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Western resort ready to open

By Liz Wood

Marie Tran, the Sous-Chef at Brush Creek Ranch, was busy chopping tomatoes in the state-of-the-art kitchen. Behind her were warming ovens and a bread/pizza oven. In front of her was a beautiful rock countertop.

Guests can watch her work since the countertop opens to the great room in the lodge at Brush Creek.

On the north end of the great room is a gas fireplace with a glass wall. The ridge is lined with comfortable seat cushions and faces leather furniture. The décor looks like it was taken straight from the copper and gold mining camps of times past.

On the south end of the great room is a wood fireplace and the smell of the wood burning filled the room.

Between the two fireplaces sits a bar surrounded by mini-refrigerators and a dining

area with barnwood tops.

Rustic, yet elegant, is the best way to describe the room.

The lodge, at 30,000 square feet, has 40 guest rooms. Each room is meticulously designed to represent the West. Televisions and phones are absent from the rooms and, in fact, the only television in the lodge is a large screen TV on the east wall of the great room.

A walk-in wine cabinet that is filled to capacity with wine adds just one more distinctive touch to the great room.

Tran said she lives here permanently now. She works for White Lodging and came to Wyoming from Austin, Texas, to help out. She fell in love with the area and decided to stay.

On Dec. 1, Brush Creek Ranch will begin its soft opening phase. The staff at the ranch is working out a few accounting details and fin-

ishing up construction, said COO Michael Williams, in an interview recently.

Williams was getting ready to give a tour of the ranch to a customer and MJ Clark, editor of the Wyoming Business Report.

The customer, Brad Craft, of Southern California, was considering the ranch as an incentive retreat for his employees.

"There are five types of accommodations," Williams said. The accommodations include lodge rooms – king, queen or full bed - cabin suites, luxury cabins and the bunkhouse, which also has separate sleeping quarters on each floor of the bunkhouse.

The bunkhouse sleeps up to 26 people and, with that, the ranch can accommodate 135 people.

All of the cabins have been

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Photos by Liz Wood

Jill Craft looks at the view from Robber's Roost at Brush Creek Ranch.

restored, and the modern facilities added complement the rustic buildings from the original ranch.

Jill Craft emerged into the great room, as she had just completed her spa treatment. Jill, who traveled with her husband, tells Williams "You are awesome with your special touches."

Soon, MJ appears from her spa treatment and the only person missing is Brad.

As the group tours the barn, which has been restored and now houses a chapel on the top floor, Brad is seen walking back from his fly-fishing excursion.

He has a big smile on his face, which can only mean he had a good day. Brad confirms it as he greets his wife and introduces himself to others.

The group is now ready to see a portion of the 13,000 acre ranch. They load up into two Polaris off-road vehicles and Williams leads the way. The road is a two-track and bumpy, but Williams handles the Polaris with ease.

Surrounding the two-track road are acres of sagebrush. Suddenly two sets of ears come into view from the sage as mule deer peek to see what is causing a ruckus. The mule deer's coat has turned so they blend with the fall brush.

As the Polaris goes deeper into the ranch, six buffalo become visible, and, as if on cue, one rolls over to rub his back.

It is experiences like these that the top Fortune 200 companies are looking for when they visit Wyoming, according to Williams.

The ranch now gives all-inclusive a whole new meaning.

When Beth and Bruce White bought the ranch, Williams said, their original purpose was a second home. As they saw everything the ranch had to offer, they knew they had to share it.

The plans for the 7,000 square foot home became a 30,000 square foot lodge.

The ranch includes a 28,000 square foot indoor arena and a competition-sized wild horse arena. There are 75 horses and 800 head of cattle on the ranch, which is managed by Ron Hawkins.

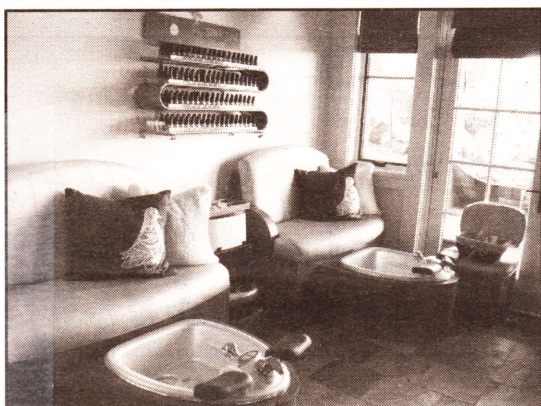
Local talent has been hired to work on the ranch, including Jake Keller. Williams describes Keller, the wrangler, as a rare find. A recent graduate from the University of Wyoming, Keller has a number of duties. He heads up the wrangler program and is the ranch veterinarian.

Ray Bernal is the director of engineering. Williams said Bernal's familiarity with the Platte Valley helps him get the goods and services needed to maintain the ranch.

Wade Allen Timm is the lead agriculture manager. "We got him when we acquired the TZ Ranch," Williams said.



The historic barn at Brush Creek has been refurbished and now houses a chapel where the hayloft was originally.



The pedicure area awaits customers at the Spa at Brush Creek Ranch.



Comfortable classrooms are a part of the lodge.



The 28,000 square foot indoor arena offers plenty of room. To the right, the buffalo on the ranch pay little attention to the visitors.



Stacey Kerns is the spa consultant. "Her expertise is unmatched," said Williams. "She has done an excellent job of bringing the spa to life."

The spa is as inviting as the rest of the lodge. The relaxing environment lets the guests know that they are about to get pampered with facials, spa treatments, manicures and massages.

The housekeeping staff includes a blend of White Lodge employees from other parts of the country, as well as people from Riverside, Encampment and Saratoga.

Ron Brown runs the gun range activities.

The operation managers are out-of-market hires, as they specialize in luxury ranches. Julie Duff and Josh Graffan,

director of activities, came from the Rock Creek Ranch near Missoula, Mont.

During the peak season, 45 people will work at the ranch. Many of them will live on the ranch, as Brush Creek brings in students from international intern programs, as well as colleges. The foundation for the employee housing has been laid behind the indoor arena.