

Reatha and Dan Montoya of
Montana Tamale Company
In the Colstrip Commercial Kitchen.



Former Colstrip School has new Life.....

What started out as an unfortunate and negative situation over a year ago, has blossomed into a positive and job creating project for a former Colstrip school. In the fall of 2001, when it was announced that Isabelle Bills Elementary School was to be consolidated into another school, Jim Nygaard, Colstrip Superintendent of Schools contacted Southeastern Montana Development (SEMDC) for ideas in developing the empty school. Since then, Jim Atchison, Executive Director of SEMDC, has been assisting the Colstrip School District in evaluating and pursuing private sector opportunities for the former school. "We are trying to turn lemon situations into lemonade." Atchison stated, of the role SEMDC is playing. Actually the lemonade has been tamales. **Montana Tamale Company** is the 1st tenant to lease space in the former school. Reatha and Dan Montoya had a successful and growing business, but they had to commute over 300 miles per week to make the tamales in a commercial kitchen in another town. "In order to grow, it was not the best business situation to be in. We found out later that the Montoya's were thinking about leaving town. We needed to find a way to keep those jobs," Atchison stated. Together, everyone pitched in. SEMDC was able to get a USDA grant to purchase the needed kitchen equipment. The school district added labor and materials, including the equipment installation. The Montoya's assisted with technical advice on their business needs. The USDA has gone through the inspection / certification process and has approved the facility. Nygaard added that "it is comforting to note that during the difficult times surrounding the closure of a school, that efforts from people such as the Montoya's and Atchison, have allowed our school to continue to compliment the community. . . . rather than becoming a burden." Reatha Montoya summed up the project by saying "Thank You to Atchison and Nygaard for all the help in getting the **Montana Tamale Company** into this Colstrip facility." "We are so excited."

