The grounds will include professional landscaping, walkways, and a replication of the original railroad double-track alignment, along with the switch that allowed the train's engine to turn around on the wye. A proposed cyclist and pedestrian pathway, located on a portion of one of these original track locations, is envisioned as being one end of the proposed Grand Loop rail-trail between Victor and West Yellowstone.

Subsequent development will include an original Union Pacific caboose that can be entered and explored, as well as a replication of the seventy-five foot high, 50,000-gallon water storage tank and tower used by the earlier steam engines that powered the trains from 1913 through the 1950s.

Efforts will be made to assure that all aspects of the interpretive center's structural components remain architecturally compatible with the original depot design. Groundbreaking is scheduled for this summer (2013).

The scenic byway interpretive center will support economic and community development by extending a more welcoming hand to the thousands of travelers who come through the Victor gateway every year. The multi-purpose facility will invite automobile, bus-tour, and bike-tour travelers to stop, shop, rest, and learn about and enjoy Victor and its many amenities. This will offer a multitude of benefits for area businesses and service providers.

Locals will be encouraged to enjoy the benefits, as well, especially during the busy summer tourist season, by providing visitors from outside the area an opportunity to experience the warmth and hospitality of the valley's citizens, while imparting visitor and other information they'll surely want to know.

The City purchased the depot with the intent of converting it from the present use of apartments to municipal office space that could serve numerous of functions, including offices for city staff or a top-of-the-line educational and meeting facility for local groups. Whatever the final choice, attention will be paid to maintaining interior finishes left over from the early days of the depot. Future interior enhancements will include local themes, such as a professionally constructed HO-scale model train layout depicting landmarks of the Teton Valley Branch.

In the meantime, improvements will continue to be made to the depot. A fresh coat of paint featuring original U.P. depot colors was applied to the main exterior sideboards and trim in fall 2012. Additionally, the porch that wraps around the east and north sides will soon be restored to the original loading-dock design, while maintaining the functionality of a deck for users of the building. Wooden planks resembling railroad ties, eight feet long and eight inches square, will be used for the loading-dock surface, providing an authentic finish. Wire railing and an original ramp will add safety and additional authenticity, while allowing wheelchair access. A \$5,000 grant was recently applied for and awarded to the City by the Idaho Heritage Trust to support the cost of this improvement.

Until the City moves in, the depot will continue to serve the tenants that call the old depot home. A city-contracted property manager oversees the day-to-day and ongoing needs of the City and the depot's tenants.

Additional funding for successive phases of the scenic byway interpretive center and future depot improvements could come from local and regional foundations, capital campaigns, public donations through partnership with local nonprofits, and municipal capital funds. There is even discussion about creating an urban renewal district. The depot originally was a gathering place for the community and a central hub through which occurred much of the transportation, shipping, and communication activity up and down the rail line and with the outside world. The future depot and interpretive center offer the promise of a similarly centralized location around which community and visitor gathering, sharing, transportation, and commerce will take place.

Hats off to Victor, for restored depots have been energizing and revitalizing downtown districts throughout the U.S. for decades. The depot and adjoining interpretive center will provide a tangible connection between the past and present, while providing a foundation for future growth. As a result of the vision and hard work of many, the future is looking very promising for the community of Victor.

*This article appears in the Summer 2013 issue of Teton Valley Magazine
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