

# Star Tribune BUSINESS

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SECTION

DOW JONES  
INDUSTRIALS

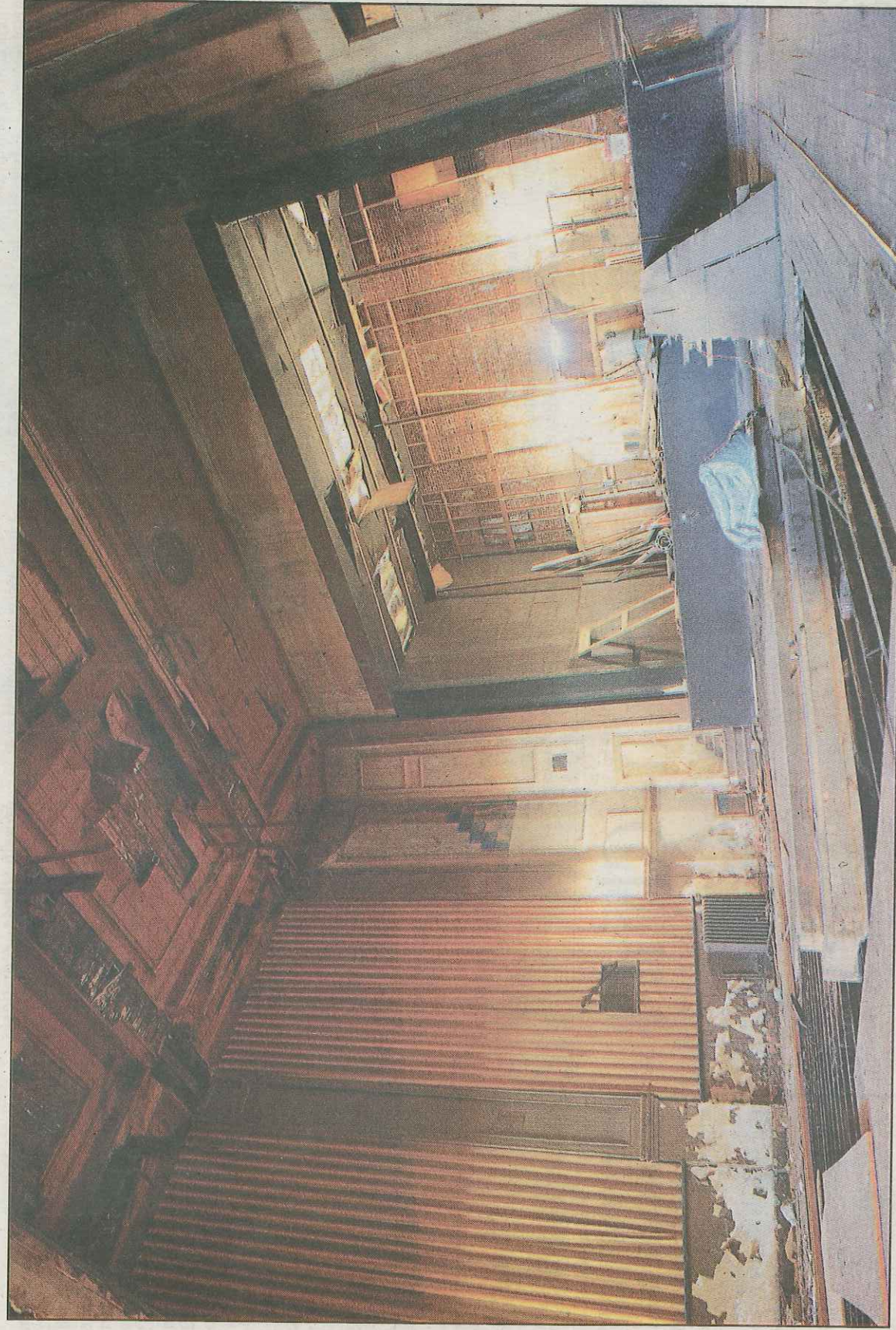
▲ -473.27 for a  
weekend total  
of 8,378.95

NASDAQ  
COMPOSITE

▲ -159.26 for a  
weekend total  
of 1,552.03

STANDARD &  
POOR'S 500

▲ -63.78 for a  
weekend to  
of 876.77



The interior of the historic Strand Theater in downtown Rawlins shows the years of neglect and water damage. Owners Pat and Rose Cain are slowly and painstakingly bringing the building back to life.

Dan Cepeda, StarTribune

# Rawlins

on the

By **TOM MAST**  
Star-Tribune  
staff writer



Pam Thayer, the executive director of the Rawlins Main Street/Downtown Development Authority, shows the new plans for the historic Ferguson Building in downtown Rawlins. The space is being prepared for mixed use by a California developer.

Dan Cepeda, Star-Tribune

## Downtown district undergoes business revival

**RAWLINS** —

**T**he idea that a person would complain about being forced to circle a block repeatedly in order to find a parking spot in downtown Rawlins makes Pam Thayer smile a bit.

Not long ago, parking wasn't a problem. Empty buildings were common in the core area. But that's no longer the case. Downtown Rawlins has undergone something of a renaissance, with several more big projects in the works.

Thayer, executive director of Rawlins Main Street/Downtown Development Authority, said the occupancy rate of downtown retail space is now at about 90 percent. And those stately, though often empty, old buildings are filling up.

"In the last two years, we've had 11 new businesses come into downtown," Thayer said. "And we've had four from the periphery of Rawlins come into downtown."

The downtown area boasts 96 businesses. The mix includes an Oriental market, a Thai restaurant, barber shops, Huckleberry's Espresso Co. and the Carbon Mercantile, a community owned clothing store.

Wal-Mart has never pulled a building permit for its proposed supercenter store, so for now at least, the retail giant poses no competitive threat to the reinvigorated downtown district.

The upsurge has helped boost bottom lines. "My downtown merchants are reporting about a 25 percent increase (in sales) over last year," Thayer said.

Major renovation work also is proceeding on three historic buildings. A California developer is refurbishing the Ferguson Building for mixed use. A restaurant is planned for the main floor. There will be 14 apartments upstairs, and a pub with pool tables in the basement.



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Go to [trib.com](http://trib.com) to see a slide show of historic Rawlins buildings.

# RAWLINS

## Continued from C1

Local residents Rose and Pat Cain are resurrecting the Strand Theater, which has been vacant since 1981.

Pat Cain said the idea is to restore the stoutly built theater after the fashion of its glory days in the 1920s. When completed, the Strand will host dinner theater, movies and streaming live video for events like opera.

An opera house in Rawlins? "Absolutely," Cain said.

Eventually, the Cains also want to feature sporting events in 3-D. The theater will include a bar and grill.

Renovating the Strand is largely a family affair, with Rose's father Jerry Gale, a general contractor, and other relatives pitching in. "We definitely want to be hands on here," Cain said.

A distinctively incised brick, known locally as "Utah brick," graces the building's exterior. Peeling away a metal facade revealed the original white terra cotta Strand sign. The theater was designed by a Denver architect for Rawlins businessman J.P. Johnson. The grand opening was Feb. 12, 1921.

Rose Cain said the theater might be ready to reopen in the spring of 2010. The Rainbow Te-ton Building, where Bunch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch



Dan Cepeda, Star-Tribune

**An empty hotel room in the old Rainbow Te-ton Building sits untouched since it was vacated at least 20 years ago in downtown Rawlins. The building, which also housed a popular bar on the ground floor, is a candidate for conversion into office and retail space.**

once reputedly stashed loot from a Nevada heist, also could be coming to life after being vacant for about 20 years.

The main floor would contain two retail spaces, while offices and a community conference room are planned upstairs.

Thayer anticipates moving her office into the Rainbow Te-ton, possibly along with organizations like the chamber of commerce, to form a kind of economic affairs, one-stop shopping site.

The Rainbow Te-ton fix-up would be done in two phases. The first phase would include major renovation work, for

which a \$1.5 million Business Ready Communities grant is being sought from the Wyoming Business Council. The second phase would focus on finishing the upstairs area. The project is expected to take several years to complete.

Thayer cited an active Main Street program and the energy boom of south-central Wyoming as factors in the business revival. She hopes the boom will provide a means for core businesses and building owners to create a strong presence for the long-term.

"It's all about sustainability and retention," Thayer said.