

grand junction

Free Press

FRIDAY

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World Headquarters Grand Junction, Colorado



**TAKE IN OPERA
NEW YEAR'S EVE**

Free Time

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Buffer quest yields record results in 2004

By **Josh Nichols**
Free Press Staff Writer

The goal is to save open space in the Grand Valley.

They call it the buffer zone. And those with the Mesa Land Trust believe positive strides were made in 2004 in creating a buffer of open space between the communities of Palisade, Grand Junction and Fruita.

Calling it a banner year, the Mesa Land Trust was able to protect six new

properties.

In order to do so, landowners sold the development rights on their property to the Mesa Land Trust in the form of conservation easements — guaranteeing the land would never be developed.

The six conservation easements were purchased for about \$2 million, but were appraised at nearly \$3.5 million.

"The Community Separator project's success this year demonstrates the increased interest among landowners in using conservation easements to achieve their financial and land protection goals," Tom

Latousek, the Mesa Land Trust staffer that manages the Community Separator Area project easement purchase program.

The new properties protected this year bring the total number of protected properties to 15, with a total acreage of 717.

Two recent acquisitions include the 14-acre Stecher property near the intersection of 35 and E Road in East Orchard Mesa and the 13-acre Likes-Durnell property on G Road near 35 1/2 Road in Palisade.

Both easements were acquired at a bargain price, about \$100,000, making each landowner eligible for Colorado conservation tax credits that can be transferred and sold for additional cash.

"The great thing about these two projects is that both are adjacent to already-protected lands, forming large blocks of open space and high-quality farm ground," Latousek said. "This means that we're achieving one of our Community Separator project objectives of creating real, tangible, on-the-ground buffer zones of protected lands, while stabilizing the diminishing ag land base at the same time."

The Stecher easement is the third property to be protected in the highly productive area of the Palisade buffer, with at least two more adjacent properties likely to be protected in coming years.

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Second annual teen party tonight

By **Josh Nichols**
Free Press Staff Writer

They had so much fun in its debut year, they decided to do it again.

The Grand Junction City Youth Council hosts its second annual Teen New Year's Eve Party tonight at Grand

Convention Center. All students in eighth through 12th grade are invited.

In addition to being able to dance at the biggest dance party in the Grand Valley on New Year's Eve, local youth will be able to participate in Several Bump and Jump activities like "Rock'em Sock'em."

The event also will feature a prize vault and

What: Grand Junction City Youth Council Teen New Year's Eve Party
When: 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. tonight
Where: Two Rivers Convention Center in downtown Grand Junction

The Free Press office will be closed today in observance of New Year's Eve.
Happy holidays from the Free Press staff.

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Dane Stickney

► **BUFFER:** *About 43,000 acres have been protected*

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The Likes-Durnell project means that a one-half mile block of orchard ground on three adjacent properties is protected forever in the G Road and 35 1/2 Road area.

The Mesa Land Trust is a local, private, nonprofit agency that holds more than 80 easements protecting approximately 43,000 acres of land in and around Mesa County.

Fifteen of those easements sit within the community buffer zone, an area between the three communities that local governments have agreed should try to be protected from development in the future.

By selling the conservation easement on their property, landowners are compensated for foregoing their property's development potential, while continuing to own and run their place as usual.

For more information, check the Internet at www.mesalandtrust.org or call 464-5750.

Reach Josh Nichols at jnichols@gjfreepress.com.

Top: The Likes-Durnell orchard near Palisade, along with two other properties, is part of a one-half mile block of orchard that has forever been preserved as open space through the Mesa County Community Separator program.

Bottom: This view of the Stecher property near Palisade is one of the six easements protected in the community buffer zone in 2004.

Courtesy photos

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