

# Built to Last

A Carbondale nonprofit works with a broad range of businesses to create sustainable structures. By Carla Peltonen

**W**hat strikes you when you speak with the people who run the Sustainability Center of the Rockies (SCOR) is their strength of purpose, a purpose that is physically manifested in the architecture, structure and function of the projects they develop.

Architect and SCOR board member Jeff Dickinson perfectly illustrates the sense of resolve that permeates the organization. When asked how he originally became involved, he says with a wry look, "Heck, I've been working on this stuff since I was a kid." He then recalls building a solar collector in shop class when he was only 14. In high school, he was a member of a team that won the Virginia state championship design competition. The project? A sustainable city of the future powered by renewable energy.

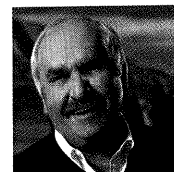
SCOR's goals are to improve the built environment, conserve energy, use local materials to eliminate trucking, make buildings healthier for people, implement interior landscaping and use natural lighting from windows, all in order to increase sustainability.

Laura Kirk, a landscape architect, is the president of the SCOR board of directors. Her motivating philosophy is to tread lightly on the land. She came to SCOR because it was the one place she found where she would not have to make the kind of compromises that were necessary in a commercial setting. "This," she says, "is the opportunity to do the right thing for the right reasons."

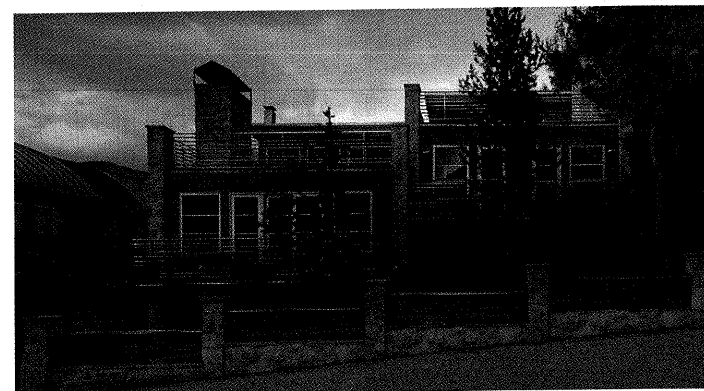
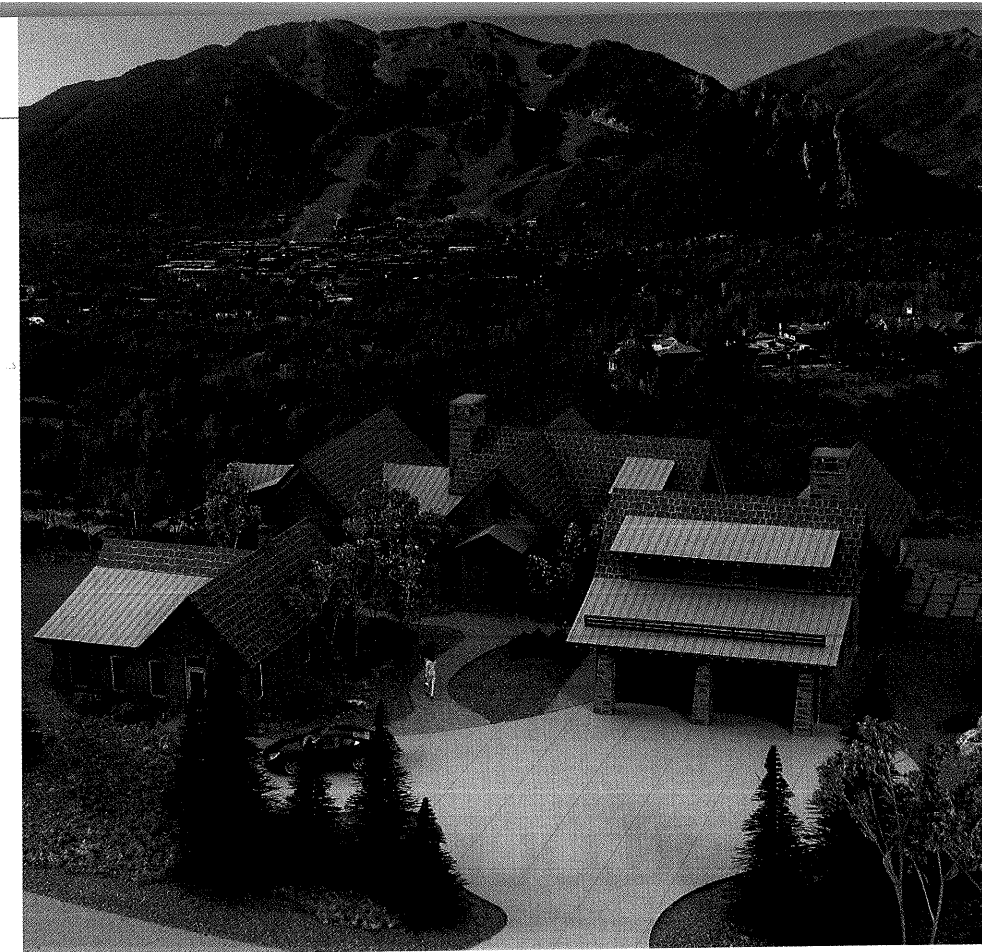
Above: The Round Room of the Third Street Center, a Carbondale elementary-school conversion headed up by SCOR. Rendering supplied by Land + Shelter.

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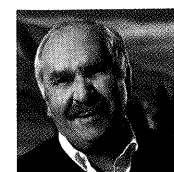


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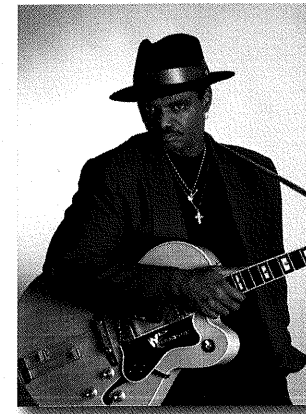
The project is a testament to the dedication of those involved with SCOR.

SCOR evolved over the past 15 years from several organizations, taking its current form in 2006. Eleven board members (architects, landscape architects, designers) and numerous volunteers from all walks of life have joined in SCOR's efforts to turn the Roaring Fork Valley's built environment into a prototype of resource-efficient living. They do so by partnering with nonprofits, local governments and for-profit businesses on green-building projects of various sizes.

Now a fully functioning nonprofit, SCOR is particularly proud of its current project, the Third Street Center, a Carbondale elementary school built in the 1960s that was traded to the town and is now being renovated into a space for more than two dozen other nonprofits. Offering leases for less than half the current market rate, according to their brochure, the building will be flooded with natural light, animated by art and filled with innovative green technology that will minimize the facility's carbon footprint.

The project is a testament to the dedication of those involved with SCOR. There have been many remodeling complications, ranging from foreseeable issues with construction and implementing new green technologies to discovering asbestos in the school's walls. Additionally, the original school's design created particular problems. Most serious, according to Kirk, was a lack of light and ventilation. The theory when the school was designed was that fewer, smaller windows would prevent children from being distracted. More current research shows that test scores of students in sunlit rooms are actually higher.

The Third Street Center seems like the perfect summary of SCOR itself: on the cutting edge of green planning and design, developing physical examples of what we can do to improve our homes, workplaces, towns and cities. ■



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