"I Enjoy Helping People" Sam Haslem

By Pat Guzzle

David Sherrod originally had the idea and started working on this story a couple of years ago, but never had a chance to finish it. What was completed sat in the Three Wire Winter files until the beginning of this year. Mr. McKelvie encouraged some of us to complete some stories that were partially finished. Looking through the stories, I chose to complete this one on Routt County Extension Director Sam Haslem.

The interview started with Sam's early childhood. "I was born April 9, 1930 in Vernal, Utah. Times were poor during the '30s, between drought, Depression and Mormon crickets. We had a hard time making ends meet. My father was and still is a cattle rancher. He is 90 years old and still raising cattle and that's what we did in those days. We wintered in Utah and summered in Colorado. It was about 35 miles in-between the two places. We wintered cattle down the river below Jensen, Utah on the desert. We owned 6,900 acres. Most of the land was in the west end of Moffat County, in fact, the road that goes from Dinosaur to the canyon country of Pat's Hole went through our land. Dad sold that summer country years ago and he still runs Hereford cattle in Jensen.

"The biggest bunch of calves we ever had was when we branded 452 head of calves in 1952. That tells about the size of the cattle operation. We ran 30 head of mares, raised quarter horses, and had 25 head of saddle horses. We ran our livestock on 30,000 — 40,000 acres of federal leased land plus our own land. Both summer and winter we had to do things on horseback. In fact, from 1932 to 1941 we didn't have a motor vehicle. Everything was horseback, team and wagon, team and buggy, or team and sleigh. We had to have three teams to operate the ranch.

"That's kind of the way the ranch operation was. We moved everything horseback. In fact, when I got out of college, I had five head of saddle horses. This was about what we figured we had to have because we would ride a half a day, come in to camp at noon and change horses to go out again in the afternoon.

"Our nearest neighbor was Pat Mantle. Pat Mantle has all these dude horses here at Steamboat in the summer. Pat and I went to the first grade in school together. The school was a one-room building located in Pat's Hole. It's down in the canyon at the Mantle Ranch. That old school is a historical building, and still exists. The old desks were still in place when I was there a few years ago. There are three log sides to the school. The fourth side is the canyon wall. The first time school was held in that building was in 1935 and Pat Mantle, his older brother Ponch, who is now dead, and myself were the students. My Mom was the teacher.

"Mom and Dad were both in their 30s before they got married. She was a Congregational missionary for many years both overseas and in the south. She was a very accomplished teacher, and was the first teacher at the Mantle Ranch School. Also she taught at the collegiate level in a Greek school on the coast of Turkey and had command of about three or four languages. The reason Mom taught school was the times were tough. The extra money put food on our table.

"In those days, in fact even today, we raised a big garden. We ate a lot of fish out of the Green River. Also we produced our own beef. We didn't have refrigeration so our meat had to be hung up in the shade to cool. Milk and vegetables had to be placed in cool spring water.

"We didn't have a car or a tractor. We were what some people called poor."

"The house at Jensen had a dirt roof. The ceiling was covered with a piece of cloth very much like percale and we called it a lining. Mom would take it down twice a year, wash it by hand, starch it, iron it and stretch it back up in place with carpet tacks. The walls of the house were made of logs. To recalsamine the walls and to redo the ceiling was a spring and fall chore.

"In 1937 Dad moved a large log cabin, with a team of horses and a wagon from one of the homesteads he had purchased from the top of Blue Mountain to Jensen. It took him three days to make the round trip, 35 miles each way. He was by himself, so he would roll those big logs on poles up on the wagon. The third day he would come back to Jensen and unload. It was a two-room cabin, but we added a screened porch on the front a few years later. In 1941 we added two more rooms. That was a big year for us because we added onto the house but we still didn't have running water.

"We had to carry the water from the Green River by horse and sled."

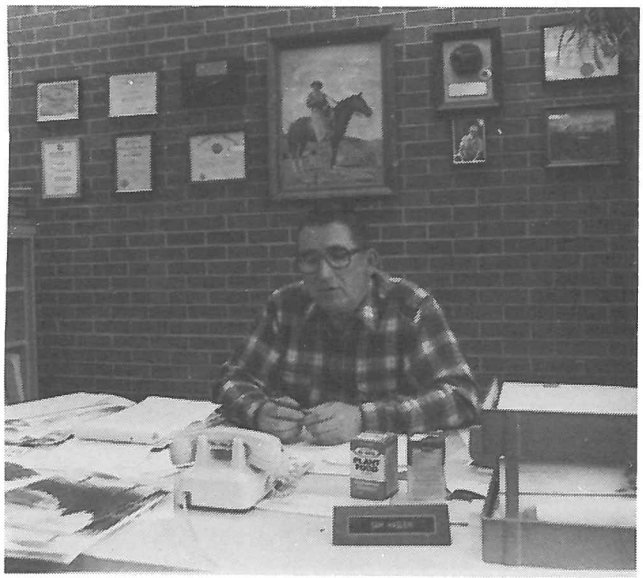
"We had to carry the water from the Green River by horse and sled in large wooden barrels. We would haul water from the cow camp at the mountain or back from town. In the spring you could almost plow the Green River, it was that thick. That was the water situation. In 1940 we got electricity to the ranch. In 1949 my Dad spent what he thought was a lot of money, $10,000. He put water in the house, added sewer facilities, a bathroom, Mom's art studio, fireplace and a modern kitchen. It was a very comfortable house and also pretty good-sized."

I asked Sam what it was like growing up in the '40s, being isolated the way he was and if he was conscious of what was going on in World War II.

"I think we were more conscious than a lot of people are these days of what is going on. In 1941 we bought a radio from Montgomery Ward that cost $12. I still have that radio and it's still a good-sounding radio. We always listened to the news. We were very conscious of what was going on. My Dad's family were all veterans. They were not what you call slackers. We had neighbors that stayed out of the service during World War I, but Dad and his brothers went. Dad had no use for anyone who wouldn't do their job in the military. Dad is a chartered member of the American Legion and is still active in it.

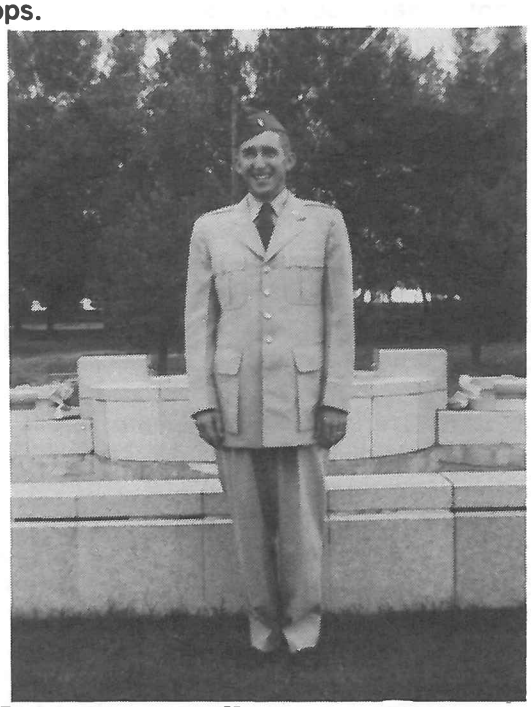
"During the war and in the '40s I trapped muskrats and sold furs. The prices were pretty good and as a matter of fact that's when I started taking flying lessons. Along the Green River there were a lot of cattails, willows and of course it produced a lot of fur and we harvested it. We didn't have a car or a tractor when I was very young. We were what some people might call poor. We didn't know we were poor, but we had to scratch for every dollar we made. Not only did we have a drought, we had the Depression and Mormon crickets. Any one of those factors was enough to tip a lot of people over at that particular time. My family was the only family in the Jensen community not on relief, WPA or PWA of some kind. A lot of families on relief had cars. In 1941, we bought a Pontiac, just before World War II.

"When I went to college I was on what was going to be a six-year program. I would go two quarters and then come home spring quarter and help out on the ranch. I did that for a number of years and then the last year I was in college I just borrowed the money to finish. I took 23 hours a quarter. I made the best grades I ever did that senior year. I got out of college in 1952 and then I went into the Air Force. I went through



"In the spring you could almost plow the Green River, it was that thick."

navigator training because I found that even though I was the highest in the class of 1952 on pilot aptitude scores, I was nearsighted. I couldn't pass the physical as far as being able to be a pilot. I ultimately ended up in a B-36 squadron which was a great, huge airplane, with 10 engines. Four jets on the wings and six pusher-props.



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"The B-36's job was to carry the great big atomic units over the top to Russia. That was one of the few combat aircraft the United States has ever built that never fired a shot in anger. It was a humongous airplane that weighed 357,000 pounds on take-off. It would carry 35 tons of bombs, 4½ tons of ammunition and 16 men in the flight crew. Its job was strictly strategic work. Fortunately the aircraft never had to go to war. None of them are active anymore; they're just in museums. The rest of them were scrapped.

"I got out of the Air Force in 1954, went back to the ranch and visited with the Extension Agent at Vernal, Utah who is now the executive secretary of the Utah Wool Growers Association. I had a nice little bunch of Hereford cattle at that time, but the cattle industry was really lousy and I was thinking about keeping food on the table. The agent steered me to a job that was open in Colorado. I started out in Colorado Extension in March of 1955 on a job that I thought I would stay three or four years and learn a little more about agriculture. Since then I've stayed with the Extension Service of CSU. I guess a person could say that I've almost been at one job for 31 years. My first professional job at the university was Indian agent to Towoac southwest of Cortez. I worked with the Ute mountain tribe there. Then late in the fall of 1955, I had a chance to become a 4-H agent in Adams County.

"I was youth agent there until 1959. I had the chance to go to a small town in southwest Colorado, Norwood, which was 70 miles from the nearest traffic light. I went over and looked the situation over and I loved it! I think I probably enjoyed my extension career more in Norwood than any other place. This was an area where people were so isolated that on everything they did, they had to be organized and pull themselves up by their bootstraps, which they were very good at.

"Telluride was the county seat of San Miguel County. I also had the west half of Montrose County where Montrose was the county seat. So it was 70 miles to the county seat. It was still another 70 miles to the part of Paradox Valley on the west where my office was. At Norwood I used an airplane a lot. I did an awful lot of air ambulance flying in that area and I did some flight instructing. As a matter of fact, I organized the ambulance program at Norwood which was sort of a socialized ambulance thing where the family would pay $5 a year into the fire department ambulance fund. That gave ambulance services to the family for a year.

"Of course, all of us were volunteers driving the ground ambulance. The nearest hospital, a good one, was in Grand Junction, which was 130 miles away. All we ever got for compensation was one meal on the trip. That's how we were able to operate that ambulance service, a low budget deal that is still operating. The first ambulance we got was an old hearse we got from a mortician and away we went. In that period of

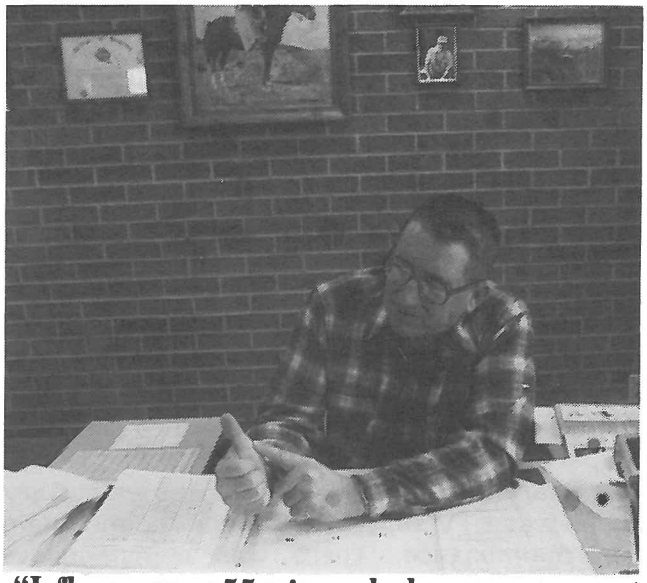
Sam's first car, 1952 M.G.

time, I flew some 55 air ambulance cases out of that valley. Sometimes I would land in some ranchers' fields with an airplane and pick up an ambulance case. Sometimes we landed on dirt roads. It seemed like three quarters of the flying was after dark. We landed with highway flares, we landed with car lights and did all sorts of things that I probably wouldn't do at the age I am now.

"We were there until 1967 and my supervisors said, 'Hey, you need to do more graduate work.' The university has a sort of nice way of putting pressure on. They said, 'We have an opening for a sheep and wool specialist at CSU. You've done your share of work with sheep in the San Miguel Basin, so why not come to Fort Collins?' We had a terrific selection program we put together there. We would use shearing records as a means of selection. We actually graded the fleeces on thousands of head of sheep each spring. We got the fleece data at shearing time in the spring. We then used that selection criteria on the sheep when we went through the herds in the fall. We used individual ear tags and we used portable livestock scales. We weighed a lot of cattle and used that as selection criteria. Needless to say, I went to CSU as sheep specialist for three years. I also did more graduate work and then got the chance to come to Steamboat.

First solo flight - 1946 Luscombe 8-A

"There were several reasons why I wanted to come to Routt County. One, I wanted to come here a long time ago, and two is that I loved the freedom of field work rather than campus work a lot more. And so I came here to Steamboat in the summer of 1970. It was 140 or 150 miles closer to the ranch than Fort Collins was, and that was another reason why I came here. The final reason was the chance to get away from the bigger town. My two oldest children, Richard and Terri, graduated from Steamboat Springs High School and then we bought our place at Hayden and my daughter, Sherri, graduated from high school in Hayden."



"I flew some 55 air ambulance cases out of that valley."

Sam went on to tell about some of the things that he has done for agriculture in Routt County. "One of the most successful things was when we pulled together a bunch of the agriculture leaders here in the early '70s. We asked, 'What would you like to learn from the university?' I had the Dean of Agriculture over here for that meeting. A bunch of these ranchers said, 'You know, there's a lot of people offering a lot of big money. How do we sell our ranch? How do we manage the money? What kind of a contract do we do?' The Dean of Agriculture said, 'Well, Sam, we're going to have to even go outside of the College of Agriculture for this type of information.' We ended up working with some of the Denver banks, with the trust departments, and so on. We put on a series of seminars on how a rancher sells his ranch. This was a different type of teaching, a different type of program thrust that we had ever run into before.

"The biggest thing that I like to do is put on some real good workshops. For instance, on a Saturday afternoon, we had a workshop on Mountain Meadow Management and pasture management at Yampa. We did it on Saturday afternoon so that the ranchers who also worked at the coal mines or some other job could take part in the program.

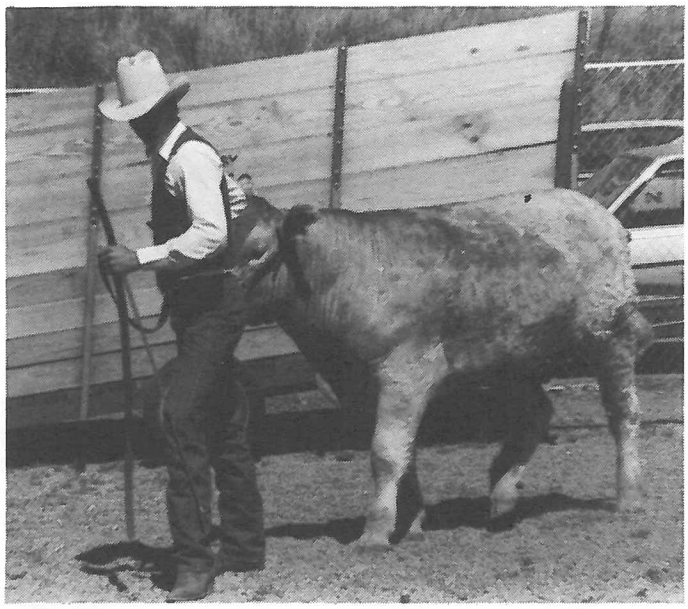
"We had a big wheat meeting in Hayden not very long ago. Dan Sullivan, who was recently on our staff, carried that meeting because I was at a state meeting where we were coordinating weed control activities from all over the state. This

was a major meeting on wheat, improving wheat quality and quantity by scientific fertilization using soil tests. You might say they were research demonstration plots on increasing the income substantially per acre by fertilization on the wheat ground down by Hayden. I think that was money very well spent and I think we'll see a lot more fertilization here.

"One of the things that wasn't publicized very much in the early days was the ski area here. We worked hard with the ski area getting approval of 245-T for brush control. We wanted to use it as a herbicide on the ski area. We had to not only get clearance from the Forest Service and State Department and everybody else, we had to also get clearance from Dallas. This was when Gary Kline was LTV superintendent on the mountain for maintenance. There was a humongous amount of time involved in that program just clearing all of the red tape. I assure you that not all of the red tape was in government.

"These are some of the things we've done: We've put on sessions on implants of cattle, how to improve the pounds produced on the summer range by using hormonal implants in cattle. We also have a very active Routt County Wool Pool. This is a marketing organization that sells all of the members' wool by sealed bid sale. These are all, for the most part, small ranchers. It's interesting that a lot of sheepmen up and down the valley, especially in Craig, find out just what price we have received for the Routt County Wool Pool. We have started to be a price setter. In the Routt County Wool Pool there's about 5,000-10,000 fleeces. The pool is made up from people ranging from the 4-H member with one sheep to the rancher with 400-500 head."

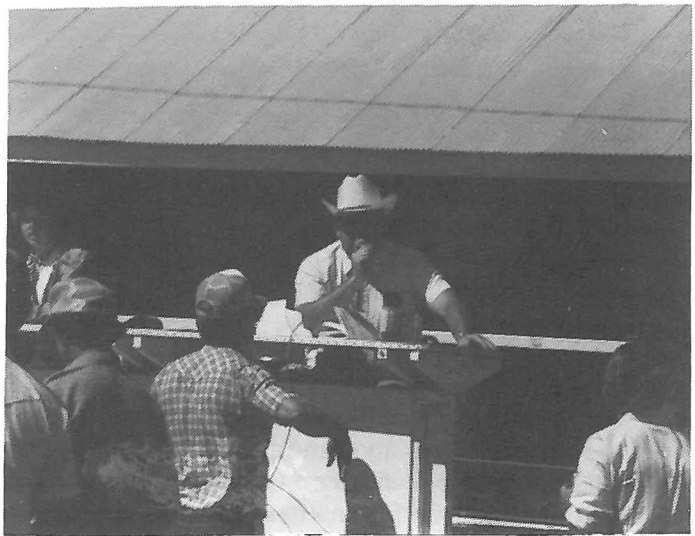
Sam says that the Routt County Wool Pool is one of the most successful pools in the United States. Sam's accomplishments don't end here, though. "I was very busy in the early '70s. An awful lot of people moved here and built homes. Some were very expensive homes. They came from areas where the climate wasn't so severe. So some of the common questions were, 'How do I make a pretty lawn? What fruit trees do well in Steamboat? What can I grow that's natural?' Most people dug the basement out and just piled the basement material out around the yard and a lot of these folks thought they could just throw wild grass seed out and make something grow. One of the problems here is the fact that subsoil is really parent material that would take a couple of million years to make soil. Most people don't have that much time to wait. The horticulture problems of someone coming to a new, severe, much different, very short season type climate, the different insects, disease problems that we have, it's a completely different ballgame. So, we did an awful lot of horticulture work and we still do.



"I still do a lot of work with 4-H kids."

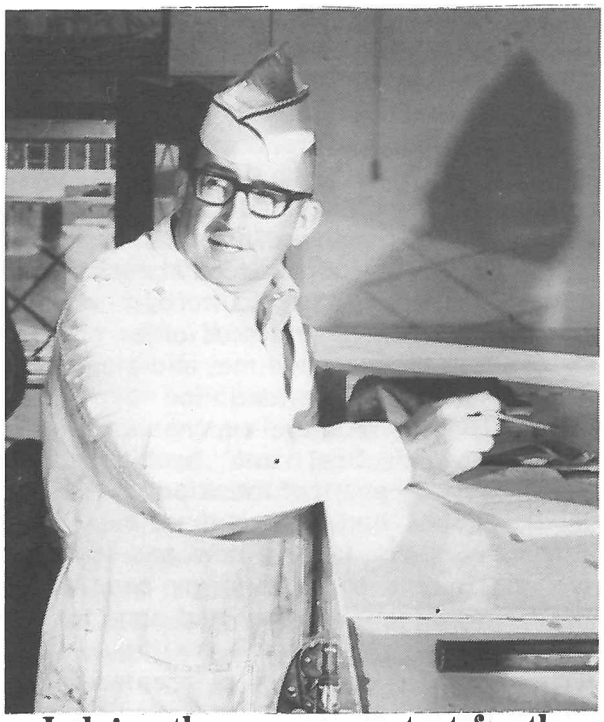
"The 4-H program, I think, is very important. I think it's one of the finest youth programs in the world, and I like to work with it. I still do a lot of work with 4-H kids."

With pride in his eyes, Sam told us about the Routt County Fair. "Our office puts tooether all the ads for the fair book, we secure all of the judges, we train the superintendents on what to do at the fair, and of course at fair time, you're lucky to get 3 to 4 hours of sleep a night. Ninety-five percent of the work is done by volunteers and I don't think that you could hire people that do a quality job like the volunteers do. The only compensation they get is a meal during fair time. They get a luncheon for themselves. They pay for the barbecue, rodeo and so on. Even those who are on the Fair Board or help put it on pay to get into the gate. It's pretty much a break-even type thing. We don't charge for people to see the exhibits, the art, the crafts, the garden,



"The Routt County Fair is an excellent fair."

home ec. and so on. We try to do it as a community service from people to people. The only thing that we charge for is the rodeo and the barbecue. The barbecue on sale night is kind of a break-even thing for the 4-H kids. They put that on to attract more buyers to the sale.



Judging the carcass contest for the Routt County Fair.

"I've judged a lot of fairs. I was in three other counties before I came here. I've judged county fairs and some classes of state fairs. I've judged the carcass contest for state fairs and I've judged for three different counties in Wyoming, a number in Colorado, and I've even judged in Arizona. The Routt County Fair is an excellent fair. We have some outstanding quality here. We have top quality livestock, and we're working on improving the grounds at Hayden. We've purchased a bunch of new equipment, some new horse stalls and this type of thing. We had a long fight, but finally got a bunch of good hog pens down there. The 1985 Fair was a super fair. The quality of the exhibits and livestock was excellent.

"In 1983, we had an eight-county show called the Northwest Colorado Livestock Expo in July. Here, an individual is judged on personal interview, what they know about their project, how well they show the animal, and how well the animal shows on record books. It's a good training ground and a good eight-county competition here in Hayden. It started in Kremmling in 1967; the next one was in Routt County, and this was the third time it was in Routt County. The first time it was in Routt County, I was one of the judges. That was in 1968."

When Sam came to Routt County, he did see some problems which he still sees. He explained what these problems are. "There's two or three things. One is that we're a long way from the markets. We have a severe climate here and if we're going to fatten the livestock, we have to import the corn and grain. High-priced land is another. Weeds are another one. One of our major weed problems is the new land owner who may not realize that those pretty yellow flowers and those pretty blue flowers are a noxious weed and not a wildflower. Many of the landowners that have come here in the last 15 years just aren't conscious of how important weed control is. Consequently, the guy across the road is constantly fighting weeds that are blown in from the neighbor."

Sam also sees problems with Routt County livestock. He admits that the financial situation is looking up, but there is still a long way to go. "Beef prices are a bit stronger this fall. This is good, but it still isn't strong enough compared to the other things that we buy. Ranchers have to spend a lot of money with other professionals, whether it be medical or attorneys or what have you. Those costs in relation to what we get for beef have snowballed over the years. It's a very mechanized system we have to use because of our short growing seasons. But, it's a nationwide problem. It's very tough for agriculture to flourish in one place in the United States and fall in another.

"For years we used to say that really what we're doing in northwest Colorado is merchandising grass. The cheapest way to sell it and get it out of here is in a four-footed animal. If you

Sam and wife, Louise, watch the 1971 Routt County Fair.

think about that, that's really what we're doing because a lot of these mountainsides, there's no way you can harvest grass except in a four-footed animal.

"We're spending a lot more money nationwide advertising things like fish and chicken and lots of other things to eat rather than beef or lamb. In Routt County the livestock that we produce, for the most part, are beef and lamb. We also sell a lot of hay and wheat and if you take these four items out, you've taken agriculture out. Labor costs have also gone up very much. For instance, if you go down to the grocery store and buy a $1.10 loaf of bread, for everything that is agricultural in that bread you've got less than a nickel. The Pendleton wool shirt that I'm wearing probably sells for more than $45 in a store now. There's less than a dollar and a half worth of wool in it. A $300 man's suit has less than $5 worth of wool in it."

I next asked Sam if this would have a large effect on someone just starting in ranching. He replied, "I see it hard for a young rancher to get started here unless his family has been in the ranching business for a long time and they're not carrying a heavy debt load. One of the big problems in this farming thing is the interest factor. These interest markets just snowballed a few years ago and this just blew everything completely out of the picture. Agriculture never was a real high profit item.

"One of the things that we've seen happen here in this valley is that they've traded labor for equipment. Many ranchers are running well over $100,000 worth of haying equipment. This stuff wears out and depreciates rapidly. When you figure all of the costs, it gets very high.

"A $300.00 man's suit has less than $4.00 worth of wool in it."

"To maintain a cow in this valley, it will take at least two tons of hay. So, it's very expensive to keep a cow in this valley. If you want to succeed, you've got to do a super good job and not carry a heavy debt load. I hope that ranchers won't pull out in this recession. I've got a strong feeling for ranchers; I think they're the salt of the earth. I hope that some way, somehow, they can hang on."

Sam is not involved only in agriculture. He also deals with community development and gave us a basic outline of what his job involves. "What I work for is called the Cooperative Extension Service. The word cooperative means that it is funded by three sources — federal, state and county. I am actually an employee of the United States Department of Agriculture. I am also an employee of Colorado State University and the county. It's a contract type thing so that when you figure the total cost of running the whole ball of wax, the county contributes a third, the state about a third and the federal government about a third. Here on the county level, the county pays for secretaries plus our third agent. On the state level, all of our state specialists are picked up by the state and the federal governments. Some of the funds come from contracts and grants. For instance, Colorado Wheat Growers Association is financing one of our wheat people.

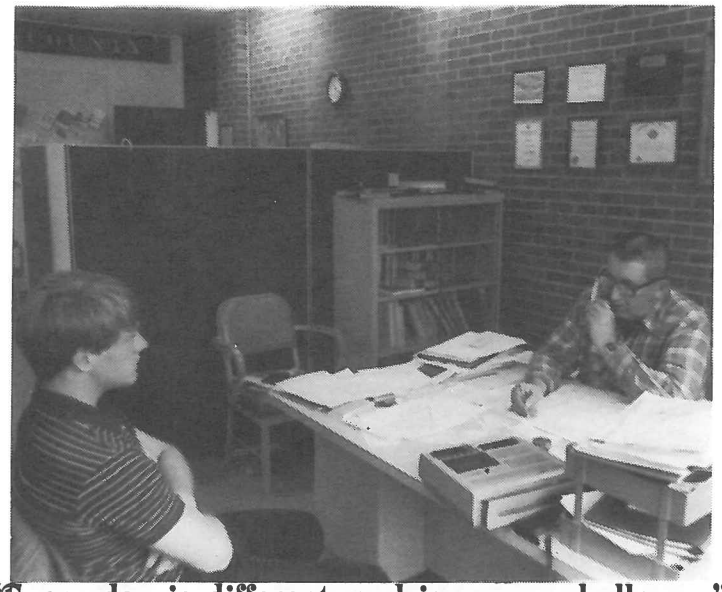
"Prior to the American Civil War, higher education in the United States was for professionals like lawyers, doctors, teachers and ministers. And prior to the time that the Morrell Act went through, higher education meant just those four professions. The land grant act provided for a land grant/college at each state to teach the common man agriculture, mechanical and home economics arts plus other pursuits. This went in at Civil War time, and along came another act that provided for experiment stations. The job of these experiment stations was to do practical and problem-solving research for the benefit of mankind. In the early 1900s they found that we had these experiment stations over here finding new and improved ways and maybe 20 miles away people were doing things exactly as they had done for hundreds of years.

"The extension service was created in 1914 with the job of carrying information from the land grant colleges to the people. At that time the 4-H clubs were started and the first county agent in Colorado was at Sterling. They had corn clubs and pig clubs prior to that time. That's why the extension service was started.

"Many new ideas have generated into a business and then someone is actually making the business work. A lot of them come from the research of the land grant college system that was practical, problem-solving research for the benefit of the people. Shirley Portouw started putting on re-upholstery schools a number of years ago. They are very well-attended; in fact there's a waiting list almost to get on. I think this year's sign-up for the school she just finished, within 30 minutes the sign-up was done and over with!

"Those are practical, problem-solving things for the benefit of the people. That's essentially what our job is. We are challenged in four subject matters. To do youth development work, agriculture, home economics and community development. That gives a pretty broad spectrum when you start looking at different things. Anything that brings the dollar into the community, you can class as community development. Any type of business, any type of new activity that helps generate some bucks in the valley is part of community development."

Although Sam is employed by the county, he doesn't spend all of his time here. "I spend an awful lot of time here in the office, but I also



"Every day is different, and is a new challenge."

spend a lot of time behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. Sometimes there are meetings in Fort Collins or Denver. My wife says that I don't spend much time at home and I can believe that. I don't punch a timecard. I work an awful lot of Saturdays, an awful lot of late nights, early mornings and weekends.

"One of the things about this job that's hard to realize, is this is the only office in the courthouse people do not have to come in to. Every other office dealing with this courthouse is regulatory. You buy license plates, you get a driver's license, you pay your taxes, the Sheriff serves papers on you, or something like this."

Sam concluded by telling me what he is expecting to work with in the county and some of the high and low points of his profession. "We'll be working more and more on semi-urban horticulture. Many people who have moved here are four generations away from the farm. So, in the summer, we get an awful lot of calls about plant disease, insects, and different types of flowers.

"I think we're going to see more and more technical agriculture. Those who stay here and who stay in agriculture would rather be on the cutting edge of technology. In other words, they are going to have to produce just as effectively as possible. I can take hay samples with a powered hay-coring machine. I can take small cores out of a number of bales and send it off to a laboratory for a complete analysis.

"We have the capability now of taking that feed analysis, and punching it in to a computer terminal. We can punch in what kind of livestock, their age and weight, and we can then figure how much feed is needed to sustain that animal. Then, the feed experts can do a better job of managing that nutrition for the rancher's livestock. I heard a comment once that the nutritional effort that goes into Colorado

"I hope that someway, somehow the ranchers can hang on."

livestock is about three times that of the average home. You have to pay extreme attention to the feeding of livestock if you want to make money. Sometimes the best feed manager is the one who loses the least.

"I see big improvements in the next 10 years. Right now, the community development groups of Steamboat and Hayden are working on the possibility of getting a wool mill in northwest Colorado. This would help northwest Colorado, eastern Utah and southern Wyoming. Right now these areas produce 2.6 million pounds of wool and are paying for it to be transported to a wool mill thousands of miles away to get it processed. They are looking at all different aspects of this so that we can know that they will make the best decision possible. I am basically adding some backup information so that these people can make the best decision possible."

As of this March, Sam will have had the job of extension agent for 31 years. He concludes the story by telling some of the low points and high points of his career. "It's a rather low-paying profession. For instance, we're starting people with a master's degree (they have to have a master' degree to even be hired by the extension service) at $16,500. This is not an 8 to 5 job, this is a job that requires an awful lot of weekend work. Consequently, we just can't make a whole heck of a lot of money. On the other hand, you don't have much time for any sideeines, you might say. The profession has been very good to me. I've won a few honors. I was a national officer in our professional association.

"I think the hardest part of this profession is finding things to do with your family. I hate to admit it, but I haven't been skiing with my son yet this winter. I've had an awful lot of weekend commitments for one thing or another. You end up putting a lot of hours in that are not very visible. Very few people see you leave a meeting in Denver that ends at 6 o'clock at night and drive home. Not very many people see you pick up a diseased wheat sample west of Hayden at 6:30 in the morning and get it in the laboratory in Fort Collins by 8. The only way I could do that was because I was flying an airplane.

"I think working with people is the best part of my job. Also, the fact that you're not doing the same thing day after day. Every day is different, and is a new challenge. Usually there's a lot of work stacked up that you seem to never get done. The fact that the job is different and the fact that people don't have to come to you unless they want to, I think these are the two big rewards. I enjoy helping people."