

# Birth of Rialto Bridge celebrated as harbinger of downtown revitalization



Written by

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A crowd of around 100 people buzzed with excitement Wednesday morning, standing on the large dirt patch that is the site of the Rialto Bridge project.

The project's groundbreaking ceremony drew city officials, project leaders and funders and dozens of interested citizens to the site adjacent to the Rialto Theater on historic Fourth Street in downtown Loveland.

"This is going to be one of the best managed, best looking and busiest venues in the state," said Roger Clark of the law firm Clark, Williams & Matsunaka during the ceremony.

Clark talked about the history of the Rialto Theater and the vision William Vorreiter, a Loveland banker, had for the theater that would hold one-fourth of the city's

population when it was built in 1920.

Demolition of two buildings just to the west of the theater was completed last week, and construction of the three-story public and private space will begin in the next several months.

Mayor Cecil Gutierrez told the crowd that he has been excited to start this project for years and he is glad to be a part of it.

"It is a great time to be the mayor of Loveland, and I am honored," he said.

At the groundbreaking event, City Manager Bill Cahill talked about the importance of downtown areas to create vitality in cities.

"There is no such thing as a great city without a great downtown," Cahill said. What establishes the trademark and identity of a great city like Chicago or New York, Cahill said, is its downtown.

"The community has renewed its commitment to downtown Loveland, and

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we are going to make something out of the downtown and we're going to invest in it," Cahill said.

Cahill thanked leaders in each of the three sectors of the community working on the project — city Senior Planner Mike Scholl, developer Troy Peterson and Phil Farley of the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado.

"This is truly a historic event for downtown, and I'm very proud," Peterson said during the groundbreaking.

Peterson said he bought the old Monaco's building, one of the two that came down during demolition, roughly 10 years ago and slowly developed a vision for a theater expansion in the place of his building and the Quality Shoe Repair building.

Five or more years ago, Peterson said, he met with Cultural Services Director Susan Ison and the two dreamt about a project like the Rialto Bridge over a glass of wine.

"This is an outstanding example of a public-private-philanthropic partnership and the power of such a partnership and what it can do for Loveland," said Joe Scherger, chairman of the Loveland Community Fund, part of the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado.

"We believe that this project will provide much enjoyment for the community of Loveland for many years to come," Scherger said.

Cahill said that the Rialto Bridge project will be the first of many more downtown revitalization projects that will keep Loveland vibrant for a long time.

Ison and Rialto Theater Manager Jan Sawyer made a joint statement about the project that focused on the words "persistence" and "vision" — topics the two had chosen independently of each other.

Ison noted the statue in front of the Rialto Theater is named "The Persistence of Vision."

The Rialto Bridge will create a three-story building that includes expanded storage, a workshop and a dressing room for the theater as well as a community room, reception space and conference room, according to a press release. The private portion of the building will house a restaurant on the main floor and offices on the third floor.

Jim and Jennie Edwards, the couple that will create the restaurant on the ground

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floor of the new building, were honored at the groundbreaking.

The restaurant, to be called Next Door, will feature a tapas menu and seat 80 in its main area and 40 more in the bar, Jim Edwards said.

The restaurant's decor will be contemporary and rustic, he said, and several elements from the torn-down buildings were saved to be part of the restaurant, like wood floors and ceiling tiles.

"We're excited to be here," Jim Edwards said.

The couple own the Twin Owls Steakhouse in Estes Park, where Jennie grew up in the restaurant business.

Peterson said he hopes the new building will be open in January of 2012.

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