

Fort Collins/Northern Front Range

N. Colorado: Reality bests perception

Having lived in and done business in Northern Colorado over the past eight years, I have noticed that many of the people I have encountered from outside the area believe that the municipalities of Fort Collins, Loveland and Greeley are standalone communities completely independent of each other.

While this is true governmentally and historically, the fact is that the land area in which these municipalities are located is rapidly transforming into a solitary region and has been doing so for years. This is not only significant from a growth trends standpoint, but also it is vital to understanding the economic significance of a region of this size.

"Regionalism" is the word used locally to describe this consistent pattern of the physical



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physical regionalism include the relocation, or location as the case may be, of several prominent businesses in the region. Such location decisions are being driven primarily by these companies seeking more convenient access to a larger labor force or to a larger customer base. In other words, why limit yourself to a popu-

lation of 100,000 people when you can tap into 500,000 people?

The mechanisms that produce this convenience are more central real estate locations and transportation infrastructure (vis-a-vis Interstate 25 and U.S. Highway 34).

Recent good examples of businesses participating in this locational evolution include:

The Promenade Shops at Centerra (new regional lifestyle center/mall), The Medical Center of the Rockies (\$250 million trauma center), the Budweiser Events Center and Larimer County Fairgrounds, Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital, Thunder Mountain Harley-Davidson, American Eagle Distributing, Swift & Co., State Farm Insurance, Kroll Factual Data and Hesketa Corp.

In addition to the aforementioned businesses choosing more central locations, several new residential developments are under construction or planned in more central Northern Colorado locations. Specifically, Christland Inc. has estimated that there are nearly 12,000 residential units under construction or planned within an approximately three-mile radius of the intersection of I-25 and U.S. 34. Proof of the strong demand for more convenient and central housing is evident by the strong absorptions of the residential projects (such as Highland Meadows) that are already in the specified area and by the num-

ber of people who leave their home municipalities on a daily basis to go to work in another one of the municipalities in the region. Specifically, in its 2001 Household Travel Survey, the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization found that 17 percent of Fort Collins' work force commutes out of Fort Collins to work; 45 percent of Loveland's work force works outside Loveland; and 30 percent of Greeley's work force is traveling elsewhere for employment.

The majority of these commuters are traveling to another Northern Colorado municipality to work (only 12 percent commute to metro Denver/Boulder for work). Furthermore, it is quite common for a family to live in one municipality and have the wife work in one municipality, while the husband works in another municipality. If that was your family, would you not find it much more convenient to live in a more central location?

The point of all of this is that Northern Colorado really is not just Fort Collins with an approximate population of 125,000 people or Greeley/Evans with a population of approximately 100,000 people, but rather an area that functions not unlike a larger metropolitan area, with multiple surrounding suburbs, tied together by its transportation infrastructure. Northern Colorado is a single thriving region, with more than 500,000 people with average household incomes exceeding \$67,000; it is roughly similar in many key measurables to a community the size of Colorado Springs.

Demographic source: Claritas Inc., 20-mile radius from I-25 and U.S. 34. ▲