

Architectural Gems Part II

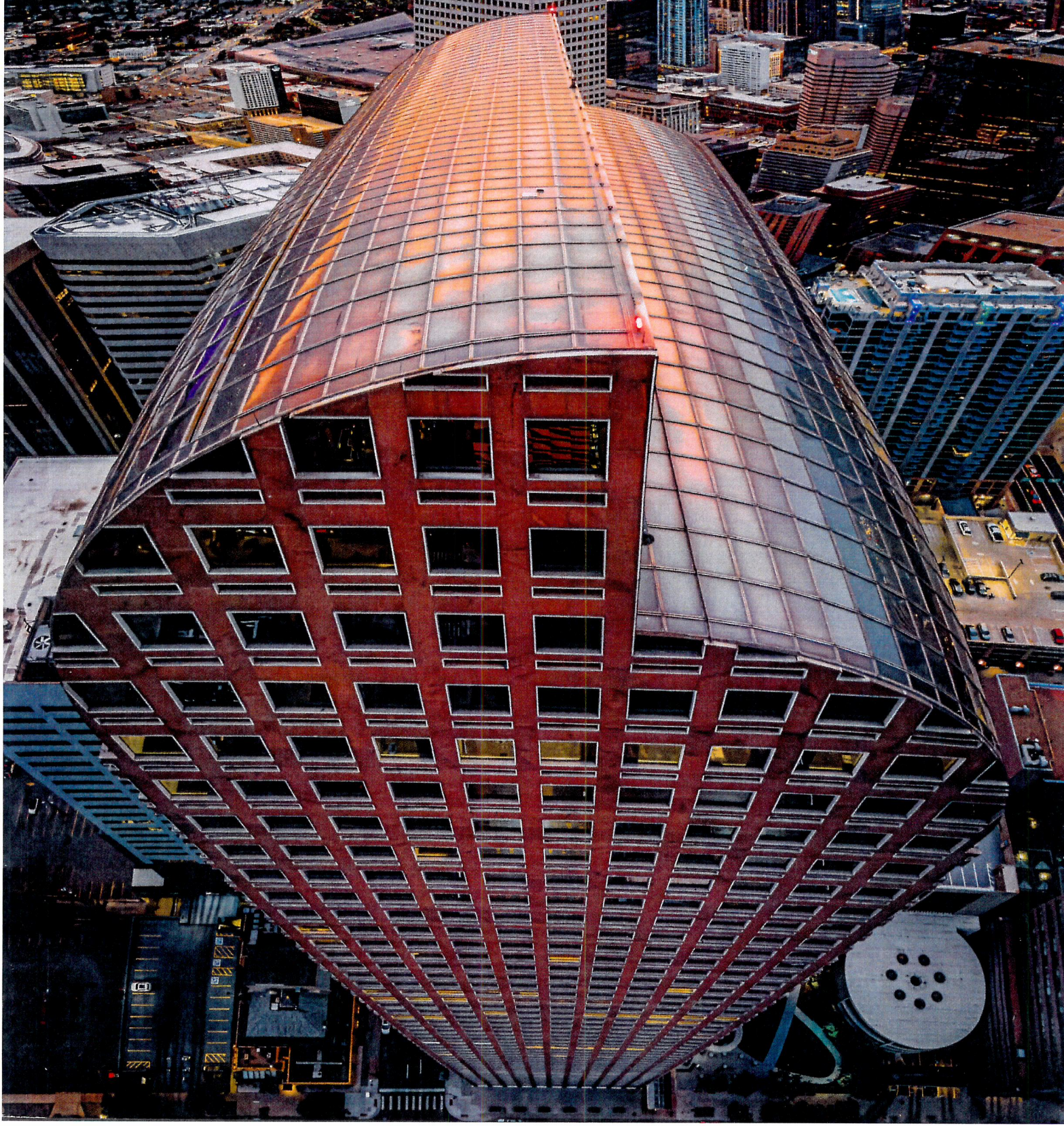
Glider Pilots

I-70 East

Westcliffe Dark Skies

ColoradoLife

MAY/JUNE 2021



Who do the helpers call for help?

by MATT MASICH

When Coloradans need help, first responders rush to the scene in ambulances, fire apparatus or squad cars. When Colorado first responders need help, Ed, and Joanne Rupert of Timnath rush to the scene in an ARMOR vehicle.

ARMOR stands for “All Responder Mobile Operational Response.” It is not an armored car but one of two Mercedes-Benz Sprinter vans with the rear area retrofitted with plush leather chairs – a counselor’s office on wheels. 911 dispatchers, law enforcement officers, correction officers, firefighters, EMS workers, ER nurses, doctors and other frontline personnel in northern Colorado know that when the emotional stress of their jobs becomes overwhelming, the Ruperts and the National Peer Support Academy-trained

therapists and medical staff at First Responder Trauma Counselors are just a phone call away.

Ed and Joanne Rupert know the often-unbearable stress first responders experience, because the couple has experienced it themselves in their own long careers as first responders. In his 50 years of service, Ed Rupert has done everything from recovering victims of the 1976 Big Thompson Flood as a founding member of the Larimer County Dive Rescue Team, to surviving being the target of 127 bullets fired at him in a single incident as a member of the Larimer County Sheriff’s Office, to working as a paramedic and firefighter.

“First responders are normal people doing extraordinary things to make sure the public is safe,” Rupert said. “When most people call 911, it’s a traumatic experience

they’ll remember for the rest of their lives. First responders have those experiences multiple times a day.”

Being an everyday human tasked with superhuman responsibility can take a heavy emotional toll. For every one first responder killed in the line of duty, Ed said, four to six take their own lives, with only 40 percent of the nationwide first response agencies reporting. Yet because society views them as paragons of strength, most are hesitant to reach out for help.

Joanne, who had worked as a firefighter/EMT and as a victims’ advocate with the Larimer County Sheriff’s Office, went back to school 20 years ago to become a licensed professional counselor. She discovered just how great the need was for first responder counseling services when, as part of her internship, she was assigned to work with prisoners in a Fort Collins Detention Center and as the mental health therapist and negotiator on Larimer County SWAT. She found much of



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Chris Amundson

Ed and Joanne Rupert of First Responder Trauma Counselors use trained therapy dogs to comfort the frontline personnel they counsel.

her demand for therapy came her from law enforcement and other first responder colleagues.


Recognizing the unmet need for a robust peer support system, Joanne and Ed founded First Responder Trauma Counselors. Every day of the year, any time of day or night, the Ruperts take calls from first responders in crisis. Joanne travels the U.S. training agencies in peer support and even wrote the textbook on the subject, *All Badges, All Uniforms, All Scrubs*.

First Responder Trauma Counselors contracts with agencies throughout northern Colorado and has offices in Fort Collins, Loveland, Greeley, and Frederick. The group now has 13 licensed, culturally competent counselors who are current or former first responders. Through Joanne's peer support work, another 19 first responders are currently studying to become counselors to work within their program.

First Responder Trauma Counselors' two ARMOR vehicles have flashing lights they can use when they need to clear traffic, but most often they operate discreetly. Equipped with a team trained as counselors, paramedics, nurses and medical practitioners, they arrive quietly at first responders' homes when the call for help comes.

Therapy dogs Bunker, Badge and Stryker often accompany the human helpers. The goldenoodles instantly decompress even the most stressful situation, Ed said. Trained to lie on a patient's lap or feet, Ed calls them living, breathing warm blankets.

First Responder Trauma Counselors, (911Overwatch.org), is funded in part by a 501(c)3 nonprofit called "911 for 911." Those who want to help Colorado's helpers can donate at 911for911.org.

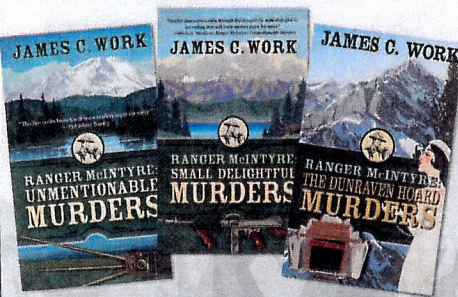


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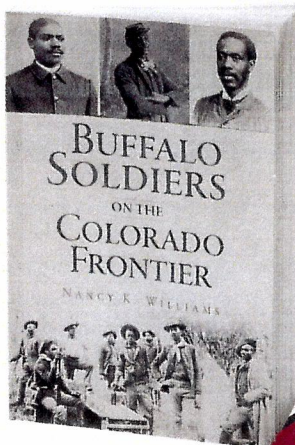
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