

communityprofile



PHOTO/DAVID SLADKY

A cog railway carries visitors to the top of Pikes Peak. Katharine Lee Bates composed "America the Beautiful" after a visit to the peak.

SPACE TO GROW

For better and for worse, Colorado Springs is booming thanks to a high quality of life and high-tech opportunity

By Bett Coffman

Tom Davis, MD avoids being too positive about Colorado Springs for fear that singing the area's praises could attract too many newcomers.

His ambivalence even seems mirrored by the weather. "Here we are in April and expecting a snow dump this afternoon and it was 65 degrees yesterday, but that's so-called springtime in the Rockies," says Davis. "My wife and I think of Springtime as June, Summer as

July, and Fall begins in August. It's really bad and we love it."

Even Davis's decision to move here four years ago was a contradiction in purposes. After six years in a dual practice and administrative position in Fort Worth, Texas, he had decided to go back into full-time practice. But then he visited Colorado Springs.

"I came up for an interview simply wanting to get away from Texas for a day and a half. The day I came up the weather was cruddy but the organiza-

tion was wonderful and the rest is history," Davis says of his acceptance of the position of chief medical officer of Penrose/St. Francis Health Services.

Colorado's second largest city is more than a mile high at 6,035 feet elevation. Colorado Springs is at once a military town and an artistic enclave, a land of unpredictable snow and very predictable sunshine. The altitude combined with a mere 14.7 inches of annual precipitation mean the climate is officially classified as "alpine desert."

COLORADO SPRINGS

Continued from previous page

Yet the term alpine can be misleading. Area residents relish 250 sunny days a year and moderate temperatures.

Eric O. Ridings MD, a midwesterner by origin, loves the weather. “The climate is exceptional. It’s dry. It’s semi-arid which means that in the summertime the heat is not as oppressive and in the winter the cold doesn’t feel as cold as it does in the midwest.”

In addition to the comfortable climate, residents are privileged to live beneath one of the continent’s most famous mountains, Pikes Peak, on the front range of the Rocky Mountains. Pikes Peak and other mountains in the vicinity overlook the eastern plains of Colorado and provide a backdrop for the city.

Poets and painters

It was just these views that inspired the city’s founder, William Jackson Palmer, to build his ideal city here in 1870. Palmer, a Civil War hero, envisioned a place of intellectual pursuits and restful escape for visitors to be inspired by the mountains and nourished by the healthful climate. He purchased 10,000 acres and founded both the city and the Denver and RioGrande Railroad in 1871.

Early on the city established itself as an intellectual and cultural center, a vast departure from the rough and tumble mining towns which had sprung up across Colorado. Only 15 years after its founding the city had an opera house. The orchestra was formed during World War I. Alexander Hunt, a Colorado Territory leader, predicted that the city would fail because there were too many poets here.

Teacher and poet Katharine Lee Bates was certainly inspired when she visited Pikes Peak in 1893. Following her visit to the summit, she wrote the poem “America the Beautiful.” Indeed this area personifies those lines — spacious skies, purple mountains, and fruited plain.

Spencer Penrose used his copper and gold wealth to build the Broadmoor Hotel in the late 1800s, a luxurious five-star resort with three golf courses, eight restaurants, and a spa. His wife, Julie Penrose, was influential in the development of Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

Today’s 182-square-mile city is liberally endowed with parks, wide streets, and a thriving arts community. Annual arts festivals, including a month-long Imagination Celebration, the Great Pikes Peak Cowboy Poetry Gathering, the Pikes Peak Writers’ Conference, a Mountain Music Festival, and an annual playwrights’ forum draw creative people from across the country to solicit the mountain muse.

Davis, a classical music aficionado, says the arts in Colorado Springs are abundant. “We have a very good small city symphony. The visual arts—painting, sculpture—abound. We have a fine museum located here in the city.”

The Colorado Springs Symphony offers outdoor concerts in the summer and indoor concerts during the cooler seasons. The Colorado Opera Festival is held each July, and the Colorado Springs Chorale and the Da Vinci Quartet also present regular concerts.

Local colleges frequently present poetry readings, theater, and dance performances. Painters and visual artists drawn to the area by the stunning scenery, have works available at 25 local galleries, many in Old Colorado City.

People First

“I think that the practicing physician comes here and is making a lifestyle choice,” says Davis. “Where I practiced for many years, it used to be said that Mercedes’ bred in the doctors’ parking lot because there were always so many more at the end of the day than at the beginning.

That’s not the case here. I think the professionals here are people first. They have lives out of medicine. It’s an exceedingly family-oriented community. It is an outdoors and fit community.”

Davis says that doctors gather to enjoy seasonal recreation. “We have a collection of doctors here who, during ski season, will congregate and take a caravan up to the ski slopes in the mountains and spend the day skiing. Likewise, similar groups of people will take mountain bike trails in the summer.”

Colorado Springs is an extremely diverse community. One factor in that diversity is the military, which has brought in a racially and culturally diverse group of people, many of whom have stayed. The absence of a medical school to produce home-grown doctors means the medical community is made up of transplants from all over the country.

“Because of the draw of the area we have a very broadly trained bi-coastal professional base that is very rarely encountered in a community of this size. You are exceedingly likely to find a doctor who came out of an eastern or west coast training program and that melting pot serves to preclude provincial thinking, I believe,” says Davis.

Perhaps because of the city’s diversity, there is an open and friendly atmosphere.

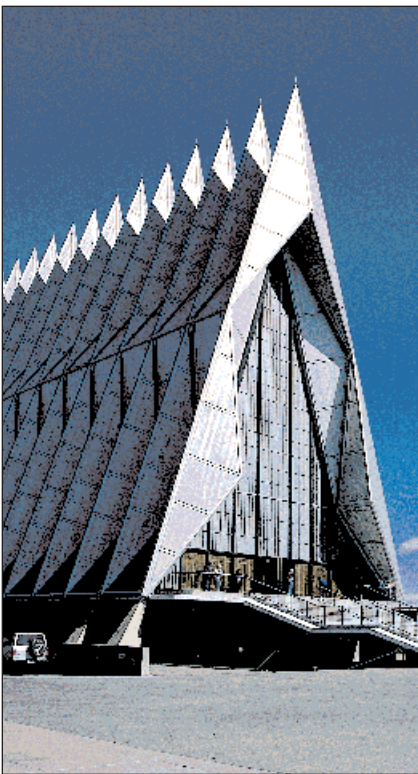
“The people are extremely friendly. People on the street will say ‘hello’ to you routinely. Clerks in stores are always smiling and helpful,” says Ridings. “I was very struck at the friendly atmosphere here, even coming from the Midwest which is a very friendly place also.”

That congeniality also extends to the medical community.

“I am in solo private practice and the physicians that I met within the community have been very helpful in suggesting how to go about doing well in this medical environment and recommend-

COLORADO SPRINGS

Continued from previous page



Colorado Springs was founded as a place from which to view Pikes Peak. Left, the Air Force Academy's Cadet Chapel. Right, the Colorado Springs U.S. Olympic Training Center has training facilities for 23 sports.



ing other professionals like accountants and bankers," says Ridings.

Growing pains

The attractiveness of the area along with an influx of businesses have made Colorado Springs a magnet for people looking for opportunities

and a nice place to live. In just five years, between 1990 and 1995, the metro area population surged from 397,018 to 465,885.

This population expansion and its accompanying development have been so dramatic that those who love Colorado Springs are tempted to discourage more people from coming.

"Tell everybody to stay away from here. It's a terrible place to live and nobody wants to come," says T. Duncan Sellers, MD with a laugh.

Sellers admits his warning may not have much effect, however. "A lot of people are coming from California trying to escape California because it's a nice community. It's nice weather and there are a lot of busi-

ness opportunities here."

Congestion in roads, schools, and rapid real estate development have been the result of the growing population. Residents often actively oppose new developments but seldom stop them. Many times they must be satisfied with improved infrastructure plans and a few accommodations for existing homes.

Ridings clarifies his attitude toward growth: "Everyone agrees that growth is good, it brings in people and jobs and so on, but the rate of growth and how involved the city council and city departments should be in the master plans for developments and so on is something that is still being decided," he says. "There

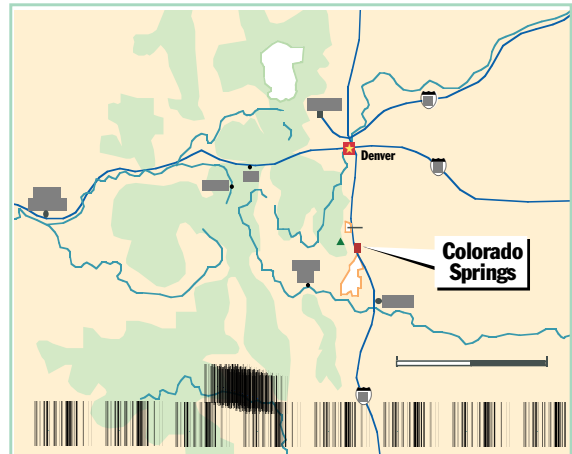
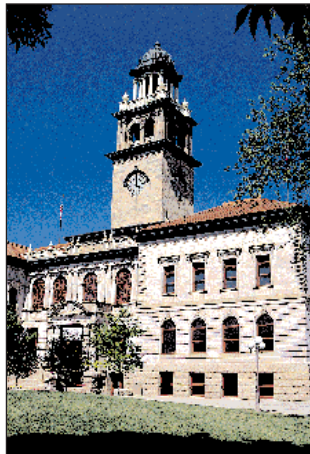
COLORADO SPRINGS

Continued from previous page

Statistics

POPULATION:	Days of sunshine:
Colorado Springs:	250
326,856	TRANSPORTATION:
MSA: 465,885	Airports - Colorado
CLIMATE:	Springs Airport,
Annual Rainfall:	188 flights daily by
14.7" (total	10 major carriers.
precipitation)	Interstates - I 25,
Annual Snowfall:	US 24
35.9"	COST OF LIVING:
Average High/Low	Indexed at 103.4
Temperatures:	(100 is average)
January - 40°/ 16°	Median Household
July - 85°/ 57°	Income: \$34,765

Right, Garden of the Gods, a striking collection of red rock formations just west of Colorado Springs. It is the area's most visited site. Below, Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum.



is concern among the citizenry about maintaining the quality of life, maintaining open space within the new subdivisions, making sure that the infrastructure matches the rate of population influx."

That may take some doing. The city's wide streets and abundant park land will be hard to maintain in a rapidly growing setting. Apparently a majority of residents are willing to make some sacrifices to maintain their quality of life. This spring, voters elected to increase the sales tax by .1 percent to generate money to acquire land for parks and open space.

Tourism and technology

The city founded for tourists more than 125 years ago now hosts 5.9 million visitors each year. The \$744 million those visitors spend here each year make tourism the second largest industry in Colorado Springs.

The Colorado Springs economy was based largely on tourists until World

War II when the U.S. military established itself on the land around the city. The Army's Fort Carson, the Peterson Complex, consisting of three Air Force bases, and the United States Air Force Academy are all Colorado Springs institutions. In addition, U.S. Space Command, Air Force Space Command, U.S. Army Space Command, as well as the North American Radar and Air Defense Command (NORAD) make Colorado Springs 'space central' for the military.

The military installations are by far the largest employers in the area and contribute 45 to 50 percent of the

Colorado Springs economy. Diversification efforts on the part of economic development organizations have reduced that contribution from 70 percent in 1970. These efforts have drawn an array of high-tech manufacturing and computer-related businesses to the area. Prominent technology-related businesses with facilities in Colorado Springs include Digital Equipment Corporation, Atmel Corporation, Hewlett Packard Company, and MCI Network Services.

"If the San Francisco peninsula is silicon valley, we have been called silicon mountain," says Davis. "There are

COLORADO SPRINGS

Continued from previous page

a lot of high tech software and hardware computer firms in the front range of Colorado.”

An educated work force has helped attract these high tech businesses. Colorado Springs is home to 19 colleges and universities, many offering graduate degrees, including the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado College, a renowned liberal arts institution, and Beth El College of Nursing. Several of these universities have programs designed for working people, offering classes on weekends and evenings.

For younger students, Sellers says he finds the public schools very adequate for his fifth- and ninth-grade children. Ridings says that some of the 10 area school districts have better track records than others. “Some of them are exceptional, with over 95 percent of graduates going on to college. The district that includes the downtown area of course doesn’t have the same reputation as some of the more affluent suburban school districts. But there are several in the more affluent sections of the city that have exceptional schools that have opportunities for anything that you could imagine: multiple advance placement courses, excellent sports teams.”

Couch Potatoes Need Not Apply

Physical activity and a healthy lifestyle are innate parts of life in Colorado Springs. “In late ‘96 there was a study that showed that of states and their citizens pursuing healthy lifestyles — weight, smoking, etcetera — Colorado was at the top. I believe that’s true,” says Davis. “Couch potatoes need not apply.”

“There is definitely an emphasis among people who live here on physical fitness,” agrees Ridings. “Which may be helped not only by the outdoor activities but by the location of the Olympic training center here.”

The Colorado Springs U.S. Olympic Training Center is home to the U.S. Olympic Committee as well as support services and training facilities for 23 sports including swimming, judo, shooting, and cycling.

Ridings says the training facility is an excellent resource for physicians and doctors can volunteer their time to treat athletes, although selection is competitive. “But all the time there are competitions going on, or just practices of very talented athletes that you can go and observe.”

Residents have endless opportunities for activity. The city’s parks and facilities offer ice skating, roller skating, racquetball, swimming, tennis, golf, hiking, biking, and some cross-country skiing.

Within a couple of hours’ drive is some of the best skiing in the world. World-class ski resorts such as Vail and Aspen dot the Rocky Mountains northwest of the city.

Ridings enjoys both downhill and cross-country skiing in winter, but he stresses that summer recreation is equally important for residents.

“In the summertime of course the mountains are still there and there are multiple opportunities for hiking and climbing. Most of the recreation really does center around the mountains. I’m a hiker and there are just hundreds of marked trails nearby. The city is adjacent to a large national forest that extends up into the mountains, Pike National Forest. That area is available for everyone.”

Davis, too, emphasizes the importance of year-round recreation. “The first thing I would say is that the Colorado resident quickly does discover outdoor activities to do in four seasons. And while most vacationers think of us as a ski land, the hiking, the camping, the biking have an extraordinary appeal and I think the people who live here appreciate Colorado for its distinct four seasons

more than for the winter sports.”

The crowning point

Pikes Peak, the 14,110 foot mountain named for Zebulon Pike, is probably the biggest reason Colorado Springs is where it is. The surrounding Pike National Forest has trails and camping areas as well as whitewater rafting, rock and mountain climbing, and cross country skiing.

The peak can be conquered in other ways as well. Runners in the annual Pikes Peak Marathon make the arduous journey up and down the mountain. Bike riders get a thrill out of riding down the peak on mountain bikes equipped with special brakes. The less athletic can take advantage of a toll road to the top of the peak, one of only a few of Colorado’s 14,000 foot peaks accessible by car. A cog railway also climbs to the summit from Manitou Springs.

Another popular site in Colorado Springs is Garden of the Gods, an extraordinary array of red rock formations considered sacred by Native Americans. Near Manitou Springs and Garden of the Gods is Manitou Springs Cliff Dwellings. Anasazi Indians carved a settlement out of the red rock cliffs and occupied the area between 1100 to 1300 A.D.

Mountain rivers, such as the Arkansas River, are excellent resources for rafting, fishing, and kayaking. The Royal Gorge Bridge, the world’s largest suspension bridge, spans the Arkansas near Canon City.

The Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, America’s only mountain zoo, is nestled against the side of Cheyenne Mountain just southwest of the city. The zoo participates in the recovery of endangered species, including Siberian Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Red Pandas.

The Springs also offers some fast-paced spectator sports. The Pikes Peak

COLORADO SPRINGS

Continued from previous page

International Raceway will open this year and host top international racing teams and some of the fastest cars in the world. The Sky Sox minor league baseball team enjoys the popularity associated with its parent team, the Colorado Rockies, based just 68 miles away in Denver.

Ridings says he enjoys the proximity of Denver's arts and sports teams, such as the NFL Broncos and the NBA Nuggets. "From the northern suburbs, Denver is an hour away. It's kind of nice to have the availability of Denver and the professional sports teams up there—the Colorado Rockies which everybody is very excited about, and the Broncos—and not have to actually live in Denver, which I would never want to do."

Ridings says traffic and crowding are problems in Denver, as well as a less-desirable climate, which is prone to smog, particularly in winter.

Davis agrees that Denver is near yet far. "Although we're only about 60 miles from Denver, we are geographically separated — I would quickly add geographically, demographically, socio-politically separated."

Friends and competitors

Since there is no medical school in Colorado Springs to produce a steady supply of young physicians, health-care organizations here must rely on recruiting efforts. Thanks to the outstanding climate and lifestyle, they have no trouble luring the best physicians to 'the Springs.'

"Because this is such a desirable place to live, practices are able to recruit from a number of candidates when they need to expand," says Ridings. "We have quite a number of people practicing in the Springs who come from the best university training programs around the country. That leads to an intellectually stimulating environment in which your consultants are going to be at the top of their field and able to give you the best

advice," says Ridings.

The city has two primary civilian hospital organizations. Penrose/St. Francis Healthcare System includes Penrose Hospital, Penrose Community Hospital, and St. Francis Health Center as well as a specialized Alzheimer center, an emergency care center, and a minor medical treatment center in southeast Colorado Springs.

Memorial Hospital, which is owned by the city, is the fourth hospital. Memorial offers specialized maternal/child services, heart care, emergency and trauma services, and a cancer center offering both conventional and investigational therapies.

Sellers is one example of a top-notch physician recruited to the city. Three years ago, he came to Colorado Springs from Geisinger Medical Center in Pennsylvania to join a former colleague in electrophysiology practice. Sellers credits the hospital with supporting the establishment of a first rate electrophysiology lab and practice.

"First of all, the hospital environment is a wonderful place to work," says Sellers. "I work mostly at Memorial Hospital, but I do some at Penrose as well. The staff at the hospitals has been outstanding as far as helping with the electrophysiology laboratory and getting all the things that we needed and allowing us to do the electrophysiology practice.

"We have our own dedicated EP lab with dedicated nurses and technicians and all the dedicated equipment," Sellers says.

Medical research was a strong point in Sellers' career in Pennsylvania and it continues here.

"At these hospitals we have been able to do research putting in investigational pacemakers, investigational defibrillators and be involved in a number of different drug studies," Sellers says.

The competitive market can work

against a spouse, warns Davis. "This is a wonderful place to be recruited. It is a very tough place to be the non-recruited professional spouse of one who was recruited. That is because the talent pool is so broad."

Ridings, a physiatrist, and his wife, a radiation oncologist, avoided that problem by each developing their own contacts within their fields. Each found a position with Memorial Hospital. Ridings is in private practice and serves as the medical director for rehabilitation services at Memorial Hospital.

The attractive lifestyle draws people to Colorado Springs, but it takes a quality working environment to close the deal. The mountains just outside the window provide an added bonus according to Davis. "I never remember going to my office in Fort Worth, looking westward and seeing the majesty that I see here." ■

Bett Coffman is the associate editor of UO.