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DRIVING IT HOME
Wedemeyer family maintains ranch, rural lifestyle for more than 100 years

The Heritage Issue

What’s inside:
- Tucker Fagan reflects on 30 years in the Air Force
- Mother-daughter pair, Jane Eickbush and Shareen Muldrow, share plans for bloomin’ 37-year-old floral business
- Wyoming Bank and Trust marks its centennial year in business

and much more!

Wyoming Tribune Eagle
MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER
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Karen Wedemeyer remembers helping her grandfather separate cream from milk as a child on their ranch south of Chugwater, where her grandfather would exchange cream and eggs for sugar, flour and other staples.

The ranch has seen many changes – it no longer has milk cows, and the wheat fields the family cultivated for decades have been turned back to grass for pastures – but the heritage passed down through the generations remains strong.

“I love the ranch,” Karen Wedemeyer said. “I like the outdoors. I like the animals.”

Both sets of Karen Wedemeyer’s grandparents homesteaded about two miles from one another in Laramie and Platte counties. Today, Karen Wedemeyer and her husband, Russ, both in their early 70s, maintain the combined ranch that has been in the family for more than 100 years.

“We love what we do,” Russ Wedemeyer said. “I’m 73, I’ll be 74 years old, but as long as my health holds up, I’m gonna do what I’m still doing.”

That involves maintaining a cow/calf operation of about 200 Hereford cattle and nearly 8,000 acres of dryland pasture. The couple manages the ranch on their own, with occasional help from their four adult daughters – Shelly Van Why, Carrie Gross, Kristy Senn and Cindy Kahl – and 11 grandchildren, who take part in brandings and other projects.

The Wedemeyer Gard Schulz Ranch was established in 1913 after Karen Wedemeyer’s paternal grandparents, Homer W. and Theresa Gard, moved to Wyoming from Nebraska and established the original homesteaded 10 miles south of Chugwater in Laramie County.

Karen Wedemeyer’s maternal grandparents, Peter and Hedwig Schulz, immigrated to America from Germany. The Schulzes came to Wyoming in 1912 and filed a homestead claim at the urging of Hedwig’s brother after living in Hartford, South Dakota.

The homesteads grew as neighboring homesteaders sold their land or returned it to the U.S. government.

“A lot of people didn’t endure and stay,” Karen Wedemeyer said.
“So, my grandparents picked up land, a little corner here and a little corner there, to add to their homesteads.”

The homesteads were combined in 1946, when Karen Wedemeyer’s parents, Francis Gard and Hildegard Schulz, were married. They raised their two daughters, Karen and Patricia, on the ranch.

History is rich on the Wedemeyer Ranch, including the Cheyenne-Deadwood stage route, which ran through the property, and later the Yellowstone Highway before Interstate 25 was built. The ranch’s large barn has long been a landmark along the route.

During the blizzard of 1949, Karen Wedemeyer was an infant, and her parents hosted some travelers who were stranded in the storm and also had an infant with them.

“Dad followed the fence line along to hold onto something so he didn’t get lost to get over to milk the cow for milk for the babies,” Karen Wedemeyer said.

She remembers social gatherings at the Grange a few miles south of the ranch, and Ladies Club meetings hosted at people’s homes and organized through the Extension Office in Cheyenne.

“I remember as a child going to the Grange,” Karen Wedemeyer said. “That’s where our social life was. The folks played cards. The kids played with each other. … They had a dance hall and a filling station there. We’d go there for dances. The kids would fall asleep, and they’d put us in the back room and just pile coats. When our kids were there, they had Halloween parties. The adults and kids and everybody would dress up. We just had a ball.”

The ranch straddled the Yellowstone Highway, and Karen Wedemeyer recalls dashing across the highway as a child from her parents’ house to visit her grandparents in the original Gard homestead. Now, the Wedemeyers live on the original homestead site, and daughter Shelly Van Why lives with her husband, Michael, and three children, ages 4 to 14, in the house where Karen Wedemeyer grew up.

“When I got pregnant with our first child, we just wanted to move back home,” Van Why said. “So, we went ahead and we bought the house here, my grandparents’ place, and then 40 acres that were just right with it so that we could come back home here. This was always home. You can go a million different places and visit all over the world, but this is always home.”

She remembers growing up with her three sisters, helping feed cattle, pick up hay bales, and learning the value of hard work and integrity.

“They’re very independent and very hard working,” Van Why said of her parents.

Van Why is a teacher like her mother and grandmother before her, and her husband runs a ranch.

Wedemeyer Gard Schulz Ranch timeline
1877 – Homer Willard Gard is born in Crown Point, Indiana
1877 – Peter Schulz is born in Hamburg, Germany
1880 – Theresa Massoth is born in Cordova, Nebraska
1901 – Peter Schulz immigrates to America, making his way to Hartford, South Dakota
1902 – Peter Schulz marries Hedwig Pensold in Hartford, South Dakota
1906 – Homer Gard marries Theresa Massoth in Geneva, Nebraska
1907 – Homer “Francis” Gard is born
1908 – Hildegard Schulz is born
1912 – Peter and Hedwig Schulz move to Wyoming with their daughters, Meta and Hildegard, and file for a homestead claim southeast of Chugwater
1913 – Homer Gard moves to Wyoming to homestead 10 miles south of Chugwater and work as a carpenter, building homes and businesses in Chugwater
1914 – Homer Gard’s wife, Theresa, and children, Francis and Regina, join him in Wyoming
1925 – Francis Gard is among the first graduating class of Chugwater High School
1931 – Hildegard Schulz receives a teaching degree from the University of Wyoming
1942-45 – Francis Gard serves as a sergeant in the Army during World War II
1945 – Russ Wedemeyer is born and grows up on a ranch west of Wheatland on the Laramie River
1946 – Francis Gard marries Hildegard Schulz, joining the Schulz and Gard ranches
1948 – Karen Frances Gard is born, 16 months after her sister, Patricia
1954 – Hedwig Schulz dies
1954 – Homer Gard dies
1958 – Peter Schulz dies
1967 – Theresa Gard dies
1970 – Karen Gard marries Russ Wedemeyer
1972 – Russ and Karen Wedemeyer move back to the Gard Schulz ranch, where they raise daughters Shelly, Carrie, Kristy and Cindy
1976 – Rebecca Wedemeyer dies in childhood
2003 – Hildegard Gard dies
2004 – Francis Gard dies, and Russ and Karen Wedemeyer assume ownership of the ranch
The Wedemeyers have turned their mechanic business out of their home. They have a few horses and 4-H animals for their kids, and they help out with branding and other projects on the ranch. But they haven't pursued ranching as a career.

"There are four of us, so it’s not a place that would support all four families," Van Why said of the ranch. "But having both of my sets of great-grandparents' homesteads, it’s more of a sentimental place than anything. Definitely we want to keep it in the family. All of the grandkids always come back and always help with branding."

The Wedemeyers are passing their lifestyle on to their grandchildren and are planning for their oldest grandson to stay with them for a month in the summer. Van Why said her parents always supported her and her sisters in all of their activities.

"Mom is wonderful with the grandkids," she said. "She has taught my daughter how to sew, and she's always working with all the grandkids with her gardening."

Van Why teaches fourth and fifth grades in Chugwater, where she, her sisters, her mother and grandfather graduated.

“They used to have rural schoolhouses out here,” Karen Wedemeyer said. “My grandpa and my dad moved a rural schoolhouse into Chugwater, and that was the schoolhouse. And then they converted it to a church. About 20 years ago, we built a new church, and that old schoolhouse/church is now the library in Chugwater.”

Education is important to the family. Karen Wedemeyer’s parents knew each other through the years, but they didn’t get married until they were about 40 years old, both having pursued education and careers elsewhere. Francis Gard attended rural schools in his younger years and was among the first graduating class at Chugwater High School in 1925. He went to the University of Wyoming for one year, then took a job in Cheyenne before joining the Army during World War II. Hildegard Schulz attended high school in Cheyenne, boarding with a doctor and his wife during the week and coming
home on the weekends. She later received a teaching degree from the University of Wyoming and taught school in Cheyenne for 13 years.

Karen Wedemeyer also received a teaching degree from the University of Wyoming and was still in school when she met Russ Wedemeyer during a rodeo in Wheatland.

“I went to school at Wheatland, and I never knew her until after I got through school and she was going to college,” Russ Wedemeyer said. “We met, and that was it. Six months later, we were married.”

Russ Wedemeyer grew up on a ranch on the Laramie River west of Wheatland, where his grandparents moved after leaving a settlement on Iron Mountain because of wolves.

“That’s all I knew ever since I was a little kid,” Russ Wedemeyer said of ranching. “That’s all I did. My dad raised a lot of sheep and then went to cattle.”

The Wedemeyers moved into the original Gard homestead house in the early 1970s, when Karen Wedemeyer’s parents were ready to retire. Karen Wedemeyer gave up her full-time teaching career once the couple decided to start a family, but she continued to substitute teach for 30 years.

The couple endured their share of hardships, including the death of their first daughter, Rebecca, in 1976 and a fire that destroyed the house in 2006. They’ve also seen the ups and downs of the ranching industry, which operates at the mercy of agriculture markets and weather.

“It’s been hard,” Karen Wedemeyer said. “There were a lot of years that we wondered how we were going to meet the bills.”

The winters have been milder in recent years, and Russ Wedemeyer called this past winter one of the best he’s seen.

“When I first moved here, the first couple weeks of March, we had about three blizzards right in a row,” he said.

This year, they got through the blizzard in mid-March before calving started. They were ready for the storm, having brought the cattle closer to the house, ready to put them up in a shed Russ Wedemeyer built after those first rough winters.

The Wedemeyers are among 286 Wyoming families that have been recognized by the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office’s Centennial Farm & Ranch program since 2006, honoring families that have owned and operated farms and ranches for 100 years or more.

“First and foremost, you have to admire the pioneer spirit that kept these people in the ag business that long. Obviously, they’re the backbone of the agricultural business in Wyoming,” said Renee Bovee, temporary Centennial Farm & Ranch coordinator for the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office. “These people in the state of Wyoming are a huge economic force, not just ag-wise, but in so many different ways. It’s impressive. And they keep on doing it, and their next generation keeps on doing it.

“You have to admire that tenacity. They have good years. They have bad years. They have all of the trials and tribulations of any family, and yet they’re also a business.”

She noted the challenges farmers and ranchers in the state face, including the ups and downs of the markets, unpredictable weather and pressure from competing land uses, such as development, energy extraction and wildlife preservation.

“These people are wonderful stewards of the land, stewards of our history and stewards of the agricultural process, and are often founding members in their communities,” Bovee said.
Tom Annear shares his life’s work while Flowing through retirement

By Elizabeth Sampson

Anyone who has enjoyed Wyoming’s recreational waters – especially for fishing – probably owes something to Cheyenne’s Tom Annear.

A 38-year employee of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Annear retired in 2018 as the department’s water management supervisor. He spent his career protecting fishing opportunities and fish populations for the people of Wyoming.

He did this by immersing himself in the concept of instream flow, which is managing the water flowing in a stream channel to protect or restore habitat for fish – all while balancing the competing uses of that water flow. For example, the water may also be needed for out-of-channel uses like irrigation, hydropower, recreation or municipal uses.

Throughout his tenure of developing the model of how water is managed in the state, he was always passionate about his job.

“I always wanted to go to work,” he said. “I really felt like I was making a difference. I started this job as a youthful idealist, and I retired as a somewhat less-youthful idealist.”

After obtaining his master’s degree in wildlife ecology from Utah State University, Annear started working for Game and Fish. At the time, instream flow wasn’t widely understood. But by the time Annear retired, all that had changed.

He helped create the Instream Flow Council, an international organization of stream flow biologists from fish and wildlife agencies in the United States and Canada. Plus, he literally wrote the book on the concept of instream flow. Annear authored or co-authored four books that helped shape the discipline of instream flow in North America and other countries. The book “Instream Flows for Riverine Resource Stewardship” was a huge effort by Annear and 15 other volunteers from all over the U.S. and Canada. The book integrates stream science, public involvement, water law and institutional capacity. Working nights and weekends, in addition to doing his day job, he and his team finished the book in two years.

“It blows me away to think about it today,” Annear said. “I was just driven. We were going to get this done.” The book came out in March of 2002, and they had sold every one of the 1,000
copies of the book they had printed by July. Next, they went to work gathering illustrations to go along with the first version, and they published the updated book in 2004.

This book continues to guide water managers all over the world and can be found on the desk of anyone who has anything to do with water, Annear said. He noted it is even used by people managing the Yellow River in China.

More locally, Jeff Geyer, a water conservationist with the Laramie County Conservation District, said Annear's work has been vital to Wyoming.

"Tom has made a true impact on the conservation of Wyoming's water resources," Geyer said. "His instream flow work was not only foundational for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, but is used across the world. His life's work has really made an impact on water policy, resource collaboration, and, most importantly, people understanding the value of a natural-functioning riverine system."

When it comes to being a water management supervisor in Wyoming, a big part of the year is managing ice.

"I became an expert on ice processes and patterns," Annear said. This knowledge helped the department protect the fish population in the winter and helped Annear make recommendations on new dams. In fact, Annear worked on every proposed dam project that the state considered since the formation of the Wyoming Water Development Commission in 1983.

"I did the environmental fishery studies on every one of those for 35 years," he said. He also made recommendations for the releases of water flows through each dam that would make for a better stream fishery than before the dam was built.

Because the ownership of water rights and how they are used has a tendency to be a contentious issue, Annear said he wasn't always loved by everyone. Despite that, he said he has developed good working relationships with people in agencies all over the state.

"One of the things I am proudest about in my career is having good relationships with sister agencies that used to be adversaries," Annear said. "I have good friends all around the state in all those agencies. There's this element of trust that has come up because I like to think I've been a reasonable and open-minded person. Those relationships were gold."

Not only did Annear work with people in departments around the state, he also worked with members of the public, encouraging them to learn about the importance of instream flow. He created a program called X-Stream Angler, whose purpose is to help people understand where protected streams are in the state.

"It's about education," he said of the program. "You don't have to catch a fish. It's all about helping people understand and demystify instream flow and what it's good for."

Anyone who fishes in three different instream flow segments can fill out an application and send in photos of themselves doing so to earn a prize. More information about X-Stream Angler and a map of the qualifying stream segments can be found at https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Fishing-and-Boating/Instream-Flow-XStream-Angler.

Now that he's retired, Annear has no intentions of slowing down. He teaches a graduate level course at the University of Wyoming called Instream Flows for Riverine Research Stewardship. He publishes articles on instream flow, and he's a part of the Crow Creek Revival organization that is working to restore the creek for both recreation and for wildlife habitat.

"Even though he's retired from Game and Fish now, he's still providing his knowledge to the younger generation so that they understand how the real world works," Geyer said. "I really admire the fact that Tom never gives up on the work he believes in."
By Elizabeth Sampson

Some people may have time to stop and smell the roses, but the women who own Bouquets Unlimited know those roses need de-thorned and de-leaved, carefully shaped into a beautiful bouquet and quickly put on a van to be delivered to 400 front doors around town.

For Jane Eickbush and her daughter Shareen Muldrow, the behind-the-scenes experience of working in a flower shop is no mystery. Eickbush has owned Bouquets Unlimited for 37 years. She is getting ready to retire in June, and her daughter is buying the business from her.

Muldrow has worked at the shop with her mother for 27 years, so she knows just how much work it actually takes to accomplish delivering 400 Valentine’s Day bouquets. She also knows what it means to breathe a sigh of relief when Valentine’s Day is over, then do it all over again at Mother’s Day – at the same time as creating prom boutonnieres and corsages for three high schools. Working 12-hour days during all the holiday rush times is just family history for her.

When Eickbush opened her business, she was in the same spot she is now, at 5709 Yellowstone Road, but she was in a much smaller building. Her original building was a 900-square-foot former gas station that had also been a veterinary clinic. When she moved into the space, she had to clean out a few animal bones before she could open her new shop.

In a city and state whose heritage famously includes early rights for women, she said she didn’t really think about the fact she was a female business owner.
Another big change for their business was the advent of the internet. People now order flowers online. The shop works with both FTD Floral and Teleflora, and can deliver flowers locally that people order from all over the world.

A wall in their shop is covered with top-seller plaques from both organizations, with Bouquets Unlimited receiving yearly recognition for the amount of business they do. They frequently place in the top 500 sellers of more than 20,000 flower shops.

Being a Cheyenne business has helped them to be successful, they said.

“I love living in Cheyenne,” said Muldrow, a fourth-generation resident. “Everybody seems to be so friendly, and they like to support small businesses.”

The mother-daughter pair said one of their favorite memories is arranging the flowers for Muldrow’s wedding. It had more flowers than any other wedding they have helped with, and Muldrow loved getting to design the whole thing,

“Of course, she got anything she wanted,” Eickbush said.

They also love how happy their product makes people, and their customers have become like family to them.

“The best part is seeing smiles on customers’ faces,” Muldrow said. She remembers a customer who came in to pick up a flower delivery she had missed. “She started crying because she was literally so happy.”

As Muldrow prepares to take over the business, the avid cyclist, who bikes on the Spradley Barr Wind Chill cycling team, said she doesn’t plan to make any big changes. She learned what she knows from her mother, so she is well prepared.

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” Muldrow said.
When you have been alive for almost 100 years, you've had time to figure out what you like in life. For Cheyenne resident Iris Trosper, who turned 99 on May 18, that thing is being a member of the X-JWC. She has been a club member for 41 years, and the club has been a part of the Cheyenne community since 1940.

Trosper is one of many in the X-Junior Women's Club who have been involved for years and are still going strong.

"It's just a fun group – an active group to be with," Trosper said. When the club originally formed, it truly was a junior club and was only for women who were 35 or younger. Once they reached 35, they were required to go into the women's club, instead of the junior version.

"They didn't want to, so they added an X in front of their name," said treasurer Bev Campbell.

"You look at our group and you think, 'junior? junior what?'" Campbell said. "We're starting to pick up some younger members, and hopefully that will continue, because we're only going to go so far. We get excited when a 55- to 60-year-old joins us."

Part of the international General Federation of Women's Clubs, the X-JWC focuses on community improvement, as volunteers work to enhance the lives of others. They are one of two GFWC groups in town, with the other one being the Women's Civic League of Cheyenne.

Whether they are raising funds for their two Laramie County Community College scholarships or buying defibrillators for local fire departments, the members of X-JWC look for ways to help people in the city, the state, the country and the world.

"I think there are many people who really like living in Cheyenne, and they want to give back," said club President Trish Peoples. "I only moved here nine years ago, and I consider..."
Cheyenne home. I would never feel right living in a community that is so giving without giving back. The members feel like they are fortunate people, and they want to give back to the community."

Their long history of identifying community needs and looking for solutions means many Cheyenne residents may have benefited from their volunteer work without even realizing it.

X-JWC formed in 1940 when 50 Cheyenne women organized a junior women’s club under the sponsorship of the Cheyenne Women’s Club. Within a year, World War II started, and the young mothers were busy rolling bandages, canvassing for the Red Cross, explaining the point-rationing system to the public and working in the U.S.O. After the war, they turned their attention to Cheyenne and the needs of the community, and they have been active ever since.

After the war, they supported the DePaul hospital and purchased three bushel of wheat as part of the Friendship Train that went through Cheyenne collecting donations for the citizens of France who were struggling after the end of the war.

A club history book includes information from the 1940s about the group taking a stand on legislation concerning margarine and gambling. It also reveals a long-held club secret. A raffle for a quarter-horse took an unfortunate turn when the donated horse was found dead in its pasture the morning of the raffle ticket drawing. After a quick conference, the women agreed to a substitute sister horse and then swore each other to secrecy.

With decades of projects to pick from, Trosper said her favorite one is usually whatever their current project is, but one from her time as president really stands out.

Trosper calls the gazebo the club erected at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens in 1990 her baby because she was the president when they gave it to the gardens. The club was proud to have the gazebo built from scratch in time for Cheyenne’s centennial celebration with the help of members and their husbands.

Another iconic club project from 1984 and 1985 is the large brick-and-metal map located at the corner of Lincolnway and Capitol Avenue in the Depot Plaza. The club paid for the map by writing, directing and producing a musical, raffling a 1930 Ford and asking people to adopt a brick in the map for a donation. The bricks themselves were 100-year-old paving bricks donated by the Union Pacific Railroad for the project. However, the 60,000 pounds of bricks were in Laramie and needed to be collected. Members donned work clothes and got the job of loading them up done with the help of family and friends and a trucking company.

More recently, the club has held many fundraisers to support other local organizations who are helping the community. They donated $5,000 to the Cahill Park friendship playground, and this year they are supporting the Cheyenne Animal Shelter and the Unaccompanied Students Initiative.

They also make sure to have fun.

"There is always something going on,” said member Nadine Samuelson. “Everybody just has fun. It's not all work.”

They host bunco, literary and craft sessions, too. The combination of helping the community and having fun builds camaraderie among the members.

“It adds something to your life,” Campbell said. “There are very few of our members who you couldn't call and they would be there for you if you needed them.”

Members meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 11:30 a.m. at the Red Lion Hotel at 204 W. Fox Farm Road. New members are always welcome, and those who are interested should call Peoples at 805-757-2125.
One simple thing: behind Fagan’s storied career in government

By Elizabeth Sampson

There was 18 inches of snow on the ground in northern Virginia when White House staffers called Tucker Fagan’s home and said they were coming to get him for a top-secret meeting with the president.

They only had one question – which vehicle was going to be able to make it through the snow to get him? They had a four-wheel drive Secret Service vehicle, a Secret Service Cat and, if all else failed, they had a helicopter.

Fagan told them not to worry because the 18 inches of snow wouldn’t be a problem. He had a Volkswagen with chains on the tires he had purchased on Nationway in Cheyenne, and he knew he could make it to the White House.

He put the highly classified information he had to share with President Ronald Reagan in the Volkswagen and headed out. He did, indeed, make it to the White House, and when he arrived, they took him to the Presidential Emergency Operation Center. He was on one side of a conference table opposite a list of the Who’s Who in national security, waiting to teach the president about our nation’s nuclear protocol.

While he nervously waited for the president to arrive, he reminded himself to not let his brain or his mouth go into hyper-speed.

Suddenly, the door opened and the president came into the room, cracking a joke that there were rooms in the White House he had never even heard of.

As everyone in the room laughed, Fagan realized Reagan was a regular person. He immediately felt at ease, and launched into the complicated process of telling the president all about what was in the Football – the name for the black briefcase that is always with the president and contains multiple nuclear strike plans.

When they were finished, the president turned to the other men in the room and said that if our country should go to war, Fagan was the guy he wanted to talk to.

“I said, ‘Mr. President, that’s my job,’” Fagan remembered.

So how did Fagan go from buying a Volkswagen in Cheyenne to being in a conference room with the president? Like Cheyenne, Fagan’s history is connected to the Air Force. The retired colonel’s 30-year military career was bookended by Cheyenne, with an impressively long and winding tale in between. While in the Air Force, he did everything...
from writing the war plan for the United States to picnicking with a member of the KGB at the foot of a destroyed statue of Stalin.

Fagan’s first and last duty stations were here, and following his retirement, he and his family made Cheyenne their home.

He credits his upbringing by his hardworking parents and some advice he received from an Irish immigrant named Jack with setting him on his path to success.

Raised in Scarsdale, New York – one of the wealthiest cities in the nation – Fagan said his family was surrounded by extreme wealth, but they were a regular family. His father was a fireman, and his mother was a homemaker. Working-class Irish Catholics, the Fagans did everything they could for their six children. Years later, his brother said something that really stuck with him.

“We were born in Heaven, and we didn’t know it,” Fagan said. As he thought about his childhood, he realized his brother was right. “We had a good mom and dad who took care of us,” he said. “We didn’t have fear. We didn’t have want. We didn’t have nice things or nice clothes, but we had a family.”

Fagan said the work ethic he learned from his dad stuck with him throughout his career.

“I want to be around people who stand with me in the good times and the bad times,” Fagan said. “Even in the bad times, you don’t walk away. You help me, and I will help you. That was the firefighter ethic I learned from my dad. You don’t ever let your friends down.”

Starting when he was a senior in high school, and all through college, he was a Teamster who worked in a warehouse, loading groceries onto trucks. The warehouse employees were a mix of Irish immigrants and a few men who had spent time in prison.

“It was a beautiful education,” Fagan said. His first day on the job, a man named Jack, who had come from County Clare, Ireland, in his teens, approached him and told him about some unwritten rules. First, don’t ever cut in line, because that means you think you are better than the people behind you. Second, don’t ever make somebody look bad in front of the boss. Finally, don’t dig. Fagan explained there was a box where all the work orders for the warehouse were placed, and digging through the pile for an easy job while leaving the hard jobs for someone else was not allowed.

“They were human rules; Fagan said. “Months later he said to me, ‘You know the reason we came to America? For generations, we’ve worked with our back. We came to America so our kids and grandkids could go to college. You’re the one.’”

Fagan listened. He graduated from The College of Christ the King in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1968, during the height of the Vietnam War. He joined the Air Force, and soon found himself at F.E. Warren Air Force Base as a missile launch officer. When the New Yorker arrived here, he said he felt a little out of his element, so he mostly stayed in his room and studied the missile launch system.

“Eventually, I memorized the entire system,” Fagan said. “Every single light or switch that wasn’t in the right position, I could tell you why. They looked at me and said, ‘OK, that dude’s a geek. There is something wrong with him.’” Even though he jokes about it, others noticed how much he knew and pulled him into the group who evaluated other crew members. This led to a job in Omaha, Nebraska, in Force Application with the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff, whose job was to build the nuclear war plan.

“If you are going to pick this kid who used to play stick ball in the street to be one of the eight to build the U.S. war plan, I’m going to learn it,” he said. “I’m going to devote my entire life to knowing every single weapon – where it is, how big, how fast, how accurate, can it penetrate enemy defenses? I tried to learn every single target in the Warsaw Pact and in China. For many of those first couple of years, I never ate lunch. It was an awesome job.”

When he first started, they used IBM punch cards to create war plans, which were an answer to the question of what they would do if there was a nuclear threat from a particular enemy. With the punch cards, it took about four months to create a single war plan. By the time he left six years later, they had a massive computer that filled a room, and they would create four or five war plans a night.

Soon, he ran the nuclear section for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, working with several other military officers.

“Our number one job was to build the Football,” Fagan said. “That black bag is always near the president. Inside was the document I produced. It’s called the Black Book.” His knowledge of what went into the black bag is what led him through a snowstorm in a Wyoming Volkswagen into a conference room with Reagan.

His military career story next winds into a time where he did top-secret work.

“Then I went black,” Fagan said. “I didn’t wear a uniform anymore. I did things I can’t even tell my family 30 years later.” He and his co-workers had been warned that if they ever revealed the content of their work, they would find themselves in Fort Leavenworth, the military prison. He attended the National War College for a year, during which time he was part of a delegation that traveled to Russia. He continued to move up the ranks, serving as vice wing commander at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana and then on to Cheyenne as the wing commander.

As wing commander, he lived in the biggest brick house on base. On the refrigerator, he kept a photo that he had taken of that same brick house when he and his wife first lived at F.E. Warren. At the time, they lived across the
Jeff Wallace grew up in Burns as the son of the community banker, and he has continued the family atmosphere as CEO of the century-old bank his father bought in 1970.

Wyoming Bank & Trust, which is celebrating its 100th year, was charted in 1919 as Farmers State Bank of Burns. Dennis Wallace remains chairman of the board of the bank, which moved its main office and charter to Cheyenne in 1995.

“We still have the branch in Burns, and they still do very well,” Jeff Wallace said. “But, honestly, it’s still about the same size as it was in ’95.”

The limited opportunity for growth in Burns spurred Dennis Wallace to make the move. The bank also expanded to include trust services and a mortgage department. That diversification, along with the bank’s focus on one-on-one service, have been key to the bank’s growth.

Wyoming Bank & Trust had $195.2 million in assets as of March 31, according to its latest Call Report with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. When the bank moved to Cheyenne in 1995, it had about $14 million in assets. The bank also ranks first in the state based on return on assets, which was 2.16% last year.

“We’re not looking for fast growth,” Wallace said. “It’s been a slow, steady growth, and that’s what we want to continue doing.”

The branch in Burns still has three employees, while the Cheyenne branch has grown from about 12 employees to nearly 40. Turnover is low, with some employees staying with the bank for 45 years. The bank’s welcoming atmosphere extends to the customers.

“We get to know our customers really well,” Bass said. “When they walk through the door, they’re not a number. We know them. We
know their family. They become friends. I think people really gravitate to that.”

Lorna Dunlap, branch manager in Burns, has worked at the bank for 42 years, having been hired by Dennis Wallace as a teller.

“It’s been a pleasure to work here all these years, and it’s something I still look forward to,” she said. “As long as I’m able, I think this is the best place to be. I love my bank. I love the community. I love the people I work with. I love the people I work for. It’s just been an excellent experience.”

She described both Dennis and Jeff Wallace as “extremely intelligent” and forward-looking.

“(They) are always looking forward to what’s coming down the pike,” Dunlap said. “What can we learn? What can we offer so that we don’t stay static, and, especially, don’t go backward? They’ve both been excellent, as far as I’m concerned. Good bosses. They’ve got to be for someone to stick around 42 years.”

The bank focuses on real estate and commercial lending.

“Our loan decisions are made right here, and we don’t necessarily have a program that determines who gets qualified and who doesn’t,” Wallace said. “We look at each loan individually, and we make a decision based on that application. I like to say we’re more of a character lender than some of the bigger banks.”

The 2004 acquisition of #1 Properties brought another wave of change to the bank, and it continues to keep up with changes in technology and regulations.

With a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Hastings College and an MBA from the University of Denver, Wallace started his career as a CPA at McGladrey Hendrickson & Pullen, and later worked for various managed health-care companies in Colorado, negotiating contracts before his father lured him back to the bank.

“He didn’t want to make it feel like I was obligated to come back, but the guy that he actually hired to open up the Cheyenne office said that if your son’s ever going to come back, now would be the time to do it,” Wallace said.

Since then, the bank has seen continual changes.

Technology is an ongoing challenge for the bank, which has been able to do it, too.”

Wallace said banks often face criticism for holding on to legacy software systems, but upgrading is complicated and can be risky.

“There are so many little nuances that if you come in and try to start from scratch kind of get overlooked,” he said. “It ends up being a lot more complicated than it seems like it should be. … We have a lot of regulation around what we can and can’t do, too. We just can’t go out and try something new next month and see if it works. We’ve got to be pretty sure that whatever systems are in place are very well tested.”

Regulatory changes are another challenge the bank faces, and they can be particularly difficult for small banks, such as Wyoming Bank & Trust, which has one compliance officer, compared with larger banks that have many.

“The amount of time we spend making sure we stay in compliance with a lot of the new rules and regulations is not pleasant,” he said, citing the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act since 1995 and works to keep up with new developments, such as mobile banking apps and remote deposits.

“We don't have the resources to develop those programs ourselves, so we rely on third parties, and that makes it harder, because sometimes we're not necessarily their priority,” Wallace said.

The bank recently rolled out Zelle, a digital payment network established by a conglomerate of large banks.

“There are so many different options out there for new tech, you kind of have to pick the winners and loser because some of them are gonna cost you, and people aren't going to use it or like it, and you end up losing money,” Wallace said.

He pays attention to new developments and tries out new products he sees. He recently saw an advertisement from a large bank for a credit card touting the ability to open an account on your phone in five minutes and decided to try it out himself.

“It works, and it was easy,” he said. “I couldn't believe how easy it was. I got an account in five minutes. I didn't even have to send them a picture of my driver's license or anything. … That keeps us motivated to figure out how to keep things efficient and simple. If they can do it, we ought to be able to do it, too.”

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See Jeff Wallace, 22
James Ehernberger: Tracking railroad history
From steam engines to today

James Ehernberger has witnessed Cheyenne’s rich railroad history unfold from the Big Boy steam engines of the 1940s to the diesel locomotives of today.

His work as a railroad historian began before his 34-year career with the Union Pacific Railroad and continues decades after his retirement, resulting in a treasure trove of information and memorabilia he is keen to share.

“I must have railroading in my blood, because I started watching the trains all the time in Bushnell (Nebraska) in 1944,” Ehernberger said. “Seventy-five years ago, I was watching trains. I watched various things take place. I was quite alert. A kid really takes in a lot.”

His fascination with trains emerged through photography, which he took up in childhood. The chance to buy a coveted Graflex camera led Ehernberger to his first job as a call boy for the Union Pacific 1953 when he was 16.

He was still a teen when his first two photographs to be published in a national magazine appeared in the March 1955 edition of Trains magazine. Since then, he has contributed to countless magazine articles, books and documentaries, and amassed an extensive collection of railroad memorabilia.

“It’s one of the most outstanding collections of railroad memorabilia probably in existence,” said William Hopkins, manager of collections at the University of Wyoming American Heritage Center, where Ehernberger has been donating his collection a piece at a time since 1999. “It’s quite large and quite detailed. It’s especially rich in material relating to the Union Pacific.”

The collection includes photographs, more than 100,000 negatives, postcards, maps, diagrams, blueprints, financial records, accident reports and more, encompassing 567.44 cubic feet in 1,042 boxes.

“If you’re a railroad enthusiast, this is a must-look-at collection,” Hopkins said. “It gets quite a bit
Ehernberger, who never married and has no children, began donating his collection in an effort to ensure its preservation after watching the collections of other railroad enthusiasts go astray. The collection includes items dating to 1846 and tracks Cheyenne's beginning in 1867, when Gen. Grenville Dodge, a chief engineer for the Union Pacific Railroad, surveyed the site for what would become Wyoming's capital city.

"Cheyenne wouldn't have existed if it hadn't have been for General Dodge," Ehernberger said, noting that the arrival of the track brought about the rapid rise of Cheyenne.

Ehernberger spent his early childhood in Bushnell, Nebraska, where his father operated a welding, blacksmith and hardware store before moving his family to Cheyenne in 1950. In Bushnell, Ehernberger was drawn to the railroad, watching the station agent and the telegraph, and even learning the telegraph code. He saw the mail crane that the postman would hang a mailbag on to be retrieved with a hook as the train went by.

"The high-speed train would come by, and they had a hook, and they could pick up that mail bag on the fly, and they'd kick off one for us also," Ehernberger said, adding that the Railway Post Office lasted until 1967.

Ehernberger remembers seeing troop trains carrying military service members.

“They had windows open, and they’d talk to us and everything,” he said. “The ones I remember best, they had sailors on them, because I remember their white hats.”

See Ehernberger 20
He observed the arrival of the last of the Big Boy steam locomotives in 1944. The steam engines have drawn widespread public interest through the years, with thousands of people gathering along the track in May to see the Union Pacific’s refurbished Big Boy 4014 leave Cheyenne on its way to Ogden, Utah, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad.

Some of Ehernberger’s first photographs were of the blizzard of 1949, another event of historical significance.

“I was able to go to the depot, and I overheard the station agent and the section foreman discussing conditions on the railroad,” said Ehernberger, who participated in a 2017 Wyoming PBS documentary about the storm. “The blizzard was so bad that the engineer could not observe the block signals. So, they station blocked them, sort of like we do in a road construction, where they hand you a flag or something. The trains could only go when they reported at the next station. Well, the first train froze to the track at Hillsdale, so that meant nothing else could move. Things were tied up for about two weeks on that. It was a major thing on the Union Pacific.”

In 1950, as Ehernberger was entering his teenage years, he moved with his family to Cheyenne.

“Of course, coming to Cheyenne, the first thing I did was spend time at the depot,” he said. “I was very friendly. I got acquainted with everybody. In those days, nobody ever paid any attention much. I could walk over to the roundhouse.”

Ehernberger went to work for the Union Pacific with the goal of earning enough money to buy a Graflex camera like theirs.

At that time, the local steam shop was operating full force around the clock, repairing steam locomotives until the railroad bought its first 250 diesel locomotives in 1954 and there was going to be a change from steam power to diesel power, and the Cheyenne shop gradually declined,” Ehernberger said. “The last shopping of the Big Boys was actually done in the later part of 1956, perhaps one in early ’57. I saw that shop go from three shifts a day to one shift, and by 1959, when the last regular steam operations took place, they just had a skeleton force.”

Another significant change Ehernberger witnessed was the establishment of a new line that bypassed Sherman Hill west of Cheyenne and eliminated the need for the helper locomotives that assisted trains to the summit. He also saw gas turbine locomotives come and go, and communications on the railroad advance from telegraph to radio communications to the computer age.

During his 34-year career with the railroad, Ehernberger held many different positions with Union Pacific, including secretary to the superintendent, train dispatcher and division rules examiner.

“I was not afraid to take any job,” he said. “I took on some pretty responsible positions. … I always felt that the secret to success was to work, and I always tried to give my boss more than they asked for. In other words, my goal was at least 110 percent. That paid off, actually, because that’s how I got promoted to some of the jobs I got because they could depend on me.”

Bob Fryml, who is on the
archive committee of the Union Pacific Historical Society, said serving as secretary to the superintendent provided a unique opportunity to travel with and learn from the superintendent.

“He saw aspects of the railroad that a normal craftsperson like switchman, brakeman, conductor, maintenance, way employee, mechanical car department, clerical would not see,” Fryml said.

“Along with his responsibilities to handle correspondence, filing and dictation, he had to be very discreet. He was probably keeper of a lot of secrets that he will never tell.”

By the mid-1980s, mergers and changes in leadership led to job cuts and a preference for hiring managers with college degrees. Feeling the pinch from that, Ehernberger signed up for an early retirement buyout, leaving the company in 1988 at age 51.

Since then, he’s been pursuing his avocation as a railroad historian.

“He has spent hours and hours at the microfilm machines at the State Library, and does a tremendous amount of tedious research,” said A.J. Wolff, a friend and fellow photographer, who met Ehernberger in 1971 when he was working on a book about Sherman Hill.

“He contacted me for pictures related to the modern diesel and gas turbine power,” Wolff said of their meeting. “So, I supplied him with prints, and he gave me my start in getting published.”

The men worked together over the years on various projects.

“When the steam engines would run, we’d go out and travel together and have a good time, chasing the train up and down the track and getting the pictures,” Wolff said. “I just enjoyed his company. I think the last time we did anything like that was like in ’95.”

Wolff called Ehernberger a “gifted photographer” and a “strong researcher.”

In May, Ehernberger traveled with the Union Pacific Historical Society to Promontory, Utah, to give a presentation on his photography for the group’s convention, held in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the Golden Spike ceremony in Utah that marked the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869.

“People ask me if I miss the railroad,” Ehernberger said. “Well, I railroad every day. I’ve got a wonderful library.”
parade field in a small house, and one day they decided to drive over to take a picture of the big house – but they were afraid to get too close when they took the photo.

When he came back as the wing commander, he didn't want his airman to feel that same fear, so he gave some instructions to all the colonels on base that exemplified his leadership style. “They should know us,” Fagan said. “We have hopes and dreams. We do some things right. We do some things wrong, just like them. So don’t ever let me see you berating or demeaning or treating someone in a bad way.”

After his term as wing commander, it was back to Washington, D.C., to be the chief of organization for the entire Air Force under the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. They worked to streamline Air Force operations, and while he was working there, the commander of the 20th Air Force called him and asked if he would come replace a retiring vice-commander in Cheyenne.

Fagan had two children attending the University of Wyoming at the time, so he jumped at the chance to return to Cheyenne. He served as vice-commander of the 20th Air Force under three different commanders, and retired from the Air Force after 30 years – in the same duty station he started in.

He retired on a Friday night, and the following Monday morning, he started working for the State of Wyoming. He was the first director of State Parks and Cultural Resources, and then became the director of the Wyoming Business Council. During his tenure there, he promoted the idea of growing businesses that were already in Wyoming. He also helped Wyoming cities qualify to be the home of corporations looking to relocate to the state by improving city infrastructure, and he helped secure federal research dollars for Wyoming companies that had ideas for new patents.

One day, after he retired from working for the state, he was outside painting his house. Cynthia Lummis, who was planning to run for election to the U.S. House of Representatives, called and asked if he would help her with her campaign. He said yes, and she won. She went on to serve four terms, and during her time as representative, Fagan served as her chief of staff.

He retired for a third time, and now he does some work for Gannett Peak Technical Services, a software development company owned by his two oldest sons. He serves on several boards in the community and enjoys having big family dinners that include his wife, three sons, a daughter, their spouses and grandchildren.

When he considers the many leadership roles he’s had, the work he has done for the state and the country, and the many accolades he’s received, Fagan says what got him where he is today is one simple thing. “We were born in Heaven, and we didn’t know it.”
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