**The silver lining

From boomtown to mountain resort, Georgetown survives**

By **David Salcido** Las Cruces Bulletin, Fall, 2014

One of the great pleasures of living in Las Cruces is its proximity to so many wonderfully diverse getaway spots. Lakes, mountains, sand dunes, desert trails, river excursions – the possibilities are endless for those wanting to get out of town for a few hours or even a few days.

A truly enchanting region of southern New Mexico can be found two hours west in the Gila Wilderness of Grant County, tucked away along the winding Mimbres River. Here farmers and ranchers still value the same elements they have for generations: cattle, crops and kin. Rolling hills and grassy savannas give way to rocky outcroppings dotted with juniper and pion pine and eventually to mountain vistas crowned by Ponderosa pine.

In this picturesque corner of the state, the past and present intermingle and every family has a story to tell. History is compressed and the farther off the main roads one wanders the further back in time one finds oneself.

One such place is Georgetown, a once bustling silver mining boomtown of the mid- to late-19th century that has all but disappeared into the annals of history, leaving little but overgrown foundations, crumbling footings and the occasional relic hidden in tall grass. High above the Georgetown site on Parapet Mountain, sits a grouping of cabins owned by an enterprising couple whose mission, it seems, is to keep the memory of Georgetown alive.

Jon and Susie Eickhoff are corporate retirees who settled in these mountains at the beginning of the 21st century, after successful careers as owners of a research and development firm in Michigan that counted as its clients such notable brands as IBM, Xerox and AT&T. Today, they own land all over the Mimbres Valley, including the old McGregor mining claim just above the original site of Georgetown.

History aside, the area the Eickhoffs have chosen for their cabin retreat is a panorama of pleasure given to glorious sunrises that paint the valley in vibrant shades of green, blue, yellow, orange and pink and spectacular sunsets with explosions of color from the deepest red to the brightest orange, punctuated with distinctly banded rainbows during the rainy season. At night, the canopy of stars is overwhelming, with the milky way dividing the darkness – a river of stars unfathomable – and the quiet is so profound it is almost sepulchral in its vastness.

It is very easy to see why generations of pioneers put down roots here. For some, it must be the closest they had ever come to heaven on Earth, despite the hardships of making a life here.

Expertly designed by Susie Eickhoff and built much like efficiency apartments, the cabins each have a combined living room-kitchen area, offset by a bookcase, behind which is the bed. Energy-efficient fireplaces, operated via thermostat, keep the temperature perfectly regulated and make for cozy evenings and mornings. A bath and vanity area take up about a quarter of the 400 square feet. Each cabin is themed after the life of one of the area’s more colorful characters, and named accordingly.

Some, like the Brannin cabin, named for Stanton Strother Brannin, a rough and tumble character who owned the first patented mining claim in New Mexico and was the father of 13 children, features walls and ceiling of blonde tongue-and-groove wood with integrated beams.

Another, named for Lottie Deno, a notorious gambler who provided sanctuary for desperados in Georgetown and was the inspiration for Miss Kitty on the “Gunsmoke” television series, has whitewashed stucco walls with decorative wallpaper wainscoting on the bottom half.

The bath and kitchen are generously stocked with toiletries and all the necessaries to prepare light meals, including glassware, dishes, pots, pans and a full-sized coffee maker. A full-sized refrigerator and two-burner stove wrap around to a double bowl sink and a breakfast sitting area.

The furnishings are comfortable, with overstuffed armchairs or couches. The decorations are in keeping with the cabin’s namesake, including shotguns, needlepoint, large framed maps of “Pioneer New Mexico” and other treasures. The floors are either wooden or tiled throughout. Ceiling fans move air around in the bedroom area and the living area, over the fireplace. All in all, very nice arrangements and perfect for the weekend traveler.

For those who cannot live without their modern conveniences, a television with satellite access and a full slate of popular movies on dvd are offered. Books and magazines line the bookshelves, including many books on the history of the area.

Outside the cabins are covered patio areas, with tables and chairs, as well as gas firepits with lounge chairs facing out into the valley. The entire area is surrounded on all sides by piion pine, juniper and occasional cottonwood trees. Hiking trails also abound, throughout the area, for the adventurous.

As if that weren’t enough, the Eickhoffs have also provided areas of relaxation for their guests on two large communal patios, one with tables, chairs and benches overlooking the Georgetown site, the other a bit farther up the mountain with lounge chairs and a solar soaking tub flavored with Dead Sea Salts to keep skin hydrated. The overall effect is one of comfort and leisure.

If it’s a quick daytrip you’re looking for, the Mimbres Valley has plenty to offer, but if a weekend retreat or an extended submersion into a simpler way of living are what’s needed, the Georgetown site and the Georgetown Cabins overlooking it are hard to beat. History, comfort and wide open spaces that seem to go on forever – that’s the real New Mexico.

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