



The dining area serves up what everyone comes for – tradition and a feel for the Old West – and that is the historic aura of Montrose’s past and the spirit of The Duke who drank at the bar. Photos of previous customers and plenty of memorabilia line the walls of The Red Barn.



BARN

FROM PAGE B1

was the place to go.”

“It was the fall of 1968,” Nelson recalled. “I made a lot of friends in there. John Wayne and Glen Campbell were in there. It was the Old West – Colorado culture. It was a delightful time. We met a boatload of characters in there. Since, we’ve seen our culture change. I’m not saying its for better or worse, just different.”

John “Fritz” Hanna, who was a contractor, built the restaurant for Donald McComb who, Nelson says, backed out of the deal and left Hanna with a restaurant and no owner.

“Fritz didn’t know anything about the restaurant business,” Nelson said. “As close as he came to a restaurant was he was a meat cutter in the Army, but he was convinced he was going to make a go of The Red Barn and the restaurant business.”

THE EARLY DAYS

Hanna persuaded Harold Mitchell, who was the electrical contractor during the construction of The Red Barn, to enter into the business with him.

The duo co-owned the restaurant, but they also knew there was money to be made in the hospitality business, so, on adjacently acquired property, they built a motel.

“Neither one of these guys knew too much about the restaurant business, and it didn’t take long for Mitchell to realize this and that he preferred the motel business. After awhile, he asked Fritz to buy him out (of the restaurant),” Nelson said. “I don’t know that they made any money back then, but Fritz learned the business. I came along years later, and Fritz was very good to me. I got to be a part of Fritz’ life. He was hard-wired differently. He didn’t shy away from too much.”

Montrose County records indicate Hanna continued with the restaurant and Mitchell took over the motel, an amicable split, which Nelson corroborated. Today, the hotel is the Days Inn, which is owned by local businessman Brandon Hertz.

“I remember there was a convention scheduled the day the hotel opened,” said Nelson, who worked summers away from college at The Red Barn. “I remember moving mattresses in the hotel the day guests were arriving.”

Nelson graduated college in the spring of 1972 with a degree in business administration and began working at The Red Barn full time.

From then, Nelson learned the business and found he liked the life, so he worked a deal with Hanna to buy the The Red Barn on time.

“Fritz was awfully good to me,” Nelson recalled. “There was no paperwork, just a handshake, and he lived by it. Fritz wasn’t a businessman, but he became a great businessman. Fritz taught me the key to business is really how you treat your staff and guests,” Nelson said. “It’s what differentiates

The Red Barn Restaurant
Chronology of ownership
(Transaction date, seller, buyer, price)

- June 1, 1967 – John C. “Fritz” Hanna builds, opens Red Barn Restaurant; takes on partner Harold E. Mitchell, an electrical contractor.
- April 17, 1973 – Harold E. and MaryAnn Mitchell sell half-partnership to John C. “Fritz” and Joanne Hanna, \$62,800 at the time of hotel spin-off.
- April 22, 1982 – John C. “Fritz” and Joanne Hanna sell restaurant to Ted Nelson, \$185,000
- Jan. 5, 2000 – Ted Nelson sells to Jim Kerschner, \$400,000
- Feb. 7, 2001 – Jim Kerschner sells to Jim Kerschner Enterprises, LLC, Quit Claim Deed
- Dec. 16, 2002 – Kerschner Enterprises, LLC, sells to Leslie Presby, LLC, \$600,000
- Nov. 22, 2014 – Restaurant closes; Tenant businessperson moves from Montrose
- Dec. 10, 2014 – Property listed for sale with Renfrow Realty, \$548,888
- Dec. 20, 2014 – Presby, LLC, lower sale price to \$498,888

Courtesy of Montrose County Assessor’s Office

you from the chains.”

Taking the lessons he gleaned from Hanna, Nelson owned the restaurant and made a life for nearly 18 years, from April 22, 1982, until selling it on Jan. 5, 2000. Since its opening, the restaurant was sold and bought several times, among the owners was Jim Kerschner. Attempts to reach Kerschner at his radio station for comment were unsuccessful.

“It was really something in its day,” Nelson said. “It was the place in Montrose. Now, I’d have to say the building is very, very tired.”

BEGINNING ANEW

Rumors abounded that Nelson was going to buy the restaurant again, but he scoffed at the idea.

“I’ve heard that, too,” Nelson mused. “I don’t think so. Why would I want to buy a restaurant three blocks from my place (Ted Nelson’s Steakhouse)?”

Since The Red Barn’s closing Nov. 22, Renfrow has been charged with finding the right person or persons to breathe new life into the landmark restaurant, and he’s confident it will happen.

“It has seen some use,” Renfrow said. “However, with its reputation and location, it is an amazing opportunity for the right buyers.”

Renfrow defined the “right buyers” as someone with restaurant experience.

“I’d say (the buyers would be) someone with a restaurant past,” Renfrow began. “Someone with big-city restaurant experience who is tired of that life and looking to get out of the big city to a more relaxed Colorado lifestyle.”

When originally listed for sale Dec. 10, the price was \$548,888, almost \$52,000 less than Current Owner Chuck Presby paid. Since, that figure has been lowered another \$50,000, to \$498,888.

“Basically, we just wanted to get it under a half-million,” Renfrow said of the deal with Presby to drop the price. “I think the right people could really make it work.”

LOOKING AHEAD

The dining area serves up what everyone comes for – tradition and a feel for the Old West – and that is the historic aura of Montrose’s past and the spirit of The Duke who drank at the bar.

Wayne memorabilia is everywhere, as any marketing guru would say it

should be.

There are photographs and etchings of Wayne and a full poster of him in the neatly decorated bar that seats almost 50. The secluded bar booths offer cut-glass panels above for privacy. More open bar-room seating offers steeply lacquered tables on barrels, and there is adequate seating at the

bar that offered a selection of nine tapped national and regional brews.

Besides the greater poster of Wayne in the bar, there are lesser-framed photos of hockey, football, boxing and baseball greats that include Babe Ruth flanked with St. Louis Cardinals standouts Dizzy and Paul Dean and another with Ruth and Lou Gehrig, the New York Yankees’ Iron Horse.

The floor of the dining area and bar are wood laminate and appears to be in good shape. Around the high-traffic areas where waiters and waitresses would frequent, there are sturdy red-clay tiles.

Seating capacity of the restaurant is 192, which a quick count of the chair and bench availability includes bar patrons.

Known as a steakhouse as trumpeted by a large, nearly life-size steer atop its roadside sign, The Red Barn menu offered so much more. In all, there were snacks, appetizers, sal-

ads, soups, Barn burgers, specialties, Red Barn favorites and seafood besides the steak offerings. All total, there were 65 items offered on the menu – the cover of which features none other than an eye-patched Wayne – ranging from the smallest dinner salad to the 14-ounce prime rib.

MULTIPLE REMODELS

Originally built by Hanna in 1967, in the Red Barn has seen many remodels, and now consists of 5,745 square feet that not only included expansion of the building but of the parking lot as well, Renfrow said.

“It looks like its been remodeled quite a few times, the last being about 2000,” Renfrow said. “The building comes as is, with FF&E, meaning all the furniture, fixtures and equipment. It’s all here, all the memorabilia.”

The entry foyer and waiting area is decorated with a neat wall-hanging that explains The Red Barn’s historic past. Beyond is a collage that includes its most famous patron, Wayne, and other photos of famous cowboys from stage, film and history, including Sam Elliott, Kevin Costner, Roy Rogers,

Paul Newman, the Lone Ranger, Wyatt Earp, Bill Hickok, Billy the Kid and Buffalo Bill Cody.

Leading from the waiting area into the dining room down a small hallway are turn-of-the-20th-century photos of downtown Montrose, complete with dirt streets and proud photos of Native Americans.

At the end of the hallway, patrons can go left into the bar or, if their table is ready, have a seat at one of the many historically decorated booths. Every booth offers a little different piece of nostalgia, so patrons are may prefer varied tables with each visit to savor The Red Barn.

The dining room serves up a definite taste of the Old West. Predominantly displayed is the massive remnant of Bully, an American bison provided by Ray and Delores Higdon of Ridgway. The mastodon of a mount is more than just the head and includes much of massive bull’s cape.

MORE ARTWORK

At another booth is a framed replica of a wanted poster, urging the capture of Jesse and Frank James and another of Billy the Kid, each with a replica period handgun.

Still another booth displays DeJulio artwork of patrons at a bar, a conestoga wagon and cowboys. Another booth prominently displays photos of Tom Selleck, Willie Nelson, Apache Chief Geronimo, Costner from the “Dances with Wolves” movie and many people’s current-day favorite cowboy, Elliott.

The Red Barn constantly reminds of a cowboy’s rough edges, and its decorations are synonymous with the Old West and the spirit of movie “True Grit.” The Red Barn capitalizes the Wayne mystique and fame, and it does it well.

Legend recalls during one of visits of Wayne and the movie cast to The Red Barn during the autumn 1968, many of the crew were Hollywood types and began ordering such mixed drinks as pink squirrels, kamikazes and mai tais. Hanna, the original owner, also tended bar. Perhaps confused by the myriad of drink requests of which he was unfamiliar, it is said, a frustrated Hanna reached under the bar, grabbed a baseball bat that he kept there and slammed it repeatedly on the bar, saying: “Enough! We got whiskey, and we got beer.”

Jim Renfrow, father of John Renfrow of the real-estate company, corroborated the story.

“It’s kind of legend,” the elder Renfrow told the Daily Press. “Fritz was a unique individual.”

Nelson spoke fondly of his many years at The Red Barn, saying the time he came to know Hanna was a period in his life he would not take back for anything. Now, at 64, Nelson said The Red Barn would need more time and effort than he could give.

“I can tell you this,” Nelson said. “These projects, such as The Red Barn, take longer, at least 10 years. If you don’t love it, someone who does will take it away from you. It was a fabulous place and time.”

NEW LIFE FOR RED BARN

STORY BY ALAN LEWIS GERSTENECKER | PHOTOS BY JUSTIN JOINER

Red Barn was popular spot for dining out

The Red Barn Restaurant, once the landmark dining establishment in Montrose, is on the cusp of a new life, if realtor John Renfrow has his way.

Located at 1413 E. Main St., The Red Barn closed in November and now is for sale, but the nostalgic eatery that for at least two generations has been a stable for the area’s dining populous is poised for rebirth.

Opened in 1967, The Red Barn was the place to dine and to be seen. It became the evening watering hole for cast members during the production of the 1969-released movie “True Grit,” starring John Wayne, Glen Campbell and Kim Darby, which was filmed in the Ridgway area. Besides the Ridgway connection, local resident Jo DeVinny was a stand-in for Darby during part of the filming. (See related story.) DeVinny is married to Dave DeVinny of DeVinny Jewelers in Montrose. Also, local artist Robert DeJulio painted many of the signs for the movie production set, and his artwork graces the walls of The Red Barn.

“There was a time when people would wait three hours for a table at The Red Barn,” said previous owner Ted Nelson, who bought the restaurant in 1982. “You realize when it was built, it was located on the edge of town. It



More inside

• Read stories submitted by readers about the restaurant. Page B3

• See additional photos of the Red Barn. Pages B3, B4

• See the timeline of the restaurant’s ownership. Page B4

Lucky break: Local woman was stand-in for Kim Darby

Jo DeVinny will say in a heartbeat she was in the right place at the right time.

As a young woman, DeVinny had success with Montrose’s Magic Circle Players.

“I did enjoy myself,” DeVinny said last week of her young acting days in Montrose. “I found I liked acting on stage, going into character and being someone else.”

With her stage and acting interest piqued by her Montrose experience, DeVinny learned in the autumn of 1968 that producers were soliciting extras and bit parts for the John Wayne-starred movie “True Grit,” most of which was filmed in Ridgway.

“I was in Denver when I heard (about the



SEE MOVIE, PAGE B3

Deb Reed
Broker Associate
(970) 209-1396
DebReedRealtor.com

I decided a long time ago...

... that I am not good at New Year's resolutions. I think it has something to do with the fact that I have to perform them for a WHOLE year, and that sends me off the rails! I mean, you are talking to someone who can carry on a fifteen minute internal conversation about whether or not to eat a piece of chocolate... and the chocolate wins every time! I have now realized the need to narrow my scope a bit and have different goals. I will smile at everyone; I will have a kind word or compliment every day for those around me; I will try to talk to a small child everyday and see the world through their eyes. You know, I think I can do this...

Lot 8 Hawk Parkway

- 56 acre lot with B-2 zoning.
- Convenient cul-de-sac lot for your professional office or business.
- Right across the street from Sears!
- MLS #690576
- \$70,000

Each Keller Williams office is independently owned and operated.

970.252.8528

1521 Oxbow Dr., Ste. 120 • Montrose, CO 81401

kw COLORADO WEST REALTY **KELLERWILLIAMS.**