

SUMMER 2010



# *Signature* **MONTANA**

RECREATION ■ LIFESTYLE ■ ART ■ BUSINESS ■ HISTORY



# The Calvert Hotel



LEFT: The outside of the revitalized Calvert Hotel.

BELOW: In the book, *The History of Lewistown*, by Robert Dissly, Mrs. Jack Humphrey recalled the Calvert's history as a high school dormitory for girls. Even today, traces of the girls' occupancy, such as these initials, linger in The Calvert.

## STATELY AGAIN

After 30 years laying flooring in hundreds, maybe thousands, of buildings, Steve Duffy wanted a new direction in life. In August 2007 he purchased the Calvert Hotel in Lewistown for \$280,000 at auction. Although the Calvert was distressed, Duffy found a sound structure with promise behind the building's native brick walls. Still, his million dollar-plus investment revitalizing the nearly century-old structure into a stately, fashionable hotel



full of western hospitality was a bold venture in unassuming and relatively isolated Lewistown.

Aided by his wife, Teresa, his father, Leonard, and Eric Gerlinger, owner of Gerlinger Construction in Lewistown, Duffy tore into the Calvert, stripping walls to the studs, excavating piles of earth, ripping off roof shingles and dismantling two chimneys. Only the framing and bricks remained untouched. Although Duffy delved into the remodeling and restoration with intensity, he took care with the old hotel's soul as a former high school dormitory for girls. "An upscale, resort style hotel is what we wanted while preserving as much of the original look as possible," Steve Duffy explains. "We wanted to give a sense of restoration rather than replacement."

At the September 2009 grand opening, Duffy watched jaws drop as locals and out-of-town guests stepped into the lobby with its 1930s phone booth, gas fireplace, Wi-Fi and meeting rooms. Throughout the hotel, guests will find a blend of modern amenities and period furnishings and fixtures. Orig-

**RIGHT:** Large, private baths in every guest room feature a pedestal sink, ball-footed bathtub and walk-in shower.

**FAR RIGHT:** Every inch of the revitalized Calvert Hotel--from the exterior's native brick to the interior's warm, rich tones to the guest rooms' custom-made massive, wooden headboards--exudes refined, classic elegance.



nal window seats and banisters are worn and nicked, and in one nook, the initials "H.M." scratched in the wood remind guests of the young ladies who once bustled in the hallways. The transom above each guest room displays the room number. Of the 28 rooms bright with natural light, there are four King suites with gas fireplaces framed in marble or granite, luxurious linens and comforters, and spacious bathrooms with walk-in showers and ball-footed bathtubs. Earth-friendly features include energy-efficient lighting and windows, and insulation made from recycled newsprint. On the roof, 90 solar tubes collect enough

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energy to run a boiler that produces heat. Lewistown old-timers remember the Calvert as the Fergus County Improvement Corporation Dormitory that opened in 1917 as a surrogate home for 50 girls attending Fergus County High School. In August 1925, financial woes forced the dormitory to close. Emma and George Marsh bought the building and turned it into the Calvert Hotel. Yet, the Marshes recognized the continued need for a dormitory. Thus, many young men and women continued their education while living at the Calvert and working there as maids or night clerks.

When the Marshes modernized the building, many exquisite, original fixtures were lost. The Calvert changed ownership and standards dipped. Gradually, the Calvert lost its zeal. Even so, locals embraced the relic, realizing its contribution to Lewistown's cultural heritage. Says Duffy, "The locals were happy about the project, and many of them shared their memories about the hotel." Duane Ferdinand, Lewistown's historic

preservation officer, adds, "The restoration of a historic building is always a tremendous asset to a community. Steve and Eric should be commended for their commitment and labor of love."

The Montana Preservation Alliance did just that. Last November, it awarded Duffy its "Outstanding Rehabilitation Project" award. Says a MPA spokesperson, "The Duffy's and Mr. Gerlinger have taken great care to preserve the original feeling of the interior spaces and at the same time incorporate compatible modern conveniences and design elements."

Vacancy rates are rising as business travelers and other clientele discover the Calvert. Duffy mentions hunters and anglers, athletes and fans drawn by the many Class C tournaments, visitors who come for the Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Chokecherry Festival. If he had qualms about the venture, it's the location and limited visibility one block off Main Street. By 2011, a restaurant, bar and sky-lighted atrium will be in place, and for guests with canine companions, a 28-station dog kennel.

Duffy likens the Calvert to a bed and breakfast, welcoming and cozy, but with the added amenities of a resort hotel. Having spent nearly three years of his life bringing his plans for the old hotel to fruition, Duffy now feels personal satisfaction. "I'm fortunate to have the skills, knowledge and contacts to do a project like this," he says. "It's very rewarding to see the results." **EM**



*~Freelancer Cathy Moser writes about history, lifestyles and the outdoors from her home in central Montana's Judith Mountains.*