

NEW MEXICO & LOCAL NEWS

Alan Best has connected with Raton

By **TIM KELLER**
The Chronicle-News

When newlywed Alan Best left his family's Tucumcari farm to go into the world, he couldn't have seen Radio Shack looming in his future. After a brief stab at college in Las Cruces, he moved first to Española, then Taos, where he opened his first Radio Shack franchise at the age of 23. He's been wearing Radio Shack shirts ever since.

Back in Tucumcari – 40 years ago last month – 16-year-old Alan had asked an attractive 14-year-old girl named Dorothy on a date. It worked out pretty well: they married two years later. Today, Alan and Dorothy Best are longtime mainstays of the Raton community.

Alan spent his first years in business working for his parents, who had moved to Española to open a sprawling Army surplus, hardware, and housewares store called Surplus City. After three years, they moved the whole business to Taos, where Alan opened a Radio Shack franchise inside the Surplus City store. The fol-

lowing year, 1976, his parents opened a Radio Shack franchise in Raton for an absentee owner from Santa Fe. In October of 1979, Alan and Dorothy moved to Raton to run the business, and in 1982 Alan bought the franchise.

That was before computers, before cell phones, before flat screen TVs. Radio Shack was in the shopping center on the south end of town. Alan bought the old Ben Franklin dime store building downtown and moved Radio Shack. For years, he leased most of the big building to Records Ace Hardware, keeping Radio Shack in a smaller area next door. In 2005, after Ace moved, Alan and Dorothy remodeled and moved both their businesses into the current 5000-square-foot Radio Shack store.

The explosion of new technologies has transformed Radio Shack's business. "We've grown every year since 1992," Alan says. "The main thing we did was add cellular phones. That was a big boost in business. Cell phones and cordless phones are our main lines. For a while, we installed hundreds of satellite sys-

tems every year. We started when the satellite dishes were 8' and 10' across, then it switched to the small dishes. But that's all gone now.

"But about three years ago we started carrying high-definition flat screen TVs. We never sold many of the old TVs, but with the flat screens our TV sales have picked up substantial-

Dorothy and Alan Best have been at the heart of the Raton community for 30 years.

Photo by Tim Keller



ly and, since the prices fell below \$1000, they've been moving really well."

Surprisingly, a price comparison shows Alan's out-the-door prices on flat screen TVs significantly lower than the best-known high-volume discount electronics retailer online. Asked how he's able to do that, he responds, "Well,

we're well-established and don't have as high an overhead as the big-box stores. The cost of doing business is lower in a small town. I own my own building and don't have to pay a lease. In a city, I'd have to pay \$5000 a month to lease this much space, so that's \$5000 I don't have to make each month.

"Local stores have to

compete with the Internet; that's just the way it is. People want to see their TV before buying, so we have to buy displays. But if we don't compete in price, they'll see the TV here, then order theirs online. I have to beat the online prices."

He employs four full-time employees and says consumer electronics is a

great business. "It's one of very few businesses that has grown over the last two years while most businesses were going down."

During his 30 years in Raton, Alan has been active in the community, sitting on economic development committees and helping to found the Raton Optimist Club. He was on the board of Raton Main Street for 3 years. He remains active in the Kiwanis Club, where he has served as treasurer and president.

Life is not all business, though. Alan is an avid hunter and fisherman. He keeps a saltwater reef aquarium at home, just outside Raton at the foot of Bartlett Mesa. He and Dorothy are devoted hikers, with nearby Lake Maloya and Sugarite State Park their favorite home hiking grounds, but they also travel to enjoy hiking in such places as Angel Fire, Taos, Colorado, and the Grand Canyon.

After 40 years, Alan and Dorothy remain inseparable: her office is next to his. Whether they're on one of their frequent vacations or at home or work in Raton, it's all good.

I-25 work north of Trinidad

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maintain safety for both the traveling public and our construction crews."

The \$6.1 million project is scheduled for completion in September 2010. Lafarge West Inc. of Longmont, CO is the prime contractor.

Information about this or other CDOT projects is at www.cotrip.org or by calling 511 statewide.

Bill Fegan and the Kaleidoscope Players

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during the day, but only drinking in the bars at night." The Shuler Theater had been restored with new seats, fresh paint, and repairs to the gold moldings by volunteers in the Shuler Restoration Commission, and the business community was anxious to bring life to the historic theater, and downtown Raton, with live performances at the Shuler. "What would it take for you to bring your theater group to Raton?" the group of business leaders asked Fegan, who answered, "Money." They replied, "How much?" Fegan spent that night working up a budget to present to the group, which was the beginning of a wonderful run of musicals, dramas, and comedies at the Shuler Theater.

At Fegan's request, the Kaleidoscope Players arranged to end their annual tours at Raton, which allowed the company to perform summer Repertory Theater in the Shuler. According to Fegan, when he arrived at the Shuler, he found that the original green velvet curtain was still in use, there were no lights except for a row of 25 watt red, white, blue, footlights, some of which were burned out, and no costumes or sets. But, with the help of many volunteers, the Players themselves, and the efforts of the Federation of Women Club, the Shuler continued to see improvements. In 1968, Grace Chapman Thaxton (wife of Manville Chapman, who painted the murals in the Shuler lobby) initiated the



Photos courtesy of Bill Fegan, Santa Fe Trail School for the Performing Arts

Kaleidoscope Players on stage during a performance of Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians." Bill Fegan is standing behind the sofa (with drink in hand).



Bill Fegan and Ben Zeller clowning it up on stage

drive for new seats on the main floor, and in the 1988 the FWC, whose president was Betty Rea, made improvements in the bal-

cony by re-tiering the floor and installing new seats.

The first play to open in 1963 was "Androcles and the

Lion," with Fegan as Caesar. Other Kaleidoscope performances at the Shuler were: "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," "I Do! I Do!," "Luv," "The World of Carl Sandburg," Lewis Carroll's "Other side of the Looking Glass," and Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians." In addition, Fegan and one of the other members of the Kaleidoscope Players, Ben Zeller, wrote many one and two-person plays that were later taken on tour.

Some of those included "The Great Debate," which was based on the debate between Lincoln and Douglas, a play based on "Peter and the Wolf," and several solos on Ben Franklin and Mark Twain.

Fegan continues to bring



Marty McGuire with Connie Simmons in "I Do! I Do!"

live theater to Raton as the manager of the Santa Fe Trail School for the Performing Arts, which provides the Summer Repertory Theater and the Raton Youth Theater. The school also partners with El Raton to provide simulcast performances from the Metropolitan Opera at El Raton. Maintaining his office at the Shuler, Fegan is usually on hand to give tours of the historic theater to visitors throughout the year, and to provide information to other groups or organizations that book performances in the Shuler.

This year, Raton celebrates the 95th anniversary of the historic Shuler Theater with a wide variety of events that include performances of "Arsenic and Old Lace," Chautauqua programs, special exhibits at the Old Pass Gallery, a premiere of a mini-documentary on the theater's history, dinner and luncheon engagements, and an award ceremony. Complete details of the anniversary events may be downloaded at www.raton.info. For more information on the history of the Shuler Theater visit www.shulertheater.com.

Commissioners discuss revolving loan program

Continued from page 1

as they had in place with Pueblo County for a similar program."

The two boards in both counties will also have to agree if a proposed plan by Tri-County Housing will be a sufficient agent to handle the Loan Service Processing for the revolving loan program.

The last issue will be to update the policy, most of which is dedicated by the state who controls most of the grant monies.

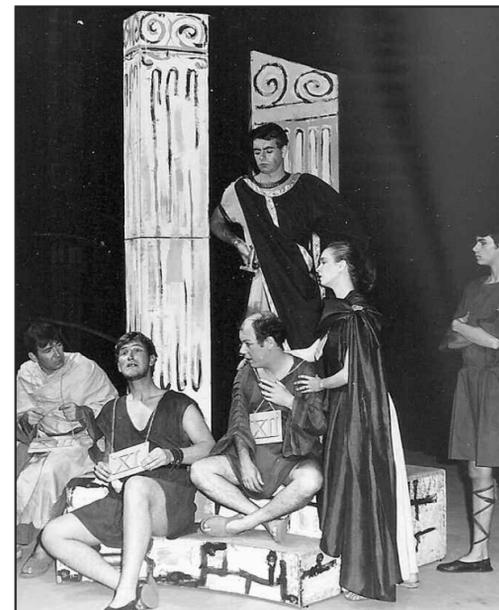
"Once the money has been loaned out and then paid back, the money paid back is then considered revolved funds," Cordova said. "Then, once the money becomes revolved, then the Bi-County boards in Las Animas and Otero Counties, not the state, get

to dictate the monies in which the funds get loaned back out. This is the concept of the revolving load program."

One of the reasons the program does not get the attention in both counties that both counties want it to get is because under federal guidelines, it states the borrower must create at least one new job for every \$25,000 borrowed. This is not easy to do in these tough economic times for any new or existing business.

So with the revolved funds, these criteria may not be applied. There are some revolved monies left from the last program.

For information on the Revolving Fund Loan Program for new and existing businesses, call Cordova at (719) 845-2568.



Kaleidoscope Players on stage during a performance "Androcles and the Lion." Bill Fegan as Caesar is seated at far left.

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Publisher:

Aileen Hood, ext. 5

aileen@trinidadchroniclenews.com

Director of

Creative Services:

Sheila Hamlin, ext. 6

sheila@trinidadchroniclenews.com

Reporter:

David Santistevan Jr.,

ext. 3

david@trinidadchroniclenews.com

Classified Advertising

Office Manager:

Noah Simpson, ext. 4

noah@trinidadchroniclenews.com

Circulation:

Larkin Roy, ext. 1

Office hours: 2-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

larkin@trinidadchroniclenews.com

Business Manager:

Barry Hood, ext. 8

barry@trinidadchroniclenews.com

Reporter:

Richard Sitts, ext. 7

richard@trinidadchroniclenews.com

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