

The History of Ridgewood

The Ridgewood residents of today owe a debt of gratitude to the Warren family and to the early home and land owners and those who followed. They endured hardships and faced many challenges in the development of the Ridgewood property. They volunteered, joined together, and took action to do what had to be done when their land or their community was threatened, and they persevered. They paved the way for the residents of Ridgewood to fulfill their dreams of living in comfort and peacefulness on beautiful forested acres, of breathtaking mountain views, a multitude of wildlife, and best of all—the most wonderful friends and neighbors to be found anywhere.

So let us go back in time to 1967, almost 50 years ago, when Ed Warren, a retired New Mexico rancher, accompanied a friend to this land surrounded by the Pike National Forest. Ed “realized that this was a special piece of land offering beauty, seclusion, and a wonderful place to live,” so he made a small down payment that day to purchase 607 acres, once homesteads and working horse ranches. This first parcel of land included where the ranch house stands, the land where the first and second filings are located, plus some land to the north. These acres within the national forest were first brought together by Fritz Hammer, the resident ranger for the Manitou Park Experimental Station for many years. Fritz purchased private land elsewhere in Colorado and traded these with the National Forest Service to consolidate the 607 acres that would become the Hammer cattle ranch. The Hammer family left behind the log ranch house that Dave and Carol Warren occupy today.

The development of Ridgewood eventually became a family undertaking by Ed and Etta Warren and their son Dave and wife Carol. Ed asked Dave to become his partner in the venture; and, after a year of marriage and just coming out of the Air Force in 1969, Dave and Carol took residence in the old log house to begin their work as on-site developers and sales brokers for the Ridgewood property. The Warrens purchased an additional 40 acres (third filing) in 1970 and then acquired about 160 acres at the north end making up portions of the sixth filing in 1971. After surveying, contour mapping, and platting of the area, the Teller County Commissioners approved the plats for Filings 1 and 2 in 1971. This was the beginning of Ridgewood. The total land area of the development today is approximately 827 acres consisting of Filings 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, some adjacent non-platted plots and the ranch land retained by the Warrens as the “Living Waters Ranch.”

In 1974, the access road from the ranger station to the development was the old ranch road which Dave improved and maintained with his 1950 vintage farm tractor. Dave was also chief snow plower for the road. After a drawn out bureaucratic process, the Forest Service approved the route through the forest for a new road in 1974. All roads, except in filing 6, were built to the latest Teller County specifications on a 60 foot right of way. That same year, the County Commissioners were finally convinced that enough people lived in the development to warrant county road maintenance. The Woodland Park school bus route was extended to Ridgewood in 1976, which gave Spruce Road priority for snow plowing.

Probably the biggest comfort shock to early Ridgewood residents was the sorry state of affairs at Mountain Bell. The only phones in the area early on were at the ranger station and land sales. The first phone service to Ridgewood home owners finally arrived in April, 1973, thanks to an assist to the phone company by Carol Warren. She volunteered herself and her horse to drag lines through hip deep, snow covered utility easements so the phone crew could hang their lines on IREA poles. But application for a phone—and getting it—was also a real adventure! Residents could not rely on having a working phone, so many trips were made to the headquarters building in Colorado Springs to do battle with Mountain Bell representatives. We should be thankful for the telephone service we have today!

Originally the choice for picking up mail was at the Woodland Park post office or a rural mail box on Highway 67. In 1973, rural mail deliveries were extended to the Ridgewood entrance, and the Gazette also began making deliveries. Thanks to the efforts of a resident who was a retired postmaster, the mail route was extended to home delivery in 1977.

Early environmental threats included a growing infestation of dwarf mistletoe, especially among the ponderosa pines along the west and northwest borders of the development, and the mountain pine beetle also arrived in the area. To fight the dwarf mistletoe infestation, Dave Warren organized crews to cut and remove diseased trees in the summers of 1972 and 1973. Then a 50 foot buffer zone was created by cutting out diseased trees on the forest side of Ridgewood borders. The fight against the pine beetle lasted five years beginning in 1975. Dave again organized property owners to form work crews to cut and spray infested trees. The old 1940 tank truck purchased by the Warrens and homeowners for a volunteer fire truck was pressed into service as a spray truck. Over the five year life of the program, about 1000 trees were felled and used for firewood. With the exception of an area in the northwest section of the sixth filing, loss of trees within Ridgewood was minimal. Augie Setter was a big contributor to the program in getting to the trees that could not be reached by the spray truck. Due to the determination and hard work of Dave Warren and many Ridgewood volunteers, the Ridgewood forests were saved!

The early home owners were a close-knit group with a common desire to see the development grow and succeed. Dave and Carol Warren promoted a Ridgewood family concept with annual picnics, group meetings, and help to newcomers in converting to a country lifestyle. Neighbors helped each other and readily participated in group volunteer projects. Over a period of years, two community organizations evolved from these efforts: The Ridgewood Homeowners Association and the Ridgewood Water District and Water Board. Before formation of these groups, the home owners met periodically to deal with problems, such as the proposed US Forest Service project to fence their borders with Ridgewood. The homeowners protested the fencing project, saying that the fence was to deny them access to the forest. The project was cancelled after completing the fence along the western border of Ridgewood.

At the beginning of development, the Warrens hired a geologist to survey the land area. The geologist's report indicated the likelihood of high producing water wells, so the Warrens made the decision to go ahead with a central water system in the first three filings rather than private

wells. Dave was the general contractor for construction of the system, which involved help from geologists, water engineers, water attorneys, and volunteers. In 1972, the system started out with one well and a standby well. Initially there was a capacity of 8500 gallons and five miles of distribution pipe. Today, we have three wells and a storage capacity of 20,000 gallons.

There were many problems with the water system along the way, the most significant being a drought cycle that began in 1974 and caused the standby well to dry up and reduced flow in the main well. The Warrens put in a second well to replace the standby well, and heavier supply lines were installed to prevent leaks. Even so, intermittently between 1974 and 1982, it was necessary for volunteers to use the old tank truck to haul water from the spring in the fourth filing.

Even with the early hardships of living in Ridgewood, the location, minimum size of two acres per lot, and the quality of the development encouraged healthy land sales. All filings, including the final fourth filing, were basically sold out by 1979. In the spring of that year, a temporary committee, the forerunner of the Ridgewood Homeowners' Association, was organized with their main objective to cure water problems. The homeowners voted for a property association, set up an organizational fund, and hired a water attorney. In November, 1979, the first Board of Directors of the Ridgewood Homeowners' Association was elected. Then Ridgewood property owners voted to create a water district, which became a reality in 1981, and the association took over permanent operation of the water system.

In the next two years, the District initiated a series of capital improvements which greatly increased the reliability and capability of maintaining the system. They invested \$500 to buy a 2500 gallon tank truck without a motor, which was later matched with an old International truck. This, plus new tires, became the Ridgewood water truck. They also hired a new water attorney and proceeded immediately to implement her recommendations to tap into the underground White Spruce Creek flow. A District election held in September, 1985, unanimously approved the issuance of a \$100,000 bond to pay for construction and to extend the water lines. But in June, 1986, thanks to a nearly snowless winter, well production began falling below consumption, and the problem increased throughout the summer. Volunteer drivers again saved the community by making nearly daily water runs to Woodland Park with the water truck.

An environmental threat of another type occurred in October, 1983, when NORPAC Exploration Services of Englewood conducted seismic tests in the Manitou Experimental Forest. Residents complained to elected officials, and the Forest Service promised that nothing would be done without an environmental impact study. Then in October, 1985, the Forest Service advised that they had received six applications for oil and gas leases within the Experimental Forest. The sites adjoined Ridgewood eastern boundaries plus a small area to the southwest of Ridgewood. Again, Ridgewood residents took action by writing individual letters of objection to the Forest Service and elected representatives. The Forest Service held a public meeting which was attended by 47 Ridgewood residents—all opposed to the plan. Ridgewood's concerted efforts resulted in the Forest Service impact study never being completed.

In recent years, Ridgewood volunteers have joined together to form a Community Wildfire Protection Committee (CWPP) and with the assistance of the Colorado State Forest Service and the Coalition of the Upper South Platte (CUSP), ultimately wrote the Ridgewood Wildfire Protection Plan. This resulted in our designation as a “Firewise Community”—the first in Teller County to earn this recognition. Ridgewood volunteers continue to be active in local and neighborhood wildfire mitigation projects. The Ridgewood Water Board installed a new water tank and is planning for gradual upgrading and replacement of the water system. Our Homeowners’ Association pulled together donations from residents to purchase a security camera and provided the opportunity for property owners to contract aerial spraying to protect our beautiful spruce and fir trees. Ridgewood residents definitely demonstrate our willingness to confront problems, and we continue to do what needs to be done for the love of our land, our homes, and our community.

I have adapted information from the Ridgewood archives, author unidentified, to write this commentary of Ridgewood history. I am also grateful for the invaluable information found in Dave and Carol Warren’s article, “The Beginning of Ridgewood,” which appeared in the March, 2002, Ridgewood newsletter.

Sharon Ledlow