

Neighborhoods

Places to live, people to see in Colorado Neighborhoods

Story: Jon Goldberg

UNIVERSITY PARK

THE ESSENTIALS:

WHERE IT IS – NEXT TO DU. The neighborhood sits adjacent to the University of Denver, extending east from University to Colorado Boulevard; from the south it runs from Yale north past Evans Avenue to I-25. The neighborhood is bookended by two light rail stations and is minutes from downtown and the DTC.

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL – HISTORIC, BUCOLIC, BUT URBAN. Often known as “Observatory Park” for its century-old observatory, this historic and vital neighborhood features wide, quiet street, mature trees, architectural and cultural landmarks, local parks and an active, close-knit community.

THE HOMES – VICTORIANS AND NEW DELUXE HOMES. University Park is most famous for the classic, architecturally fascinating original Victorian properties constructed for the DU founders, faculty and administration 100 years ago. Increasingly, the neighborhood is becoming well-known for the high density of new, luxury custom homes being built on scraped lots, typically large, estate-like properties with top-of-the-line materials and finishes.

WHAT YOU’LL PAY – AN AVERAGE OF \$350 PER SQUARE FOOT. Scrape-off or not.

THE HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY PARK is steeped in the history of the University of Denver itself. Methodist John Evans, who became territorial governor

in 1862, came from Chicago, where he founded Northwestern University and the town of Evanston, Illinois. He envisioned a comparable institution in Denver, and in 1863, he helped found the Colorado Seminary, later named the University of Denver, downtown. In the mid-1880s, the school started looking for a more pastoral place to relocate.

Based on a large private land grant, they chose the undeveloped prairie where DU now sits. The plans included a residential neighborhood east of the school, and on Arbor Day 1886, University Park was founded with the vision that it would become a beautiful adjunct to the university.

Many early residents played significant roles in the history of DU and Denver. For example, benefactors Bishop Henry White Warren and his wife, Elizabeth Fraser Iliff (widow of cattle baron John Wesley Iliff), lived in the Queen Anne-style Grey Gables on Professor’s Row on South Milwaukee Street and in the castle-like Fitzroy Place.

A NEIGHBORHOOD OBSERVATORY. One of the earliest DU buildings to break ground was the Chamberlin Observatory, which still lies in the heart of University Park. In the late 1880’s, real estate tycoon Humphrey Chamberlin donated the land that is now Observatory Park, along with \$50,000 to establish an observatory and telescope. Noted architect Robert Roeschlaub, whose work already included the Central City Opera House and Trinity Methodist Church downtown, was selected to design the structure. Professor Herbert A. Howe, the university’s astronomer, guided construction of the telescope, still operated by the university today and frequently available to the public.

WHY IT’S HOT. University Park is a historic, established and tight-knit community and beautiful homes, quiet treed streets and superb central Denver location. The neighborhood remains closely connected to the exciting and rapidly evolving University of Denver. The last 10 years have been heady times for

DU, with the construction of a dozen new signature buildings, such as the Ritchie Center (home of Magness Arena), two NCAA Hockey titles and a steadily climbing academic ranking and reputation.

The landmark homes and observatory still anchor the community, while new construction is creating the opportunity to live in an established neighborhood but in a large, custom home with an up-to-date layout and high-end finishes.

SCRAPE-OFF CENTRAL. University Park is truly the epicenter of the teardown and rebuild phenomenon in Denver. Especially south of the observatory, almost entire blocks have been transformed from older, more modest mid-century houses to \$1 million plus custom built estates. Why? Explains Chris Cardiff, managing partner and founder of Birch Street Group, who has built several homes in the neighborhood, “Many of the smaller homes have become functionally obsolete.”

There are some growing pains with newcomers and longtime residents seeming to travel in different circles, “Once they arrive, the newcomers often seem to be voluntarily incarcerated in their huge homes,” says Paul Linton, an attorney who lives in an older home. On the other hand, newcomer Micah B’Hondt, an event planner, says, “We naturally tend to mix more with others in new homes who also have young families. Give us a chance. We are not reclusive. We actually walk and get out in the neighborhood a lot.” Longtime resident Ed Stein, political cartoonist and writer for the Rocky Mountain News, simply doesn’t care for the new homes. “It’s a matter of taste. I have no philosophical objection to them, but I have yet to find one I really like. They seem to be hodgepodge of styles.”

To the credit of many developers, such as Birch Street, some of the homes are painstakingly crafted to blend in with the existing architecture, with deliberate use of Colorado materials and techniques. Others, not so. There will always be disagreement on these matters, for as longtime resident and local real estate agent Pam Adams notes, “You can’t dictate taste.”

In many ways, the redevelopment is renaissance for University Park. “One example is that young families are moving in and rejuvenation the community,” says Adams. “I have noticed an increase in PTA involvement and fundraising at our local elementary school. It is the natural progression of our neighborhood.”

Special thanks to Pam Adams of Metro Brokers, Adams Company for her assistance with this story.

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When buying or selling a home, you need the help of an experienced professional who understands the details fundamental to achieving outstanding results.

-Jon Goldberg, a former attorney, puts his 20 years of experience in real estate and law to work for you.

-A contributing writer to *Colorado Expression* magazine, Jon knows Colorado. You can read his “Neighborhoods” article feature in this issue.

Call Jon today to discuss the details of your real estate needs.

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