

BEET STREET

UniverCity Connections

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In his introduction to **Cities in Civilization**, Sir Peter Hall asked

“Why should the creative flame burn so especially, so uniquely, in cities and not the countryside?”

“What makes a particular city, at a particular time, suddenly become immensely creative, exceptionally innovative?”

His answer takes 1,000 pages to tell. But the long and short of it is that the creative flame ignites and burns in communities that invest in themselves, where the polity is so structured that it has, not only the ability, but the inclination and the drive to look at, to reflect on, to explore, to interpret, and to project into uncharted waters all that falls into the realm of the human condition.

Hall uses case histories—Athens, Florence, Paris, Vienna, London, New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, and others—to ferret out patterns common to these cities and to their golden ages. One of these is “living the good life” at least by the standards of those cities at the time of their flowering. Living the good life really means having the time to use one’s brain for purposes beyond mere subsistence. Another is public investment—the willingness of the public to invest in the cutting edge. Again, such investment was made according to the standards of the time. In Athens public monies were used to design and build structures that, even 2,500 years later, instill awe in us. In London such investment was more utilitarian—public infrastructure in the form of water, sewer, and power systems. Another thread running through the golden age of these cities was a certain chaos to the political and social environment—democracy, which is the most free-for-all political structure humans have created; and social rebellion or upheaval which has manifested itself in a vast number of ways: impressionism, women’s suffrage, child labor, unionization, art-deco, post-modernism, flower power, and so on. Yet another commonality among these cities is that they undertook individually to address and fix problems faced by the community’s themselves. Two other threads: these cities attracted creative people and these creative people were of every stripe—not just artists, but industrialists, technologists, scientists, builders, thinkers, revolutionaries.

Fort Collins fits within the framework described by Hill. We live the good life, we invest in the public infrastructure and we have visionary plans and visionary leadership that guarantees much greater levels of investment in the next 100 years. We have a dynamic, volatile democracy here—just mention the Poudre River to get a lively discussion ignited. Fort Collins also tends to attract creative people but it isn’t yet on the map as a creative place.

That is where Beet Street comes in. Beet Street is a program—24 themed events every year. Downtown Fort Collins is the home of Beet Street. It will be based in a 5,000-seat

amphitheater but will also include educational facilities for adults and children, a year-round community market, a culinary school, a hall of philosophy for programmed and extemporaneous events and performances. It will be a partnership with local arts, cultural, entertainment, educational, dining and commercial enterprises. Beet Street facilities and programming will be intentionally dispersed through the downtown neighborhood to encourage interaction with the Fort Collins community. This dispersion is why the DDA is working to turn our alleys into an exciting, discoverable pedestrian network.

The Downtown Development Authority, which is launching Beet Street, is an economic development agency. From that prosaic perspective, Beet Street is simply an economic engine. But it is an economic engine with a considerable twist: traditional economic development targets industrial and commercial expansion and recruitment. Traditional economic development targets what is referred to in the business as “primary” jobs. Beet Street proposes to displace, or at least supplement, industrial and commercial economic development practices with a cultural milieu that attracts residents and visitors with curious minds and businesses with curious, maybe even far out, ideas about capitalism, corporate citizenship, what it means to be a member of planet earth. Fundamentally, Beet Street is cultural development. It sets up an environment for intellectual, spiritual, recreational, and educational exploration and renewal. It is a playground of sorts for the exercise of the mind. Its topic matter is all that has to do with humanity—that is, all that is cultural. That means it is inclusionary because all of human thought, action and interaction, creation and destruction is cultural in the sense that it is not solely a product of nature. And it is serious business.

Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waist-coat pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

So let's jump into the rabbit hole and take a look at Beet Street.

The siq, rent by earthquake, not water, is a canyon that twines deep into the mountains, 650 foot walls of rough, marbly-layered sandstone rise up on each side and press against one's shoulders as three or maybe four walk abreast pass through the mile long canyon to the rose city of Petra, capital of Nabataea. Petra was a commercial trading empire from the fourth century B.C. until the Romans conquered it in A.D. 105. Caravans moved across the Arabian deserts through Petra which lay at the junction of the north-south trading route running from the Gulf of Aqaba and Damascus and the east-west route from Beersheba to Gaza.

Emerging from the deep shadows of the siq, sun floods the valley and the grand Nabataean and Roman buildings and 800 tombs carved into the dark red sandstone cliffs. One tomb, Kazneh, which means “treasure” was, according to Bedouin belief, the hiding place of a Pharaoh’s treasure, ensconced in the urn at the top of the façade. Facades themselves were “carved” by inserting wood shims into grooves in the rock and then wetted down. The wet wood would expand and crack the rock.

Petra, the Sphinx, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Mecca—Beet Street will take you there through week-long explorations of Middle Eastern history, culture, and current affairs.

The morning rush hour on a Tokyo subway train begins at four a.m. and it is not for the timid. The exiting masses and the entering masses charge each other to escape or board the train. Once in, the mashing, smashing press of human flesh against human flesh, the intermingling scents of a thousand sweaty bodies, reminds as no word or picture can that Japan is a very, very populous nation. But this is the time and the way to Tsukiji—the Tokyo fish market. Every morning, every day of the week, thousands flock to the market to buy for the day’s meals or to stock restaurant kitchens and grocery shelves. To quote from National Geographic:

"Tsukiji is a fish market in the sense that the Grand Canyon is a ditch or Caruso was a crooner. Among the wholesale fish markets of the world, Tsukiji ranks at the top in every measurable category. It handles more than 400 different types of seafood, from penny-per-piece sardines to golden brown dried sea slug caviar, a bargain at [U.S.] \$473 a pound. It imports from 60 countries on six continents."

"Frozen assets, bluefin tuna worth top yen are readied for Tsukiji's morning auction. The market's clamorous labyrinth of stalls showcases all manner of seafood—from live sea eel to pickled octopus—and reflects the well-ordered confusion of Japanese society. Says Tsukiji scholar Ted Bestor, "Tsukiji reveals as much about Japanese culture as it does about Japanese cuisine."

The world of the east, Japan, China, Singapore, Viet Nam, is as different to us in the west as is Mars to the earth. Yet the East is today what the United States was in the 19th century—an emerging global powerhouse commercially, culturally, and militarily. We need to know and understand it. Beet Street will bring it home.

Shortly before World War One Nancy Astor, the American-born wife of Waldorf, Viscount Astor, visited Winston Churchill’s home. In conversation with Churchill, she expounded on the subject of women’s rights. Churchill opposed her on this and other causes she happened to hold dear. In exasperation Lady Astor said: “Winston, if I were

married to you, I'd put poison in your coffee." Churchill responded: And if you were my wife, I'd drink it."

Entering the men's room in the House of Commons one day, Churchill found Clement Attlee already standing at the urinal. Churchill took up his stance at the opposite end of the urinal. "Feeling standoffish today, are we Winston?" asked Attlee. "That's right," replied Churchill. "Every time you see something big, you want to nationalize it."

Most of us know Winston Churchill was a wag. And we know of his leadership during World War Two. But the relationship amongst Allied leaders and how it has affected the world we live in today remains an intriguing and sometimes mysterious topic of exploration. Was Churchill a friend to Stalin? Did he intentionally and deviously draw the United States into the war? How did the summit at Yalta result in the Cold War?

Beet Street programming will explore such topics. It will look at U.S. foreign policy from both an historical perspective and in the context of today's world. It will enliven your mind with seminars and discourse on water rights, science and global warming, the common heritage of the three great western religions, the art of India, the varied societies of the American Indian, it will bring Mikhail Baryshnikov, Luciano Pavarotti, Bill Cosby, Loretta Lynn, Donald Hall, maybe Barak Obama and Newt Gingrich to our stages. Beet Street will draw thousands of visitors to our city to enjoy local cultural events, local and specialized retailing and dining opportunities, and all the recreational opportunities the Rockies offer.

In the lower level of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Stephanie Morton encourages a little boy and little girl from Selma, Alabama, to push, poke, and pinch wet clay into a singularly unique, if not artistic, images of their mother. At that same moment, their mother sits in a pew at the Beet Street amphitheater engrossed in reflections by Frank Gehry about the influence of 19th century architecture on modern design. Gehry hangs around after his talk. He sits on the edge of the stage and answers questions that range from professional to personal. How to incorporate modern green building principles into historic buildings. How to bring modern amenities into an older home.

Later, Gehry and another visiting family sit down over coffee at the Bean Cycle. They share stories about architecture, but also about life, the weather, politics, religion. Gehry leaves to visit the Children's Art Workshop where he and the Mother from Selma talk with Stephanie about her program and the creations of the children in the classroom.

In the evening, they walk along College Avenue. They stumble upon Trimble Court and follow it, without knowing where it will lead, into Old Town Square. A fiddle band performs on stage. Diners sip locally brewed beers on the many outdoor patios. The family wanders northward and joins the Thursday evening art walk. Tomorrow Dad may play golf, or tennis, or take a run through the foothills, the kids will attend The Children's theater production of Once Upon a Mattress. Mom will be back at the amphitheater for a

session on 21st century cities, part of a week-long program on architecture and American society.

Beet Street is run by a committee that includes arts, DDA, City of Fort Collins, business, philanthropic, and educational representation. Through that committee partnerships are being or have already been forged with Colorado State University, the Poudre School District, civic ventures, environmental interests, banks, and the local arts and cultural community. Beet Street very much fits the mold of UniverCity Connections and fully expects to be a part of the results of this effort.

Over the course of a year, Beet Street will produce 24 themed programs, each drawing as many as seven to ten thousand people to Fort Collins. These visitors share our community's sense of wonder about life, our willingness to embrace the unconventional, our curiosity and our desire to know more. We will learn from each other, we will explore the vast world of human culture together, we will grow, be renewed, and be challenged to look beyond ourselves.

And Alice said to the caterpillar:

I hardly know, sir, just at the present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”

Beet Street is a wonderland where we change, maybe several times, but always for the richer, wiser, and, hopefully, happier.

Thank you.