

IN THE INTELLIGENT CITY, WE SELL OUR WARES OVER THE WEB

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Written by dave

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THE GAZETTE

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BY DAVE HUGHES

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YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

Colorado Springs needs a fresh economic vision. Could we develop ourselves internally and externally as the “The Intelligent City?” Could we capitalize on the only radically new economic engine since the automobile: personal computers as the means of production, and the Internet as the highway for the mind? In the first part of this story I traced the economic history of the Colorado Springs area from 1871: English money, Health, Gold, Tourism, Military bases, Tech Manufacturing. Our population climbed from 20,000 to 500,000. But never became prosperous for all. Now we have become far too dependent on defense dollars and decisions made in Washington, not here. We gain and lose high-tech manufacturing plants because decisions about opening or closing here are made in other bigger cities. Tourism is too seasonal and small to fully support our bloated population. Now we are running out of water. Growth for growth’s sake is no longer sustainable. If we stick to that path, the costs for a city of a million residents is not twice what it is for half million. It’s more than double. Already highly “conservative” city councils and county commissions can’t meet their budgets for basic infrastructure needs: maintained roads, police, fire, parks, utilities, government services. Costs are going up faster than citizens are willing or able to tax themselves to pay for them. There is no economy of scale in big city growth. Bluntly put, the quality of life decreases the larger a city gets, while costs go up. But isn’t it the quality of life which draws and keeps us here, even as it degrades and per capita income declines? We gotta break that mold. We need a radical new economy. First of all, we have to disengage from the idea that the only way to grow economically is to grow physically.

Developers don’t like such talk. For after developing, they walk away. Even from the city. And leave the rest of us to pay the dollar and psychic costs of growth. We have to be willing to accept Editor's note: This is the second part of a two-part series about Colorado Springs' economy by YourHub writer Dave Hughes.

For 30 years I developed and was able to derive an income by using ever more powerful telecommunications, from an acoustic modern and Radio Shack Model 1 computer in 1977 to the full Internet today. We need to build a New Economic Model for the entire city and county. We need to develop an Intelligent City model that projects, then measures and tracks over time, the flow of money in and out of the Pikes Peak region, and how it circulates within it, from and to individuals, not just institutions. Now who can do this? For starters we already have in Colorado Springs many qualified economists, academics, business, government agency specialists, and independent researchers who can contribute to and construct the model. A Pikes Peak community-wide model, but not as it is now: a separate chamber of commerce model, a city government planning model, a county government model, a utilities department model, a homebuilders model.

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Will developing such a model cost money? Sure. But when the chamber of commerce asks Colorado Springs Utilities for money out of your rate pay for officials to go and lobby manufacturing firms to relocate here, it surely can contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to build and refine the model. All sectors can contribute. UCCS can be the home for the public/private study, model, and meetings. We will have to gather large amounts of data, much of which is not even collected locally today, much less correlated with anything else. For example, who knows the total Defense Department Retired Pay for residents of El Paso County? How many "home businesses" are there in El Paso County? How many computers, and robust networks, or Independent programmers? How many local "Distance Learning" institutions are here with local instructors? All guesswork. Then we need to launch a set of initiatives for a city that wants to export its brain power via telecommunications, and import dollars. How?

The Internet, dummy! For the first time in history, every person in El Paso County can, with personally owned, ever more affordable computers, operated from home, or from a nearby office, or even school, connected locally to the global Internet, wired, wireless, fibered, sell their products.

We can provide all we can create and deliver, from architectural drawings, computer programs, educational services and financial advice, to art work in digital form, music, novels, stories, essays, medical consulting services, Web designs, technical advice, survey analyses and marriage counseling. We can provide all of it to distant markets over the net at trivial real communications costs. And we have a few assets to build on.

We have an educated work force, many of whom already have knowledge of great value. We can attract others who don't need local jobs. And train the ones we have. We need to systematically educate our own populace on how to market themselves online to distant employers and markets. Look at the flood of television advertisements offering "Distance Learning — how to get a degree online."

We should systematically inventory the very large number of residents, including retired ones, who could teach, for pay, a very wide range of subjects online. And we should teach them how to teach online, and as a city offer their services to the rest of the world!

The local cost of living is a function of the sum of all the costs for housing, utilities, food, services and, increasingly, transportation. Yes, gasoline costs and all the costs for buying, paying for, and then operating the cars we drive to work For all the vague promises of "going

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green,” the reality is that owning two or more cars just so that breadwinners can “get to work” and students in the home can “get to school” is not going to go down. But working and studying from home, or neighborhood “work centers” can reduce those costs to individuals and government by reducing the daily volume of traf?c, not increasing it endlessly as we are now in the old economy. Both work and learning could and should be promoted from home!

Both local governments and local companies and all academic institutions have to encourage and support and not prohibit their employees from doing all or part of their work and study from home! Why should a clerk in the county assessor's of?ce drive round trip from Calhan just to sit in their costly — to maintain and equip — county of?ce building?

Why should I drive to Memorial Hospital, have a technician put a wireless device close to me to monitor my pacemaker, when I could be monitored at home just as well, and without adding to road congestion, at lower cost to me, my medical in- surance, the city, and the hospital? Colorado Springs could become The Intelligent City.

Increase income, lower costs. It will take community leadership committed to this idea. Who's ready? planted from seed this last summer. I won't say which one of my children described the fruit [of an apple tree as ' it grew bigger, and bigger that turned out, upon my tour through their yard, to be a nectarine. But I will say the homegrown fruit was duly quartered and enjoyed by all, between grandmother and parents and grandchild. I would wish that all families could enjoy such fruits of their labor, even if only from a county or city lot.

Do we really need so many parks that residents don't have a hope to work the soil in Colorado? Think of the health bene?ts to children. What of all the unused land in El Paso County? I would be willing to chip in for irrigation if I had my own plot in which to grow vegetables. Would some- one out there be willing to donate old chain link fenc— ing to keep out the deer and the rabbits? Who else could use fresh vegetables next summer? Who out there would be willing to grow fresh ?owers for the supermarkets?