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A venue to be proud of

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Staff Photo |

Mike McKibbin

I'm not sure it's ever happened to me before in my half century or so on this earth. (See how I didn't say exactly how old I am? Pretty sneaky, huh?)

A week ago tonight, I walked in to the remodeled New Ute Events Center in downtown Rifle and was actually left speechless. Granted, it was only for 10 or 15 seconds, but still.

I couldn't find the words to explain my reaction to seeing, for the first time, the all-new, colorfully decorated room that used to house a stained movie theater screen; old, uncomfortable seats that left you feeling kind of dirty at times; and freezing temperatures – year-round – because the 1940s-era building had NO insulation and a heating and cooling system well past its prime.

As I heard several others say after their eyes also grew wider and wider, "Wow" was the first word out of my mouth. And I'm sure many more people will say the same thing on Friday, May 23, when the doors of the events center are thrown wide to the public.

This community should definitely be proud of what the city and the volunteers of the New Ute Theatre Society have done to transform the old Ute and Rifle Creek Theater into a very attractive – and hopefully profitable – local and regional cultural amenity.

And another strong point: The 18-month-long remodeling project – "worth the wait" is something else I said – came in about \$60,000 under budget. As NUTS President Helen Rogers said, that's unusual for a project like this. You might have read in the Daily Sentinel about how much more it's going to cost the City of Grand Junction to finish renovating the Avalon Theatre: A \$8.2 million project is up to around \$9.65 million.

Rifle awarded the events center project to PNCI Construction of Grand Junction for \$1.7 million, expected the final cost to approach \$2 million, but it looks like the finally tally will be in the neighborhood of \$1.6 million. Not a huge savings, but a savings.

And I think once people have a chance to see and experience a play, musical performance, wedding or what have you, they'll appreciate it even more. I'm sure looking forward to seeing the entertainment at the open house.

As I toured the facility, the design of the original building was evident throughout. True to the intent of the NUTS group to capture the best of that era's architectural style. Well done, Rich Carter.

And the lighting, sound and visual systems – you can control them all remotely from stage, thanks to our modern times – should ensure the most enjoyable viewing and watching experience anyone could desire.

As someone said to me as we viewed the stage and seating area from up in the control booth, who wouldn't want to come here to perform? Now, granted, the seating limits of 280 people likely mean we won't see someone like Katy Perry or Justin Bieber come to Rifle. But I really hope to one day enjoy an acoustic concert by one of my favorites, John Hiatt. Heck, he hangs out in the Aspen area a lot of the time, so he wouldn't have to worry about travel.

A guy can dream, right?

Actually, I'm sure the next school play or musical, high school choir performance or whatever will be just as great an experience for parents, relatives, friends and everyone else. I'm betting Ryan Monarch can't wait to being his talented students down from Rifle High School.

And the local business community should hopefully be all smiles, too, as events attract people to Rifle from the surrounding area and relatives travel from out of state to enjoy whatever event takes place in the building.

So here's a wish for good luck to all the NUTS members, supporters, the city, future performers and anyone else who cares about the importance of the arts to a community.

The curtain's going up on a new page in Rifle's long history. Break a leg.

Mike McKibbin is the editor of The Citizen Telegram.

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Should Glenwood's Blake gate be opened?

- ☐ Yes, just during the bridge detour.
☐ No, never.
☐ Yes, permanently.

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WEATHER FORECAST

45° F ^{NA}
Wind 0 mph ESE



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Sunday, February 12

Dwight F. Ferren - Guitarist

3:00 pm

Chris Bank & Mark Johnson

3:00 pm

Common Cents for Colorado: Wo...

3:00 pm



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