Certifiably Creative:

[BY DAWNE BELLOISE]

Crested Buttians have long been known for their innovation and creativity, inspired through amazing summers and wilderness, harsh winters and high-altitude end-of-the-road survival.

Throughout its mining town history, music played a prominent role in the town's character. From the 1960s infusion of artful hippies to the current influx of artisan residents, much tourism, along with the flavor and soul of the town, has been built upon our eclectic events, festivals, and celebrations—made possible by the talent and creativity of the collective and individual artists of every genre, from music to food to fine art.

So naturally, when the state of Colorado offered a Creative District certification to those communities that qualify, the Arts Alliance of the East River Valley and the town of Crested Butte figured we fit the criteria. The Arts Alliance is a local group of 14 non-profit organizations whose mission is to make Crested Butte a nationally recognized arts destination.

Jenny Bernie, co-chair of the Arts Alliance and executive director of the Crested Butte Center for the Arts, feels the benefits of such a designation would be tremendous for Crested Butte. "The big benefit for us would be that it would help us grow in our efforts to support the work we're already doing," Bernie says. "We're trying to make it a fine tuned machine, working together. So the assistance from Colorado Creative Industries [CCI] would reinforce the work we're doing and help us advance our mission in terms of being an economic driver for Crested Butte and support our desire to be noticed. It's all about bringing people here."

The mission of Colorado Creative Industries is "To promote, support and expand the creative industries to drive Colorado's economy, grow jobs and enhance our quality of life."

The CCI states, "Colorado is a magnet for creative enterprises and creative workers. With almost 8,000 businesses and 186,000 jobs, the creative sector comprises the state's fifth largest employment cluster. Colorado's Creative Industries Division, within the Office of Economic Development and International Trade, was established in July 2010 to capitalize on the immense potential for our creative sector to drive economic growth in Colorado. The division merges the former Colorado Council on the Arts and the state's Art in Public Places program."

In order to qualify for certification status, a creative district must meet certain criteria. The certification area has to be geographically contiguous with artistic or cultural resources that play a vital role in the quality of life in a community, including its economic and cultural development. There also has to be a concentration of artistic and cultural activity, such as a major arts or culture facility, arts and entertainment businesses, arts and cultural activities or artistic/cultural production, and all of this has to be engaged in promotion, preservation and educational aspects of arts and culture for the community and provide interpretive, educational or recreational uses.

The proposed Crested Butte Creative District encompasses an area from the Crested Butte Center for the Arts and Town Park and runs west to include all of downtown Elk Avenue, bordered by both Maroon and Sopris Avenues. This district includes 16 artist-owned studios and galleries, three co-op galleries, 20 year-round Artwalk events and ten performance venues including bars, restaurants, and coffee shops—and let's not forget community radio KBut.

Our town is also home to renowned artists, award-winning filmmakers and TV producers, architects, designers, published writers, actors, dancers, musicians, painters, photographers and chefs—all part of Crested Butte's cultural creative community.

For 42 years, Crested Butte has hosted the Crested Butte Arts Festival, with more than 12,500 attendees. Now in its 18th year, the Crested Butte Music Festival is a six-week happening with 45 events attended by more than 8,000 people.

Then there's the Crested Butte Dance Collective, Bluegrass in Paradise, the Gypsy Jazz Fest, the Crested Butte Songwriters Festival, Alpenglow, the Crested Butte Film Festival, Crested Butte's Plein Air Invitational, the People's Fair, the Wildflower Festival, the Mushroom Fest, the Wine and Food Fest and the very uniquely Buttian Vinoto... just to name a few. When you combine all of these magnificent events, there's seemingly not a moment we aren't immersed in culture.

Bernie explains that a Creative District certification would recognize the collaboration of the Arts Alliance, and enhance artists working together. The Arts Alliance feels their community work is an economic driver for Crested Butte.

"The CCI will evaluate all of our efforts, from working with our galleries to our festivals, and then make suggestions for what we could be doing better," Bernie says. "It's promotional hand-ons development of our efforts and it's recognizing what the town is about."

"We're not only a recreational destination but also an arts destination," Bernie points out. There's also a $5,000 matching grant to assist for technical assistance for evaluation in becoming certified, after which CCI will do a site visit of the town.

"This is a natural step for us, because of how much the arts have grown in the community. We know there'll be a lot of other places applying, but we'd be honored to get the designation," Bernie says. She emphasizes that this is an effort between the Arts Alliance and the town of Crested Butte, which didn't hesitate at the opportunity to apply.

Bernie says, "They were excited and felt it was the right thing to do. We're ready. It's the next logical step for the community. Crested Butte is truly a creative and inspiring place to live and the arts are a critical part of the community that brings everyone together. Over the past ten years, we have experienced unprecedented growth in our programs and festivals and we believe this is a perfect time to take a detailed look at ourselves, develop functional collaborations and stronger communication channels. We believe a Creative District certification would be the best way to achieve this goal."

For more information on the Creative District Certification program visit coloradocreativeindustries.org/communities/creative-district-certification. Also visit the Crested Butte Center for the Arts at crestedbuttearts.org.