

## HISTORY: Western theme caught on and became official

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a subdivision of Brooks Scanlon, a force in Bend that began with a mill and logging outfits and diversified to set the standards of lifestyle in Central Oregon.

Construction of the lodge, condominiums, and Big Meadow Golf Course had begun. Several lots had already been sold to future homeowners, who were attracted to the unobtrusive layout of a mountain community. Here, they could spend retirement years or enjoy vacation homes, or just live peacefully, removed from traffic, noise and population.

Quiet living in nature was the concept of the ranch, a very different concept from that of many destination resorts that were beginning to change rural landscapes. There would be no retail complex at Black Butte, as it was not intended to be commercial. That presented a challenge. Black Butte residents and guests would want and need a place to shop.

A leadership team of Brooks Scanlon President Mike Hollern, Brooks Resources President Bob Harrison, and Brooks Resources Marketing Manager Bill Smith saw a simple solution to this challenge.

Sisters was the answer, but the town was not attractive — rather homely, in fact — and didn't offer much. The rodeo was the only event in the sleepy town, a weekend of raucous, brawling fun that brought income to Sisters businesses which might not have otherwise survived the rest of the year. The Brooks conglomerate, a sponsor of the rodeo, enjoyed the event and recognized what it did for the small town of fewer than 500 residents, but their needs were greater.

"We wanted to control Sisters from being ugly," explained Bill Smith, who has continued to be a visionary in making Central Oregon attractive and desirable. (The Old Mill District in Bend is his most notable creation.) "We also didn't want it to become too busy, but we did want to create a place for Black Butte residents to shop."

The colorful Harold Barclay, a friend whose company supplied logs to Brooks Scanlon mill, said simply, "Let's buy Sisters." This was not an absurd idea at the time, Smith said, as a highway frontage lot could be purchased for \$10,000. Barclay's idea was to purchase all existing businesses and revamp

them into an inviting adjunct to Black Butte Ranch outdoor amenities.

Brooks Resources President Harrison envisioned an alternative plan. Brooks would offer a \$5,000 grant to build false storefronts of Western theme to any existing business in Sisters, or to new construction that honored the theme. This would give Sisters a unique image and enhance its attraction. If a business owner kept the Western theme frontage for 10 years, the loan would be forgiven.

Ruth's Café, now The Gallery Restaurant and Bar, was the first business to take advantage of this offer. Dave Clemens, a local contractor, followed with the Western-themed Sisters Veterinary Clinic. Sisters Drug Store, formerly located at the corner of Elm and Cascade (The Palace), was next.

Leithauser Grocery (at the current site of Sisters Drug) jumped into the offer, attracted by the funds and by the theme. The Leithausers were very involved with the rodeo, so a Western theme was greeted enthusiastically, according to Edith Leithauser.

When Bill Reed, Jr. built his General Land Office (which later became Reed Bros. Realty), he and his father, Bill Sr., opted to do a Western theme. Brooks Resources, which was not financially involved in that project, saw this was a good indicator that their idea was bearing fruit.

Another important objective of Brooks Resources was the restoration of Hotel



PHOTO PROVIDED

Downtown Sisters was nothing special until Black Butte Ranch developer Brooks Resources created incentives to create Western-themed storefronts.

Sisters, even though it was not part of the Brooks investment portfolio. The septic system was failing. The building was in need of a considerable amount of repair, after years of minimal maintenance.

"Remodel usually involves plywood and sheet rock," Smith said, "a process that was not appealing to a remodel of a building of this stature."

Again, Brooks Resources stepped in and gave financial assistance to the varied group of the building's owners to

assure that the integrity of the historic pearl of Sisters was not compromised. The restored building was later purchased by Bill and Jan Reed, to reopen as a restaurant in 1985.

Sisters City Council and planners sanctioned the Western theme in 1978, requiring all new construction to conform to this model. Shortly after, Sisters Rodeo moved to its new location south of Sisters. In the next decade, Brooks Resources sold Black Butte Ranch to the

homeowners.

Old gas stations, dilapidated motor lodges, crumbling eyesores and outmoded poorly functioning buildings began disappearing as the popularity of Sisters grew. Shopping and dining spread to side streets, as tourists began roaming the town that had been a former inconvenience for travelers trying to get to the bigger boroughs of Bend and Redmond, or further east.

"Sisters is nice," Smith said. "Bend visitors always plan to spend a day in Sisters."

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