

Meet the Carvers

A POW founding family shares its memories

On Sept. 23, 2021, the Board of Directors of The Powerhouse dedicated the **CARVER FAMILY PLAZA** to honor one of our founding families. (See sidebar at right.) We sat down with Jim, Bill, Claire and Colin Carver to talk about their journey with The Powerhouse that began 20+ years ago with an old, dilapidated building and a vision of what it could become.

How did your family originally get involved with the Powerhouse project?

BILL: The story starts back in the 1990s with the Children's Museum of Durango. My dad, Red, was on the board, and he roped Jim and me into helping with workshops for kids. They could build a bat house, a step stool, a toolbox, things like that. We'd make the blanks, and the kids would put them together.

The tiny space above the Durango Arts Center couldn't serve older grades, so we needed a bigger space with the idea of turning it into both a children's museum and science center. The power plant building seemed like a good candidate.

The structure was always intriguing. It was this old, abandoned building down on the river. And it was beautiful. Well, it had the *potential* to be beautiful, but it was actually an eyesore back then. A little group from the Children's Museum went in front of the City Council and asked them for a stay of execution on knocking down the building so that we could look at raising funds. We were just a young upstart. We didn't really have much credibility for such a large project, but they eventually let us have a shot at saving the

building. We did a Phase I \$1.3-million environmental remediation of the site led by Jeff Vierling and Jama Crawford. Once we removed the hydrocarbons, the asbestos, and the toxic level of pigeon poop, we started on the actual capital campaign and eventually raised about \$5 million towards the project.

COLIN: One thing I remember during that time was speaking at the City Council meeting as an eight-year-old and telling them what a great idea it would be. Even then, I had a sense of how pretty the building was. And it certainly inspires a sense of wonder when you look at it.



What went into making the science center a reality?

JIM: I remember how **so many people came in and helped out.** It takes a



Claire, Colin, Bill and Jim Carver

whole community to build something like this, and there's a lot of good people that put in their time to make this project happen. I remember we needed a lift to move out the equipment in the building, and Target Rental said, 'Yeah, we'll send you one or two of them; what do you need?' I remember them asking if we had someone to operate it. I said, 'Yeah!' I figured it couldn't be that hard. (*lots of chuckles*)

BILL (smiling): We were trying to pick up a 10,000-pound condenser with a 9,000-pound lift. That's the one sitting out in front of The Powerhouse now.

CLAIRE: I definitely remember the early days of moving out some of those big pieces of equipment and seeing pretty quickly how the space transformed. Once you removed the foot of pigeon poop around the building, its potential started to reveal itself. Walking through the cleared space, for example, through



1994: The Children's Museum of Durango launches in an 1,100-square-foot attic space above the Durango Arts Center with handmade exhibits lovingly built by dedicated volunteers.

1999: The City of Durango receives historic preservation and environmental remediation grants to stabilize/repair the building and mitigate environmental contaminants. It becomes apparent that substantial additional work and funding will be required to rehabilitate the building, so the Durango City Council considers demolition.

Volunteers from the Children's Museum use the public comments period of Council meetings to advocate saving and restoring The Powerhouse and present a petition with over 1,600 signatures in support of their request.

2001: Colorado Preservation, Inc., names The Powerhouse to its list of Most Endangered Places. Volunteers operating in a partnership between the Children's Museum and the Durango Discovery Museum collaborate with the City of Durango to continue grant-funded work to rehabilitate the building.

the boiler room. It was like discovering the new secrets of this big building.

BILL: Right after we had the building cleared and cleaned out, we did our first Gala with Governor Ritter in attendance. I think we raised over \$400,000 that night, which marked the beginning of our capital campaign. I traveled up to Denver presented to Front Range foundations. The **Southern Ute Indian Tribe made an incredible \$1 million contribution for rural STEM education** because that's really what it's all about: getting kids interested in science and staying interested in science.

As they move through middle school, we often lose kids thinking they're not that great at science. They just haven't had that informal learning model highlighted by the hands-on experiences science centers provide. It's by complementing formal learning through that spark of curiosity and experiential learning that helps keep kids engaged. **That's the reason we're involved — to make sure the kids in this area have access to those kinds of experiences that kids in larger cities may sometimes take for granted.**

What are some of the memories around The Powerhouse that stand out in your mind?

BILL: I remember Paul Wilbert, who was a good friend and had been on the Children's Museum Board, told me that I should get involved as well. I responded, 'No, I can't. I'm running a business, and I've got three little kids at home. This is not a good time.' Paul said, 'Actually, it's a perfect time because **your children are going to grow up seeing you involved in**

the community. And they're going to see drawings on kitchen tables of what the project could look like. If you wait to give back to the community until they're all grown, it will be too late. Now is the time', and I agreed. I credit Paul for tipping me over into community involvement back then.

CLAIRE: After college I actually went to work with the Pinhead Institute, a STEM program in Telluride. As a LEGO League coach, we would bring kids, some of whom were from really rural areas, to Durango for the regional competition and we would camp out inside The Powerhouse. We'd bring about 50 kids from these really tiny schools. Durango was a big city to them, and they would come to The Powerhouse so excited. We dropped the screen and played *Night at the Museum*. They'd have a slumber party on the ground, we'd order a bunch of pizza. The specific memory I have is when they were all watching the movie and it was snowing hard outside, and just then the Polar Express went by. All of them ran up to the top of the eTree, and they all just had this light in their faces. At that moment, **I felt very proud thinking about how this place not only provides science education to our community but to other kids in more rural environments as well.** It was very heartwarming.

The final thing I'd like to say is how **The Powerhouse has been such a significant place for us our whole lives.** So many of our life events — from early childhood to senior pictures, gala events and funerals — The Powerhouse has become an important gathering place of hearts and minds.

2002: The City of Durango agrees to a 35-year lease for the Durango Light and Power Company property with the Durango Discovery Museum (The Powerhouse). Work continues for the next nine years to convert the building into a museum space, and to raise funds to pay for exhibits and materials.



2011: Grand opening of the Durango Discovery Museum and the Southern Ute Energy Gallery.

2016: The Durango Maker Club partners with The Powerhouse to launch the MakerLab, a member-led workspace offering community access for 3-D printing, woodworking, welding, blacksmithing, sewing and textile projects, jewelry making, and electronics projects.

From the CARVER FAMILY PLAZA Dedication Sept. 23, 2021

"The Board of Directors of The Powerhouse is honored to recognize the Carver family's many years of visionary leadership, generosity, and volunteer service by dedicating the Carver Family Plaza today.

While this celebration marks The Powerhouse's 10th anniversary, the story of this project and the saving of a community treasure goes back more than 20 years when City Council was a vote away from demolishing the 1893 Durango Light and Power Building.

The Carvers have been a part of that story every step of the way, from gathering 1,600 petition signatures, to helping persuade the swing vote to forestall the Powerhouse's demolition, as board members and fundraising chairs, through thousands of hours of volunteer service at the Children's Museum of Durango and in restoring the power plant building, and as major donors both personally and through the Carver Brewing Company's commitment to supporting their community.

Today we recognize the inspiration and dedication the Carver's have brought to the children of Durango and their leadership here by dedicating the Carver Family Plaza in their honor. On behalf of all who have been impacted by their example, we thank you for all you have done here and throughout our community."