

BUENA VISTA'S RIVERFRONT COMMUNITY

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# Buena Vista development a stream come true for siblings

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*The Denver Post*

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Jed Selby climbs one of the boulders that Buena Vista's South Main offers to the public. Selby and sister Katie are developing the neighborhood, which sits on what once was a riverfront dump. (Aaron Montoya, The Denver Post)

**BUENA VISTA** — Ken Cannon is awash in sawdust, assembling a fence behind his new home in his new neighborhood on the Arkansas River.

"I like the outdoors life here. I feel better here," says the retired airline pilot from Texas who, with wife Jeanie, recently built the tidy, stone-chimneyed, bright-yellow home. "I feel like we invested in a lifestyle. We invested in Jed and Katie's dream."

Jed and Katie Selby are the 30-something brother-sister team sculpting a fresh façade for the Arkansas River Valley's bucolic Buena Vista. Their now-5-year-old dream is to rescue their favorite stretch of river in their hometown from an enclave-minded developer and create a 315-home community on what was once the town's riverfront



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(Click to enlarge.)

dump.

The siblings are unlikely developers. They spent their 20s as professional whitewater kayakers and parlayed a family investment into a three-decade plan known as South Main. The development is a showcase for new urbanism, the pedestrian-oriented approach to community design found in neighborhoods such as Denver's Stapleton, Lakewood's Belmar and Longmont's Prospect.

It's a new approach for Buena Vista, population 2,200, where its historic downtown core was neglected. Today, downtown's south end features cruiser bikes leaning on picket fences, kayakers and climbers scaling giant boulders in grassy, riverside parks. South Main is helping revive downtown by bringing it to the river and adding living spaces in a largely commercial area.

"All we did was extend the town's historic grid from downtown to the river," says Katie, 33, who with her husband, world-champion kayaker and Princeton grad Dustin Urban, is raising their son in a sky-blue, 1,300-square-foot home in South Main.

The neighborhood's new vibe and new residents — a mix of retirees, second-home owners and young professionals — are fueling new businesses. Eddie Sandoval's Asian Palate sushi and Thai restaurant has stayed busy since opening last spring.

"I didn't know what to expect," says Sandoval, a 31-year-old Vail Valley transplant, as he slices fresh tuna for the night's sushi rush. "It's so different here than in Vail. It's a much smaller town with a lot less traffic, but on the other hand, everyone here seems to really want everybody to thrive. It's much less cutthroat."

Still, the depressed economy has pinched South Main. Prices are pushed "as low as they can go," Katie says. The Selbys by now should have been done with their 50-lot first phase and deep into developing the planned high-density row houses, condos and lofts.

But only 24 homes are up or under construction currently, and six homes, which sold in the past month, will be going up this fall. Still the core is far enough along to support a new eatery, the Eddyline Restaurant & Brewery, where every week is busier than the previous one and weeknight waits for tables are commonplace.

Even though he can't afford a new home in South Main, 20-year-old Fil Payne is a big fan. Dipping into a

chalkbag dangling from his waist, the lithe, tattooed climber cranks through gymnastic moves in South Main's new bouldering park, part of the project's recreational-centric vision.

"After work I can come and climb, paddle and not have to drive anywhere," Payne says. "BV's getting cool. Who would have thought?"

South Main homes stand in stark contrast to those a few blocks west. The Selbys are determined to blur the distinction. They've acquired 84 residential and commercial lots along South Main's border and west into town. Their first homesite outside the community just hit the market, priced at \$44,900, a third of the cost of the best custom-home lots offered near the river.

"We are integrating the two. Once the plan is fully reached, everything here will be 'downtown BV,' " Jed Selby says.

The town's leaders have worked closely with the Selbys to preserve Buena Vista's communal character. While there is little opposition to the South Main plan, longtime locals are carefully watching every step, says Mayor Cara Russell. What she hears most from her constituents is "We don't want to be like Breckenridge."

"There are a lot of people who want to keep Buena Vista a secret," Russell says. "We recognize that, and we also recognize it will grow. This is the time to plan for how we'd like to manage that growth."

Careful management by town leaders meant a prolonged and scrutinized application and approval process for the Selbys. Then they needed to sway buyers.

"It's been hard to convince people to come to a town with an unproven real estate market, with an unproven model and inexperienced developers planning homes on the town dump," Jed says. "I had no idea how all-consuming it would be. But it's working. We don't need to walk around with people in order for them to get it. It's finally speaking for itself."

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Fil Payne, 20, a big fan of South Main