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Our FACES

HEART AND SOULES
Cheyenne events coordinator boosts Civic Center events

The Happenings Issue

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• Keeping the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra in tune with Lindsey Reynolds
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By Jonna Lorenz

David Soules has a different view of the shows he helps bring to the Cheyenne Civic Center than most people.

“When I come in to see the show, I’m not necessarily looking at the concert. I’m not watching the artist. I’m watching the crowd and seeing the excitement they have. That’s what makes me proud,” Soules said.

Soules was hired as the City of Cheyenne’s booking and programming manager in August 2017 after working as a founder and venue manager at The Gryphon Theatre in Laramie. Along with a team of people, including technical director Andrew Hays, marketing coordinator Reese Ruiz and venue manager Amy Gorbey, Soules is reinvigorating the Civic Center.

Their work is being noticed. Sen. R.J. Kost, R-Powell, attended “Rhythm of the Dance” at the Civic Center in February and was impressed.

“It’s just a really nice facility. I’m really amazed at the events you get, compared to even, like, Billings,” he said.

Fast turnaround

Soules was hired with a directive from the Cheyenne City Council to draw a more diverse audience to the Civic Center and reduce the city’s subsidy of the venue. The subsidy was as high as $309,240 in Fiscal Year 2009 and was about $200,000 a year between 2014 and 2017. It fell to $120,000 for Fiscal Year 2019 and is expected to remain at that amount, said City Treasurer Robin Lockman, noting that the venue likely will always have a subsidy for community organizations and events.

From July 2018 until the end of February, the Civic Center hosted 60 events, scanned 25,637 tickets and recorded ticket sales of $1,166,177 and
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revenue of $1,213,343, according to Cheyenne Community Recreation and Events Director Teresa Moore. Those numbers are up from the previous eight months – October 2017 to June 2018 – when the Civic Center hosted 53 events, scanned 11,000 tickets and recorded ticket sales of $961,169 and revenue of $971,169.

Those numbers don’t include such private events as the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra or such community events as the governor’s inauguration, school events and naturalization ceremonies.

“As far as booking and putting us on the map, he has done a great job,” Moore said of Soules, noting that he is a key member of a team of people collaborating to improve the Civic Center.

Along with reducing the Civic Center’s subsidy, the city also wants to boost the vitality of the community.

“You want a vibrant community. You want to support the arts. You want to support the local artists. You want to make our young people want to stay in Cheyenne. It’s really multi-pronged,” Moore said.

The Civic Center is meeting those goals with a wide range of shows, including the Avett Brothers, Trombone Shorty, Peter Frampton, a variety of Cirque performances and iLuminate, which appeared on “America’s Got Talent” in 2011. These new offerings are in addition to the local symphony and ballet performances and Broadway shows that have been staples at the venue.

“I could not be more pleased with the work of David and the entire team and staff at the Civic Center,” Cheyenne Mayor Marian Orr said. “I think that we’ve created such a buzz around the facility with the various and varied acts that we have coming to our community. … We’re actually hearing a lot from people on the Front Range who enjoy coming here, rather than going into Denver.”

She said the turnaround at the Civic Center has happened faster than she anticipated.

“I thought it would take a couple of years to turn it around. From the day we brought David on, things have gone gangbusters,” Orr said.

**Varied experience**

Soules grew up in Casper and spent five years in Chicago, working for lighting and production departments at Victory Gardens Theatre and various nightclubs, even landing a gig as a gaffer, running lights for a Comedy Central production of Tommy Tiernan’s “Something Mental” show. He spent the next three years – from December 2007 to September 2010 – on tour with VEE Corporation as head electrician for “Sesame Street Live” and “Curious George Live.”

“My background has always been working in the theater,” Soules explained. “I wanted to be an audio engineer, but audio engineers are a dime a dozen, so I ended up going into lighting programming.”

He returned to Wyoming in 2010 to be with his wife, Caroline, who was working at the University of Wyoming. He answered a newspaper ad for a weekend supervisor at the Laramie Plains Civic Center, which hosts The Gryphon Theatre.

“When they interviewed me, they saw my theater background and kind of offered me a chance to help them revitalize and build this theater and turn it into what it is now,” Soules said.

It was his first step into booking shows, and his successes in Laramie included bringing Mumford & Sons to The Gryphon in 2012.

“We just started calling around and figuring out the industry,” Soules said. “I was just winging it at The Gryphon, and now that I’ve got eight years under my belt, or nine years now, I’m feeling pretty confident.”

When his wife got a job as assistant registrar at Laramie County Community College, Soules made the move with his family to Cheyenne. His 6-year-old daughter, Charlotte, is sometimes seen at the Civic Center, punching tickets at the door for the events her father books.

Among the biggest lessons Soules has learned is the importance of understanding what the community wants.

“You’ve got to really listen to the community and find out what they want to see,” he said. “There might be a show that I think is amazing personally or a particular genre that I personally like and think, ‘Oh, this is a no-brainer,’ and then it would underperform because that’s not what the community wants.”

**A team effort**

Soules said he’s always looking for input, interacting with the community on social media, chatting with people at the bar and researching past shows to see what has worked.

“It’s just a lot of research,” he said. “That’s something you just kind of learn. You learn on the job.”

He’s picked up tools along the way, including venue management software and a booking database that provides details on artists, agents, tour histories and pricing. An intern in Laramie tipped him off to the database.

“I’m always open to new ideas, and if someone has a better way to do it, I’m happy to listen to them,” Soules said. “Some of the best people to network with are audio engineers because they mix a lot of shows. They see the behind-the-scenes stuff.”

He’s also part of a listserv of arts organizations in the region and talks with other venues, such as the Casper Events Center, about working together to route shows through both locations.

The job – which involves
Georgia Rowswell steps up the arts in Cheyenne

By Jonna Lorenz

Georgia Rowswell walks the talk when it comes to promoting arts and artists in Cheyenne.

A professional studio artist, Rowswell moved to Cheyenne from Atlanta about 10 years ago and was surprised the community doesn’t have an art center.

“There just wasn’t a lot,” she said. “So, I thought, ‘What can I do? I can’t create an art center by myself. I can start an art walk.’”

Rowswell turned her living room into a gallery and included it as a stop on the first Cheyenne Artwalk in 2010.

“I wanted to do something that would raise the profile of the arts and artists in town, and have a place where the public could come and see what artists do and how they work,” she said. “When I started that, all of a sudden, I began meeting a lot of people throughout town and beyond Cheyenne, artists who were really hungry for a place to show their work. The Artwalk has shown over the years probably hundreds of different artists’ work throughout the different venues.”

Last year, Rowswell and Terry Kreuzer opened a gallery and studio space, Blue Door Arts, in the historic Hynds Building on Capitol Avenue downtown.

“She does world-class work, and she has great capabilities to bring people together,” said Bill Lindstrom, executive director of Arts Cheyenne. “That’s exhibited in the Artwalk events that came together under her leadership.”

Arts Cheyenne took over the Artwalk about five years ago. The free event is every second Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m., when downtown galleries, businesses and restaurants welcome visitors to stroll through their spaces, enjoying art and refreshments and mingling with artists. Information about exhibits is online at www.cheyenneartwalk.com and also on the organization’s Facebook page.

Blue Door Arts is hosting Art Workshops @ the Hynds, underwritten by the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund. The two-day classes cost about $30 and include all materials, with about 10 workshops expected to be included in the series. Rowswell also is starting a monthly Pop-Up Maker’s Place (PUMP), giving the public a peek into the working life of artists.

“Since I’m a studio, I decided I really wanted to feature not only what I’m working on, but also feature other artists so that people can see how artists work, why what they do is valuable. And I’m.”

Three Crows Gallery & Gifts, owned by Beth Rulli, LeAnn Lively and Beverly Jones, and Art @ the Hynds Collaborative, the studio and gallery space of Mitch Guthrie, Mike McIntosh, Kevin Robinett and Greg Fladager. During the Artwalk, the inside doors separating the three spaces are open, so visitors can easily move from one venue to the next.

Other venues included on the Artwalk are Artizen Photo Printing, Cheyenne Artists Guild, Clay Paper Scissors Gallery, Deselms Fine Art and Custom Framing, and Paramount Café and Ballroom.

“We’ve always been impressed with her ability to see down
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Catering provided beautiful Valentine’s cookies for the February Artwalk reception. She starting thinking about connecting Cheyenne Restaurant Week with the Artwalk, or possibly hosting a food truck night, providing an opportunity for caterers and food trucks to promote their offerings at the art venues.

Rudloff recently picked up a copy of “For the Love of Cities” by Peter Kageyama and immediately thought of Roswell. He compared stories in the book of kids using art to engage with their communities – including a teen who used a water-repellant chemical to paint messages on sidewalks that only show up when it rains and another kid who placed little bronze mice throughout a town – to the work Roswell does.

“She is always pushing a new idea to improve the arts, improve the community,” Rudloff said, adding that Roswell is among “the type of people that make a community spectacular.”

While keeping busy making a living with her art, Roswell still imagines building an art center in Cheyenne.

“I’ve talked about it for years,” she said. “We need more people involved with the vision. Especially, I would say, somebody who’s good at grant writing. That’s how you make it happen. And also, someone who’s good at general fundraising, as well, and knows people. That combination of people just hasn’t happened yet.”

Lindstrom said of Roswell.

Rowswell grew up in Buffalo, New York, and lived in southern Georgia and Atlanta before moving to Cheyenne with her husband, Dave Rowswell, who was pursuing a job as an art teacher at Cheyenne’s East High School. The couple has two grown children. Abby, 29, lives in Cheyenne and works at the Laramie County Library. Ian, 32, is in the Air Force, stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri.

“Since I’m a studio, I decided I really wanted to feature not only what I’m working on, but also feature other artists so that people can see how artists work, why what they do is valuable. And I’m just one of those curious people that want to know how do you do that.”

Rowswell’s own art education came from two places: a bachelor of fine arts from the University of Buffalo and the influence of her parents.

“My mother, although she didn’t call herself an artist, she really was,” Rowswell said. “She was a maker. I always saw her working on something – knit, crochet, embroidery, bobbin lace. In the latter part of her life, quilting was her love. Growing up, I always saw her working on a project.”

Likewise, her father expressed his creativity through woodworking.

“The whole made-by-hand ethic was strong in my family,” Rowswell said.

Her work is rooted in curiosity, and Rowswell follows that curiosity, learning about the world around her until something grabs her attention and inspires her art.

“When we moved here, I was a bit concerned about what my voice in the West was going to be,” she said, adding that she took her inspiration from the geology of the state.

A visit to a gem and mineral show inspired a piece based on snail fossils. Her move to Wyoming also sparked her use of textiles.

“This whole working with fabric really is an outgrowth from moving here,” she said. “It’s not something I was doing when I was in Atlanta. I’ve always been attracted to unusual materials and layering. My current work is using old clothes and household textiles and cutting them up and making them into pieces.”

One project involved using her late mother’s clothes, cutting them up and creating circular pieces. She will teach a workshop on the Life Ring Series in May.

“The design motif is taken from the growth rings of trees. That tells the story of the tree, not only how old it is, but what each year was like with the weather or insects or fire. I felt like it was conceptually a good design motif and symbol for people to replicate.”

Her artwork has been displayed at the Western Spirit Art Show & Sale, and this year she was encouraged to enter the Cheyenne Frontier Days Western Art Show & Sale.

“I’m pretty off-center for that show, because that’s a really traditional western show,” she said. But she entered and was accepted, prompting the show to add a mixed media category to accommodate her.

Darren Rudloff, president and CEO of Visit Cheyenne, called Rowswell a “fascinating lady who placed little bronze mice on sidewalks that only show up when it rains and another kid who placed little bronze mice throughout a town – to the work Rowswell does.

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Wyoming Tribune Eagle

By Elizabeth Sampson

Although she isn’t the one who stands in front with a conductor’s baton, Lindsey Reynolds is the one who keeps the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra in tune.

For the last three years, as executive director of the organization, the Cheyenne resident has been in charge of the behind-the-scenes work that keeps the music humming along.

“My position with the symphony oversees everything on the business side,” said Reynolds.

That includes everything from handling the day-to-day running of the symphony to overseeing the staff, working with the 17-member board and its six board committees, and being involved with the extensive planning that goes into putting on their concert series each year. She also is in charge of contracting and negotiating with the agents of all the guest artists who perform with the symphony.

She coordinates with the staff of the Cheyenne Civic Center, where a majority of their concerts are held. And finally, with only 25-30 percent of the CSO’s funding coming from ticket sales, Reynolds spends a good deal of time managing fundraising and grant-writing initiatives.

“This job definitely has a lot of hats – from selling tickets to just answering the phone,” she said.

For Reynolds, though, perhaps the most important work she does is foster a sense that the symphony is accessible and available to everyone.

“Sometimes people have the impression that the symphony is kind of snobby or unapproachable – especially for families,” said Reynolds. “We know that if we can get people in the door, and they have the experience of listening to the concert, they love it, and they want to come back. Sometimes it’s just getting them past their notions of what it might be like.”

If anyone knows what the symphony is like, it’s Reynolds. After earning both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in music in her home state of Ohio, she moved to Greeley, Colorado, to earn her Doctor of Arts in Oboe Performance at the University of Northern Colorado. From there, she went on to become the instructor of oboe for the University of Wyoming in 2005, a position she held for 12 years.

During that time, she also started playing for the CSO as
a substitute oboist and English horn player. She became the orchestra manager in 2011, a post that made her responsible for all of the musicians, including making sure they all had their contracts, knew what their schedule was, and affirming they were there for the rehearsals and performances. Then she took on the CSO's educational program. Finally, she became the orchestra librarian and kept track of distributing music to the musicians for each of their performances.

As she and her small staff look for ways to teach others about the joy of the symphony, they focus on community education. Their programs reach about 6,000 people each year, from pre-K-age children to adults.

Every year, they hold a family matinee, which is held in the afternoon and offers tickets at significantly reduced prices. Adults pay only $10, and student tickets are $5.

“That’s a program that’s been growing, and one I think is really exciting,” Reynolds said. Student prices are always discounted, thanks to fundraising the CSO does to help defray the cost of tickets for their youngest audience members. They also offer 600 free student tickets per year.

One education program Reynolds is especially passionate about is called Words in Music. She helped implement it when she was the education coordinator. Third- and fourth-graders from around the Cheyenne area have the opportunity to listen to a piece of music the CSO will be performing in an upcoming concert. Then, they compete in a creative writing contest with a response to the music.

Similarly, Art in Music invites junior and senior high students to create art based on a piece of music. Every student who participates in these programs gets ticket vouchers to the performance for themselves and their family members.

Reynolds also oversees the Youth Educational Symphony (YES!) concerts. All fifth- and sixth-grade students in Laramie County School Districts 1 and 2 as well as junior and senior high orchestra students get to attend a 50-minute concert, where they learn more about the symphony, the musicians, the instruments and the conductor, William Intriligator.

Rounding out the important work of introducing the symphony to children are musical story times held at the Paul Smith Children’s Village at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens, and instrument petting zoos, where children can take a look at instruments and even try playing some of them.

“I think the educational outreach we do is really effective and reaches a lot of people throughout the year,” Reynolds said.

In addition to helping people get comfortable with and love the symphony, Reynolds said working to maintain a professional symphony creates an asset for the Cheyenne community.

“We are a cultural amenity that can help attract people to Cheyenne so they know when they live here they don't have to go somewhere else,” Reynolds said. She said sharing musicians with other regional symphonies of a similar size, including the ones in Fort Collins and Greeley, Colorado, allows really high-quality professional musicians to perform and make a living here.

“As someone who didn’t come from this area, that’s something I wouldn't have expected,” Reynolds said. “They create a really fantastic product that people enjoy when they come.”

In addition to two “YES!” concerts and the family matinee, the symphony puts on six full symphony concerts and three chamber music concerts with a smaller set of musicians. After all the planning for each production, the managing of the organization and the educational outreach efforts, it’s the concerts that Reynolds loves the most about her job.

“I love the concerts, but I am a musician,” she said. “For most of them, we’ve been planning and working on them for more than a year. When you get there and everything goes smoothly and the orchestra is on stage and playing, you can just sit and enjoy the performance and see the fruit of all the labor.”

People who are interested in giving the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra a try can find its schedule and ticket information online at cheyennesymphony.org.
By Jonna Lorenz

Mike DeCarlo spent 13 years volunteering on the Grounds Committee for Cheyenne Frontier Days, getting to know the intricacies of pulling off the “World’s Largest Outdoor Rodeo and Western Celebration” before being hired as grounds superintendent in August.

“I love this place,” he said. “I spent a lot of my time out here. And now I get to spend it all out here, and I’m getting paid, and I can go home at night and do other things. I love the place. I love the people. It’s fun to be out here.”

As a staff member, DeCarlo works closely with volunteer Grounds Committee Chairman Jerry Moberly, mobilizing dozens of volunteers as they handle maintenance, repairs and preparations, ranging from electrical wiring to picking up trash and cleaning bathrooms.

“During the show, those guys are on call,” DeCarlo said. “So, if there’s a water break, we’ll send the plumbers. If there’s a blackout, if we lose power somewhere, we’ll send the electricians down there. Toilet leaks, we’ll send the plumbers down there. Broken fences, broken panels in the arena; Grounds Committee takes care of a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff that people don’t see.”

With more than half a million visitors participating in Cheyenne Frontier Days events each year, there is plenty of work to keep the committee busy.

This year, CFD will open a new 35,000-square-foot multipurpose building, which will include space for the General Committee, headquarters staff, volunteers, sponsors and meetings. The $7 million project, which broke ground in August south of the B stand, is expected to be ready in time for this year’s show – July 19-28. It is being paid for by the nonprofit Cheyenne Frontier Days organization, and DeCarlo doesn’t anticipate the building will create any extra work for volunteers this year.

“It’ll be ready to go,” he said. “It’ll be brand new, everything will be set up. Everything will be ready to go.”

The building is a “much-needed improvement for Cheyenne Frontier Days,” General Committee Chairman Jimmy Dean Siler said. But, aside from providing needed indoor space and a rooftop deck for viewing events, it won’t change Cheyenne Frontier Days or the work that goes into it.

“We’ll still put on the same show,” he said.

Work on the annual event continues year-round, with fundraisers and regular meetings of the 10 committees, which
include those overseeing concessions, tickets, rodeo, Indian Village, parades, military, security and contract acts, in addition to the Grounds and General committees. All together, about 3,000 volunteers are involved with Cheyenne Frontier Days.

“First coming in, it’s a little overwhelming,” DeCarlo said of volunteering. “There’s a lot of people, a lot of things going on. But I met some really good people and made some good friendships over the years. It’s fun. You have a lot of fun.”

DeCarlo previously worked as an electrician, and he brought those skills to his volunteer work with CFD.

“Mike’s biggest strengths are his knowledge of the park and all of the skills that he can bring to it,” Siler said. “Mike is a tremendous leader. I guess the best way to describe him is he’s an all-around. We rely on Mike. There’s not too much that he can’t do.”

For the past six years, volunteers have been working to upgrade all the communications network infrastructure throughout the 88-acre park. Last year, the Grounds Committee built a merchandising building. That project is a source of pride for volunteers, including Bob Ingleby, a retired firefighter.

“You got to see every board that went up and everything that went into it,” he said. “After it was all done, you step back and say, “This is something that we did.”

This year, the Grounds Committee is putting up more security cameras around the park, along with more television monitors.

“That’s one thing about Frontier Days is they’re always trying to enhance the experience for the customers,” Ingleby said. “They’ve got so many activities out there. When you talk to somebody from out of town and they’re just raving about how great it is, the feeling that you are part of that is just unbelievable.”

Work days will begin at the end of April, with volunteers coming together to clean, make repairs and complete other projects to prepare Frontier Park for the show.

During the winter, DeCarlo and two other grounds staff members complete maintenance and repairs on equipment.

“We have backhoes, skid steers, arena grooms, trucks – not a lot of equipment, but it still takes time to change all of the oil and change blades and change teeth,” DeCarlo said. “We’ve got lawn mowers and tractors and all of the implements that go with those.”

DeCarlo recruited Rick Bell to volunteer on the Grounds Committee in 2013.

“I can tell you that he’s very dedicated to Cheyenne Frontier Days,” Bell said. “He basically lives at the park. He’s all about making sure the show goes on.”

Bell said the committee is like a family, and members help each other when in need. Last May, when tornadoes caused damage in Federal, where Bell lives, many Grounds Committee members reached out, ready to lend a hand.

“Fortunately, my house did not get hit like some of the houses there, but they were at least reaching out and offering their services to me,” he said.

Developing close friendships is what many volunteers say is the best part of volunteering.

“It’s gratifying to see all of these guys come together from all different walks of life that can come and work together and put something like this on,” DeCarlo said.

For more information about Frontier Days, visit www.cfdrodeo.com.
Mike Morris: turning former warehouse into downtown hot spot

By Elizabeth Sampson

Every Friday night during the frigid depths of winter, the upstairs of Cheyenne’s Asher Building is the hottest place in town.

Transformed each weekend into an intimate music venue where up-and-coming artists make themselves known, the historic downtown building is home to an eclectic concert series known as Fridays in the Asher.

Behind the weekly transformation and ahead of the curve on spotting new artists is Fridays in the Asher volunteer Executive Director Mike Morris. He does everything from scouting for new artists to helping move the concert equipment into place each Friday afternoon. He volunteers his time both with Fridays in the Asher and as vice president of Arts Cheyenne to make sure Cheyenne has a music series that is available to all.

“It’s a cultural and social aesthetic really unlike anything else in Cheyenne,” Morris said. “It’s very cutting edge, and it’s a very welcoming and friendly environment.”

That friendly environment extends to everyone. Making sure music is completely accessible to all is one of Morris’ passions and a goal of Arts Cheyenne.

“It is very important to us to make it affordable to everyone,” he said. “We want to make it accessible to anyone. It is important in this day and age to make things inclusive.”

In order to keep the admission cost low, Morris and the other volunteers fundraise, including asking for community sponsors. They run their own bar in-house, with volunteers serving as bartenders to help keep as much money centralized in the event as possible.

All ages are welcome, and the shows are family-friendly. They have a license to serve beer and malt beverages, but they simply card at the door, which allows them to welcome families, as well as those over 21.

As for musical genres that will appeal to a wide range of people, Fridays in the Asher is one of the most musically diverse lineups in the region, Morris said.

“We try to get everything,” Morris said. “We did an EDM show, a couple hip-hop ones, neo-soul, alt-country, R and B, punk and hard rock.”

Upcoming shows will feature artists ranging from Portland’s indie rock group The Cabin Project to perennial Wyoming favorite Jalan Crossland, Ten Sleep’s own banjo-playing singer-songwriter.

“We’ve grown the scope of this every year,” Morris said. “What’s special about this series, in particular, is you have such a positive vibe at every concert. There’s such camaraderie and togetherness.”
Finding these artists is the most labor-intensive part of Morris’ volunteer work. He spends the summer months going to concerts and scouring websites like YouTube and Audiotree, looking for new artists who will be a good fit for the series.

“We are trying to attract rising talent that is outstanding caliber, but is also going to be affordable for us,” he said. “Most of the folks that we have are rising artists who are touring through.”

Morris also keeps an eye on Wyoming talent.

“It’s been a good platform for boosting up local music,” Morris said. During the four years he has been involved with the event, there have been about 30-35 Wyoming artists in the lineup.

One thing that helps attract artists to the series is the Asher Building itself.

“This is a totally unique atmosphere for the artists to play because they’re playing formal venues most of the time,” Morris said. The concerts have been held at the Asher since 2017, but the series is about eight years old. It started out as Fridays in the Hynds, but as the prospect of redevelopment of that building came up, they decided to move to the new venue.

As community members look for ways to revitalize Cheyenne’s downtown and utilize buildings like the Asher, Morris has some ideas about the role music will play in that endeavor.

“It’s cultural and social vitality, but it also spurs on economic development,” he said. “That’s why we hold this in the middle of the winter. Last year, we almost had 3,000 people through the course of the series. Those people hit bars and restaurants downtown.”

Morris grew up in Cheyenne and finds value in the community, which is part of what drives him to make Fridays in the Asher succeed.

After he graduated from the University of Wyoming, he moved to Denver to work with the NFL as part of the Denver Broncos’ media staff. Eventually, his sights turned north toward his hometown.

“I felt a calling to come back to immerse myself in Cheyenne,” he said. “I liked growing up here, and I see great potential. I see potential for new ideas to be ingrained into the community fabric that already exists.”

His way of capitalizing on that potential is always the music.

“It provides room for dialogues and networking in today’s America that are harder and harder to find,” he said. “People will go out to these concerts and forget everything as far as difference. We are providing areas for people to come out and connect with one another.”

To find out more about the remainder of this year’s series, which takes a break from mid-March until it resumes April 10, visit artscheyenne.com/fridays-in-the-asher/.
By Elizabeth Sampson

Pam Freeman is a fair person. So were her parents. So are her kids.

From being in 4-H as a girl to serving on the board, Freeman has been a steady part of the Laramie County Fair for years.

“Pam is one of those exceptional volunteers who has done it for many, many years in a lot of different capacities,” said Laramie County Fair Manager Jeff Ketcham, who is also Freeman’s former agriculture teacher. “Anytime we need a volunteer or we’re putting on an event, she’s always there and wanting to help. She has great ideas and suggestions.”

Ketcham went on to say that without volunteers like Freeman, the fair wouldn’t exist.

“If we had to write a check to hire everybody to put on the fair, we wouldn’t be able to afford it,” he said.

Since childhood, Freeman has held just about every role a person can have at the fair. The Laramie County Fair, which will be July 31-Aug. 10 this year, is an annual community event that showcases both 4-H and FFA projects, as well as exhibits from members of the public – and offers community entertainment like pig wrestling, mutton busting and a demolition derby.

Every year, participants celebrate the hard work they have put in throughout the year – whether that is successfully raising livestock for auction or displaying their photography in an art show. It’s these participants who make up the fair community itself, and what keeps Freeman coming back year after year.

“Fair people are the best people,” she said. She said the youth who are involved prove that there are good kids in the world doing good things.

“They work so hard taking care of their animals and doing their
projects,” said Freeman. “They all get along. Nobody bullies anybody, and they help each other out.”

Freeman joined 4-H as an 8-year-old girl, and soon showed just about everything a 4-H kid can show, including horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, rabbits and chickens. In junior high and high school, she was also a member of FFA, showed livestock and competed in livestock judging.

After high school, she and her dad shared poultry superintendent duties at the fair, and she eventually went on to serve as superintendent for 15 different events, such as the entomology and range management projects.

She and two of her children, who are grown now, recently started a jackpot livestock show at the fair, where 4-H kids pay a fee to enter and can win cash prizes. They hold the event in the evening so members of the public can enjoy it after work.

During the fair, Freeman can be seen everywhere. She helps with the livestock weigh-in and is the clerk of the pig show. She and her family also raise sheep and sell lambs to local 4-H and FFA members for their projects, so when the sheep show comes around, she is there helping those kids where she can.

And if that weren’t enough, she also helps the auctioneers during the livestock auction at the end of the fair.

Freeman’s involvement with the fair doesn’t end when it wraps up each summer, though. Her work continues all throughout the year. She has been a 4-H club leader for 37 years. When her own three children were old enough for 4-H, she became a 4-H parent. She also served on the fair board for seven years.

“When our kids were growing up, fair was our vacation,” Freeman said, noting she used to take the entire week of the fair off from her job when her kids were still at home and involved in 4-H and FFA.

In fact, even Freeman’s job connects to her love of agricultural education and the fair. When she was in high school, she participated in a program that allowed students to get credit for working at an ag-related job. She started working in the greenhouse at the High Plains Grassland Research Station, and after she graduated from college, she returned there to work as a biological science technician on grazing research.

Freeman said children really benefit from being part of the fair. When the children complete their projects, they have to keep records of what they did and then sit down for an interview with a judge at the fair.

“I’ve seen what it’s done for my kids,” she said. “The thing you will notice about 4-H and FFA kids is they can speak to adults. They aren’t afraid to tell the public all about their projects. I tell the kids one of the most important things you will get out of this organization is the ability to speak to people.”

There are other benefits she touts, as well. She said 4-H and FFA teach participants how to keep records, how to manage money, and the importance of doing a job well. They also learn important lessons about having responsibilities.

To learn about enrolling in 4-H, contact the Laramie County Extension Office at 307-633-4383. Local junior high and senior high school ag teachers have information about FFA. For more information about the Laramie County Fair, go online to www.laramiecountyfair.com.
Behind the stage makeup is an actor. Behind the actor is a curtain. Behind the curtain is a swirling sea of actors, set builders, lighting technicians, costume designers, concessionaires and ushers.

Behind all that is a juggler, keeping every ball in the air. That man is Todd Martin, the managing director of the Cheyenne Little Theatre Players. When the curtain rises on opening night of any production, and your banker and third-grade teacher are suddenly transformed into stars, you can be sure Martin has been behind the scenes attending to every detail.

From taking care of the day-to-day business operations of the organization to overseeing the giant volunteer force that puts on each show at the Mary Godfrey Playhouse and the Atlas Theatre, Martin has a hand in everything.

As the only full-time paid employee of the CLTP, he is ultimately responsible for the six main-stage productions and the annual summer Old-Fashioned Melodrama they perform each year.

Each show is almost completely manned by community volunteers, which means everyone is there because they really enjoy it. Local children serve as the young actors playing the roles of kids. Cheyenne’s carpentry and sewing experts lend a hand with building the sets and making the costumes. Friendly faces from the community take tickets in the box office, and locals make up the team of ushers helping everyone find their seat. It’s these enthusiastic volunteers who are the best part of Martin’s job.

“It is a really, really warm environment,” Martin said. “We try to be as welcoming as possible. You meet lots of interesting people from all angles of life.”

It’s this welcoming backdrop that encourages so many people to give it a try.

“The turnout for our auditions has been outstanding,” he said. “For ‘Peter Pan,’ we had 90 kids show up to audition. For our
Christmas show, 50 people showed up. From a participation and attendance point of view, the response has been fantastic.”

A chance to be either onstage or backstage is something CLTP offers to the community that is hard to find in any other event.

“We try to provide opportunities for all ages and skill levels,” he said. “We’re really the only ones in town who provide this opportunity for people. If you look at the fact that next year’s going to be our 90th season, I think that says something in itself. It’s become something that’s really important to the community.”

Martin is a member of that Cheyenne community himself. He grew up in Torrington and then majored in theater at Chadron State College in Nebraska. He spent his college summers doing summer stock theater, both at the Fort Robinson Post Playhouse in Fort Robinson State Park and the Theatre West in Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

After college he moved to Austin, where he did freelance acting and technical work. In 2001, he moved back to Cheyenne to take on the job of technical director for the CLTP. He did that for four years, and then returned to Austin, where he did more acting, directing and designing for theatrical productions.

In 2012, he went to work at Baylor University as the technical director at Waco Hall, and then went on to be the artistic director of the Gaslight Baker Theatre in Lockhart, Texas. That’s when the opportunity to come home to Wyoming came knocking. In 2017, the managing director job at CLTP opened.

“This job became available, and I had fond memories of my time here from before,” Martin said. “I thought – why not? I will apply. Lo and behold, they hired me.”

Now he spends his time making sure everything gets taken care of for each show.

“Right now, we have a show in performance, we have ‘Boeing Boeing’ in rehearsal at the Atlas, but then ‘The Secret Garden’ just started rehearsal. So it’s just making sure that all the needs of those individual shows are being met. You want everyone to have a good experience and feel like they are being treated fairly.”

He also works in concert with the 15-member board of directors and with various committees. For example, he works with the programming committee that selects each year’s shows, and he works with the fund development committee, applying for grants and working with donors.

“There’s lots of balls in the air at one time,” Martin said.

Anyone who would like to get involved with the CLTP is welcome to find out more. Their business hours are noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Mary Godfrey Playhouse, 2706 E. Pershing Blvd. People can also find a list of their volunteer opportunities, upcoming show dates and ticket purchasing information on their website, www.cheyennelittletheatre.org.
Civic Center "phenomenal."

"David is a very energetic, very people-oriented, talented coordinator and knows what will fit," Lindstrom said.

The success of events at the Civic Center benefits local audiences and artists alike, he said.

"Whenever you have visitation by talented people, you believe in yourself that much more," he said.

The Civic Center's success also boosts Cheyenne's reputation outside of the community. About two-thirds of tickets for the Avett Brothers concert were sold to people outside of Cheyenne.

"We applaud David and his team for bringing in so many events that have the ability to attract visitors from outside of Cheyenne, outside of Laramie County, who might not have been here before," said Darren Rudloff, president and CEO of Visit Cheyenne. "These events are giving people a great first taste of our community, and hopefully we can get them to come back."

The Civic Center is touted for having excellent acoustics with a more intimate setting that offers benefits over other concert venues.

"I don't even try to go to Red Rocks anymore. I'm just so spoiled by our Civic Center," Rudloff said.

For more information about the Cheyenne Civic Center visit www.cheyenneevents.org/civic.

15 concerts or comedians to the venue, Soules said.

They will scale back the number of high-dollar family shows, like the Cirque shows, and bring in more affordable events for families, like the family film series, which will be themed parties like the Civic Center's previous "Polar Express" and "Harry Potter" events, including popcorn, treats and fun for children.

"They love the variety, they love the options, but if you're on a budget and you have a family, you can only afford so many shows," Soules said of Cheyenne families.

The new direction of the Civic Center, along with other efforts in Cheyenne such as Fridays in The Asher and Jon and Renee Jelinek's plans to reopen the historic Lincoln Theatre as a music venue, are creating a new vibe for the city.

"I think we have a lot of work to do on building that younger audience Cheyenne wants," Soules said.

That work involves slowly building audiences by bringing in different types of shows until reaching a tipping point where third-party promoters, like as Live Nation and AEG, start seeking out Cheyenne as a stop for their tours.

"I think it takes a whole community to do this," he said.

"Phenomenal" activity

Bill Lindstrom, executive director of Arts Cheyenne, called the scale of activity in the Civic Center "phenomenal."

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