



Buck and Helen Knight Foundation: *Faithful Support for the Crail Ranch Homestead Museum*

By Anne Marie Mistretta

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Christmas arrived early for the Historic Crail Ranch Homestead Museum in 2013 when a gift of \$900 was delivered by a Santa elf dressed seasonally in his red Patagonia jacket. That elf was none other than Mike Scholz, Chair of the Buck and Helen Knight Foundation Board. Buck and Helen Knight began their nonprofit foundation back in the 1970s to support community service projects in the area. Nearly a half century later, the foundation donates approximately \$50,000 annually to worthy causes.

May 2014 Update – *Anne Marie Mistretta, chair of the Crail Ranch Homestead Museum, reports that the Buck and Helen Knight Foundation has once again chosen Crail Ranch for a Foundation award of \$3000 targeted to assist in the current building projects underway at the Ranch.*

The Knights were both born in Paradise Valley and came to Gallatin Canyon to work on the Elkhorn Ranch. Buck and Helen ventured into the dude ranching business. Rather than converting an existing stock ranch into a tourist attraction, they built from scratch and created a legacy that has extended to the present. They bought ten acres of what had been Bert Stillman's dilapidated homestead and opened Buck's T-4 in 1946, starting with a few cabin rooms, a gas station, a restaurant, and a bar. They added more rooms and a dance hall in 1950 and then an additional 160 acres. A summer and hunting season resort, it gained a reputation for western hospitality.

According to Mike Scholz, whose family purchased the business in 1970, the Knights were a true team. Recognizing Helen's organizational and financial skills as well as her cooking, Buck often said, "Without Helen there would be no business." Helen would respond, "Without Buck there would be no customers." Not only did Buck have a welcoming smile and great personality, he was a renowned hunter, guide, and outfitter.

The Crail Family was good friends with the Knights. The Humes, who purchased the Crail Ranch in 1950, were also close to Buck and Helen. Jack Hume, who then lived in Oakland, California, had been one of Buck's hunting clients. He brought his new bride, Elaine, on a honeymoon in 1947. They stayed at Buck's T-4 and asked Buck to keep an eye out for any ranches coming onto the real estate market. Within three years, Jack and Elaine packed up their home in Oakland and moved to the Meadow and onto the Crail Ranch!

The Historic Crail Ranch Conservators, dedicated to preserving the homestead and that era of history, will use the Knight Foundation funds for preservation of the ranch and the new support and storage structure they plan to erect next spring.

The Knight's gracious hospitality and generosity are remembered and extended through the Buck and Helen Knight Foundation. Over the last two years, the following groups have benefitted from the Knight Foundation:

Historic Crail Ranch is a project of the Big Sky Community Corporation, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization which exists to promote, acquire, preserve, and maintain land, parks, trails, and easements for the use of the people of the Big Sky Community and general public.

- The Historic Crail Ranch
- Eaglemount
- Morningstar Learning Center
- Bozeman Senior Center
- Gallatin Valley/Big Sky Food Bank
- Heart of the Valley Animal Shelter
- Pioneer Museum
- Willing Workers Ladies Aid
- Women In Action
- Friends of Big Sky Education
- Bozeman Schools Foundation
- Museum of the Rockies
- Travelers For Open Land

(Portions of this article are excerpted from *Images of America: Big Sky*, written by Jeff Strickler and Anne Marie Mistretta. The book is available in many Big Sky area retail stores and through most major national booksellers.)