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## **CU across Colorado: CU Denver team fans out to help rural areas with community projects**

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**Jennifer Kovarik**, Northeast region

**Jeff Wood**, Southeast region

**University Technical Assistance Program**  
Colorado Center for Community Development  
College of Architecture and Planning  
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Ken: Welcome to CU on the air. Today we're talking to representatives of the university technical assistance program or UTA. It's a unique collaboration between a Colorado Center for Community Development in the College of Architecture and Planning at CU Denver, and a division of local government within the Colorado department of local affairs or DOLA. The program assists rural communities with public improvement projects. It offers students a chance to transform their knowledge and knowhow by working in communities. Today on CU

on the Air, we're talking with the field supervisors who manage projects and the student employees for the UTA program. Welcome to Chris Anderson, West Slope region, Jennifer Kovarik, Northeast region, and Jeff Wood of the Southeast region. Thanks for joining us on CU on the Air.

Chris: Thanks for having us.

Ken: So you all have completed a remarkable 2000 projects since this was formed in the 1970s. And I know you had a little hiatus, but, you've done almost a hundred since 2014. Can you give us each an example of some projects from your region you're particularly proud of?

Chris: I think we're proud of all the projects of course, but it's particularly rewarding when they move from concept through the entire process, engage, the other local talents and become constructed. And so I think for me in my time with UTA, it would be in Dove Creek, we completed a public service center building and a senior center building that both managed to get on the same track through concept design, and the students completely knocked the socks off the county commissioners. And that was used and is now fully functioning structures that are benefiting the community.

Jennifer: One project in my region is the Kersey town hall and streetscape project and that is actually breaking ground this month. And so that's another project where the students came up with the conceptual design. The town really bought into it. It's gonna revitalize the downtown main block and kind of be the catalyst for four blocks of streetscape improvements. It's also a, reuse of a building on the main street. And so there's just a lot of really great aspects of that project and the students really shined in that project.

Jeff: I think the thing I would say is the diversity of projects that we do is the thing that makes it the most remarkable. I'm doing a river restoration in Del Norte or Del Norte-Tay. Depending on where you are in from, we're doing a train depot, a transit depot in LaJunta, which they're hoping will help the train station or the train stop there. You know, the Amtrak folks. We do parks and we do all manner of things.

Ken: Understanding that they're all unique. Generally, what's processed from idea to execution? How do the projects come forward and how do you all get involved?

Chris: Well, that process can vary, but generally speaking, at this point with our involvement across the state, a lot of it's repeat, repeat clientele. And because these town managers, administrators, county, elected officials communicate with each other and they say, 'Oh, well, I worked with UTA and in our county or in our town, we want to do that.' It builds off the relationship with the regional managers at DOLA who are in the field as well and very, in tune with their communities.

Jennifer: Yeah. I would also add to that that the region managers are really great and kind of being the eyes and ears of what's going on in these communities. And so they'll send us potential projects or projects and we'll kind of talk further with the communities. something interesting is, if you live in rural Colorado, it's not uncommon to drive an hour to go somewhere. And so they learn about projects than other communities and they get a little bit envious or they get a bit

excited about winning a project and, it's not necessarily the same type of project, it's just they have needs that need to be covered and we really help them with that

Jeff: general checked envy. If, we do a recreation center in one town, then within a few months we're going to be called by some town, which is 25 miles away though since say we need a rec center too.

Ken: Are students involved from the outset once an idea comes to you?

Jennifer: I've taken students out to projects where I meet with them to just kind of assess what the project would be. Cause sometimes it's not very clear what the project is. And so that's a good learning opportunity for students to see how the interaction is and kind of to streamline what the goals are. And then the project will come to fruition with the scope and we get signed.

Jeff: Well we're, we're also, we're also teaching practice. I mean the university would look at that definition. And so part of what we're mentoring is showing students how to make first contact with the client. How do you ask the questions to create a project or how does that first meeting go? Initial contact. And so I think there's, something to be learned for that. Sometimes they're just great note-takers. They sometimes like produce like eight pages of notes and I'll look at them and go, we only met them for like 15 minutes. You write every word. My region is so far away and yours is too, I'm sorry Chris, so I try to get them in there right away because oftentimes we can avoid this. You know, we traveled a little less because I, after a five hour drive, it's like, I don't want to go back here next week. If this is going to be a real project, I'd like to maybe bring the students along at the outset so they've seen the property and that kind of stuff. So,

Chris: Well, it's not uncommon either. You know, final presentation for instance, everybody's super excited about what the students are presenting and how it looks and the community is almost always generally really on board with the concept. And that something is finally happening. And somebody from either the, staff or elected officials will come up and say, 'Well, I have this idea about this project or whatever.' And, and they'll start this brainstorming process with the students and they'll say, 'Well, have you thought about this? Or we did this in this other community and it worked out really well.' And eventually those turn into project scope conversations that we have, and usually turned into a project.

Jeff: I want to point out one of our best tools that we have, and that is the students because they are, they come agenda free. They show up with more open-mindedness and most people, you know, even architects and landscape architects, oftentimes we have our own biases. And I've had projects that were pretty controversial. I'm from the very beginning, I could tell the town, the citizenry of the town was sitting in there with their arms folded saying there's no way we're going to be able to do this. And you put in front of them, 25 year old students with, their whole future in front of them and it suddenly melts. They're suddenly like, 'Oh, I could see this happening.' The students' enthusiasm is a huge hammer that I use to sort of break that, that ice at the beginning of our projects.

Ken: What is the process by which, okay, an ideas accepted, how does it then get done?

Chris: So we're open to ideas all the time. And of course we are, you know, backlogging things trying to, you know, keep projects in the queue. And really all it amounts to is conversation with their regional manager and then a conversation with us. Sometimes that's flipped. And then we try to rope in the regional manager and then we make an effort to go meet with the community at either the site or wherever in the steering committee involved. If they have one suggest that they create one. Getting an understanding through either a single meeting or a couple of meetings of what the scope of work is, come back, write that scope of work up and figure out what we think the cost for that will be with student time involved. And then relay that back to them for their circulation and approval, which then just gets attached to a MOU, memorandum of understanding that was provided to us by Dola through coordination with the university.

Jennifer: And each project has a scope. So we outline whether it is exactly that we're doing.

Chris: Everybody reads the scope, nobody reads the MOU,

Jeff: student enthusiasm is generally a wonderful thing. Why do you think the students are enthusiastic about working on projects and largely rural communities? The students

Jennifer: that have worked for me really have been excited about the opportunity that they see how they can help the community through design. So whether through the built environment, whether through something that improves the health and the wellbeing and just the general welfare of the community, it's really clear that they can actually apply what they're dreaming about in studio, in school and apply it to a community and the people in the community get really excited about it.

Jeff: And nothing says great portfolio, like built projects and so they can sort of say, 'And here's a library I did in Bayfield. You did well you know the perspective of what you built the project already. I think that's a great thing. Also, I think they love their bosses. Most of them,

Jennifer: They do love their bosses, but it's also a multidisciplinary angle that they really get to see that it comes to fruition. So they're not just designing one building or designing one park. They're actually seeing how all of the holistic design comes together and really benefits the community.

Chris: Oftentimes these projects have had a phase prior to us being involved where a community has hired maybe some engineering firm to do an assessment on something. And so they get to analyze and work with these drawings and documents and use that as a base to move their design from and apply the techniques that they're learning in their classes. And then we as the supervisors impart on them, some of the direction of how things might work or we should rethink things and process it in this way all within the framework of what's feasible for the community. Not just presenting a pipe dream, but something that they can actually move forward with. Sometimes the pipe dream is what they need to get community buy in. But with a lot of our projects, usually the next step is some grant of some kind to fund it because the funding locally is so limited. These things happen in phases and parts. And so that process of creating feasible chunks for the community is what helps that success and is why the students get to see these things usually come to fruition.

Jeff: So what's been the feedback from the students? You know, I've had, I've gotten text messages and emails from former students that have said they never realized how well prepared they were when they left because they were able to do more in their context of their office than just the traditional drawing, you know, details or whatever. They'd had experience meeting with clients they had experienced meeting in front of a community or a city council or whatever. And those kind of experiences don't necessarily get pushed to the underlings in a new office. That's something that goes to the more advanced people. And so the fact that they can walk in and say, yeah, I've handled community meetings before.

Chris: I think the, one of the strongest pieces of feedback that we receive is the public, communication skills and just being confident in presenting the ideas and speaking clearly and being on the same level as the people in that room so they can understand exactly what it is that you're trying to convey from the group. You know, the, the, the pieces and parts that you captured from them over the numerous meetings that we've had.

Jeff: The skill sets that all designers need to learn early on is the ability to listen and listen well and take criticism in a way that can be constructive rather than, you know, 'Your assaulting my good idea. I don't like you to actually say you're looking at my good idea and you're giving me thoughts to make it actually something that you're going to like too.' And that empathy and that listening muscle is one of the things that I would say all designers need to learn.

Jennifer: I've had a couple of clients, recently say we really want the students to think outside the box. And so the students get really excited about that. But what I think they learn as you can think out of the box, but you could also make a real project out of it. You don't need to come up with something crazy cause it actually needs to work and it needs to have buy-in from the community. And so I think that's a really valuable learning opportunity that you don't get elsewhere. Coming up with the strategic thinking of how the project can actually happen, how to get buy-in, how to really listen to the client. But also how to make the project become constructable and affordable price because we are pretty frugal if the state dollars and the, and the grants that they get, we do really beautiful designs, but they're not elaborate costs.

Jeff: Well, one of the things in academia I, you know, I don't know how familiar you are with like academic design work is that tends to be a little bit more free form. Not so grounded in reality, shall we say and no budget. Yeah, no, there's no budget. There's no timeline. There's actually usually no engineering community meeting. Right. You learn in what we call the studio environment to sort of let your creative juices flow unencumbered, which is exactly what it should be. Yeah. But now I've had students where they have let those creative juices flow and I kind of sit there, I give them the rope and say, here, tie a noose for yourself if that's what you're going to do in terms of having, getting in front of a bunch of people and then saying I want to do this. And they're kind of going, that does not look like our community at all. And that sort of brings you back to sort of like go, 'Oh yeah, we're working for real people on a project that may get built and this isn't just paper, this is going to be bricks and mortar at some point.' It's a good learning experience for them.

Jennifer: Yeah. And similar to the, to the real world, you actually have an architect working with the landscape architect and a planner, and you don't necessarily have that in the studio experience in the curriculum because they're trying to foster something different. But with the clinical

teaching practice and going out to the field and being able to really listen to what the community wants and being able to design something much bigger than themselves, I think the students really take that with them and hold, hold onto it.

Ken: It's obviously a great experience for the students, but it seems to me like the communities, if they had to go out and hire someone to come in and do this work, you know, most of them are smaller rural communities without big budgets. But boy, it seems like a big one for them as well.

Chris: Correct. How we operate is we're a fee for service, with the communities that we work in. But it's structured very similar to around how DOLA structures their grant program and it's a cost share. And so the grant that the university has for this program covers part of the community's cost and then they cover the rest. And right now that's a 60, 40 split. And that's sort of at the discretion of the DOLA regional managers as they see their community, the community. And so obviously the whole point in this program is to be able to do the work however you can. So basically not to say no.

Chris: Our perspective as practicing designers across the state is that we're creating work for the local firms across the state as well. That these are projects that would otherwise have just sat in limbo because conversation never progressed beyond the fact of how are we going to do this? And it goes out there and become something feasible. And so, it's really a way for the department of local affairs to reinvest some of the severance tax dollars back into the communities in which it came, along with their other programs and then, but also do it in a way that's financially feasible for these communities.

Ken: Strikes me that's a wonderful use of severance tax.

Jeff: Yeah. Well a lot of these communities are the ones that are the most impacted by that kind of stuff. They've got people coming into their town and in some cases living temporarily and maybe in some cases deciding to stay there and so they're impacting the population so they're going to need more libraries or rec centers or bigger courthouse or whatever conditioning or whatever it is. We try very hard not to compete with architecture, landscape architecture firms that are charging what we would say full freight because we don't want to take work from practicing professionals, but oftentimes as you said in your set up that, that a lot of these towns don't have architects and landscape architects.

Jeff: So and to pay a Denver firm to drive, you know, five hours in some cases maybe more to, to help them with a park, the costs are going to be prohibitive and so they're never going to get it out of the door. And so we sort of act as the crowbar to open up the safe with, well and on top of it too these projects are usually at the stage where they need almost pre-concept development too, because there needs to be some conversation a lot of times about whether it should be a project in some cases. And we can help through that. And at the fee that we charge, it's more economical for them to go through that conversation if it were not to turn into something or it transpired into something else than to go in.

Jeff: And we just consider ourselves, you know, part of that process. There are projects that we go, we will pick up and we'll put it before the community and it will be clear that the community

does not want that library or that park or that baseball field or whatever it is we're doing. And that even though the parks department wants it, yeah, somebody within the town or the county will want it. And that's the other side of the coin, that if we can break the cold heart, the ice and the cold heart, we can maybe draw those communities to begin to see, 'Hey, you know what, maybe we do need that new rec center or something like that.' And some, you know, when you explain it and you have a big dialogue in front of the whole community, sometimes people change their position and that's kind of maybe what we're trying to do as well.

Jennifer: And with every project being so unique, some of the projects we do a lot of community input, some of them lesser, but we'll put together a report that the community will have. And they can use that to build upon or give to a future architecture firm to use. And we've heard from firms that have actually used the reports that they're so appreciative that the students had gone through that kind of initial process to help kind of refine what the needs are. That it's a lot easier for the professionals to kind of move that forward.

Jeff: Yeah. Plus, I'm sure that our students have a much warmer reception than highly paid professionals in front of a community. I've, I have no way to test it, but I think that theory has got some validity to it. No ulterior motives. So I imagine every one of these towns, you've got at least one grumpy old dude sitting in the front row and, who just doesn't like change.

Chris: The, slogan on the welcome sign into Nucla Colorado is a thousand friendly people in one grumpy old guy.

Jeff: He happens to be the mayor. No, I'm just kidding. I don't know the mayor of Nucla.

Chris: The students love that by the way. They, they take photos in front of that sign. You know, that's actually a really wonderful learning opportunity for them to think about how they're communicating and to work through the situation and see how it can be diffused. And it's usually centered around, frankly, almost all the time about change. It's just the concept of change in these communities and there's always seemingly the same people who are the movers and shakers and they're trying really hard. And then there's the few or one person that is showing up at town meetings and, and trying to stir things up a bit. And in our community meetings generally, kind of what you said, the hearts are softened by the end of the meeting because of how they're presenting it and how we work through how we want to present it in that it's not coming at them that the community as this directive, this is how it's going to be no matter what, that this is a process in a chain of other processes and there's opportunity to make it even more yours beyond us.

Chris: But we're trying to get that to that point where you can say, 'Oh, I see what this could be, or I see how this could go and changes. Okay.'

Jeff: I think sometimes the education comes to the grumpy old man. We did a fire station, a residential fire station, places for the fire, people to sleep, you know, it, real bathrooms, bedrooms, all that kind of stuff. And yeah, guys sit and said, 'Why do we need all this space? Can't they just sleep in barracks? That's what we did in the military.' And I mean, and he was completely serious. There was not, he was no touch of irony. And he, and, and people sort of looked at him like, are you crazy? Like we'll try to attract fire people to help our community.

We're not going to have tents out in the back behind where we keep the trucks and having them sleep in a tent we're going to have. And so you realize that you're kind sometimes the, the grumpy old guys out of step with the community too.

Jennifer: I also think that education is a huge opportunity in those situations. I've had older kind of grumpy folks at meetings that they have a twinkle in their eye when they start up, they start learning about what's done in other communities or precedents of how you can turn a historic building into a community center and make it multi-functional for different uses. And here are a few examples and they've actually asked for more examples in the students go find better precedents. And you know, it doesn't have to be the fanciest precedent, but I feel like they do kind of warm up to this chance and want to learn more. And I feel like it opens their eyes to change it sometimes good. So I've seen some grumpy folks really turn around and that is really heartwarming.

Jeff: Definitely should, we also have really staunch supporters who are elderly. So I want to point that out.

Ken: So Chris, when we talked over in Grand Junction, I mentioned to you that several people walked away, including members of our board of Regents saying, 'Wow, this is cool. This is a great program.' New president was very excited about it. You know, I think this is absolutely what universities should do. You're educating students, you're serving communities in the state. It's very inspiring. So I'd ask what inspires you all about this?

Chris: It's the work really. It's helping the communities well for me on the West Slope in which I live, work and spend a lot of time in, you know, envisioned positive change and become better. And I think for me, I can relate it back to what I found out after taking this position with the university, the impact that this program had in the community in which I live, which is free to Colorado and the parks that I use, the trails that I use, the welcome center, that I use, the museum that I go to, we're all at some point a project through this program with different supervisors at the time, you know, I had no idea what that did, but the sense of place, I guess is where I'm getting at that that creates all that stuff creates, even in my community. I can see that in all the other communities. And I see the people that get behind it and really find the joy and the power and what that's doing for their community. And, and that's, that's the inspiration.

Jeff: When I took this position, I was thinking it was about designing buildings and enriching the built environment. Cause that's what I've been done all my life. I'm an architect and I was really kind of what I wanted to do. And what I've found is that what I enjoy even more is kind of being an ambassador. You know, when you travel around the state, it doesn't take a political science major and understand that we've got a blue hole and a red donut that's Colorado. I feel like being an ambassador to the rest of the state, building that bridge between rural and urban Colorado. And it's kind of interesting how we're all, you know, in different camps perhaps, but it's really where there's talent in Southern Colorado where I think I could run for mayor. It's great to know that because I have a fallback position for my retirement. As long as you're not grumpy, we'll know by then, maybe.

Jennifer: 30:27 Well I moved to Colorado about 20 years ago and I moved here sight unseen, bought a map and circled where I was going to the far Southwest corner of the state. And



driving across the landscape was incredible. As we all know, the state is incredible. So what I am really inspired about is having new projects where the students ask me, where is that town? What is it about? And I say, well, find out everything you can about that town and the community and what the jobs are like and the employment market and what do people do there? What is the landscape like? And then actually getting in the car and driving there with them is like eye opening. And especially students that haven't even thought about going to maybe like the Plains or spending time in places and like learning to meet people along the way and stopping at all of the unique restaurants and other communities that we can build off of like experiencing what a park is in a nearby community and how you can capitalize off of the inspiration of that specific area. That's what keeps me coming to work because it's just really inspiring. It's always changing.

Jeff: 31:52 I think one of the things that the sort of unmentioned great thing about our jobs is the road trips themselves sitting in the car with three or four students, sometimes five or six students, depending on the size of the car. We're driving and having these long conversations about all sorts. We've actually thought we should be taping this conversation because somebody would want to listen to it. Actually doubt that it's true. But you do get into these conversations about different places we've seen in and you know, different life experiences. We talk a lot of different things, not architectural or parks. Sometimes I've got students that have recent babies and how to change diapers and what did, how to sleep at night and stuff like that. The comradery and personal connection is amazing.

Jennifer: 32:56 Yeah, we've, we've watched the amazing lightning storms on the plains and storms rolling in. Been terrified with snow storms, but the landscape of Colorado. I think that that's just really inspiring. And, and knowing that, you know, the Front Range is really growing and there are a lot of professional services in the Front Range, but you don't have to drive far to really feel like you've gotten out of the Front Range. It's a good, you know, 40 minutes and you can feel like I'm out of it. So,

Ken: 33:26 So one of the impressive things is looking at the map of Colorado and seeing the dots where you all have completed community projects and you literally are in every corner of the state. But as we talked about at the start, there's more people who need your services. How will you expand what you're doing?

Chris: 33:49 So that's an ongoing process that we coordinate with DOLA. I'm obviously trying to spread our work out as evenly as we can across the state. There's definitely communities, Jen, in your region, you know, there's a lot, obviously going on up around the oil and gas fields. And so there's a lot of need there. We do, the best we can to, obviously keep ourselves at capacity, which is not hard. And we do that by coordinating really closely with DOLA other agencies in the state that are partnered with DOLA as well, that have become, resources for us. We, participate in, conferences, such as the CML conference, the Colorado municipal league conference where a lot of our, constituents, have a presence. And so, and as a matter of fact, this, June, we did a presentation there at one of the sessions with, really, really great turnout and really, really wonderful, feedback, from, from constituents. And so at this point, it's a common knowledge that we're there. The phone lines are always open.

Jennifer: 35:11 Yeah. In some of my communities, we say we want to spread the love around because some people work with us and then they have an idea for another project and then another project and another project. And it's like, we love working with you too. We need to go somewhere else now and maybe in a few years or multiple years come back.

Jeff: 35:30 We want to keep the mass with lots of dots all over the place, widely spread dots are looking for rather than concentrated dots. So

Chris: 35:38 it's a concerted effort to, to keep that spread around.

Ken: 35:41 How much capacity do you have?

Chris: 35:43 So we, I think on average what we do about 30 to 40 projects a year with about 30 to 40 students, hired students at the center, our busiest time is the summer when we have the capacity doors kind of wide open. Students are not in school mode for the most part. So the weather's good so we don't have to worry about it. But we do work year round. The students are employees and when I say employee is the work that they do at CCC D through the UTA program is a job. It doesn't count towards their graduation in credit hours per se. And so they're getting that experience on top of their curriculum, which we are, sympathetic to obviously as students during the school year. But, so we run year round and the communities, love that part because we can keep things moving.

Ken: 36:39 Are they graduate students? For the most part?

Chris: Yeah, there have been some exceptions, but mostly graduate students. We find, the interest kind of resides primarily with them and the skill set for what we're, we're doing. That doesn't mean that we can't bring in others. We also do have the opportunity, to, to hire students from across the state as well from partner universities, when a project requires maybe some specific disciplines. So, but by and large, our base, employee is, is, a student from the College of Architecture and Planning.

Ken: 38:12 Backing up a little bit, is there a typical decision maker in each community? I mean, I know there is one, but is it the city managers at the mayor is at city council who generally makes a decision on go no go. Well

Chris: 38:26 That does vary. I, the sometimes the, the, the staff, the hired staff, so manager or administrator that might be.

Jeff: 39:22 But we almost always go before the board of County commissioners or the town council at some point to get a up or down vote from them. That's just the political process that has to go through. So there's actually several gate points along the way. It's not, it's usually not just one person. When we've had experiences where we have somebody who is just a, what I'd say, a strong, strong little person, when there is just a single point like that, and that happens to be the way the project goes, it usually stops in its tracks. Projects don't get built. They don't, they don't go beyond the whatever board it has to go be. If someone's afraid to put it out there for a community meeting, that generally is, is an indicator that you don't even believe in it yourself.

Jeff: 40:12 How many of them don't get done? What percentage? Well, 30%. Yeah. I don't know if we've crunched those numbers that specific, but yeah, probably 30. And, and oftentimes, even now, I would say of those 30%, it's because they might've been shelved for a period of time and now they're starting to come back because of some transition in local, the local board or something happened. and so you'll see those comeback. Super important point is that political structure of communities, sometimes the city council changes, sometimes the town manager gets fired, sometimes the park and rec director gets fired or quits or whatever. And suddenly the project that we've been working on is no longer, it's no longer important to them.

Jennifer: 41:04 I think it's always a good sign when the projects have the town board involvement, whether it's just at the end, but the person who we've been working with has been briefing them. And I had a project go on ballot for a rec center and it got denied by like seven votes, which is pretty sad. But sometimes, there's projects that we've done a few projects that are feasibility studies showing is there a need, is there a need for a childcare center in this area? Is there a need for a rec center? And you know, students mapping out the distance to the nearest childcare center or rec center. It's typically proving there is a need for whatever the people are asking for.

Jeff: 41:51 I'd say a 70% success rate. It's a fabulous track record.

Chris: 42:02 Once we've established that relationship with the community and we're done on the UTA side, part of what, what DOLA appreciates that we can do is assist the community in moving beyond us as well. And so making recommendations about how they might proceed down a path of either hiring the other design professional or looking at ways of putting together or thinking through a capital campaign for fundraising or how they should do that and what other sources of funding are available so that when they, when they do get to that point, they can be shovel ready. And what a lot of the grant programs call ready to go.

Ken: So how did each of you come to be interested in design architecture, community development?

Chris: 43:36 I think that's a process through the work that we did, at least from, I don't know, always have to start, but I guess from my perspective, so, I was working in architecture on the West Slope, in Grand Junction, prior to this position and found out about it through the previous person that held this position, who retired. And what's great about it for me is I'm working in the same communities that I worked professionally doing school design, town-hall design and all the other stuff that I had, I previously was doing. There's always been a strong part in my background of creating better places wherever I am. And so it was just a pathway and continuing that effort.

Jeff: 44:53 For me the, the impetus was when I was like in junior high school, my parents remodeled their house and I was, I would run home from school every day, try to get there before the contractors knocked off for the day. And sort of see what they'd done. It's like, 'Oh, I want to do this. I want to be involved in construction.' I knew pretty early on after smashing my

thumb a few times with a hammer that was, wasn't going to be that guy, but I wanted to design buildings and be a part of that world.

Jennifer: 45:37 I am a landscape architect, a planner. I grew up in Chicago where they have amazing public amenities. The libraries, the parks, they're very amazing. Just public spaces that everyone can use equally. And so I feel like that is like my foundation. And so as the landscape architect, I practiced resort design, high-end design, National Park Service design. Just having lived kind of in various places throughout the mountains of Colorado and now in Denver, I feel like there's such a huge opportunity to create these amazing places in all different parts of the state and places that people might actually value a lot more than in the more densely populated areas. And so that coupled with teaching students and actually giving them real world experience that I don't think they would get otherwise. I just feel like it's, it's really, it's a win-win job.

Jeff: 47:02 What's interesting is I did my graduate work at Berkeley and I go back to Northern California quite a bit. I go back and, and when I talked to friends who also were either went to Berkeley or actually affiliated with the university in the architecture department, and I described what we do here, they like jaws drop and they're like going, why don't we have that program here? Like that's the, that's the coolest thing ever. And I'm like, yeah, well yeah, indeed. You probably should.

Chris: 47:48 You can see some of it and some of it is unseen and, but the impact that the higher education programs have on these communities is, is really powerful. And the communities remember that too.

Jeff: 48:39 I think it's also important to point out that we're lucky to have a campus located in an urban environment like Denver, attracting really good bright-eyed students that want to participate in this kind of a program. 'I get to study in an urban environment, but then go explore and work in there in the rural part.' It would be wrong for us to say that we don't depend on really talented students to get the work done that actually gets polished and, and built. It's, it's not necessarily, it's not our design work that it gets done. It's their design work that gets done.

Ken: Perhaps you could just tell us a little bit about some of the projects, either that you've done or their upcoming that just stick out in your mind as illustrative of what the program's about.

Jennifer: 49:45 I'll start because I have a public meeting tonight where the students are presenting, they're presenting their final design to the town board in the town of Strasburg. And so they had a building that was used as kind of like a rec-used, meeting space and the students have transformed it into a community center. And so the interior and the exterior of the building is really multi-functional and it's really creating a sense of place. We have some really exciting renderings and plans. We have a childcare center that we're looking at, the design in Stratton as well as a rec center fitness center, kind of on the same parcel of land. We're doing an art master plan and the town of Windsor and we did a lot of community input this summer. We've got over 600 survey responses on what the people wanted to see for art in their community and where they want art. Yes, it was outstanding.

Jeff: 51:13 Well, I was going to say that for me, the first half of my summer was spent our first third of my summer to spend on a, we'll call it a historic reuse of a theater, the Fox theater in Walsenburg, Colorado. When you have a creative element to the project, something that's artistic and film being that what I'm talking about here is it adds to the juice of the, of the project. And we were told early on that we'd be making a presentation in the Fox theater. So we designed a presentation with videos and, and digital walkthroughs and stuff like that that would be showable or make use of the space, shall we say. This does grand old theater with a big screen and having hundreds of people sitting in the theater watching, this sort of cinematic quality presentation, which, the students took the challenge and ran with it. And I will say that it exceeded my expectations when it was all said and done. I was super proud of it, super proud of their work.

Chris: 52:21 They're saying, no, that's not true, but they, but they really were.

Jeff: 52:24 They've really worked their tails off and the community was really, really happy with it. And that'll be a project that we're gonna be wrapping up in the next six months.

Chris: 52:37 I started off this summer, on a fun note, I was invited to two ribbon cuttings, one for, the town of Cobra and for the phase one of their, downtown main street beautification project that they had completed. And it was a cookout in the park, brats, hot dogs and local entertainment and things like that. There's a lot of fun, great community. And then, the following day actually was invited to the ribbon cutting for the library in Norwood, Colorado, which was 100% obviously done by the students. So much so that the, the architects from Denver here pretty much used a design verbatim because they felt it was so phenomenal for the community. The, next few weeks were week after week of travel and fieldwork and community meetings in Rangeley and Craig and all in main street meetings.

Chris: 53:43 Nucla, Naturita all over the place. And, I think what was really fun too this summer is we finished, two main street beautification projects, for the West end, each community nucleon, Naturita. And through that process I kept the students involved in coordinating with C. dot.

Jennifer: 54:38 I just want to add, we had a project we finished in May, for the city of Sterling and it was the urban park, again, in their downtown used to be a gas station was abandoned and just sat vacant and we turned it into a public plaza that got so much community buy in, someone who's donated a fire pit and they're making a donation wall.

Ken: 55:07 I suspect there's listeners out there who are hearing this and saying, 'Boy, how do I get some of that?'

Chris: 55:19 As a point of first conversation, the DOLA regional managers because they want to talk about other things besides just that and how that relates to the bigger picture for the community. and we understand that completely. Cause sometimes, a community might have an idea about something they need, but as the manager's looking at them and what they're trying to go for, maybe it means that they need to do a comprehensive plan update first to identify that project as a priority for instance.

Jeff: 56:06 I think email is the best approach.

Chris: 56:17 Um, and, we'd love to come out and visit and talk about whatever project they're interested in.

Ken: 56:24 Well, it's been wonderful to talk today with Jennifer Kovarik, Jeff Wood, and Chris Anderson from the University Technical Assistance program and the College of Architecture and Planning at CU Denver. You're doing some great work out there. I'm delighted to hear about, so thanks for joining us.

All: Thank you so much.