

# The Pueblo Chieftain

## BY DESIGN

### Former Puebloan earns Architectural Award for Urban Work

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Architects do so much more than design houses for rich people.

Former Puebloan James Abell has shown during his 35-year career that they design affordable housing, too. They help transform abandoned buildings into homes for homeless people. Architects bring communities together — they listen, apply liberal doses of imagination, draw lots of plans — and they help the residents make their parks and schools and streets more appealing, more attractive, more serviceable.

In short, Abell says, *"They build for humanity."*

Abell was in the area last week visiting friends, including architect John Hurtig and his wife Barbara at their Beulah home. Their connection goes back many years, and the two architects talked about how Pueblo has changed, how the Historic Arkansas Riverwalk of Pueblo, the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library and even the emerging Fourth Street bridge have engaged residents in a new way.



*"In 1962, when they had just finished the bridge, my mother and I drove across it,"* Abell says. *"I remember there was no room for a bike to ride. The bridge today has a 10-foot walkway."*

Abell notes that American culture has become increasingly private in the past 40 years. Americans travel in Europe and are charmed by the vibrant public spaces, the parks, gardens, sidewalk cafes and small attractive shops filled with people, and then they come home and wonder why their cities are so different.

*"There are three places,"* he says. *"The first place is home. The second place is business (work). But what's our third place? Where's the best third place in Pueblo? The best third place for me growing up was the City Park tennis courts. The riverwalk is an emerging third place today."*

Abell, who has lived in Tempe, Ariz., since leaving Pueblo as a young man to attend Arizona State University, says he loves being able to go to a concert on campus, drink coffee at a sidewalk table, spend time in a public park.

*"I enjoy public places like you wouldn't believe."*

Yet it was his love of the natural world that led him to also embrace landscape architecture, he says. *"I'm the guy you call when you want to do the whole environmental thing."*

Abell — philosopher as well as architect and urban planner — will be honored next month in Miami at the national convention of the American Institute of Architects. He'll receive the Edward C. Kemper Award which recognizes contributions to the field of architecture. He is, in the institute's words, *"the public face of what architects and the AIA can do to help people in need of better cities, towns, neighborhoods, streets, homes and businesses."*

A large part of why he's being honored involves a process with a funny-sounding acronym: R/UDAT. Regional and Urban Design Assistance Teams bring together professionals — specialists in architecture, landscape architecture, transportation, economics, planning — who volunteer their services to help cities shape their future. A city decides in advance what it wants help with — a new park, a more "walkable" downtown, new landscaping for a highway — the R/UDAT team leader makes a reconnaissance trip to check things out, then the team comes to town and holds meetings with various groups of people. Based on what they hear, the team makes recommendations and suggestions.



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The host community must pay about \$20,000 for team members' meals, transportation and for multiple copies of the finished study book, but that's considerably less than the \$100,000 they'd otherwise pay, Abell says.

He started his own firm, Abell and Associates Architects, in Tempe 30 years ago. The firm's design services include architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning. Abell also served for 10 years on the City of Tempe's Planning and Zoning Commission.

Abell has taught architecture classes at Arizona State University and at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture in Spring Green, Wis., and Scottsdale, Ariz. He also helped develop a 16-week architecture curriculum for Phoenix-area fifth- and sixth-graders that was taught by 90 members of the American Institute of Architects.

Most significantly, James Abell has led or participated in 16 such major community-design projects for the American Institute of Architects, leading teams in Vermont, Utah, California, Ohio, Texas and throughout Arizona. And he's used many of these R/UDAT projects to involve architecture students in urban design and community outreach.

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▲ *Bird's eye perspective of the new Mountain Green, Utah town center. Abell was the design team leader for this completely new town center plan embraced by local residents.*

