

City of Colstrip Newsletter

Fall 2025

Mayor's Message Mayor John Williams



Tomorrow's Town ... Today!

City Council meetings are the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month unless rescheduled due to a holiday.

City Hall Open
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Monday thru Friday
except on Holidays

City Court Office Hours:
Tuesdays and Thursdays
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Inside this issue:

Mayor's Message	1-2
History of Castle Rock	3
Schoolhouse History and Art Center	4
Bicentennial Library	5
Beautification Committee	6
Southeastern Montana Development Corporation	7-8
Public Works Department	8

Happy Thanksgiving Greetings!

With the approaching celebration of Thanksgiving, it gives us all a time to reflect, look around, and reflect on the blessings we have all around us to place special meaning into "Happy Thanksgiving".

I will begin this article with being thankful, and at the same time with some sadness, for how thankful I am to have been associated and worked with the late Senator Duane Ankney. Duane was a true champion of the people and served all the men, women and families that live in Colstrip. He was passionate about his belief of the value and benefit of the energy that is developed here. Duane was a true Colstrip Montana Hero and I am dedicating this publication of the newsletter in his honor. A celebration of Duane's life is scheduled for May 22, 2026 at 11:00 am at the Colstrip High School with burial to follow at the Colstrip Cemetery.

If you haven't already done so please take a drive to the Colstrip Cemetery. The city took on the ownership and operation of this beautiful area from Rosebud County. Please see how your city has taken on this diamond in the rough and turned it into a beautiful gem. A brief history of our cemetery shows the property was owned by the Montana Power Company and donated to Rosebud County. The area was surveyed and plotted out by Colstrip residents Jim Rogers and Dan Negethon. In its early operation Lloyd Gange of Colstrip did the upkeep on the site. Because of difficulties in recent years with its administration and maintenance, the county transferred its ownership and operation to the City of Colstrip in 2023. The city accepted this transfer, appointed a Cemetery Board and is in the process, with the help of a Coal Board grant of \$180,000, of upgrading and turning this into a beautiful area respective of those Colstrip family members interred there. Colstrip recognizes that our cemetery is an integral part of our city. It is a very special place that speaks of our past and links it to our present and future. For many of us it is a vital part of end of life decisions, making the selection of final rest becoming aware of our own mortality. The Cemetery Board has done a wonderful job of putting this all together.

(continued)

Mayor's Message Continued

Most recently I had the opportunity to visit with a former Mayor of the City of Helena at the Grid United Transmission Line informational meeting and update. He made a point of expressing his compliments toward the appearance of our city. He shared with me that he had taken the time to drive around our city and was very impressed with our streets and general appearance of our city. I expressed my appreciation to his compliments and shared that our streets are a work in progress.

We have just embarked on the general updating of all our streets as we follow our Pavement Improvement Plan (PASER). This next year will be a continuation of upgrades to our streets as we are currently preparing to go out for bids to hopefully receive good bids for our upgrades.

Congratulations to our new council members Corrie Hadaller and Zane Longacre. I look forward to your contributions as City Council members. A very special Thank You and appreciation to Rose Hanser and Greg Koczur for your service to the City of Colstrip. Your valuable contributions to the success of our city are very much appreciated. Rose also served our city as Mayor from 2012-2015 and Greg has served on the City Council since 2014. Greg remains on our city's Fire Board as a valued member since before we became incorporated as a city. I sincerely appreciate your valued service to our city.

Congratulations to the Colstrip School Board and all the administration, teachers and students on the successful outcome of the school bond levies. I am really excited for you as you now begin the challenge of building upgrades and improving school facilities. To provide a brief history, the high school and elementary school are 45 years old as they were constructed in 1980. The funding for these schools were Coal Board Grants from the Coal Severance Tax: \$3.3 million for the high school and \$1.6 million for the grade school. The funding did not come from property taxes. The upgrades will come from property taxes with the majority of the funds coming from the power plant owners. I have encouraged and will support the School Board to make application to the Montana Coal Board to assist in this project. While there are no guarantees for this to occur, the fact that the voters have demonstrated their local effort and support by passing the bonds will assist in a grant request.

The city's Planning Board has done a fantastic job of updating our Growth Policy. I invite the members of our public to take a look at this guiding document that outlines the community's vision for its future. Additionally, this is a very important and valuable tool that we use as we prepare for requesting other funding opportunities for future projects. Your city has long embraced a progressive economic and community mindset, that we have captured in our official slogan "Tomorrow's Town Today". The goal of this updated document is to continue the enhancement of the quality of life for our residents that we are thankful for and enjoy in our city.

As I began this article, Happy Thanksgiving to everyone. We have many things to be thankful for in our city. We are all very blessed with the quality of life within our city by the work and efforts of many.

The following article was written by Abigail Stewart, a 2024 graduate of Colstrip High School currently attending Dawson Community College, about the history of our area.

The Castle Rock Community

Before you stand two remnants of a once thriving community. These landmarks, Castle Rock and the Castle Rock post office, are the whispers of the brief, but vibrant Homesteading Era of Montana. Around these, the homesteading community of the Castle Rock country flourished. This small community was formally established between 1910 and 1914 when Del Binkard built his cabin and post office right beside this grand sandstone formation. Originally, he wanted to name the community Stocker Creek, after the creek which flows through here, but the U.S. Postal Service thought that it would be confused with Stockett Montana. Thus, Binkard named it after his second option: the rock by which his post office stood.

Though homesteading here began some years before the establishment of the post office, the post office was an integral part of the community. For many years, it functioned as the main social building of the town, operating as both a post office and a community center. As the population grew, however, other gathering places were established. A community hall was built and, spread throughout the area, were five schoolhouses. Unfortunately, only one of these survived to the end of the twentieth century. The rest, including the one nearest this location, either burned or were torn down.

Castle Rock country was quite expansive and held several individual towns within it, the two most prominent being Castle Rock and Hopsonville. Castle Rock was the home of notable cowboy, Joseph H. Proctor, who herded for the FUF outfit in Castle Rock before it was homesteaded. Today, several of the abandoned cabins that made up Castle Rock can be seen along Castle Rock Road.

Castle Rock and its post office prospered until the 1930's, when a drought occurred. At the same time, the mining town of Colstrip was rapidly developing. Consequently, many of the homesteaders moved to Colstrip. Soon, the Castle Rock land was sold to the mine. As fewer people remained in the area, and Colstrip became more established, the need for the Castle Rock post office diminished, causing it to close. However, its shell still remains here and the legacy of its community still lives on in Colstrip.



Schoolhouse History and Art Center

Kayla de la Ossa, Executive Director



"As long as autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas, and colors enough to paint the beautiful things I see." — Vincent van Gogh

Fall is a special time when change and beauty surround us. At SHAC, we draw inspiration from this season of renewal and hope you, too, take a moment to appreciate the creativity and growth it brings.

In the spirit of renewal, we are excited to share that our Summer 2025 renovation initiatives are now complete! We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Colstrip Impacts Foundation, Grid United's Community Investment Program, and Avista. Thanks to their generous support, SHAC now boasts freshly painted interiors, refinished floors, and updated exterior siding, enhancing our space for all who visit and create here.

We recently wrapped up our Creative Aging program, led by artist Keely Perkins of Miles City. This six-week program, designed for adults aged 60 and older, focused on developing new artistic skills through ceramics. SHAC was honored to be selected by the Montana Arts Council as a "seed" site for this initiative, which aims to grow into a larger, statewide effort supporting lifelong creativity. Each Monday, Keely brought her talent, warmth, and expertise to Colstrip — and the experience was nothing short of inspiring.

Beyond this program, SHAC continues to offer a wide range of art classes for all ages. To see what's coming up next, visit our website at colstripshac.org or check out our Facebook page for the latest class schedule and updates.

In November and December, an exhibition titled "Radical Acceptance" by Bozeman-based artist, Ella Watson, will be showing in the main gallery. This body of work features her signature reductive process, where she slathers canvases in thick, frosting-like layers of wax mixed with oil paint, creating surfaces lush with texture and depth. Through her ironic use of vibrant, loud colors, Watson pokes at the human condition, reminding the viewer that there is always more to be understood once we look beneath the surface. You won't want to miss this unique show.

Join us for our annual Christmas Market on Saturday, December 6th, from 9 AM to 3 PM in the Frank Brattin Middle School Gymnasium for a day full of festive fun and local shopping. Enjoy browsing over 50 amazing vendors offering unique, handcrafted gifts, holiday décor, and tasty treats — perfect for everyone on your list. Best of all, admission is free! And don't forget — Santa will be visiting from 11 am to 1:00 pm, so be sure to bring the kids for some holiday cheer and photo opportunities!

Bicentennial Library

Mary Kay Bullard, Director



Bicentennial Library is open Saturday from 10:00am-1:00pm. Bicentennial Library is open Monday-Thursday 11:00am-7:00pm, our Friday hours are 12:00pm-5:00pm.

A patron lead knitting and crocheting group will be meeting Tuesday evenings from 5:00pm-7:00pm. We are so happy to be back with fall programming. Starting back up are Lego Club, hosted by Camille on Monday at 4:15pm. Amy will host story times. There will be a Tuesday story time at 4:15pm, and a Wednesday story time at 11:15am.

Some services that Bicentennial Library offers but are not used as often as they use to be. The library staff is able to proctor test for remote learning. Please keep us in mind if you need that service.

The library staff is able to help you with many of your technology related issues. We do ask that if your issue is pretty involved that you schedule an appointment. The library staff is able to do individual programming, with notice and support. We have hosted a few of these individual events.

Every week, I switch out the yearly local paper from our collection. As someone who is not from this area, I am enjoying reading about a time before I lived here. Seeing how many people I know and names that I recognize. Bicentennial Library's newspaper collection dates back to 1977.

The Friends of the Bicentennial Library are running their annual membership drive. Joining the Friends does not necessarily mean you have to be active. Members are welcome to just join the Friends, and remain inactive, if they are more comfortable. The Friends take suggestions on how to improve the library.

Amy will host a contest soon that will be linked with Bicentennial Library's 50th birthday. For half a century, our library has served as a cornerstone of knowledge and community, and we plan to mark this milestone with a celebratory trivia contest for all ages. To make this event truly memorable, we are seeking donations of corporate swag/branded merchandise from area businesses to be used as prizes for our contest winners. Prizes could include anything ~ t-shirts, water bottles, notebooks, hats, flashlights, any items appropriate to all ages would be great! If you are able to contribute, please contact Amy at 406-748-3040.



Beautification Committee

Becky Miller

Summer and Fall have been a busy time for beautifying our community.

Our Fall Cleanup Day was a great success with over 20 volunteers lending a hand. Many thanks also to CHS students who helped out in their part of town. We appreciate all of our residents who make a difference in cleaning up our town. Shout out to the City crew who picked up the bags of garbage. There has been a definite decrease in trash over the past 4 years of having a regular cleanup day. A clean community benefits all of us.

We had our Fall Junk Pick-up Day in October. Many thanks to CPRD and the City of Colstrip for coordinating this helpful event. We do this especially for senior citizens or residents who don't have a way of getting large items such as an old couch or appliance to the dump. Hopefully community members will be mindful that this is a free service for people who really need a hand, not just an easy way to avoid taking something to the dump in their own pickup.

Knapweed eradication continued this summer with much success. Next year the weed cooperative group will also be targeting russian olives as they have taken over large areas around town. Thank you to Rosebud County Weed Supervisor Amy Adler, Talen, City of Colstrip, CPRD, Colstrip Schools, Westmoreland and other landowners for working together to get rid of noxious weeds in town, especially knapweed. While knapweed is still here and there around town, the decrease in the past few years is remarkable.

2025 was our fourth year of having flower pots outside businesses during the summer months. A huge thank you to everyone who took part in this endeavor. The pots were especially pretty this year with the extra rain and longer season we had this fall. We look forward to having the flower pots around town again next year, helping to beautify our special community.



Southeastern Montana Development Corporation

Jim Atchison, Executive Director

“What is the BIC and Why it Matters”

For the past 24+ years, I have served as the Executive Director of Southeastern Montana Development Corporation (SEMDC), a regional non-profit economic development group serving the four counties of Custer, Powder River, Rosebud, and Treasure, including the Colstrip community. Today, I can honestly say that I have never been more excited about the future of Colstrip than I am today.

What is the Business Innovation Center (BIC) and Why does it Matter? Here is the latest:

- The BIC concept was identified in the 2017 Colstrip Diversification Strategy as an option to assist the region with diversification efforts through a “One-Stop Shop” Entrepreneurial / Development Facility.
- The project was awarded five (5) grants of over \$4.4 million.
- Co-Owners SEMDC / City of Colstrip received six (6) Bids in February 2025 with favorable Budget Bids.
- The BIC Building Construction started in April 2025 at the current SEMDC Colstrip site.
- While located in Colstrip, the BIC is designed as a Regional Facility serving all of SE Montana.
- Most importantly – It gives us Hope! Colstrip is Changing - - - Not Closing!

The 2017 Colstrip Economic Diversification Strategy (Strategy 2.3) identified a need in Colstrip as follows:

“Establish a multi-functional professional facility to support small business development and retention. At a local level, the power of re-investment is a key to success. Promoting entrepreneurial development in Colstrip will not only support local entrepreneurs, but it will also retain local investment.”

SEMDC received grant funding to engage in a process to study and plan for development of a facility to support entrepreneurship and technology-related businesses in the region. The study considered the following alternatives:

- Renovations to two school buildings - Isabel Bills Elementary School or the Frank Brattin Middle School;
- Renovation and addition to the existing SEMDC Offices or
- Construction of a new “purpose-built” building on the SEMDC site

Due to a number of factors such as size, configuration, cost, and others, it was determined that a purpose designed facility was the most expedient and cost friendly option. The study and plan also included an overall feasibility study for the facility, recommendations for ownership/operation, complete with an operating plan and ten-year pro forma for its operation.

Public Works Department

Pat Zent, Public Works Director

As you are aware we have been busy repairing our streets. Hardrives Construction was here and crack sealed and chip sealed some of our streets in the city. We will be going out for bids this winter for some structural milling and overlay projects on the roads designated to begin in the spring/summer of 2026. This is all part of the Pavement Management Plan the City adopted 2 years ago.

Cop Construction will be starting the work of replacing the water main that runs along the lagoon to the Waste/water Treatment plant in November. We are also in the planning stage of replacing the water service lines on Chisholm Drive and the cul-de-sacs off of Chisholm. We are repairing about 2 lines a month at the present time.

Weave Construction has almost finished the paving of the Cemetery Road for us.

We are getting everything ready for the upcoming winter storm season.

Southeastern Montana Development Corporation

Continued from previous page

The new Colstrip Business Innovation Center (BIC) would include the following benefits to the region:

- Co-working spaces, several conference/multi-purpose spaces for conducting training, meetings and other activities allowing simultaneous use.
- A “makers space” to allow for development of prototypes or other activities related to technical development.
- Fiber optic telecommunications, teleconferencing, and the latest audio/visual equipment.
- Small, temporary rental offices for businesses until such time as they can find permanent space.
- Available to collaborate with key partners such as the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, the Blackstone entrepreneurship programs, Accelerate Montana, the SBDC, and the Montana Department of Labor and/or Commerce for meetings, one-on-one counseling, either face-to-face or via teleconferencing.
- Co-located with the SEMDC offices to support operations by the SEMDC staff.
- Training opportunities with Colstrip High School, Miles Community College, and Chief Dull Knife College.
- The project would entail constructing the new facility just south of the existing offices – once construction has started, the existing SEMDC building will be moved or demolished and the area redeveloped for parking.

Groundbreaking was held in April of 2025 and construction started in June. Completion is scheduled for February of 2026.

While Colstrip continues to diversify itself into an **Energy Hub**. It's important to note: **Colstrip is Changing - - - Not Closing!**

CITY OF COLSTRIP
12 Cherry Street
PO Box 1902
Colstrip, MT 59323

Phone: 406-748-2300

Website: cityofcolstrip.com



PRSR STD
ECRWSS
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
EDDM Retail

ECRWSS EDDM
Postal Customer
Colstrip, MT 59323