



Southwest Public Lands People



Employee News of the

San Juan National Forest & San Juan Field Office-BLM

September, 2003

COLUMBINE NEWS



Barbara Hodge (left), USFS/BLM Visitor Information Specialist, answers a visitor's questions at the new San Juan Mountains Center in Silverton.

New San Juan Office Opens in Silverton

By Ann Bond

SILVERTON – There's a new San Juan Public Lands office in southwestern Colorado. The San Juan Mountains Center opened on Empire Street in Silverton last month to act as a visitor information and interpretive center.

The effort is funded by the San Juan Public Lands Center, Mountain Studies Institute, and San Juan Mountains Association.

"The great thing is that it shows real Forest Service and BLM commitment to this community," said Bev Rich, San Juan County Treasurer. "Our county is 86 percent public lands, but until now, we haven't had a real agency presence up here."

For the past seven years, Barbara Hodge, Forest Service/BLM Visitor Information Specialist (and year-round Silverton resident) has answered visitor inquiries about public lands at the Silverton Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center. She's ecstatic that the agencies now have their own facility.

"I had limited space and visibility at the Chamber, just one table in the corner," Hodge said. "Now we have a whole interpretive room, a

bookstore, reference materials, plus we sell a lot of maps."

The interpretive portion of the center is designed to stimulate the interests of both adults and children, with hands-on materials, natural history displays, and computer access. The most commonly asked questions Barb gets are about where to hike and how to drive the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway.

*"... it shows real Forest Service and BLM commitment to this community,"
Bev Rich, San Juan County Treasurer*

The Center also provides offices for Columbine Snow Ranger Denny Hogan and BLM Alpine Loop Rangers Lisa Richardson and Scott Jackson. They share office space with Mountain Studies Institute Director of Education Ryland Gardner.

"It gives us a street-front presence to reach the thousands of people who arrive by train and the hundreds more who drive into Silverton," said Ellen Stein, Mountain Studies Institute Executive Director.

The San Juan Mountains Center will be open through the fall from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Although the visitor center will close in wintertime, the offices will remain open year round, and the facility will be available for public lectures and meetings.

(Ann Bond is the Public Affairs Specialist for the San Juan Public Lands Center.)

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