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September 13, 1998

# GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE

HIGH, WIDE,  
HANDSOME

The man behind a book known as one of the best about Montana /1P

Great Falls, Montana

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## ABANDONED DREAMS

Even after four years of failed homesteads, a primitive development north of Craig continues to attract hopefuls seeking their piece of "Freedom Country."



TOP RIGHT: A damaged van is one of a number of items Kenneth and Bernadette Chester left behind when they moved out of a subdivision north of Craig sometime during the past two years. ABOVE: A half-finished log cabin, a camper top and a field full of litter are all that's left on the Chesters' former property.

## Lack of services keeps Craig development a revolving door for all but the hardest

By CAROL BRADLEY  
Tribune Staff Writer

CRAIG — The white Ford van with New Mexico plates sits deserted at the top of the ridge, windows shattered. In a secluded meadow below, a half-finished log cabin languishes near a tipped-over camper top. Someone, or something, has strewn orange and yellow plastic plates, empty beer cans and broken glass across a field of overgrown weeds.

This is what's left of the dream home Kenneth and Bernadette Chester set out to build for themselves two years ago in a development north of Craig, halfway between Great Falls and Helena.

Somewhere along the way the dream soured. The real-estate mess is what critics feared would happen when developers began selling off parcels in this once-pristine stretch.

"They're here for a year, maybe two and they're leaving again," local fish, wildlife and parks game warden Bruce Klinton said of newcomers.

"You'll see a house started and all of a sudden it's abandoned and it's left."

The Tribunes first reported on the primitive conditions of the two side-by-side subdivisions, Missouri River Ranches



It hasn't been easy, but Matt Paton says he hasn't looked back after moving his family to the Craig development from Cape Cod, Mass. "We have no regrets," he said.

and Eagle Canyon Ranch, in the summer of 1996. Some residents of the development say they've seen improvements, at least in the caliber of neighbors who have moved in during the past couple of years.

But Brian Preda, whose cabin is surrounded by subdivi-

sion property, disagrees. He thinks conditions have worsened.

"The area's just a garbage dump," said Preda. "That's what makes me so sad."

Yet the dreamers keep coming. A few have survived, but

challenges of life in the wild. But no one pretends it's been easy.

The development offers no running water, no sewage system, no wood in electricity or gas. The dirt roads can develop ruts so deep they're impassable.

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"I'm sorry they released this information to the American public," said Whitaker. Elementary school children are now a part of daily newscasts and reports, leaving parents to answer questions they weren't expecting until middle school.

Northwest immediately began contacting all 31,000 employees that had been temporarily laid off, and officials said it should have one-fourth of its schedule in operation by Wednesday. The airline expects to be at full speed by Sept. 21.

Northwest had previously canceled all flights through Tuesday and all European and Asian flights through Wednesday.

"The strike is over, and that's what we needed," said Ben Hinz, Northwest's top negotiator. "The strike was a disaster for everyone involved."

Members of the Air Line Pilots Association struck the Eagan-based carrier Aug. 28 after two years of failed attempts to agree to a new contract. It was the largest strike against a U.S. airline since 1989, when a machinists strike led to the collapse of Eastern Airlines.

In addition to the salary increase, pilots want a phasing out of a two-tier wage scale that pays new hires at a lower rate, Zoller said. They also received stock options and profit sharing, he said.

Northwest still faces open contracts with five other unions and said Friday that the labor disputes would lead to the first money-losing quarter for the first time since 1993.

## Clinton strikes smack at Starr

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Given a day to absorb Kenneth Starr's graphic report, the White House struck back Saturday with a rebuttal assailing the prosecutor's conclusions as a "hit-and-run smear campaign."

Lawmakers, meanwhile, spoke cautiously of impeachment as they gauged public reaction back home. It is plain that what this 4½-year investigation has boiled down to, the White House argued in its second counter-report in two days.

In Atlanta, House Speaker Newt Gingrich said the lurid nature of the report was unfortunate but caused by the president's denial of a sexual relationship with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. He called on lawmakers to reserve judgment.

"I think you cannot render any judgment until you have given the president a chance to respond and given the Judiciary Committee a chance to do its job," Gingrich said.

Clinton, in his weekly radio address, noted it had been "an exhausting and difficult week in the capital — not only for me, but for

many others." Without a mention of the Starr report, he pledged to press ahead with his policy agenda.

"The most important thing to do now is to stay focused on the issues the American people want us here to deal with, from health care to the economy to terrorism," Clinton said.

President Clinton said, "I think we should be looking for all our mistakes because they are exposed in the same way as we are."

Clinton's lawyers made strong case against impeachment (20%)

## WORD ON THE STREET

Do you think President Clinton should resign?

I think he should. I think it's a lot of mess for the country and Congress.

No, I believe we should pray for all our mistakes because they are exposed in the same way as we are.

I think until we know everything, we shouldn't make a decision on very disapproval.

I think he should resign because the president should stand a good chance of being a good leader.

No, I don't think he should. I don't think he should have any say in the country.

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## Local adults struggle to answer kids' queries

By KIM SKORHOGOSKI  
Tribune Staff Writer

Kevin Lutzan's 10-year-old is asking him questions that have stumped adults.

"Who is she?" "What did she do wrong?" "What's impeachment?"

Lutzan, 29, is the father of four children, who range in age from 1 to 11.

"They have been asking and I haven't lied to them about it," he said Saturday. "I don't let them (President Bill Clinton) do this and this and this. I just tell them they had a private thing. I don't think they're old enough to hear more than that."

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Local experts offer the following tips about how to talk to children about Clinton's affair.

1. If they don't ask, don't tell. If they do, don't care or react with emotion.

2. Monitor what they watch. Watching your kids programs allows you to make what you don't want them to hear and also to know when to expect questions.

3. Be open to discuss what they've seen and heard. Make sure they know they can ask questions.

4. Ask them open questions such as "What do you think about the president?" to gauge what information is sinking in. This allows you to correct misinformation or set the family's opinion.

5. Avoid details. Unless specifically asked, avoid offering details that might be more than the child is ready for.

6. Be willing to say "You've not ready to hear that yet." For kids, up to age 7, it may be OK to explain that the president did something wrong as a married man and that lying is also wrong, but that lying is beyond that.

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## ABC POLL

81% U.S. adults surveyed Friday after the report was released.

Starr made strong case for impeachment (about 50%)

Clinton's lawyers made strong case against impeachment (20%)

Local /BACK PAGE

National /3A

More on the ABC poll /3A

## Northwest pilots ratify contract

The Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Leaders of striking pilots at Northwest Airlines ratified a new four-year contract Saturday, ending a walkout that has grounded planes since Aug. 28.

"Northwest pilots may now return to work," said Steve Zoller, chairman of the 17-member pilots' executive council, which ratified the agreement that gives pilots a 12 percent pay increase over the life of the contract.

The executive council could have deferred a decision to a rank-and-file vote of Northwest's 6,200 pilots, but did not. They approved a tentative agreement that had

been announced Thursday. Northwest immediately began contacting all 31,000 employees that had been temporarily laid off, and officials said it should have one-fourth of its schedule in operation by Wednesday. The airline expects to be at full speed by Sept. 21.

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Lewistown ranchers Joe Stilson, left, and Floyd Maxwell, second from left, applaud comments made by Gov. Marc Racicot during a three-hour rally in support of Montana's ag community Saturday, outside the Capitol in Helena.

## Ag producers ask Racicot to block Canadian trucks

The Associated Press

HELENA — Montana farmers and ranchers on Saturday called on Gov. Marc Racicot to support the South Dakota governor's move to stop truckloads of Canadian grain and meat at the border, regardless of the legality of the practice.

Racicot and state Sen. Greg Jergensen, D-Chinook, addressed several hundred producers who attended a rally Saturday afternoon at the state Capitol building to address the straggling ag economy. It was after Racicot's address that producers asked about stopping Canadian imports.

Last month, South Dakota Gov. Bill Janklow announced that state troopers would stop

and inspect all Canadian meat and grain trucks at the border, saying that redundant inspection in Canada raises the price of meat and grain from the United States.

The announcement drew criticism from Canadian officials, who questioned the legality of the move.

Gary Goldsboro, who farms east of Brady, received wild applause when he asked Racicot if he would take action in Montana similar to what Janklow proposed.

"What he has proposed, I can't find the authority to do," Racicot said. "You have to have authority to act in the manner he's proposing and quite

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WEATHER Great Falls today High: 78 - Low: 47 Mostly sunny Complete INDEX Business 1-585 Crossword 2P Legals 8C Nutrition 2-3.5A Sports 1-7S Great Falls Tribune Classified 1-10C Farm & Ranch 6B Montana 1-6M Obituaries 2M TV listings TV Week 6-10P News 8C Movies 8C Opinions 2M Weddings 2P A Garrett newsletter

# Dreams: Many toughing it out

FROM 1A

able even with a four-wheel-drive. The lots, dozens and dozens of them, sit one ridge over from the Frontage Road that parallels Interstate 15 just north of Craig.

The land is spectacular: a combination of yellow-green meadows and steep rock outcroppings. It used to be prime habitat for elk, deer and other wild animals, Knutson said.

More important, to interested buyers, is that the property's cheap. A slice of Eden can be purchased for just \$200 down and \$200 or more a month.

By carving the parcels slightly larger than 20 acres each, developers Jim and Debrae Lane of Deer Lodge were able to skirt regulations that would have required more services in the development.

The Lanes drew the subdivision lines before 1993, when tracts of land bigger than 20 acres in Montana were exempt from review. The state legislature has since tightened regulations somewhat.

Efforts to reach the developers for comment were unsuccessful. Jim Lane did not return repeated phone calls or answer a list of questions the Tribune faxed to him at his residence.

The owner of the property, Great Falls businessman John Buchanan, has been out of town most of the summer, according to an assistant in his office, and could not be reached.

## Slice of Eden

The magazine ads mention none of the disadvantages of course. "MONTANA — 20 acres in FREEDOM COUNTRY, starting at \$14,900!" boasts a classified ad in September's Mother Earth News. "Trout fishing, backpacking, camping, Elk, deer, moose, bear..." Video available.

That sounded promising to 35-year-old Matt Paton. He, his wife, Judy, and their three children, ages 8, 6 and 3, bought one of the lots and moved from Cape Cod, Mass., to Montana last January.

The couple had owned and operated their own dental lab for a dozen years or so before they grew tired of the pressure, Paton said.

Finally, "I just said I don't want to do this anymore," he said. They have dined with gusto into the no-frills life, setting up a diesel generator, a windmill and using solar batteries to create energy. They bought a welding truck, a sawmill, a tractor and a bulldozer to clear a site and build a house.

Since February, Paton has felled 70 trees.

"That was a really nice bulldozer before I got in there with my bulldozer and created it," he quipped.

## Can they last?

Whether the family will tough it out for good is the question. They're optimistic, but Paton concedes that already they've had to ratchet down expectations.

Boiling cold weather will strike before their house is finished, they have moved out of the camper again, were renting into a house farther back in the subdivision. The couple who built the house have since divorced and moved to Great Falls.

And, partly because they know the roads will be hard to negotiate in snow, the Patons have decided to home-school their children this year. Paton admits he was discouraged at first by the community's reaction to the development. "The ranchers think it's an abomination," he said, and by the signs of struggle he has come across in the back woods.

"We found some deer carcasses that were pretty mauled when we got here," he said.

But he's heartened by the character of other families who have bought lots in the last few months, he said.

More of these families are en-

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Services are nonexistent, but the view from this home explains why out-of-staters continue to buy property in one of two primitive subdivisions north of Craig.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Map by Lisa Upton.

## Putting down roots

An estimated 20 to 30 families now reside in the development, several in mobile homes. Residents might get stuck in them during deep snows, but at least they would be shielded from the cold.

None of the other tents, campers and half-built homes along the development's meandering roads appear capable of withstanding the harsh winters Montana is known for, however.

Debra Cadigan, her husband, James, and their two children probably could stick it out in the log home they moved into three months ago, but she has no intention of trying.

"I got enough sense to know we won't be able to get out in winter," Cadigan declared one recent afternoon.

She and her daughter, Karie, and a friend of Karie's, Shawnae Harvey, had just driven the 13 miles from Wolf Creek with two flat tires on their aging gray van. It was adorned with religious bumper stickers, including one that asked pointedly, "If you died tonight, would you be in heaven or hell?"

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Despite that, the Lanes have decided they'd like the family to move on. After seeing a couple dozen lots stacked up beside the Skelton's garage, the Lanes informed the Skeltons in writing that they were operating an illegal sawmill operation — a violation of the covenants — and that the developers were therefore seizing the land and everything on it, Skelton said.

He's not worried, Skelton says. When Lane drove by the property recently, repeating his threat from behind the wheel of his car, "I told him 'If you step on my property I'll shoot you on the spot and bury you,'" Skelton said, sounding half-serious.

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Samantha Skelton, her husband and four of their five children are learning to live without a dishwasher and other frills on their property in the remote subdivision near Craig.

## 'Land scam' extraordinary

Skelton said he's tired of the point-to-point rules the Lanes try to enforce at the same time they neglect essential services such as roads.

"It's probably one of the greatest land scams I've ever seen," Skelton said of the subdivisions. "I took a walk for it; I could get out of it."

For example, the Lanes charge each family \$60 a year to maintain roads. They've added gravel to some of the areas traversed by logging trucks, but the back roads remain treacherous — so much so that Samantha Skelton said she and her husband headed back into the hills on their snowmobile every few days last winter to check on neighbors they had to leave.

They found one man just in time: His truck had slid off an icy hill, trapping him inside with a broken hip, broken leg and a broken arm.

The man could have died from exposure if he hadn't been found when he was, Craig Skelton said. He said frostbite did cost the man several of his toes and fingers.

Other residents aren't as critical of the development.

The management of the property is "lacking," admits Ross O'Banion, a subdivision resident who moved to Montana from California four years ago and built a cabin on a lot near the front of the development. His mother and brother have since moved to Great Falls.

But each winter fewer people hike out of the subdivision's remote corners seeking help, O'Banion said. And he said the roads have improved, at least in his section of the subdivision.

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Shawnae Harvey displays what's left of a tire after it has gone back and forth over the development's rough roads. "Everything that can go broke has," she said.