

Making her mark

Raton native designs look for busy corner

By BETTA FERRENDELLI
Staff writer

DENVER -- Carole Kastler found her career niche about a year ago, and today, she's ready to use her talents to spruce up her hometown.

Kastler, born and raised in Raton, last year opened Camelot Design, a Denver business specializing in landscaping and floral designing, interior plantscaping and consulting.

At least temporarily, Kastler's job has taken her back to her roots. She has completed the landscape and planting design for the Raton Welcome and Tourist Information Center plot at the busy intersection of South Second and the Clayton Highway.

Kastler did several designs for the center, including a bird's-eye view of the facility landscaped with a variety of trees, picnic tables and rest areas, a nature trail, a path accessible for wheelchairs and parking capabilities for motorists with all types of vehicles, to an educational garden including flower beds with wild, perennial and native flowers and grasses. The beds will be marked with the types of flowers included, Kastler said.

"The flower beds will include selections of wild, native and perennial flowers, so that when visitors are at the center and are enjoying a walk around the gardens and stop and say 'what kind of flower is that?' they will be able to find that kind of information," she said.

And if the finished product looks anything like Kastler's design, then the welcome center is in store

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for a nice and much-needed facelift.

The Welcome Center recently received \$40,000 in city-allocated money to improve the outside appearance, which includes the landscaping, paving, curb and gutter for the area, Jeff Neal, executive director for the Raton Chamber and Economic Development Council, Inc., said.

Kastler completed her drawings for the center last October, but it will be awhile before actual work on the landscaping project begins this summer, Neal said. There are several steps that come first. The sprinkler system has been ordered and preparations are being made for the cement parking lot and sidewalk. Work on the sprinkler system is expected to begin within the next month, he said.

Kastler's landscape was designed so that when Raton actually does acquire a new, permanent building, the landscaping and parking lot areas will not have to be moved.

The new design for the welcome center will give tourists who stop at the center a chance to relax before heading on.

"The design adds contour to the center and hopefully will be inviting enough that it will make visitors want to stop and stay for awhile before moving on. This will be something good for Raton," Kastler said.

Kastler said the Raton job gave her double pleasure, because she grew up here in the hills of northeastern New Mexico, and just because she enjoys her job.

"Often, when it comes to landscaping improvements or additions for a home, people don't have any idea where to begin. A telephone book is a great place to start," she said. A majority of Kastler's contacts come from referrals.

One of the most important steps in any design process, Kastler said is to keep their end goal in mind. "It is important, during the entire process, that people not lose sight of how they want their area to look. It is one of the biggest mistakes people make," she said. As the goal comes closer to reality, that's when Kastler's work begins to pay off.

Kastler works out of her home near the Denver University-Washington Park area. Her business caters mostly to residential customers, but also includes a small number of commercial clients.

It brings her a great amount of satisfaction and pleasure. "I have found my niche. I love doing it," she said.

Finding her niche, though, came over a period of

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Landscape

time. Kastler had originally planned to study oceanography. "At a very young age, I was always interested in ships, sharks and dolphins. My mom used to check books out of the library for me so I could read about them," Kastler said. She spent two years at the University California of San Diego, studying oceanography. Following a year's hiatus, Kastler transferred to the University of California Santa Barbara, but, after one semester, decided to switch her major to environmental studies, with an emphasis in geography. Chemistry was one of the reasons Kastler steered away from her original major, but perhaps the most prevalent reason for the switch was that Kastler happened to be taking a class in her eventual major. It was then she began to realize this is where she should be. "My mind just seemed to work along the same lines of landscaping and design," she said.

Kastler moved to Denver from Santa Barbara in 1982. After doing the predictable job-hunting route of sending resumes and follow-up letters, Kastler landed a job with Tagawa, a Japanese landscaping firm in south metro Denver. It was there that Kastler got her start. From there, she moved on to work with the Beardsley/Miller Corporation in the Inverness Business Park. She resigned in 1988 without another job offer. "It was time to move on," she said.

It was during that she was contemplating having her own business. By this time, Kastler had acquired a vast amount of landscape experience, enabling her to venture out on her own, eventually earning her the chance to design the look of her hometown's busiest street corner.

CAROLE KASTLER OPENED BUSINESS LAST YEAR
Kastler designed landscaping for Welcome Center lot