

Pueblo stretches back to the Arkansas River, the wellspring of a Southern Colorado economic boom.

# Birth of Pueblo West re of Lake Pueblo construc

By DENNIS DARROW  
*The Pueblo Chieftain*

**P**UEBLO WEST — As an adventuring boy, Tom Reyes loved trips to the prairie west of Pueblo and the swimming hole left when the federal government built a small earth dam to help control the irksome Arkansas River.

Now they're all grown — Reyes, the dam and Pueblo West.

But the bond remains. Looking back, Reyes — sales manager for Rocky Mountain Boat Co. in Pueblo West — says he knew the adventure was only starting when Southern Colorado leaders decided to turn the big patch of prairie into massive Lake Pueblo.

"I think it's what really grew Pueblo West," Reyes says of the reservoir, which opened in 1975 on the same stretch of Arkansas River where Reyes and his friends from Pueblo's East Side used to play. "People started coming out to the lake and saw what's going on here."

More than any other place along the Arkansas corridor, Pueblo West illustrates the changing value people place on water. Rather than view water as a commodity to raise crops, more and more Southern Coloradans view water for its aesthetics and its tourism-recreation opportunities.

Today the unincorporated Pueblo West stands as Southern Colorado's fastest-growing town with about 15,000 people. The growth results more from suburban flight than a bunch of new boatniks, but residents know the town owes its existence — its very spot on the map — to the reservoir.

Back when Lake Pueblo was first proposed as part of the farmer friendly Frylingpan-Arkansas Water Project, oilman and developer Robert McCulloch, a boating enthusiast, saw the future reservoir as a beacon for a suburban bedroom community similar to his Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

"He was a visionary. He knew the reservoir was going to be a

draw," recalls Suzie Morgan, the current manager of the Pueblo West Metro District, who in 1969 was among the first to go to work for McCulloch as he launched his building plans in anticipation of the reservoir's 1975 opening.

McCulloch's foresight extended to securing water for his homesteaders. Today, the town controls enough water to serve 60,000 people — its maximum size at build-out. The water flows into the town through a pipeline attached to the reservoir.

Many homes need flow regulators just to tame the water pressure.

And, like most cities, Pueblo West constantly

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Houses in Pueblo West crowd together in fringes of Pikes Peak. The area has experienced inflation and development in recent years.

remains on the prowl for more and better water to hedge against prolonged drought. Several years ago, Morgan purchased 20 shares — a small number by an Arkansas Valley farmer, water utility manager Hayes said.

"We want to shore up and acquire water to survive a drought," Hayes said.

Such rainy-day purchases are common in master-planned ones, Morgan notes.

"We have a defined boundary so we have what our water rights should be. But you need to think 50 years or 100 years down the line," Morgan said.

The continued arid appearance of Pueblo West from factors other than a lack of tap water.

Given the large building lots, many homeowners prefer xeriscaping, a type of landscaping that uses water. Others put their money into home improvements, delaying the development of yards.

Jim Ozella, one of a growing number of Colorado University-trained master gardeners who live in Pueblo West, says xeriscaping fits best with the large lots.

"At one time, Pueblo looked exactly like Pueblo. The difference is Pueblo was laid out more in a traditional system," Ozella said.

Town leaders prefer xeriscaping, a technique that offers Southwest appeal while maintaining the open spaces Pueblo West promotes, Morgan says.

"Even the Committee of Architecture is not people going out and planting a lot of trees."

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Chieftain file photo

Houses in Pueblo West crowd together in front of a view of Pikes Peak. The area has experienced increased population and development in recent years.

remains on the prowl for more and better water rights as a hedge against prolonged drought. Several years ago, the town purchased 20 shares — a small number — peddled by an Arkansas Valley farmer, water utility manager Rich Hayes said.

"We want to shore up and acquire water rights in case of a drought," Hayes said.

Such rainy-day purchases are common for cities, including master-planned ones, Morgan notes.

"We have a defined boundary so we have an idea of what our water rights should be. But you never know 30 years, 50 years or 100 years down the line," Morgan says.

The continued arid appearance of Pueblo West stems from factors other than a lack of tap water.

Given the large building lots, many home owners prefer xeriscaping, a type of landscaping that uses limited water. Others put their money into home construction, delaying the development of yards.

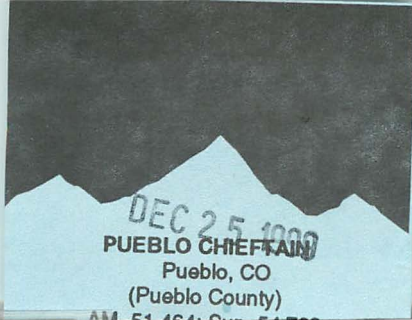
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The committee monitors Pueblo West's homeowner rules.

Ironically, the reservoir isn't visible by a large section of Pueblo West.

And many of the boaters come from out-of-county.

According to Reyes, more than half of Rocky Mountain Boat's customers travel down elsewhere. Still, that leaves a large number coming from the Pueblo area, he says.

As importantly, the large influx of out-of-towners keep the growing number of local restaurants, stores and shops hopping, he says.

"Look at all the traffic coming on the weekend," he said. Also because of the growth, Pueblo West recently received long-sought highway safety upgrades.

Meanwhile, the town's resident non-boaters flock to the open space, campsites, fishing spots, wildlife perches and trails built as amenities to the reservoir, Reyes said.

Whether the town can keep up the growth remains unknown.

A proposal to expand Lake Pueblo leaves Reyes optimistic.

"More water; more people," he predicts.

It's taken a while, but history has proven him right thus far.