

TELLURIDE DAILY PLANET

BUSINESS

Home on the range

Jim Nerlin honored for land sales, recognized by TAR

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On a weekday, in the middle of the day, Jim Nerlin's phone rings. And it rings loudly.

"Just move 'em out. You get short on grass or you're tromping it up, just move 'em on out," he said to the other end of the line. "They'll pay per head."

He's talking about breeding cattle the next moment. "Well, they're thinking about 50 pair. And we're thinking about a month or less depending on the feed and everything ... maybe it's the first of May. And then we go to the high country the month of June."

He's not a typical professional type, and it's easy to see — and hear — that.

Nerlin has been a real estate broker here for more than 20 years, and his story is intertwined with the rise — and falters — of the real estate market here. He's enjoying recognition from two groups: One, the Telluride Association of Realtors honored him for lifetime achievement in 2010 and two, he won the Colorado's Land Realtor of the Year award.

He's had a hand in some of the largest land deals on Telluride's mesas, but it wasn't always that way.

"I've been in this business for almost 40 years. I started out on a very small scale, transaction wise," Nerlin said. He'd do \$3,000, \$5,000 deals. And he'd work for weeks on them.

"There wasn't a multitude of people coming in to see those properties. You kind of learned the basics of real estate and how it should be done," he said.³³



Local Realtor Jim Nerlin, pictured with his horse, Tucker, outside of Gunnison, Colo. [Courtesy photo]

Nerlin has made a name for himself here selling ranches and large tracts of land on Telluride's outlying mesas — it's what he knows best.

He was born and raised on a farming ranch in Joliet, Mont., a town close to Red Lodge. He's the youngest of six kids and comes from a hard-nosed ranching community. And it shows.

He doesn't look like a lot of professionals in town — his jeans have that pressed cowboy look and his boots are, more often than not, at least a little dirty. Thick socks drape from his cowboy boots at the Telluride Fitness Center in the mornings.

Nerlin graduated from high school in Montana, then enrolled in college in Billings. After two years, he was drafted into the Army and served in Vietnam in 1966.

He returned and finished up his business administration degree at Eastern Montana College, where he was on the rodeo team as a bullrider.

Nerlin looks a bit like a bull himself: he's stout, built like refrigerator and isn't afraid to tell you what he thinks. He has a hawkish nose and lean eyes.

"I think Jim is a cowboy at heart," said TD Smith, TREC's president and managing broker. "He has a real love of farm and ranch property and the rural lifestyle ... Jim is fun to be with. And he's fun to work with. And he knows his stuff."

Nerlin went to work in Denver in 1970 for an aerospace company after college and decided, promptly, that he didn't want to work in an office.

"So I got my real estate license in 1971," he said.

In that time in Denver, he met his wife-to-be, Peggy. She's served as the country clerk here and together the two have three kids.

Nerlin went to work selling homesites on Gore Pass in the early '70s and worked for the Middle Park Land and Cattle Company. From there he moved to Steamboat, selling homesites off Steamboat Lake. He went to work as a ranch broker — something that to this day defines his career.

He would later move to Fairplay where he bought and sold ranches, ran cattle and developed ranch properties. But the recession of the late 1980s smashed headlong into Colorado, forcing him to liquidate the ranches.

The next stop was Pagosa Springs for a year and then, finally, Telluride in 1989. There was Jim, Peggy, their son Bo, their Labrador and some horses.

Sally Puff Courtney and Michael Ward hired him, and he worked for a developer planning and selling the McKenzie Springs Ranch. Soon after, Nerlin started working for TREC, the Telluride Real Estate Corporation, where he's worked for the past 18 years. He's now vice president of the firm.

"I think the best thing are the people," he said of Telluride. "Not only my associates and the friends that we've made here, but also my clients who have also become very good friends of mine."

That first year here, they lived in Telluride proper. Now, the Nerlins live on 40 acres in the

Carstens Ranch area of Wilson Mesa.

"And that really kind of cemented me into that area," Nerlin said. "Most of my clients come and buy in that area, and we became friends ... They're from all over the U.S. And most of them are extremely wealthy. [But] they just like to get down here and kick dirt with me."

He probably won't ever stop kicking dirt. He has plans to help brand cattle outside of Ridgway soon, and even run 900 head of cattle up Norwood Hill.

"It's kind of my forté and what I understand. And also, because I have lived and worked it, I can talk ranching to the these people," he said.

Nerlin was also named TAR's Realtor of the Year in 1996 and 2000 and has served as president of the Telluride Association of Realtors and Director of the Colorado Association of Realtors. He's talking about slowing down a bit, but we'll see.

"Yea. Sometime. You know, I like what I'm doing. I've worked all my life," he said. "I'm gonna still keep my fingers in it just to keep busy."

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