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## Greeley family to host picnic at historic farm



Tribune File Photo Judy and her mother Ruth Firestien stand in front of the historic barn at the Von Trotha-Firestien Farm in Bracewell at 30951 Weld County Road 27. The Firestien family will host a picnic from noon-3 p.m. this Saturday to collect stories and photos of the historic Bracewell community; which they will compile for a booklet.



For the Tribune An aerial photo from the Firestien family, a prominent family in the historic town, shows the heart of Bracewell, including the large beet dump, convenience store, and school. The town, which flourished from the early 1900s through the 1960s, has since disseminated, but the family hopes to collect photos and stories of Bracewell this weekend.

**Bracewell community picnic**The Firestien family will host a picnic from noon-3 p.m. Saturday to collect stories and photos of the historic Bracewell community, which they will compile for a booklet.

The Von-Trotha-Firestien Farm at Bracewell is at 30951 Weld County Road 27 in Greeley.

RSVP to Judy or Ruth Firestien at (970) 686-2338 or (970) 686-2671, or email [Picnic@BracewellFarm.com](mailto:Picnic@BracewellFarm.com).

Stretching at least twice the length of her house, the beet dump down the road from Ruth Firestien's place was once the heart and soul of historic Bracewell.

Beets — the cash crop of Greeley and the surrounding area beginning around the early 1900s — brought Firestien, 81, to Bracewell with her dad on truck trips to the beet dump. When kids who lived near the town's center just north of 83rd Avenue and O Street weren't working on the beet farm, they went to school next door to the gargantuan harvest, and beets drew their parents together outside of the convenience store after a day of unloading the crops.

The beet dump is gone, but Judy Firestien — Ruth's 45-year-old daughter — said she hopes to bring together the residents of Bracewell once again. The Firestiens will host a picnic Saturday alongside the Poudre Learning Center to hear past residents' stories and compile their pictures.

The family, which inherited the historic Von-Trotha-Firestien farm from Judy's dad, Chuck Firestien, worked in 2009 to get their farm on the National Register of Historic Places. They plan to put the stories and photos from Saturday's picnic in a booklet to share with the Greeley History Museum, the Poudre Learning Center and others interested in the town's history, Judy said.

"I've been digging in its history, and it seems like Bracewell is a special community," said Judy, who recently petitioned the Colorado Department of Transportation to keep up the town's historic signs on Colo. 392. Today, the town would have sat on the northwestern edge of Greeley.

Since the farm was placed on the historic register, the Firestiens have also hosted students on field trips and professors for history conferences. Judy said it's something the family hopes to get more involved in — and armed with the stories of past residents at the 130-year-old site, that history can only become more vivid.

Jerry Firestien, Judy's uncle, said he didn't stop harvesting beets every October until the 1980s.

"One day, I remember doing 25 loads" to the beet dump, said Jerry, the youngest Firestien brother.

A normal day would have been anywhere between 15 and 20 truckloads of beets, at about 7 or 8 tons per load, he said.

After the truck trips were over — or maybe in between — "You'd stop to get yourself something to eat or drink" at the Bracewell store, Jerry said.

Kids went to the same store for penny candy. Even Judy, 45, said she got to experience the store when she went for a soda with her dad.

"I remember farmers gathered outside in their irrigation boots," she said.

When Chuck Firestien first asked Ruth on a date, it was out by the No. 2 ditch at Colo. 392, the western most point of Bracewell.

"He had asked me before, and I said no because he was so noisy," Ruth said. But on that day, she gave in. When Ruth and Chuck were married, they moved into the farm house where Chuck was born.

It's the same house, at 30951 Weld County Road 27, where the picnic is set for Saturday, originally owned by the Von Trotha family — hence, the farm's hyphenated name, Judy said.

After the sugar beet business peaked through the 1960s, schools consolidated outside of Bracewell, and the town's residents eventually dispersed.

Jerry said he tried to buy the store before it closed, but he has since had to settle with preserving Bracewell through his stories.

Hopefully, the Firestiens said, the picnic will turn into an annual thing, and more people can share their stories in coming years.

Many people, the Firestiens have probably met before.

“Everybody knew everybody,” Ruth said.

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