

# COVER STORY

## Turning downtown into pedestrian tourist haven

*Walking bridge over Omaha, fountain plaza, evening activities proposed*

BY VICKY WICKS  
For The Weekly News

Plans to turn Rapid City's downtown into an after-sun-down destination are moving forward now that a draft plan has been completed.

Roger Brooks, dubbed "the Dr. Phil of tourism and downtowns," told a gathering of area people that Rapid City can become a destination for

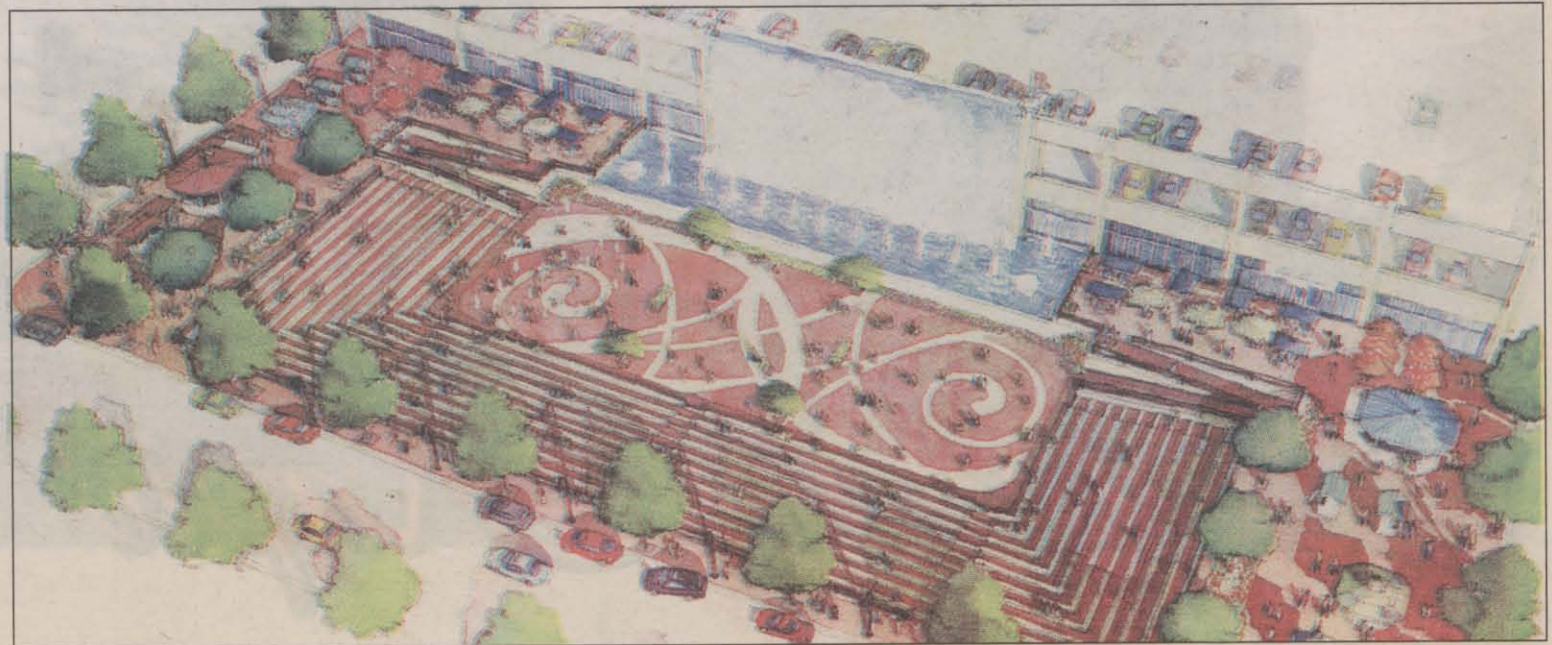
tourists looking for "the great American road trip" if its downtown offers a lively nightlife.

The centerpiece for a restructured downtown would



Roger Brooks

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COURTESY IMAGES

A mock-up of that part of the plan depicted a turquoise mesh-and-metal walking bridge arcing over Omaha, offering safe passage between downtown and the Rushmore Plaza Civic

**ON THE COVER:** Top, Rapid City in 2006 photo illustrated by Candy Erk Manthey and Marcus Erk from Pro Print; below, the same shot of Rapid City in 1912. Top, the architectural illustration of the proposed fountain plaza, if built at the Sixth and Main location. Below, a photo illustration of Omaha with a pedestrian bridge spanning between Memorial Park and downtown.

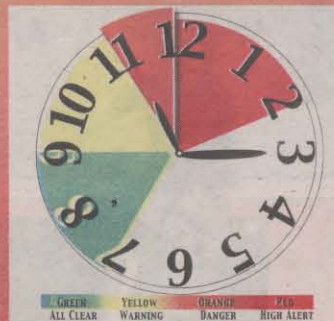


Roger Brooks

be a fountain plaza where food, shopping and entertainment is offered in a "pedestrian-friendly, intimate setting," he said.

Brooks' plan offers even more friendliness to pedestrians with a walking bridge over Omaha Street to draw locals and tourists to the downtown area.

## Council Clock



On Monday, April 21, the council adjourned at 11:15 p.m. after a 4-hour and 15-minute public meeting and a 21-minute executive session.

The Rapid City Weekly News will keep a watchful eye on the length of Rapid City Council meetings in wake of the long-running problem of endless sessions.

terpiece for a restructured downtown would be a fountain plaza where food, shopping and entertainment is offered in a "pedestrian-friendly, intimate setting," he said.

Brooks unveiled the details of his year-long study and marketing design during a long, large lunch session at the civic center on Monday, April 21.

Offering evening activities takes advantage of spending trends, Brooks said: 80% of visitors' dollars are spent on shopping, dining, and entertainment in a setting like the one Brooks is proposing, and 70% of all consumer spending occurs after 6 p.m.

The fountain in the plaza will function only part of the time; in strong winds or cold weather, it can be turned off, Brooks said.

The plaza "can be multipurpose," he said. "You can shut off the fountains, and then you can have all kinds of plays, theaters in the round, farmers markets, festivals, concerts — just all the hub of activity downtown."

A summary plan included in a press kit outlines plans for a fountain plaza that includes "choreographed shows in the

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evening with music, fire, water, and projected images and lights"; a kids' interactive daytime fountain; a stage that converts to an ice rink in winter; seating for more than 1,000 people; two restaurants; and snack kiosks.

Mayor Alan Hanks said, "It's about an experience in downtown Rapid City; you come down, you go to the fountains, you go shopping, then you sit down and eat, or vice versa."

Brooks, a consultant from

Seattle, said Rapid City needs to market what's unique, and part of the image he has in mind includes Native people.

"Something else that sets you apart from other people is the Lakota culture, and so that is a strong element of what we're doing," he said.

Destination Development Inc., Brooks' company, did research on Native contributions to local culture in Arizona and New Mexico, and results indicated the wisdom of

including that element.

Hanks agreed. "If you look at the arts we have in downtown Rapid City, a lot of it is already centered around Native American art," he said. "And there again, great opportunity to expand on that, and bring in other art forms also."

Brooks said a draft logo proposed for the project incorporates Lakota culture. Blending multiple cultures will be a challenge, though, Brooks said.

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"It's not an easy thing to do to set up yourself apart as an urban, metropolitan type of modern city, yet in this pristine setting, and then bring in that culture," he said. "We don't want to divorce Rapid City from that, but we want people to realize that Rapid City is more than the typical Western town that you might find in rural Montana or Idaho."

He says the project will take three to four years to complete and expects that a final plan will be ready by the end of May.

The location for the plaza has not yet been determined, Brooks said. The first step is to "go downtown and see what makes sense."

One possible location is the northeast corner of Sixth and Main, Brooks said.

"The idea would be to remove the [old] Sears building" and use the parking lot to make a half-block plaza, he said.

Another option would be to close off traffic on Seventh Street between St. Joe and Main for a Seventh Street Plaza, Brooks said.

"You would never turn that into a plaza until it's so busy that it's really the best solution," he said.

"We've worked in many cities where they went and closed off streets, but they didn't do anything about the businesses, and the businesses really hurt. So what you have to do is ... what we call 'rearrange the business mix' so it becomes a destination block."

Some property owners in that block are amenable to that plan, he said.

A group of downtown business owners have formed a "non-profit economic development corporation" called Destination Rapid City, according to John Brewer, who said he represents the group. Private donations totaling \$1 million have been raised already, he said, and more fundraising will begin soon.

Brooks said that fundraising, property acquisition, architectural and engineering work, and construction bids will have to be done before the project can begin, but "there are plenty of things the city can do between now and then."

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*See full page for 1st part. 4/24/08*

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