



The Bettmanns of Colorado Frame & Art Restoration, in business for 40+ years, celebrate the grand opening of their new building on West Colfax.

# QUINTESSENTIALLY COLFAX!

## LAKEWOOD'S FAMOUS AVENUE FOLLOWS ITS ROOTS TO RENEWAL

By M. Perry Williams

Change is happening . . . some small steps and some giant leaps—but change nonetheless. Lakewood's West Colfax is amid a remarkable resurgence . . . and for those who've not visited it recently—you're in for a big surprise.

The west end of Colorado's most famous avenue remains a commercial corridor that celebrates its glory days and its well-deserved moniker of "Gateway to the Rockies." Today, West Colfax still has meaningful connections to its roots—the supper clubs, dance halls, and motor inns— but also authentic offshoots to new arts experiences driven by a community that dusted itself off and decided to cultivate change.

Not since the 1950s has West Colfax experienced such a transformation. While there is still plenty for community leaders to work on, the year since the first issue of this magazine has marked meaningful achievements—too many to capture in a short article—but here's a sampling, a Top Ten List, gleaned from milestones just since the start of 2015:

**1.** The momentum continues at 40 West Arts, one of only 18 certified creative districts in Colorado. The nonprofit organization has seen significant statewide recognition and incremental growth in galleries and activities, accompanied by a doubling of creative enterprises and patronage, while contributing to the corridor's positive economic trajectory—a more than 11% increase in sales tax revenues.



2. Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design (RMCAD) has grown its on-campus and online enrollment to more than 1100 students. But enrollment doesn't tell the whole story. RMCAD has established deep community connections through the Artist in Residence Program, its Visiting Artist, Scholar, & Designer Program, FARMCAD markets on its historic campus, a commitment to volunteerism, and a new degree program that hits the sweet spot: a Bachelor's in Business of Creative Industries.

3. Estimates for new corridor residential development range from 2500-3000 units in just the W Line corridor, including WestLink at Oak Station, Zephyr Street Apartments, luxury townhomes at Mountair on 10th Avenue, the hip-and-cool West Line Flats a block from the Lamar Station, 40 West Residences at Colfax and Gray, the next phase of Lamar Station Crossing, and others in the various stages of planning, all bringing the "heads and beds" that drive investment in additional consumer amenities.

4. The major improvements at Lamar Station Plaza in the heart of the arts district is a game-changer. The classic, 1950s retail center on West Colfax is home to the iconic Mexican-themed entertainment complex Casa Bonita, plus new tenants, such as WestFAX Brewing Company, Planet Fitness, Lakewood Arts Gallery and Gallery of Everything, which makes the plaza a key destination for the burgeoning 40 West Arts scene. Since its 2015 purchase of the plaza, Broad Street has invested millions in site improvements—and a public-private partnership with the City of Lakewood resulted in a new public park on site that will host arts district and other community activities.

5. Signature companies, such as FirstBank and Terumo BCT built new headquarters, collectively investing more than \$100M and bringing hundreds of new jobs to the corridor. Prestige Imports, on West Colfax since 1984, is also planning a major expansion of its Audi and Porsche dealerships. In addition, longtime entrepreneurial mainstays, including Rockley Music, the Bettmans of Colorado Frame and Art Restoration, and Veldkamp's Flowers and Gifts, spent millions in dollars and effort to build or upgrade their West Colfax-based businesses. All this is on top of the City of Lakewood's multi-million dollar capital investments in the corridor, including improvements at light rail stations and along Lamar and Pierce Streets.

6. 2015 marked the first-ever West Colfax MuralFest, a one-day celebration of the arts, with live bands, 30+ art

booths, food trucks, the unveiling of new murals, and fun activities for the whole family. The first installment attracted artists from throughout Colorado and across the nation, drawing more than 2000 people; the next iterations of the festival are destined to be even larger. (In 2016 organizers received inquiries from artists from more than a dozen states and six countries! The 2016 festival is slated for August 20 at Lamar Station Plaza.)

7. Since the beginning of 2015, the district has unveiled 14 new public art installations (sculptures and murals). That doesn't include the six new murals to be unveiled in August 2016 during the 2nd West Colfax MuralFest. *Westword* honored both Bobby Magee Lopez's "Hear the Train A Humming" mural and Christopher Weed's "Connected" sculpture as "Best of" for New Public Art Installation in 2015, joining other noteworthy installations, such as Martha Pinkard Williams' "Stardust" mural at The Action Center and Lonnie Hanzon's "Lakewood Legacy Trees" at Lamar Light Rail Station.

8. The EDGE Theater, led by Rick and Patty Yaconis, has broken new ground in local theater, staging more Denver-area and regional premieres than any other suburban theater—and in doing so, garnering a long list of recognition, including "Best Actor" and "Season of the Year" from *Westword*, while more than doubling ticket sales since moving into the district.



Terumo BCT, Lakewood's largest private employer, built its new world headquarters in the corridor.

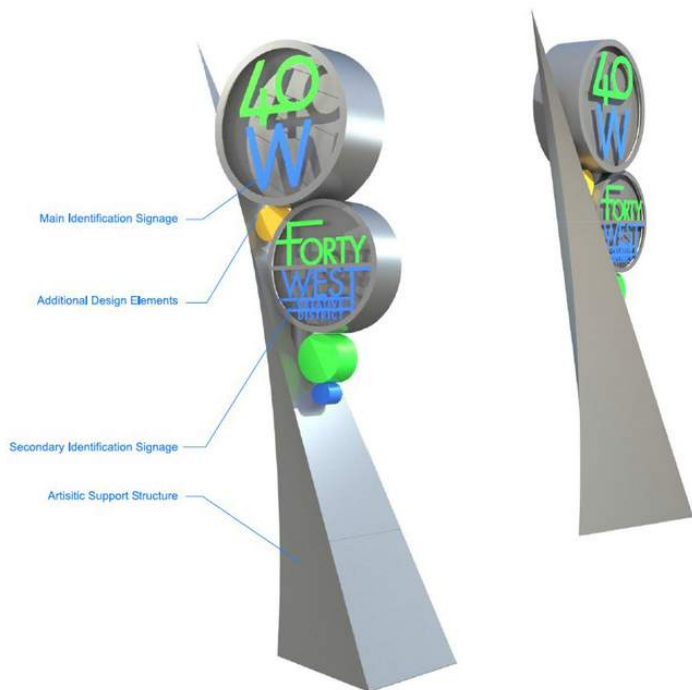


Celebrating another gallery opening, Baby Henley is a big hit with Lakewood's number one bachelor, Mayor Adam Paul.

COMING SOON – 13<sup>th</sup> & Newland St.  
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West Line Flats, 155 residential units with its own dog park and loads of other millennial-friendly amenities, is under construction ½ block from Lamar Street Light Rail Station.



New gateway monuments will soon welcome visitors and locals to Lakewood's 40 West Arts, a state-certified creative district.

9. Following the approval of the new, more flexible, mixed-use oriented Lakewood Zoning Ordinance, the City embarked on a forward-thinking path of comprehensive community planning that paved the way for revitalization. Milestone planning included the 40 West Arts Urban Design and Mobility Plan, the new West Colfax 2040 Vision Plan, and the 40 West Arts Place-making Implementation Plan. All played integral roles in the formation and growth of the arts district and the ability to secure meaningful grants, such as those awarded from the EPA, CDOT, Colorado Creative Industries, the Boettcher Foundation, the State Historical Fund, Xcel Energy Foundation, and most recently, NEA's Our Town Grant.

10. New business activity in the last two years has outpaced the previous four years combined. In addition to activity already mentioned that brought nearly 1000 new jobs to the corridor, the district has welcomed the arrival of 40 West Studios, Lakewood Arts Gallery, Gallery of Everything, Red Herring Art Supply, Guiry's Paint & Art Supply, C2 Gallery and C-Squared Studios, Hyperspace Video Arcade, and a host of other businesses too numerous to list.





City of Lakewood's Alexis Moore shares the vision for an arts loop during a community meeting at 40 West Gallery.

“There’s such a mix of activities throughout Lakewood, and that’s especially true along historic West Colfax,” asserts Mayor Adam Paul. “It’s clear this corridor is on the move.”

So what’s the next big thing? With all this momentum, the availability of light rail, and other active partnerships—such as the expansion of Mountair Park Community Farm by Sprout City Farms—young professionals, couples, and families are “discovering” West Colfax, accelerating the economic transformation. Movers and shakers say there’s more to come and share their top picks for what’s next.

**Creative District Gateway Monuments:** “I’ve seen the model and drawings,” says Kevin Crehan, the landscape architect and principal at Solara Designs who designed the new park at Lamar Station Plaza. “They’re works of art—18’ foot sculptures that communicate creative energy and serve as dynamic entry features. They say ‘something cool is happening here!’”

Lakewood-West Colfax Business Improvement District, in collaboration with the City, WCCA and

40 West Arts, is funding the creation and installation of these large 40 West Arts gateway monuments in the median on West Colfax, heralding the arrival of commuters from east and west—a key step in implementing the comprehensive strategies outlined in the place-making plan.

**40 West Arts Loop:** “It’s quite an honor to receive the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town Grant,” reflects Alexis Moore, principal planner with the City of Lakewood and member of the 40 West Arts District Board. “We’re excited to work with the community to implement the arts loop vision they first identified several years ago when planning for the area. This grant will help us design a unique artistic experience, develop a local amenity for walking and biking, and advance place-making in a way that adds to the economic vibrancy of the district.”

With the NEA Our Town Grant, the largest award in Colorado in 2016 and the largest ever for Lakewood, the City and 40 West Arts are amid a two-year process to create the first phase of an arts loop envisioned as a continuous and distinctly designed pedestrian and

bicycle route circling 40 West Arts District, connecting people to unique art experiences along the way, in parks, and other public and private spaces.

**Artspace:** “Affordable housing and workspace for artists and artisans is a key factor in keeping creatives in a district,” explains Kevin Yoshida, Lakewood-based architect and urban planner, who designed the Artspace project in Loveland, Colorado. “Simply put—you can’t have a creative district without creatives. Artspace solves this problem in a long-term, sustainable way and helps catalyze economic activity as well.”

After successful feasibility and market demand studies and a unanimous vote of City Council in April of 2015, Artspace, a national nonprofit provider of artist creative space with 40+ projects across the country, is working with the City of Lakewood to finalize the site for a proposed 40-50 live/work units as well as flexible gallery display and gathering space, creating a perpetually affordable artist enclave for the district.

**The Creativity Lab of Colorado:** “With all that’s happening here, the west-side needs an entity focused on creative ventures, and that’s the core purpose of

The Creativity Lab,” says Bill Marino, one of the Lab’s co-founders. “Teaming up with Colorado Creative Industries and RMCAD is a natural. Together with our community partners, we believe we can have a significant impact on existing creative enterprises and new creative start-ups.”

The Creativity Lab is centered around creativity, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit. A public-private nonprofit formed in the district and supported by Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design

and Colorado Creative Industries, and other community partners, The Lab serves students and start-ups, emerging entrepreneurs and existing businesses, creatives and community leaders through three focus areas—a Creative Business Incubator, a Community Design Studio, and an

Institute for Creative Community Leadership. The overarching purpose of The Lab is to nurture creative industry start-ups, cultivate new jobs, support the growth of existing creative enterprises, and foster community transformation by developing the next generation of creative leaders.

“Our organizations all share a common focus on creativity and innovation as we help move students, start-ups and our community forward in today’s creative economy,” adds RMCAD CEO Christopher Marconi.

Gateway monuments, an arts loop, live/work space for artists, and a creativity lab . . . quintessentially Colfax, isn’t it? Authentic to the area . . . innovation based on need . . . all focused on transformation for people, businesses, and the community.

West Colfax has made inordinate progress. It’s come from a 30-year decline to the up-and-coming place for creatives to convene. What does former Mayor Steve Burkholder, now Cheerleader-in-Chief call it? He sums it up in one word: “Miraculous!” And adds, “I can’t wait to see what’s next!”

Creativity Lab co-founders, Bill Marino (left) and Kevin Yoshida collaborate on space-planning for MuralFest. The Lab is now located on the campus of RMCAD.

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Photo by Jennifer Coulter





"Reinvention" mural concept by Richard Marks from MuralFest 2016



[GoWestColfax.org](http://GoWestColfax.org)



[WestColfax.org](http://WestColfax.org)



[40WestArts.org](http://40WestArts.org)

# THANK YOU!

**The Reinvention of West Colfax wouldn't be possible without all of you—the passionate and engaged West Colfax Community!**

A special THANK YOU to the Board & Committee members who volunteer to serve our three organizations—all working together to ENERGIZE historic West Colfax!

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