

## Bracewell farm to celebrate 100-year anniversary this weekend

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When Judy Firestien talks about the history of her family's farm, it doesn't sound rehearsed, but she knows it well.

This year is the centennial anniversary of the Von Trotha-Firestien Historic Farm at Bracewell, and Firestien will celebrate with an open farm Saturday. It's not an open house, as Firestien and her mom, Ruth, still live in the homes. But they want to share the farm with anyone who wants to visit.

The farm isn't as large as it used to be. Firestien's cousin Mark still farms corn and hay on 50 acres of land. At its peak, the farm had about 200 acres.

But the farm remains one of the few properties left in the town most people only know about if they're from the area. Firestien's mailing address is in Greeley and the phone number is from Windsor.

The property is on the National Register of Historic Places list, which includes the likes of Independence Hall and the Statue of Liberty. As is the case with many places on the list, Firestien decided to apply for the listing when a possible road expansion would have cut her home in half.

"The historical society was interested because everything is pretty much where it started," Firestien said.

That prevented the road from running through the property.

Although the farm is 100 years old this year, Firestien can't apply for the Centennial Farm designation from Colorado. Part of the requirement is a family must own the farm for 100 years. The Firestien family didn't officially own the farm until 1966.

"We have a few more years to go," Firestien joked.

### FROM VON TROTHA TO FIRESTIEN

Bode and Claude Von Trotha were brothers who settled on the land in 1916. They weren't the original owners, but the operation under their control used improved irrigation practices and grew sugar beets, a big cash crop at the time.

"I don't think there was a farmer who didn't raise them then," Ruth said.

Firestien's great-grandparents, Peter and Sophia Firestien, worked for the Von Trotha brothers. In fact, Firestien's house is now Judy's.

The Von Trotha brothers didn't have someone to pass the farm along to in their family, so they offered it to the Firestiens.

Years later, when Ruth married Peter and Sophia's grandson, Wilbert "Chuck," they asked the Von Trothas about a place for them to live on the farm. The idea of building a new home was obvious, but the Von Trothas were resourceful and decided to move a house that wasn't being used just up the street in their field.

"It hadn't been used except for a hired man's house," Ruth said. "The house had been sitting empty for quite a while. They moved it up here and redid it."

Ruth still lives in the house.

Even Judy's house, while original, wasn't built with new material. Remaining brick from a few old silos were used.

Even though the Von Trotha brothers didn't have someone to pass the farm on to, their lineage didn't stop with Bode and Claude.

Not too long ago, Judy said, someone with Texas plates drove into the property just to look around.

It happened to be a relative of the original owners.

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