

BUSINESS

SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 1992

GAZETTE TELEGRAPH

IN BUSINESS

Renewing a commitment to Springs

The new elevator at Seven Falls does more than offer senior citizens a bird's-eye view of the water falling 230 feet into South Cheyenne Canyon.

It also contains an optimistic message about tourism in the Pikes Peak region.

Other than renovations at area hotels, there hasn't been much capital improvement in the tourism industry here in recent years.

The \$800,000 project, which replaces a cable conveyor that was closed in 1986, is a big investment, and it says the A.G. Hill family continues to believe in tourism here. Demographics were a consideration, too, of course. Last year more than 250,000 visitors saw the falls, but only half climbed the 185 steps to Eagle's Nest observation point.

"As people get older, you need to have

it available," said Lyda Hill, president of Seven Falls Co.

Her father, Texas oilman Al G. Hill, who once worked at Exchange National Bank and attended Colorado College, bought the attraction in June 1946. The next year, the trademark lighting was installed, so the attraction could stay open



JERRY MAHONEY

evenings.

It was another lighting project that put Hill, who died in June 1988, and his wife, Margaret Hunt Hill, under the glare of controversy in 1983. It was one of those news events that stays in the memory, to some extent overshadowing the Hills' other activities. That spring Hill told city officials he would pay for lighting on Pikes Peak — Margaret said at the time it was her idea — if the city wanted to show off the world-famous landmark at night.

FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

A drive for the

Mary Ke



Bigger things in smaller packages

Digital Equipment Corp. engineer John Hartling and members of his design team created the industry's highest-capacity 2½-inch disk drive, a product officials hope will be the salvation of Digital's Colorado Springs plant. One



at night.

The city agreed, but when the lights were switched on, even Hill admitted they were pretty bright. Police got calls about a fire atop Pikes Peak. People got mad. One woman complained in the Gazette Telegraph that the lights kept her awake at night. Ultimately they were unplugged, and the Hills were the lightning rod for criticism.

Naturally, the fact that they were from Dallas was cited as a shortcoming: Some Coloradans love to hate Texans, despite the millions of dollars Texans spend vacationing in this state.

The Hills have considered themselves part of Colorado Springs for years. Every Christmas season since 1947, they have offered free admission to the falls, and have collected cash donations from visitors for Christmas Unlimited.

"As a family we have always considered it our Christmas gift to Colorado Springs," said Lyda Hill.

Al and Margaret, whose father was legendary Texas oilman H.L. Hunt, and their three children, Al Jr., Lyda and Alinda, spent every summer here for decades. The Hill children have strong memories of summer jobs at Seven Falls. Al Jr. recalled getting paid a penny for every Seven Falls bumper sticker he put on visitors' cars.

Margaret, an energetic woman, has a remarkable recollection of the early years.

She told of a visit by Walt and Roy Disney to see the new lights. They were looking for ideas for an amusement park they would open in Southern California in 1955.

She recalled that in the summer of 1954, Secretary of the Air Force Harold E. Talbott told Al that The Mesa area he had bought in 1949 was the Pentagon's preferred spot for for the academy, but at 1,600 acres, it was too small. The Air Force went north of town, and the Hills built their Garden of the Gods Club on The Mesa.

The Hills believed Colorado Springs deserved a private club that would help show off Colorado Springs. The sedate, elegant club and its pampered Kissing Camels golf course bolster the city's reputation as a vacation spot.

Family members, including grandchildren, still spend summers here, living in homes near the golf course. Margaret stays vitally interested in the businesses.

Greeting a guest on the Eagle's Nest observation deck during the grand opening of the elevator last week, she asked, "Wouldn't Al have loved this?"

Jerry Mahoney is business editor of the Gazette Telegraph.