

A few changes have been made since this article was published in 1997. Other highly trained technicians have taken Ray Citak's place, for example, but the story still reflects our spirit of craftsmanship.

## A passion for pianos

by Garren Stauffer  
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Steve Westfahl has a passion for pianos, especially old ones. He has built a career dedicated largely to restoring and rebuilding vintage pianos.

In a world where pianos are increasingly turned out from factories, mass production style, Westfahl has sought to restore the beauty and dignity of older pianos, crafted with care.

A true connoisseur, Westfahl has been known to search the country in pursuit of a particular brand and style of piano for a customer. Modern technology like the internet is a key tool in finding an old piano to rebuild. It should be noted that Westfahl's Piano Company is the only rebuilder of vintage pianos in Wyoming.

The most recent project for Westfahl was a full size Steinway concert grand piano, built in 1896. A Rock Springs doctor approached Westfahl looking for that particular style of piano. He was able to locate only one in the country, out in Los Angeles. It was shipped to the Westfahl Piano Company in October, 1996.

Westfahl contacted the Steinway Company and through a serial number on the piano, was able to trace the early history of the instrument. A trace revealed that the piano was completed on Oct. 27, 1896. It was sold in Boston on Nov. 21, 1896.

Steinway grand pianos are a favorite for many customers, according to Westfahl. He should know. He has rebuilt over 20 of them in the 20 years he has been in business.

All work that he does on a Steinway piano meets the company's exact specifications. Any parts needed are ordered from the same supplier who supplies Steinway, according to Westfahl.

When Westfahl says he rebuilds pianos, he really means it. After finding and receiving a piano, he proceeds to systematically disassemble the entire thing, down to its nuts and bolts.

Once all the hardware and playing mechanisms are removed, the next step is to send the piano body off to Denver to be refinished. Meanwhile, the hardware is shipped off to another location in Colorado to be re-

plated with a nickel finish. A local auto body shop also refinishes an interior piece of metal.

After the body and hardware have been refinished, Westfahl is faced with the task of reassembling the piano, using all new parts.

A new pinblock, which holds the tuning pegs, must be installed and then very carefully and precisely drilled to match the old one. The exact angle and size of each hole is very important.

According to Westfahl, the holes need to be exactly .007 of an inch larger than the diameter of the tuning pegs. Drill speed, temperature and angle all are key to making the holes the correct size.

Next, the hammer mechanisms are rebuilt. Here, Westfahl calls on the talents of Ray Citak, a factory trained piano technician. Citak is an expert on piano hammer mechanisms. Westfahl noted that for the recent project, four different hammer sets were ordered before one arrived which met Citak's specifications.

After all the hardware and playing mechanisms have been rebuilt, Westfahl and Citak have to restring the piano. There are 230 strings in a Steinway grand piano.

The piano is finished when the hammers, keys and other hardware are finally installed. In all, the process took about four months.

Westfahl's interest in music and instrument repair began at an early age. "I come from a musical family," he said. "The first piano I ever took apart was when my parents were gone."

From there, Westfahl went on to apprentice with the Piano Technicians Guild, as well as with several piano rebuilders.

Although he describes his work as very time intensive, he wouldn't have it any other way. He enjoys the musical, as well as the purely aesthetic, quality of older pianos and the way they were crafted.

"Back then they put so much pride into it," he said. In fact, as he disassembles pianos, he has found that every piece that is put into a piano bears the signature of the builder.

"In a way, it's like stepping into a time machine," Westfahl said. "We get a feel for what was important back then."



FINISHED PRODUCT — It took Westfahl's Piano Company about four months to fully rebuild this 100-year-old piano.

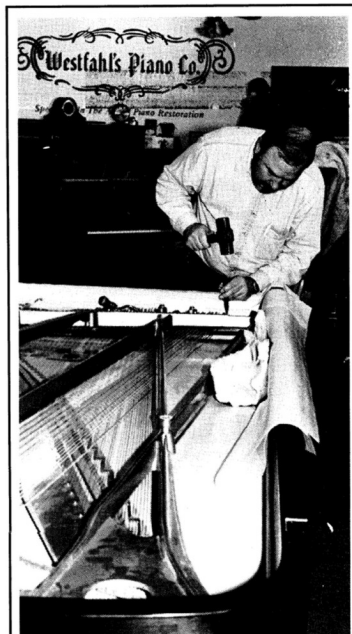
### Boomerang photos by Garren Stauffer



STEVE WESTFAHL does some final preparation before the empty body of the piano is shipped out to Denver to be refinished.



NEW HOLES for the tuning pegs must be drilled with precision. Steve Westfahl must get the exact angle and size for each hole, as he drills.



RAY CITAK carefully drives in a tuning peg, as work nears completion.



VICTORY! — After about four months of work, the piano is finally finished. Steve Westfahl, left, and Ray Citak, right, take a moment to enjoy the finished product before shipping it off to its owner in Rock Springs.



STRINGING A PIANO can be a fair amount of work, as Ray Citak well knows. Here, he wraps the string around the tuning peg, which gets hard to do with the bass strings.