37 County Road 402, Cuchara, Colorado 81055

What if you stood in the Cuchara Valley centuries ago? The air would still smell of pine, but no cabins or roads would break the silence. You'd see Ute hunters on horseback, Spanish explorers pushing north, or maybe hear the distant clink of miners' tools — depending on which flag was flying that decade. If the mountains could talk, they'd tell stories no textbook ever could.

Five Flags Over Cuchara

Long before cabins and roads dotted the Cuchara Valley, this land lay within the seasonal hunting and sacred grounds of the Ute, Apache, Comanche, and Puebloan peoples. The Mouache and Capote band of the Ute considered the Spanish Peaks sacred, and even today arrowheads surface in the soil after rains, whispering of their long presence. In the late 1500s, Spain claimed the region as part of New Spain, governed from Santa Fe, leaving a cultural imprint in language, faith, and architecture that endures in southern Colorado. When Mexico gained independence in 1821, the land shifted again, though Mexican influence in the remote frontier was limited. Lawlessness and conflict marked the era. From 1836 to 1845, the Republic of Texas claimed the Cuchara Valley in its ambitious northern reach, though it never truly governed here. Still, the ties with Texas remain—many Texans still own cabins in the valley, escaping summer heat for mountain air.

Finally, after the Mexican-American War, the United States claimed Colorado in 1848. By 1876, Colorado became the 38th state. The Cuchara Valley, with its Spanish Peaks rising above, had already passed under five different flags, each leaving fingerprints on its evolving identity.

Homesteading the Future

One of the earliest written chapters of Pinehaven's story began with Union Civil War veteran John L. Powell. Born in Pennsylvania in 1834, Powell marched with the 8th Kansas Infantry through the hardships of the war. Afterward, like many veterans seeking renewal, he moved west. In 1896 he and his family arrived in the Cuchara Valley by covered wagon. In 1905, under the Homestead Act of 1862, Powell secured 160 acres just north of Cuchara. The Act required settlers to live on the land, cultivate it, and build a home; in return, they received ownership. Powell's homestead fulfilled these requirements, and his perseverance planted the seed of what would one day become Pinehaven. He lived out his years in La Veta until his death in 1920, leaving the land to his children.

The Birth of Pinehaven

In 1943, Powell's son Charles sold the family land to John C. Vories, who dreamed of transforming the rugged property into a mountain resort. With vision but limited resources, Vories named the land "Pinehaven" and began designing cabin lots along what would become Road 402. He saw the forest as "heaven among the pines," and his plans laid the foundation for the community's identity as a retreat in the high country. Health challenges eventually forced Vories to leave Colorado, but before he did, he passed his dream into capable hands.

That man was Steve Pierotti, a native of Huerfano County and close friend of Vories. Pierotti had grown up tough—an orphan by nine, managing service stations as a teenager, and later working in the coal mines. His tireless work ethic made him one of the largest coal dealers in the county. When Vories offered him Pinehaven for $3,700, Pierotti borrowed from a friend and seized the opportunity. Through sheer determination and charisma, he sold lots, encouraged building, and helped bring Vories' dream to life. Under Pierotti's influence, Pinehaven became a thriving cabin community. Steve lived there until his death in 2017 at the age of 99, and his family remains part of Pinehaven today.

Building a Community

From Powell's homestead to Vories' vision and Pierotti's energy, Pinehaven grew from wilderness into a neighborhood. Steve Pierotti's son, Bob, carried his father's vision forward by leading Pinehaven's expansion up the mountain and ensuring its growth was both thoughtful and sustainable. With steady leadership, he guided the development of new roads, utilities, and infrastructure, while championing compliance with modern standards. His pivotal role in integrating Pinehaven into the Cucharas Sanitation and Water District secured reliable water and sanitation for generations to come. From community planning to the creation of the Pierotti

Pavilion, Bob's quiet dedication laid the foundation for a resilient mountain community whose strength endures to this day.

Cabins rose among the trees, families returned each summer, and traditions took root. Eventually, homeowners organized formally, creating the Pinehaven Homeowners' Association to care for roads, shared spaces, and community life. The Pierotti Pavilion, named in honor of Bob's contributions, became a gathering place where neighbors celebrated the very community he helped establish.

Today, Pinehaven stands as more than a scattering of mountain cabins. It is a close-knit community, bound together by its layered history, its natural beauty, and its people's love for the land. The Spanish Peaks still tower over the valley, silent witnesses to centuries of change—from the passage of flags and empires to the persistence of families who found here not just land, but home.

Our Cabin

If Pinehaven is a long conversation between people and place, the cabin at 37 County Road 402 is one of the voices that joined in during the community's middle years—after the first dreamers laid out lots, but before the modern era made cabins feel like year-round homes. It sits where the forest feels close, where the light changes fast, and where the days can still be measured in simple mountain units: the first cup of coffee, the first bird call, the first cool breeze that slips through an open window.

The cabin was built in 1973, at a time when Pinehaven was no longer an experiment and not yet a fully built-out neighborhood. By then, the idea of "going up to the cabin" had become something families could plan around—a rhythm of return rather than a single burst of frontier ambition. A 1970s cabin often carried a certain logic: sturdy, practical, and sized for real use. It didn't need to impress anyone; it needed to hold up to weather, time, and family life.

The identity of the original builder isn't known today, but the home's later story carries a clear turning point. In 1995, the cabin was remodeled by Paul Nilner for owners from Oklahoma City. The change was substantial: what had been a two-bedroom, one-bath cabin became a three-bedroom, two-bath home with a large kitchen and a garage—more than doubling in size. In a single renovation, the cabin quietly shifted categories. It was no longer just a place to sleep between hikes. It became a place built for gathering, cooking, lingering, and staying.

That kind of expansion fits the Pinehaven story. Over time, cabins grow the way relationships do. What begins as "a little place in the mountains" becomes a setting for birthdays, holiday weekends, and friends who stop by without needing to knock. Kitchens grow because stories happen in kitchens. Bedrooms multiply because children grow up and bring families of their own. A garage

appears because mountain life comes with gear, tools, and the unspoken understanding that you solve problems yourself, or at least start there.

Jim and Pam Marten didn't begin with this cabin. Their Pinehaven life started earlier, in 1992, when they purchased another cabin from Bob Pierotti with Tom and Sharon Peters. They were the "youngsters" then—weekenders who arrived with energy and expectations, stepping into a community shaped by retirees who had already learned the valley's pace. Those early years formed the kind of memory that becomes foundational: people who welcomed them, friendships that felt steady, and a sense that Pinehaven wasn't just real estate—it was relationship.

For thirteen years, they lived the weekender life: Friday drives, Saturday chores, Sunday departures that always felt too soon. It's a familiar Pinehaven pattern, and it carries its own emotional tension. You fall in love with the place, but you are always leaving it. You begin to measure time not by months, but by weekends and holiday breaks. You begin to notice the small heartbreaks too—friends who move away, cabins that change hands, the gradual quieting as familiar names disappear from the summer roll call. Those years quietly changed how Pinehaven fit into their lives.

Retirement changed everything. In 2005, Jim retired and bought another property—Number 20 on Road 404—deepening his stake in the community and making Pinehaven less of a getaway and more of a seasonal home. Then, in 2008, the Martens purchased the cabin they live in now: 37 County Road 402. It's the kind of move that signals a shift from visiting to belonging. The cabin becomes not just where you stay, but where you return—again and again—until it starts to feel like a second address in the heart.

They try to be in Pinehaven from May to October, which is the mountain season in its most generous form. Spring arrives with its tentative thaw. Summer builds long days that invite company. Fall comes early, painting the edges of the calendar with the hint of departure. To stay that long, year after year, is to learn the valley's details: which storms linger, which afternoons bring wind, and how quickly a cool evening can make you grateful for a warm kitchen.

One of the things that makes their cabin life distinct is how naturally it reaches beyond the property line. Jim is a member of the La Veta fishing club, and in Pinehaven that means fly fishing becomes a way of life—about every other day. It's the kind of routine that shapes a season. The cabin becomes the place where waders dry, rods lean in corners, and stories of water and weather get told like news. Fishing, in that sense, is not just recreation; it's a way of paying attention to the land.

Attention to the land shows up in the way Jim has served Pinehaven itself. For seventeen years, he sprayed spruce and fir trees across the community, helping protect the forest that makes Pinehaven

feel like Pinehaven. It's unglamorous work—heavy equipment, repeated effort, and a certain stubborn faithfulness to doing what needs to be done. Eventually, he simply didn't want to do it anymore, which is understandable. But he didn't close the door behind him. He still has the sprayer and chemicals available for Pinehaven neighbors who want to spray their own trees. That is community in its plainest form: stepping back without withdrawing.

Hospitality is another thread running through the cabin's history. Jim used to host multiple homemade ice cream potlucks for Pinehaven and some valley friends—gatherings where conversation and laughter mixed with the steady clink of bowls and spoons. In a place like Pinehaven, shared food is more than food. It's how neighbors become friends. It's how newcomers learn names. COVID interrupted those larger gatherings, as it did so much else, but the tradition didn't die. Even now, they still host one or two a year—smaller echoes of the old days, but still echoes with warmth.

Their memories also carry the names of people who make a place feel personal. The cabin sits in a neighborhood, but it lives in a valley. Relationships stretch outward: to local friendships, to familiar faces, to the people who make the valley feel lived-in and loved.
Like any mountain home, the cabin has also faced moments when the beauty of the place is matched by its risk. Jim and Pam were evacuated during the 2018 Spring Creek Fire. The cabin remained safe but the fire reinforced the unspoken truth of Pinehaven: community matters most when conditions are hardest.

In recent years, the cabin has become a stronghold of family life. Jim notes that for the last four years, he has had ninety to one hundred percent of his immediate family there for the Fourth of July. That kind of gathering is its own landmark. It means the cabin is not just a personal retreat; it is a family center. Independence Day in the mountains becomes more than the Cuchara Village parade and food—it becomes a tradition of being together in a place that holds history in its walls and trees.

Seen across the decades, 37 County Road 402 tells a quiet, unmistakable story: a 1973 cabin that grew in 1995 to meet the needs of longer stays, and then found its heart through the Martens' years of return, service, and hospitality. It is a cabin built not just of lumber and nails, but of repeated seasons, shared meals, and the steady work of caring for both neighbors and forest. In Pinehaven, that is what makes a cabin endure: not just that it stands, but that it is used—lived in, gathered in, and loved.

* This summary condenses five centuries of history; full research notes, sources, and citations can be found at www.CabinInThePines.org.