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# THE DENVER POST

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# AURORA

A city trying to find an identity outside of Denver's shadow



Maxwell Wilson, 5, left, along with other kids, cools off in the fountain at the Town Square of the Southlands Lifestyle Center outdoor mall last week. Andy Cross, The Denver Post

By Carlos Illescas  
The Denver Post

Jonathan Kyte and his young family moved out of central Denver two years ago in search of better schools and more-affordable housing. They found the ideal place in southeast Aurora.

Kyte and his wife, Julie, and now-4-year-old son, Cayson, live within walking distance from the popular Southlands mall. They take advantage of recreational amenities nearby such as Castlewood Canyon State Park, as well as quick access to almost anywhere they need to go.

"The price per square foot (of a home) was low, and the schools are fantastic," Kyte said on a recent day as he sat outside Southlands enjoying a cigarette while he waited for his wife, who was shopping. "It was kind of a no-brainer."

But Kyte says residents in his part of town have a hard time identifying with the city they call home.

"Nobody around here will admit they live in Aurora," Kyte said. "They say the Southlands area, or near Park-er or southeast Aurora. But never just Aurora."

AURORA » 9A

## SMARTPHONES, TABLETS, TV, COMPUTERS

### Media use in America up a full hour each day since last year

By David Bauder  
The Associated Press

**NEW YORK»** The typical American adult is using media for a full hour a day more than just last year, with smartphones accounting for most of the increase.

People spent an average of 10 hours, 39 minutes each day with smartphones, tablets, TV, radio, computers and video games during the first three months of 2016, according to a Nielsen company study released this week. It was 9 hours, 39 minutes during the same period in 2015.

Even these numbers are probably underestimated, since while Nielsen measures the amount of time spent online on smartphones, it doesn't count texting, taking selfies or talking on the phone.

Most Americans can sense the increase anecdotally given the ubiquity of

**An estimated 81 percent of American adults**

use a smartphone regularly, with the number of users growing by more than 20 million in the past year.

smartphones. People stare at screens while waiting in line for fast food, riding in elevators or walking down the street. Retail outlets post signs pleading that phones be turned off. People check messages in bed before falling asleep and reach for the devices upon waking up.

As she waits for her 5:45 a.m. spin class to begin, Cassandra Girao of Ossining, N.Y., sits on a bike scrolling through her e-mail, listening to music or solving a puzzle.

"I feel like I would be lost without it," Girao said. "My whole life is on it."

Even so, Girao said she feels better

SCREENS » 6A

## LODO SHOOTING

# Wife dies after attack



Cara Russell, who filed for divorce in April, was killed by her estranged husband.

By Noelle Phillips and Jason Blevins  
The Denver Post

A marriage that was unraveling came to a tragic — and public — end when an estranged husband chased his wife through her second-floor office in a downtown Denver building before shooting her and then killing himself.

Cara Russell, executive director of the Colorado Association for Recycling, died from gunshot wounds at 3:07 a.m. Wednesday at Denver Health Medical Center, where she had been transported after the Tuesday shooting, the Denver medical examiner reported. Russell, 52, was the former mayor of Buena Vista and a well-known figure in the Upper Arkansas River Valley.

Her husband, Mickey Russell, 58, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on the scene. He was the founder and owner of Russell Aviation and an instructor pilot.

"He came there with the intent of getting the victim," Denver police Cmdr. Ron Saunier said Wednesday at a news conference.

SHOOTING » 8A

## BUSINESS

### CENTENNIAL RESOURCE BETS ON BETTER DAYS

While some independent oil and gas producers continue to suffer huge losses, Denver-based Centennial Resource Development Inc. is pursuing a \$100 million initial public offering. » 10A

**Travel.** Frontier to offer nonstop flights between Colorado Springs and Orlando, Fla. » 10A

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## AURORA

◀◀FROM 1A

And that is a problem Aurora has been trying to fix for years. It's a city trying to find an identity, desperate to get out from the shadows of big brother Denver, hampered by a reputation of being crime-ridden, a label the statistics do not necessarily support.

Many positive things are happening in Aurora. The Anschutz Medical Campus is one of the top facilities of its kind in the country. Ground has broken for the new Gaylord Rockies resort hotel near Denver International Airport, which is expected to bring 500,000 visitors annually. A light-rail line along the Interstate 25 corridor will get rolling by the end of the year, opening up a wealth of commercial opportunities.

Yet the city still struggles to provide basic services. Aurora can't keep up with a federal mandate for police staffing levels. Its firefighters have the highest call rate per firefighter of any similar department in the country; the city doled out \$2.3 million in overtime last year just for the fire department. Aurora city officials spent nearly \$400,000 on an analysis of whether Aurora should become a city and county so it could rely on itself instead of the three counties it straddles, only to scrap that effort — probably once and for all.

Kevin Hougen, president of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, says this city of 350,000 residents faces many "unresolved opportunities" that are preventing it from becoming a major player.

Even the city's biggest cheerleader, Aurora Mayor Steve Hogan, acknowledged the city is in a state of flux. That's a departure from previous statements he has made that Aurora already was on par with other big cities. But he says Aurora is on the verge of big things with all the projects coming in the not-so-distant future.

"The city of Aurora is currently in pretty good shape," he told The Denver Post. "But we are still very much in this process of transitioning from a suburb to a city."

Aurora is certainly no different



Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center construction cranes behind a housing development. Andy Cross, The Denver Post

than other cities and suburbs that are struggling to move forward, where new developments make older areas seem blighted and unloved.

Nowhere is this contrast more evident than where East Colfax Avenue intersects Peoria Street.

On one side of Peoria is the shiny Anschutz Medical Campus, home to the University of Colorado Hospital, Children's Hospital Colorado, a new Veterans Affairs hospital coming soon and a host of research "incubators" that are developing potential new cures and technology. The campus has surpassed the ski industry as the state's top revenue generator at more than \$5 billion annually.

But cross the street, and you're in what East Colfax is known for best: gritty, run-down buildings, motels that stay in business mainly from the homeless and transient populations. Prostitutes are visibly working the streets on any given day. When crime does hap-

pen in Aurora, there's a good bet it's along or near East Colfax Avenue.

"When people hear the word 'Aurora,' they think of crime," said Aurora resident Julie Nelson, whose family has lived in the city for 14 years. "But there are a lot of good parts of Aurora. We love living here."

Hougen said change takes time. He points to places such as LoDo, RiNo and the Highland neighborhoods that were nothing at one time but now are places the coveted millennial population is flocking to.

"It's just a matter of time," Hougen said. "Not too long ago you wouldn't go to downtown Denver."

Changing a city is a "massive transformation," he said. "There are just opportunities that are unresolved."

Aurora City Councilman Charlie Richardson said a big part of the city's problem in finding ser-

vice is its lack of office development. Aurora really has no vertical office space to speak of. He said each single-family residence absorbs more in government services than it returns to the tax base. The opposite is true with office space, he said.

"Without a huge emphasis in office, manufacturing and industrial, we're just going to have to keep dreaming about having things like a big cultural arts performing center," he said.

Mayor Hogan called on the City Council at his State of the City address this year to make a performing arts center a priority for the city.

However, Richardson said because the city relies mainly on revenue from sales taxes, big-ticket items such as an arts center, coupled with Aurora paying more than half of its operating budget for police and fire, make things difficult.

"Aurora doesn't know what it

wants to be or does know and doesn't know how to get there," said Richardson, the former long-time Aurora city attorney.

What promises to change things in Aurora is the new light-rail line that is opening this year, city officials say. It will connect the Denver Tech Center to the city's center to the Anschutz Medical Campus and to Denver International Airport. Transit-oriented development, including housing and retail, is planned for some stops along the R-Line. It also will veer off the interstate near the Aurora Municipal Center, creating what city leaders hope will be a true city center and gathering place.

"All of those present tremendous opportunities," the mayor said. "Add in everything that comes along with the huge diversity that we have in Aurora. It presents an opportunity to take what is already a really good city and build into a great city. Now we have to go out and do it."

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