Travel through the Rocky Mountains outside of Denver and one marvels at their serenity, majesty, and beauty. There are also other advantages. In addition to the natural wonder, this is an area that has seen little of the poverty, pollution, or crime that has touched nearby Denver and so many cities, big and small, across the rest of America.

Granby is a winding two-hour drive northwest of Denver, on the southern edge of the Rocky Mountain National Park. For years, it relied heavily on timbering and ranching, but those days are long gone. Instead, the town welcomes tourists who visit the surrounding areas for fishing, hunting, boating, and skiing.

Skiers frequent such posh area resorts with names you might find in a travel brochure: Vail, Steamboat Springs, and Winter Park. The hotel rooms are expensive, but the air is crisp, the food is top-notch, and the water is clean.

But there also is another side to the mountains. A darker side. The pristine crevices and valleys can hide pettiness and grudges, greed and violence.

The people of Granby experienced this first-hand more than a year ago. They talk about it as though it all occurred just last week. The impressions remain deep and the memories keen. New buildings and concrete curbs in the town of 1500 people can easily replace the ones that were destroyed. Repairing the frayed nerves is more difficult.

This is the story of a producer, who watched the curbs and streets he helped build become rubble.

A producer expands
Granby is large enough to support its own concrete producer. Mountain Park Concrete sits close to Agate Avenue on the northern edge of town. The next closest producer is Aggregate Industries a couple of towns away.

Cody Docheff bought Certified Ready Mix in 1972 when it only produced 5000 yards a year. Today, as Mountain Park Concrete, it sells 40,000 yards of concrete annually and services all of Grand County.

Although primarily a ready-mix producer, Docheff’s operation manufactures precast septic tanks, manholes, landscaping blocks and barriers and wall panels for highways. Mountain Park Concrete is a family affair. Helping Docheff, 65, is his son, Joe Docheff, 38, who is vice president. Joe started hanging around the plant when he was 8 years old. Cody Docheff’s wife, Susie, works there occasionally. She takes care of book-keeping and pays bills. “in between doing laundry at home,” she says. All three are equal owners.

Business was so brisk, the Docheffs sought to expand their operation and build a larger plant on a vacant lot a half-mile away. The Docheffs planned to build a new batch plant and lease the remaining 23 parcels to small manufacturers, thus creating a small commercial-light industrial park on the northern edge of town.

It’s an exaggeration to say everyone knows everyone in a town the size of Granby. But you can’t live here without knowing an awful lot of people. Like neighbors often do, the Docheffs would talk with Marvin Heemeyer when they’d meet on the street.

Known throughout town as Marv, Heemeyer owned a muffler shop next to where the Docheffs planned to build their new plant. Heemeyer did some welding jobs on the side and rode a snowmobile in his spare time. He even did some repairs.
mostly fixing mufflers, on Mountain Park’s vehicles. Still, no one realized just how mechanically-inclined Heemeyer was, just how good he was building things with his hands.

A fire burns

The Docheffs learned that the zoning board required that they obtain a Planned Development Overlay District permit so they could build the plant. “We expected questions at first,” says Joe Docheff. “It was a new concept and it was a new idea.”

The Docheffs answered those questions at several meetings and even built a small model of the plant to show neighbors what the operation would look like. After appearing most, only one neighbor remained opposed. Heemeyer was not going to let them have it that easily.

He fought every step of the way. He complained to the Environmental Protection Agency, so the Docheffs had a professional noise analysis done. He filed an array of lawsuits, all of which were dismissed.

Two and a half years later, Mountain Park finally received the zoning permits to build its new plant. But the die was cast. Heemeyer was not going to let it go. He fought every step of the way. He complained to the enforcement officials.” It was a slow day at Mountain Park.

Joe was at the gravel pit 20 miles away at their home, and that’s where Susie was at 2 p.m. The Docheffs sell road base from their home, and that’s where Susie was at 2 p.m. The Docheffs sell road base from the gravel pit. Only Cody was at the plant. “I was screening topsoil and a call came across the radio that a big explosion went off at the precast shop,” says Cody. “I jumped out of the loader and ran across the yard. That’s when I saw the machine knocking the hell out of things.”

At first, Docheff wasn’t sure what he was looking at. “I thought, ‘What the hell is that thing?’ It was the ugliest damn thing. I recognized it and right then, I knew it was Heemeyer.”

The long-parked dozer that had the For Sale sign on it in front of Heemeyer’s muffler shop barreled out of the same building which now housed the The Trash Co. refuse company. It made a beeline for the concrete plant. But it wasn’t exactly the same dozer.

During those months when no one saw Heemeyer, he was closer to the Docheffs than they had imagined. When he sold his muffler shop to The Trash Co., he arranged to lease half of the building. He erected a wall to separate his space from the rest of the structure and changed the door locks.

The leased area became his home; he had food, a television, and a cot inside. Heemeyer spent the next six months attacking armored 1/2-inch thick steel plate to the construction vehicle. Bulletproof Plexiglas protected the slats he used to look outside. He mounted closed-circuit cameras outside the vehicle and video

Top: A sheriff’s deputy fires at Heemeyer’s bulldozer at the concrete plant. None of the 200 rounds law enforcement officials fired that day stopped the rampage. Bottom: Cody Docheff operates a front-end loader and tries to thwart Heemeyer, who fired 12 shots into the loader’s bucket. Electrician Wayne Miller was across the street from Mountain Park Concrete that day, grabbed his camera, and snapped these photographs when he saw and heard the racket.

Concrete for protection

One of his preparations still especially irks the Docheffs. Authorities would later find a pallet of packaged concrete where Heemeyer did his work. He placed the concrete in between two sheets of steel to further thwart bullets he knew would be fired. “He used concrete to protect himself,” Joe Docheff says in disgust.

His first target was the small precast shop. Heemeyer flattened it, yet somehow the two employees inside escaped injury.

Cody Docheff then took matters into his own hands as Heemeyer neared the main plant. Docheff jumped into his front-end loader and a macabre demolition derby ensued.

“I tried poking the loader bucket into the dozer’s track, into the motor, but I couldn’t beat the dozer,” he says. “I couldn’t do nothing.” Heemeyer then fired 10 to 12 50-caliber shots from a rifle, most of which struck the front-end loader’s bucket.

Heemeyer then started ramming the building while slowly circling it. Parts of the building caved in on themselves. Sheriff deputies came, but were powerless. About the only part of the building Heemeyer didn’t damage or destroy was the batch plant. The Docheffs speculate Heemeyer feared that if he knocked it over, it would topple onto the bulldozer.

Heemeyer turned his bulldozer onto Agate Avenue and pointed it south in the direction of the rest of the town. He had a plan and knew exactly where his enemies lived and worked.

Terror through town

Police officers followed closely as the makeshift armored battering ram crawled its way through town at 5 mph. Police fired an estimated 200 rounds at the vehicle to no avail. A local radio announcer stood on the street and broadcast the scene live to bewildered listeners.

The buildings Heemeyer next destroyed or damaged were notable only for how ordinary they were: Liberty Savings Bank, the town council for 20 years and was mayor when the zoning dispute started, but died recently. Heemeyer destroyed the home where his 82-year-old widow lived.

Most galling was the bulldozing of the Town Hall, not because many town records and archives were destroyed. Just moments earlier, several children were reading during a story hour in the basement which also housed Granby’s library.

Heemeyer turned his bulldozer onto Agate Avenue and pointed it south in the direction of the rest of the town. He had a plan and knew exactly where his enemies lived and worked.

Top: Granby Town Hall had to be razed after Heemeyer destroyed it. Children were reading in the basement, which housed the town’s library, just before the damage occurred. Middle: A gaping hole is left in the side of Mountain Park Concrete. Bottom: Cody Docheff looks at photographs of the destruction with his wife, Susie, and son, Joe, both of whom also work at the producer.
The Aftermath

Some said it looked like a tornado had caused destruction by helicopter that evening. Heemeyer had destroyed or heavily damaged 13 buildings throughout Granby. He had devoted his life full-time to his rampage. “The amount of thought and planning was immense,” says Joe Docheff. “The guys who dismantled the bulldozer could not believe how well it was put together.” The bulldozer, called the “Armageddon tank” by some, weighed 85 tons. It eventually was scrapped.

Authorities searched the dead man’s home and found his plan on his personal computer. Heemeyer felt he had been called on to act out his rage. “He thought this was his reason for being put on earth,” says Joe Docheff. “To teach the people of Granby a lesson.”

Heemeyer had compiled a list of 107 people he thought had wronged him. The group was split into two. Some were innocent, the other was not. Crews made repairs quickly and started batching concrete only three days later. In the meantime, the Docheffs restarted their plant in Fraser, about 15 miles away. It’s one year later and the Docheffs are eating burgers and sandwiches and joking with a waitress at the Silver Spur restaurant. When a visitor points out that at least Heemeyer did not prolong his anger at buildings and not people, the Docheffs become serious. They won’t stand for such talk. “He had no regard for human life,” says Susie Docheff. Cody adds that if Heemeyer truly didn’t want to hurt anybody, he would have plundered the center of town on the weekend, when most businesses would have been empty. “He hurt a lot of people,” says Cody Docheff. “The whole community suffered.”

Cody Docheff reflects fondly on the support and concern that the contractors who stood by Mountain Park as the Docheffs put the pieces back together. They could have ordered concrete from competitors in neighboring towns, but not. Crews made repairs quickly and started batching concrete only three days later. In the meantime, the Docheffs restarted their plant in Fraser, about 15 miles away. It’s one year later and the Docheffs are eating burgers and sandwiches and joking with a waitress at the Silver Spur restaurant. When a visitor points out that at least Heemeyer did not prolong his anger at buildings and not people, the Docheffs become serious. They won’t stand for such talk. “He had no regard for human life,” says Susie Docheff. Cody adds that if Heemeyer truly didn’t want to hurt anybody, he would have plundered the center of town on the weekend, when most businesses would have been empty. “He hurt a lot of people,” says Cody Docheff. “The whole community suffered.”

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