

Volume 7, No. 10, March 6, 2008

The Independent Weekly Line on Durango and Beyond



Quick'n'Dirty

Governor honors the Smiley Building

Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter recognized a local success story for renewable energy last week. Durango's Smiley Building was honored with a Governor's Excellence in Renewable Energy Award on Jan. 10 during the annual State of the State speech.

Located in the 1300 block of East Third Ave., the 45,000-square-foot Smiley Building was built in 1936 as a junior high school. Six decades later, it was abandoned and widely regarded as a community eyesore. However, in 1997, three partners – Charles and John Shaw and Lisa Bodwalk – purchased the building with plans to resurrect it as a community arts center.

But shortly after the purchase, \$5,000 utility bills started arriving in the mail forcing the partners to consider alternative energy options and begin enacting numerous conservation measures. Ten years later, the Smiley Building has grown into more than a community arts center; it is also the largest structure in the nation producing its own electricity and a demonstration of what can be done to "green" a large structure.

The historic building has been brought into the 21st century with endless efficiency innovations – high-efficiency boilers, motion-detected lighting, thousands of compact fluorescent light bulbs, low-flow faucets, waterless urinals, solar heating and on-demand water heaters to name a few.

In March of 2007, the Smiley Building also capped off a major solar panel installation, complementing efficiency measures with power generation. Joining an existing array of 72 panels, 120 new panels were installed, now fully powering the building and even spinning electricity back into the grid during sunny days. The move made the Smiley the only building of its size and type in America that is creating all of its own electricity, according to Charles Shaw.

The building has not escaped national notice, receiving a cover story in Solar Today magazine and now garnering a prestigious Governor's Award, which were created as part of Gov. Ritter's "New Energy Economy." The Smiley Building joined New Belgium Brewing, the IntraWest Energy Alliance, the Fort Carson Army Post and the Northeast Denver Housing Center as one of the first recipients of the award.

"Congratulations to all of you for bringing Colorado's New Energy Economy to life, for helping us give new meaning to 'bold and ambitious' and for helping to establish Colorado as an international leader," Ritter said as he presented the awards. The five winners were greeted with a standing ovation.

After receiving the award, Shaw commented, "Both Lisa and I were thrilled and honored to be recognized by the Governor for our efforts in advancing renewable energy in Colorado. We think the Governor has a bold plan for establishing Colorado as a world leader in renewable energy, and we are proud that the Smiley Building can be a leader in that effort."
