



## Press Coverage

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## Millennium Clock Finds Home Tina O'Brian

**September 21, 1999 03:00 AM ET**

The folks in a remote high-desert section of eastern Nevada still are adjusting to the news: Their newest neighbors are planning to build a 21st century Stonehenge in the mountains towering over their towns. "The town's kind of abuzz. They're curious about who they are and why they've picked White Pine County," says David Tilford, the realtor who closed the unusual land deal.

It all started a year ago, when Tilford got a call from a guy looking for a very specific piece of property. "We're looking for property in the high desert with steep mountain ledges. Can you help us?" asked the man. He identified himself as Stewart Brand.

The name didn't ring a bell with Dave Tilford, president of Desert Mountain Realty in Ely, Nev. He didn't pause to wonder why the guy wanted limestone ledges in an area with such brutal arctic winter weather that it's virtually impassable from fall to spring. Or why he was looking in White Pine County, one of Nevada's most economically depressed areas. Tilford was just happy he had a few suitable locations in his inventory.

"I thought, well, we've got that, limestone ledges that are 250 million years old," says the realtor who was thinking of a track on Mt. Washington. Most of the mountain is in the Great Basin National Park, but this land was just outside the park boundaries.

Only after they'd set up an appointment for a visit to the 80-acre parcel did Tilford learn that the land would be purchased by something called the Long Now Foundation for construction of a 10,000 Year Clock and a 10,000 Year Library to house civilization's archives. Both must be capable of surviving a nuclear blast, earthquakes and assorted other natural and manmade calamities.

"At first I thought they were nuts. I went and looked up Brand on the Internet," says Tilford who admits he wanted to check out both the caller and Long Now to see if they were for real. Any old hippie remembers Brand as the author of the Whole Earth Catalogue, the '60s and '70s era manual for responsible living, and co-founder of the respected Global Business Network (GBN), which advises businesses on future economic scenarios.

The Web site also confirmed that Brand is president of Long Now with a prestigious 11-member board weighted with some of high tech's heavy hitters--Paul Saffo, director of the Institute for the Future; Doug Carlston, co-founder of Broderbund Software; Peter Schwartz, chair of the Global Business Network and Danny Hillis, designer of some of the world's fastest computers.

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The Long Nows aren't making grand promises to the locals, but once construction gets underway (next century, they hope), it could attract tourists. But not the drive-up-and-gawk kind. Brand hopes it will take a full day of hiking to reach the clock, tucked away inside the mountain at about 10,000 feet. "The clock should be pretty hard to get to. [The location] is about 200 miles from any major city," he says. "It's safer in an isolated place. And there's a kind of pilgrimage quality to it."

The library also may be inside the mountain, if the limestone is water-free. The goal is to preserve civilization's records, especially the scientific breakthroughs and government policy-making decisions that have altered history. The Long Now crowd contends that the digital age makes this kind of deep-time archiving even more pressing since information stored in digital bits vaporizes every few years, as soon as the computer program becomes obsolete. Brand offers this analogy, "Imagine that all paper burned itself up every 15 years. That's what civilization will be like if we don't do something."

To help their new neighbors, Brand is tapping the board's various expertise: Stanford University's head librarian Michael Keller is considering ways to help the local library; and the techies are thinking about how to bring tiny Baker, gateway to the Great Basin, high-speed Internet access. For Ely's railroad museum, Brand is trying to find "one of those dot-com train nerds to help out. It's the best railroad museum in the country."

Like any self-respecting realtor, Tilford sees only good (and he hopes money, too) coming out of his transaction with the Long Now, whose members include several millionaires. "I hope White Pine County will take advantage of the knowledge and people they know," he tells me. Which prompts my next question, "So, you're taking the shorter view?"

Tilford pauses, then chuckles, "Well, the shorter view for the long-term good."



The Long Now Foundation  
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