



By Mary Margaret Green
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ST. Louis has its Gateway Arch, New York its Statue of Liberty and the District its Washington Monument. Denver has a big blue bear.

Make that a 42-foot-tall, 10,000-pound, deep-lapis-toned bear, a playful work of public art by University of Denver professor Lawrence Argent that is sure to make Democrats smile when they hold their national convention in the city Aug. 25 through 28.

Appropriately named "I See What You Mean," the bear stands on its hind legs in the grass along 14th Street, leaning forward and seeming to press its forepaws and snout against the glass-walled Colorado Convention Center like a curious, if fantastically overgrown, child striving for a better view inside.

Denver has more to amuse party animals and tourists, of course, and the staff of the Denver Post had fun compiling a list of "What we have that New York doesn't" in January 2007, when the Democrats chose the Mile High City over the Big Apple as their meeting place.

"Anything New York can do, we can do better," the paper crowed. "We've got your art (how 'bout a big blue bear?). We've got your celebrities (like comedian Josh Blue). We've got your sense of history. And we've got it all without a \$20 cover to leave your hotel."

The bear was the paper's tongue-in-cheek counterpoint to the Statue of Liberty as "colossal figure." Mr. Blue, the fourth-season winner of TV's "Last Comic Standing," was matched against Jerry Seinfeld as "comic celeb seen on the street."

In all, the paper's staff came up with a dozen only-in-Denver landmarks and lighthearted comparisons. Although unaware of the Post's picks at the time, I found my way to more than half of them last year, plus some that didn't make the cut. Together, they create an image of a city successfully preserving its past while transforming itself from one-time "cowtown" to contemporary urban center.

An easy way to travel through downtown, I soon learn, is the free bus shuttle on the 16th Street pedestrian mall. Although just 16 blocks long, the route puts passengers within walking distance of most downtown attractions, plus light rail connections that carry them to other city destinations and the suburbs. By its planned completion in 2018, the rail system should cover 120 miles.

My travel-writing friends and I don't need the shuttle to get to our first landmark, the Denver Art Museum's acclaimed, titanium-clad Frederic C. Hamilton Building. It's a short walk from the historic Brown Palace hotel, where we're staying as guests of Colorado tourism.

A shining collection of jutting angles and diverse geometric shapes inside and out, the Hamilton Building increased the museum's exhibit space by 40 percent when it opened

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Photographs by Mary Margaret Green/The Washington Times



Lawrence Argent's big blue bear seems to peer into the Colorado Convention Center. Beverly Pepper's "Denver Monoliths" (left) adorn the plaza between the Denver Art Museum's Frederic C. Hamilton Building and the Museum Residences condominium (partially seen at far left). The plaza and both buildings were designed by Daniel Libeskind. Sixteenth Street (below) has many cafes and shops plus a free shuttle service.



Getty Images

RICH WORLD OF GOLDEN

DENVER

City preserves its past while striding forward with urban galleries, eateries, performing arts



Martha Pettigrew's 6-foot-5-inch "The Enduring Navajo" is a strong presence on Writer Square, where Knox Gallery displays some of its artists' works. Others include children at play and women gossiping.