



The Light Idea

100 years of dressing the West

Maybe you don't need a Stetson hat, but if you've ever driven through northern Colorado, you probably know where to buy one. The familiar yellow signs that brighten the barren ranchland along U.S. 40 and its paved tributaries advertise F.M. Light and Sons, the Western-wear store that Frank Light founded 100 years ago in the then-sleepy town of Steamboat Springs. Back in 1905, lariats were trimmed to order and the threat of firearms kept behind the counter guarded against bad checks and shoplifters. Steamboat's a little more genteel these days, and five generations later the Light family still sells cowboy hats, boots, and clothes in the store made famous by Colorado's best-known billboards.

It was Frank's son, Clarence, who hatched the store's roadside advertising idea. Beginning in 1928, he planted his yellow signs along the region's highways and even some pack trails used by ranchers on horseback. More than 300 billboards eventually dotted the landscape within a 150-mile radius of Steamboat Springs; later, Lady Bird Johnson's highway beautification act reduced that number by half. The Light family maintains

the 100 remaining billboards during their annual springtime ritual of repainting each sign by hand.

This year, they'll add "Outfittin' the West for 100 Years" to the famous billboards as F.M. Light and Sons celebrates a century of family-owned business. Anniversary events are scheduled throughout the summer, but the big birthday party will be held in late July, complete with rodeo demonstrations, square dancing, and a 100-foot cake. Also commemorating the occasion: A book detailing the history of the family store, written by Frank Light's granddaughter Annabeth Light Lockhart, will be published in August.

For Annabeth, F.M. Light represents more than a family legacy—it's a landmark. "It means something to people," she says modestly, though customer comments in the store's guestbook voice a zeal verging on worship. "We're still doing what we've always done, and I guess that matters as much to our customers as it does to us."

F.M. Light and Sons, 830 Lincoln Ave., Steamboat Springs, 970-879-1822.

KELLY BASTONE



Water, Water, Everywhere... Finally, a different kind of water bottle

The Mile-High City has a hydration fixation. The downside? We'll be the first to confess to skipping the recycling bin a few too many times, tossing our plastic bottles in the trash and adding to that ever growing landfill out by DIA.

To pay for our sins, we're picking up BIOTA water from here on out. The Ouray-based company puts its Rocky Mountain spring water into biodegradable plastic bottles. Using a corn-based technology developed at the University of Nebraska, these plastic bottles will completely biodegrade in about 80 days in a commercial composting environment.

Pick up the water at local King Soopers and Wild Oats markets, then drop empty ones in composting bins at Whole Foods and Wild Oats.

REBECCA LANDWEHR