A Brief History of Lone Tree, Colorado

Heaven is a suburb and other stories of
Lone Tree’s first 20 years

Compiled by Hans Friedel
Forward

I created, or rather compiled, the first version of “A Brief history of Lone Tree” in December of 2016 as a holiday gift to my fellow City of Lone Tree employees. I worked for the City and was a Lone Tree resident between 2015 and 2020. Back then, I had a coworker who would distribute elaborate Christmas music mix tape CDs at work. As a bit of friendly holiday competition with his elaborate gift, I came up with the idea of writing a little history of Lone Tree through exploring how the City got its name – a story that nobody seemed to know or remember. What started as a personal project grew into something larger than expected. Unfortunately, I completely missed the winter holidays and finished it in Spring of 2017. Then as now, I am unaware of any official or unofficial histories of Lone Tree where this information exists in one place. It is my hope that former, current, and future residents find it enjoyable and that it gives them a sense of place and history. In 2022, I made a few minor revisions, corrections, and edits.

What do I miss most about living in Lone Tree? It is sunset runs at the Bluffs Regional Park.

Hans Friedel
Los Angeles, CA
2022

Places can be named after a lot of different things for a lot of different reasons. Place names can be commemorative, historical, geographic, environmental, botanical, zoological, cultural, political, supernatural, and sometimes just plain weird. For example, there are places named after screams (Screamer Road, Tennessee), accidents, (Accident, Maryland), the unknown, (Unknown Creek, Montana), and let downs (Lake Disappointment, Arizona). There is even a study of place names called Toponymy.

So, how did Lone Tree, Colorado, get its name? Was there an original Lone Tree somewhere on the bluffs south of town? Did some developer back in the 1980s just pull a good sounding name out of a
hat? Did any of the original residents know? Or... was it a lost origin place name. Other than the fact I work for the City as a Planner, the history of the City’s name piqued my interest – especially because it was a relatively recent event.

First, some background: Lone Tree, is a growing City in the South Denver Metropolitan area in Douglas County Colorado, roughly centered on the interchange of I-25 and C/E-470. Though I grew up in Loveland, Colorado in the 1980s, I had never even heard of Lone Tree until applying for a job with the City. I had driven through it many times circa 2005 on my way to Park Meadows Mall from the house I lived at in Franktown; however, had never really differentiated it from some part of Centennial, Englewood, Littleton, or Highlands Ranch. According to the US Census, Lone Tree’s population grew from 4,873 in 2000 to 10,218 in 2010. Maybe crazier, though not yet incorporated, Lone Tree as a place had a population of 1,287 in 1990 and an estimated population of 12,779 in 2015. Lone Tree’s population has basically doubled every ten years. Encompassing roughly ten square miles in 2015, mostly undeveloped, Lone Tree is expected to reach nearly 40,000 residents at full build out sometime in the future, maybe sooner than later.

It was unsurprising that I was unaware of Lone Tree the City in the mid-2000s. It was only just incorporated in November 1995 and became a Colorado Home Rule City on May 5, 1998. I was vaguely aware of the area known as RidgeGate, and the aforementioned Park Meadows Mall. Most cities in Colorado – really most cities everywhere – were incorporated so long ago that nobody alive could tell the story in the first person.

Today, Lone Tree houses major employment centers such as a 5000-employee Charles Schwab Campus and Sky Ridge Medical Center, multiple residential subdivisions, apartment complexes, and a myriad of restaurants, retailers, offices, and other businesses. Can’t forget the mall!

Back to my original question: How did Lone Tree get its name? Who named it? This question led me down quite a rabbit hole. Though I haven’t found the definitive answer yet... A story of a place literally invented from the ground up by a handful of developers, residents, and dreamers emerged. More than a Colorado story, it is a Western story told upon the striking landscapes of the New World. It is an American Story, and an unlikely one. Searching for the origin of a name, I have compiled as many Lone
Tree stories as I could find. It’s a story for future generations, told by those involved, while they are still with us. You can’t make this stuff up! Enjoy

Looking West from the Bluffs Regional Park
and the Author Enjoying some Lone Tree Recreational Opportunities
The Earliest Inhabitants

Schweiger Ranch, Then and Now

No history of Lone Tree would be complete without recognizing the people who lived here before the arrival of European settlers. People lived in present day Colorado as long ago as 10,000 BCE. In 1682, French explorers Rene-Robert Cavelier and Sieur de La Salle claimed Colorado for France. Later, the Spanish led by Juan Maria Rivera searched for gold and silver in southern Colorado. Indigenous peoples that may have lived in these parts include the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Ute, Shoshone, Comanche, Pawnee and Kiowa. They lived a nomadic lifestyles. One of the first European settlers in the area were Austrian emigrants John, Joseph, and Jacob Schweiger. The following is from the City’s website:

About Schweiger Ranch

Schweiger Ranch is the principal historic resource in the City of Lone Tree and an important cultural asset for the region. Nestled on 38-acres southeast of I- 25 and RidgeGate Parkway, the ranch is a historic gem amidst growth and development of an urban area. This juxtaposition of old and new provides a unique perspective of human settlement over time.
The Ranch was established in 1874 by Austrian emigrants John, Joseph, and Jacob Schweiger. Through purchase and homestead, the brothers began to assemble a sprawling landholding that at its zenith would comprise an estimated 4,000 acres. The Schweigers were among the earliest permanent settlers in the area. John Schweiger, eventually married Anna Scheider, a German emigrant, and built the home you see today for his growing family. They successfully farmed corn, rye, wheat, alfalfa, oats, apples and potatoes, and raised cattle (including a dairy operation), chickens and other animals. The ranch house, barn, loafing shed, and horse barn were built between 1894 and 1910. Over time a silo, tractor shed, chicken coop, granary, and cistern were added.

The Schweiger family owned and operated the ranch for nearly 100 years. Historic photos and historic accountings from Rose (see a sample of Rose's writings), the oldest of seven children raised on the ranch, relay a rich history characteristic of many pioneer families living in a remote and often harsh environment. The property was sold in 1970 and changed hands many times before coming under the ownership of RidgeGate Investments, Inc., the entity developing RidgeGate.

Reference

Wyoming makes me think about how Lone Tree might have looked before people subdivided, developed, and planted trees. Truly, Lone Tree might be the perfect name, if there was even a Tree in 1955. It would have looked much like the area around Cheyenne, Wyoming does today. Take me home where the antelope roam!

1955 Aerial Photo of the Lone Tree Area
Lone Tree 1993 Aerial Photo

Something about looking at the progression of historic aerial photos reminds of the popular misquote from the movie Field of Dreams, “if you build it they will come.” It is actually “if you build it, he will come.” Still, Lone Tree was, and still is, a field of dreams of sorts, and they did come.
Sharon Van Ramshorst

Purely from luck, I uncovered what I thought to be a solid lead in the history of Lone Tree’s name. I emailed Sharon Van Ramshorst, Vice President on the Board of Directors of the Charter Homeowner Association (HOA) – Lone Tree’s first subdivision and oldest HOA. I heard that she was the go-to person for local history inquiries. The following is from our email correspondence:

Dear Sharon:

I hope your day is going well! I am conducting a little research into the history of Lone Tree, and was wondering if you knew who the original developer was for the Charter subdivision? I am curious about the origin of the name Lone Tree. I know it was originally platted as Lone Tree Filing Number 1 in 1981 – the first instance I can see of the “Lone Tree” name appearing. Historically, there was a Lone Tree School somewhere southwest of Loveland in the late 1880s – near current day Lone Tree Reservoir – and was wondering if there was some connection to that place and name. The school was moved to Lake Loveland where it is located today. Perhaps one of the original developers was from this area – or it could be a complete coincidence as well!
From Sharon:

“I am unaware of any connection to anything in the north metro area having anything to do with Lone Tree in Douglas County. Ken Good was originally involved in the Lone Tree development. Right off the top of my head I can't recall the name of the developer after Good. At the end it was Triland Development and Onufry Shinkewski (pronounced “On Off Free Shin kew ski”) was their representative in Lone Tree.

I don't think anyone knows how they arrived at the name. That has been discussed in the past to no avail. Onufry didn't come until later in the process so I don't think he even knows. I believe all of the developers were Canadian. Onufry is in Edmonton now I believe. When he left Lone Tree he returned to Canada. Onufry was the best thing that ever happened to Lone Tree in the early years. We finally had someone we could believe when he told you something. It was Block Brothers in the beginning. Then there was Triland. Then there was Leslie Development. Don White interacted with the developer. Ken Goode owned the property where c-470 was built. The first developer that was in the housing part was Triland.

There is also a "spot in the road" called Lonetree in southwest Colorado. I believe it is southwest of Ignacio.”
Historic Lone Tree Schoolhouse in Loveland, Colorado

Built in 1888 on land donated by B.R. Bonnell to serve families southwest of Loveland named for the single hackberry tree growing nearby. The school closed in 1920 and was used for a community center until 1940, then for grain storage until abandoned. The building was donated to the Loveland community by the W.E. Morey family for preservation. The Loveland Bicentennial Committee of 1976 undertook restoration & completed the project in 1985 with the assistance of area organizations and volunteers. Operated by Loveland Museum & Gallery.
Developer Kenneth Good changed the face of New Tampa

The trail on the origin of the name was going cold; however, an internet search for Ken Good yielded an interesting story – his obituary. Though recent in the annuls of human and municipal history, 20 years is a long span of time for creatures who’s bodies only last on average about 79 years. Ken Good was a kind of latter-day *empresario*, part developer and part hustler – American. His story was westward expansion in reverse, starting in the west and ending in the east. Ken was an undoubtedly interesting person.

*Developer Kenneth Good changed the face of New Tampa*

By Bill Varian, Times Staff Writer

*Tampa Bay Times*

Tuesday, August 16, 2011

The story of Florida is the story of men like Ken Good.

Mr. Good came to Tampa in the mid 1980s by way of Dallas and Denver, a wheeler-dealer with friends in high places, having completed the purchase of thousands of acres of scrub north of the University of South Florida.

He left four years later in a fog of bank repossessions, but he had set in motion a wave of home building that would direct development — and the very shape of Tampa — for the next two decades.

"He changed the face of New Tampa," said Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn. "He believed in New Tampa and had a vision for New Tampa before anyone else saw it."
Kenneth Marston Good, one of the leading developers of the tony Tampa Palms community, died in Dallas on Saturday of complications stemming from leukemia. He was 67.

Mr. Good arrived in Tampa in 1985 with a maroon Maserati sports car and wowed bigwigs with rides in his Learjet. He had just purchased 5,400 acres from Miami-based Deltona Corp. that had been slated for tract housing.

At the time, Bruce B. Downs Boulevard was known only as State Road 581, a dusty two-lane, dead-end road to nowhere. Tampa had been losing population steadily for years.

The newcomer announced plans for a gleaming "New City in the City" of 30,000 homes, many of them high end. Mr. Good gobbled up surrounding land and also purchased Plantation-based Gulf Stream Land & Development Corp. to amass more than 30,000 acres in Florida.

Before he'd arrived, Deltona had arranged to have Tampa Palms annexed by the city because Hillsborough County could not offer modern municipal amenities such as water and sewer service. As construction got under way, large landowners to the north sought annexation and began breaking ground as well, a boom that would spread well into Pasco County for years.

Mr. Good took up residence in a 5,000-square-foot golf course home in the community.

"No doubt his project left a huge impact, not only with those living in New Tampa, but in terms of how Tampa was defined as a city on the move," said former Gov. Bob Martinez, who was Tampa mayor at the time.
Mr. Good was born in Wichita, Kan., to Forest and Ruby Dee Good, his father a strict Methodist minister. He had completed his first major real estate development transaction by age 22.

During the recession of the 1970s, he narrowly escaped bankruptcy. He relocated to Denver, where he oversaw a series of large-scale developments.

In Denver, he developed close associations with high-ranking state officials. Later congressional hearings investigated his investments with Neil Bush, son of the first President George Bush and brother of the second. Neil Bush was a director of Silverado Savings and Loan, which had lent Mr. Good and his partners $132 million and would go bust in 1988.

For a time, business appeared to thrive. Mr. Good owned Denver's largest home, a $10 million, 33,000-square-foot mansion with a separate plumbing system that pumped Scotch, gin and vodka.

But the real estate business was showing signs of trouble by the time he arrived in Tampa.

Mr. Good's business model appeared to hinge on using his acquisitions to secure more loans, which worked fine when the money was flowing. But the real estate recession that hit Florida hard in the late 1980s struck Denver even sooner, rippling to Mr. Good's Florida holdings.

Lenders foreclosed on Tampa Palms and his homes there and in Denver. Mr. Good left Tampa in 1989, returning to Dallas where, according to news accounts, he continued to work deals.

Times researcher John Martin and staff writer Richard Danielson contributed to this report, which includes information from the Washington Post and the Dallas Morning News.

BIOGRAPHY

Kenneth Marston Good

Born: Aug. 3, 1944.
Survivors: Wife Carmen; children Ken Jr., Lily, Tiffany and Tony; brother Wally Good; sister Ernestine Holmes; and four grandchildren.

Reference

Onufry Shinkewski

I searched online for information on the other original developers that Ms. Van Ramshorst mentioned, but the trail was cold. Development partnerships and companies change like the weather in Colorado—and since this was during the pre-internet days of the 1980s, much of that history is probably yellowing in a file cabinet somewhere. However, a search for Onufry Shinkewski did yield some interesting results, and other than a tenuous ownership connection to a Burger King in Calgary, Alberta, I discovered that as of 2014, Shinkewski was Vice President, Alberta Region, for Genstar Development Company. I also found an article about a Genstar development project in Calgary, and interestingly, from the accompanying picture, Calgary looks a lot like Lone Tree.

Calgary, Alberta, CA
The following excerpt is from an article on Genstar from the *Calgary Herald*:

“Onufry Shinkewski, Alberta vice-president for Genstar, says the company is moving steadily forward with development activity.

“Although we have created many significant communities in Calgary in the past and are working on our new communities today, we continue to do so in a very professional manner, but also with the expertise and knowledge that we have gained over our 65-year history. We believe that our communities speak for themselves,” he says.

Genstar has master-planned communities in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto, as well California and Georgia.”

Reference


*Calgary Skyline*
The Charter

The following is featured on the Charter HOA’s website, and reprinted here courtesy of Sharon Van Ramshorst. Clearly, the origins of Lone Tree as a place date long before its incorporation as a city. It paints a picture of a place that was literally invented from the prairie grass up. Perhaps more interesting, it describes how the concerns of involved citizens about the destiny of their place eventually planted the seeds of incorporation.

History

Some Early History of Lone Tree & the Formation of the HOA

An explanation of our name “Lone Tree Homeowners Association” – it was selected in the early 1980’s when we were the only single family area in Lone Tree and that is how we are registered with the State of Colorado. Our Covenants refer to us as “Filing #1” (although the developer named all other filings we did not receive a name), so we asked residents for suggestions and became “The Charter”. From time to time you may see those names used interchangeably.

A new subdivision known as Lone Tree opened in northern Douglas County on Memorial Day weekend 1982. The first resident had moved in and the second and third arrived a few days later. By the fall of 1982 approximately nine residents lived in Lone Tree. During that time the Park Meadows Metropolitan District was formed. An election was held in early fall in which about nine people (several representing developers) cast ballots. The formation of the district passed by one vote, putting the district $8 million in debt (nearly one million per current resident).

As more residents arrived they began asking questions about amenities that were repeatedly advertised but didn’t exist. Brochures touted scenic biking and jogging trails and acres and acres of wide-open spaces. The only visible trail started behind the Lone Tree Information Center (where the Lone Tree Civic
Center is now located) and stopped just before reaching Sweetwater Road, near the intersection of Sweetwater Rd and Lodgepole Trail. That was the extent of the trail system. There were no parks and there were no plans to provide any within Lone Tree.

As spring arrived residents noticed campers in side yards and streets. The new neighborhood in Lone Tree was quickly taking on the character of other neighborhoods in Northern Douglas County that had no covenant enforcement. The developer was approached about enforcing the covenants, which had been filed with the county. The residents voiced strong complaints as they were finding that the quality neighborhood they thought they had purchased homes in was not living up to their expectations. Eventually the developer did provide some assistance, as well as later allowing the association to have an Architectural Control Representative (ACC).

Early Lone Tree residents became concerned about how they were going to be able to enforce their covenants since the developer had not established a mandatory association. In fact, no association had been established. Without funds they realized it was going to be next to impossible to enforce covenants in the event there was a need to require compliance. The concerns were not only about recreational vehicles parked in private yards, streets and drive, but also about exterior changes to properties, including paint colors, and the addition of storage sheds, etc. Everyone knew that within a few years the repainting process would begin and some procedures and controls must exist to properly monitor exterior changes. It had also come to their attention that there was no process in place to maintain the medians once the developer left Lone Tree since Douglas County did not accept such responsibilities. Concerted efforts began to try to find a way to resolve all these concerns.

Within a year or so residents began to talk of forming their own HOA and soon an association was formed and monthly meetings began to discuss the many issues that were being raised. We registered with Douglas County to be on the Referral List and as such, received all information and packets concerning new development within Lone Tree and areas adjacent to us. We reviewed this information and when we had concerns we made trips to Castle Rock to make our case before the Planning Commission and County Commissioners. By 1985 our association had prepared By-Laws and filed the proper paper work with the State of Colorado. An official election was held for officers.
Items of special concern when reviewing Referral Packets were whether or not the developer was providing other filings with the amenities they had been promised when they purchased their home in Lone Tree (i.e. trails, parks, proper setbacks, as well as a mandatory homeowners association). When they felt the developer had not met their expectations they voiced their opinions to the Douglas County Commissioners, traveling to Castle Rock and speaking at the public hearings, quickly becoming a well respected voice from Lone Tree. As a result of this involvement every other filing in Lone Tree (except The Charter and The Vista) was established with a mandatory association. The Vista was a part of our association until 2006 when they withdrew to form their own association.

A monthly newsletter was started. Homeowners took turns printing the newsletter and hand delivering it to all residents. They also organized a TGIF Party which was held monthly and area residents took turns hosting the event. This allowed new neighbors to become acquainted and informed in order to work together for our common goals. We also had an Over-the-Hill Ski Group, Bridge Group, Pinochle Group, Gourmet Group, Out to Lunch Bunch.

Recognizing that parks were an important part of a community the association pleaded with the developer to provide parks, trails and open space as promised. Finally, after a meeting with the developer, the association received a letter from the developer telling them that if they promised to never oppose him before the county again, he would build a park just before he left Lone Tree. Instead, representatives of the association appeared at the next Lone Tree public hearing in Castle Rock with the developer’s offer in hand, along with brochures from the Lone Tree Information Center, advertising acres and acres of wide open spaces and scenic biking and jogging trails winding throughout the development of Lone Tree. They made sure the Douglas County Commissioners understood that Lone Tree residents purchased their homes based on these advertised incentives that were not being realized.

Douglas County stopped all development in Lone Tree until the developer found a way to provide what had been promised to the residents of Lone Tree. Unfortunately, The Charter and The Vista were too far along in the development process and did not have trails included in their neighborhoods. Instead the developer constructed the trail along the golf course running along Lone Tree Parkway. This associated negotiated trails through the Cypress Green neighborhood from Sunningdale to Lincoln Ave and another trail running through Terra Ridge, which included a small pocket park. We asked that these be located
within the neighborhood for ease of accessibility for all those residents. All of this eventually became a reality thanks to the assistance of South Suburban Parks & Recreation District. They were very supportive of our efforts, and without their cooperation, we would not have been able to accomplish the open space that we have today. South Suburban was also responsible for obtaining and funding the trail, which runs north from Sweetwater Park to County Line Road. This association also drew up plans that suggested a trail under the power lines to the west as well as between Lone Tree and Acres Green. After many years these too became a reality.

The land to the east of the golf course was originally zoned “office park.” The developer of that property (The Bill Walters Companies) came to the homeowners association and offered to build a three to four acre park in return for the homeowner associations’ support to rezone the land to “primarily residential.” In addition, the developer offered to build a 1500 square foot library but was unwilling to provide the land for either. The association finally found land that could be used for the library near the Cook Creek Pool. This facility was later called Oakes Mill Library. Land found for the park (now known as Sweetwater Park and previously referred to as the area ‘out by the little red barn’ which was occupied by one horse in the early days of Lone Tree) had been previously set aside for a school site but was no longer needed for that purpose. It was located not far from where the trail now forks as it enters Sweetwater Park. As time went on, the association realized a park of this size was insufficient to meet our needs and instead requested an eight-acre park. In addition, they requested a full basement be added to the library building plans. After a number of meetings, the developer agreed to the terms.

The developer agreed to pay the cost constructing the park that was to be completed in one year, and South Suburban Parks and Recreation would maintain the park once it was finished. The homeowners’ association requested that the County Commissioners require the developer to post a Letter of Credit to cover the cost of the park in the event the promise was not fulfilled. Our request was granted. In addition, this association pointed out that there were no parks or trails planned in the proposed new residential area east of the lake that was to become “The Fairways.” The association insisted that land for a three to four acre park and a trail running through the entire area to Lincoln Avenue be set aside to serve the future residents. The association insisted the developer construct the trail FIRST, and South Suburban agreed they would maintain the trail but it must be constructed to their specifications. The developer finally agreed to the terms.
Many months later an executive board member thought he saw a trail in that area. A call to the president of the association resulted in members of the executive board checking into the matter and discovering that indeed the trail had been constructed in its entirety. A check with South Suburban Parks and Recreation revealed that they were as surprised as the association that the trail was already in place. No notice had been provided to them that any construction was in progress. Unfortunately, they had not been able to ensure that construction was according to their specifications but, as previously promised, accepted the maintenance of that trail system.

Three years later there was still no park, and the homeowners’ association continued its complaints to Douglas County Commissioners. Finally a public hearing was called to begin the process of calling the Letter of Credit. It was only at that time that the developer seriously began the process of building Sweetwater Park. Within the year the park was completed, four years later than anticipated, and it is now a well-used park by many Lone Tree and Acres Green residents. Certainly it was a time consuming process for the association but ultimately worth the effort. Many mistakenly believe that Sweetwater Park is in the City of Lone Tree. That property was given by the Acres Green developer to the school district for a possible school site. When it wasn’t needed we requested the school district to release it and allow it to be developed into a park.

After watching taxes skyrocket due to Park Meadows Metropolitan District board members reimbursing developers for their costs of major roadways, via raising taxes, in 1984 when the first seats became available on the Park Meadows Metropolitan District Board, this association made sure that two residents were ready to step into those seats. When additional seats became available, two more residents stepped up to serve. We maintained control of that board for many years.

A Letter of Credit had been posted, previously, by developers to cover the original debt of $8 million, but in the late1980’s, Lone Tree residents who served on that board refused to raise the mil levy high enough to cover the debt. That decision resulted in the Letter of Credit being called. Those same residents stopped the practice of reimbursing the developer unless there were sufficient funds available without raising taxes. These actions saved all residents in the district significant money over the years. Today, five Lone Tree residents sit on that board and determine how the tax monies Lone Tree residents pay are being spent in the district.
The Park Meadows Metropolitan District now maintains the medians and right-of-way along the major thoroughfares within the District. Another of our early concerns resolved. They have been a great partner with the City of Lone Tree and Douglas County to help ensure that we are able to maintain our streets and provide upgrades when needed.

This association encouraged Park Meadows Metropolitan District to consider purchasing the Information Center when the developer moved out. They believed it would be an amenity to the neighborhood, providing a much needed meeting space as well as serving the needs of Park Meadows Metropolitan District. PMMD did purchase the building. It was later sold to the City of Lone Tree and it served many HOA’s, scout troops, bridge groups, etc. over the years and provided space for council chambers for the Lone Tree City Council. During the summer of 2004, this building was demolished for the construction of a new Civic Center, which serves as City Council Chambers. Two meetings rooms in the lower level are available for other functions and are often booked by the community. Eventually offices for the City of Lone Tree will be located in RidgeGate in the City Center east of I-25, but this move is expected to be many years away.

When a home on Seven Arrows burned, and the fire department was hampered in fighting the fire due to the fire hydrant being plugged up with rocks, the association set up a meeting to discuss the matter with the fire district. The meeting was well attended by many concerned residents. As a result, every fire hydrant in the neighborhood was checked in the weeks that followed to ensure that they were all operational.

As Lone Tree grew, the association established yearly dues of $25.00. These dues were raised to $35.00/year in 2002. The HOA has sponsored the “Yard of the Month” program during the summer months for nearly 20 years. There have been a variety of committees as various needs arose such as a parks committee, trail committee, airport committee, social committee, fence committee, and Yard of the Month and Christmas decoration committees. This association began the July 4th Celebration with a parade and BBQ which continued for about 10 years until the City of Lone Tree assumed responsibility a number of years ago and made it an even bigger and better event.

This association also started the Concerts in the Park and invited everyone in Lone Tree to attend. The City of Lone Tree now sponsors this and does a tremendous job! The association is pleased the city
thought it was a worthwhile endeavor and was willing to take over the responsibility. Currently the association sponsors a Hayride/Sleigh Ride with refreshments and a visit from Santa during the Christmas season for our members. There is an Easter Egg Hunt in the spring if the Colorado weather cooperates.

Members of the executive board and this association supported the incorporation of the City of Lone Tree. They believed that Lone Tree would be better represented with residents of Lone Tree making decisions about development in and around our neighborhood. Later some of these same residents worked on the annexation of the Rampart Range property to the south of Lincoln Avenue and east of I-25.

This article provides an overview of the many projects and activities this association has been involved in over the years. A major accomplishment the association can take credit for was persuading the city to construct brick fencing along the major arterials in the original Lone Tree. The gray fencing was becoming an embarrassment, and there was no way to ensure that all fencing would be maintained in a consistent manner. The Executive Board is pleased it was finally able to convince the city to construct the brick fencing for all neighborhoods. This beautiful fencing benefits all residents of Lone Tree.

This association purchased monument signs for The Vista and The Charter including the installation of landscaping around the monument signs in The Vista. Other associations quickly followed our lead and now nearly every neighborhood is identified.

Your executive board members regularly attend Planning Commission/City Council meetings. They closely monitor new development and the decisions of the Lone Tree City Council. Information, which is relevant to you, is provided in a newsletter that is sent to every member throughout the year and non-members occasionally.

The executive board consists of not less than five (5) members who serve two-year terms. The terms are staggered with an election each year. This process has worked well, as it ensures there are members with experience remaining on the board. It also makes it possible for the president to be someone who has been on the executive board for at least one year, although this is not mandatory. Candidates are elected to the executive board and those members of the executive board then decide positions.
Members of the association are elected to the Architectural Control Committee, which consists of not less than three (3) members. All members of the association over 18 years of age are eligible to vote in these elections or to run for a position.

Thanks to the efforts of this association there are now trails within our area, as well as several parks. The Library is a reality due to our negotiations with the developer of the Fairways. Oakes Mill Library was later torn down to make room for a larger facility, now known as the Lone Tree Library.

You can see that this association has been active for many years and has made significant contributions to the community that we are today. We’ve always been active and have been the “voice” of Lone Tree heard at the County. Our voice is now mostly directed to the City of Lone Tree but we have never been afraid to speak up when we believe it is important. We’ve accomplished all of this and more, despite originally not having an identity or a mandatory association.

Reference

Heaven is a Suburb: Towards Incorporation

The earliest article I found on the history of Lone Tree was featured in the Denver-area, alternative newspaper *Westword*.

Heaven is a Suburb  
By Stuart Steers  
*Westword*  
Thursday, May 23, 1996 | 20 years ago

The Lone Tree Golf Club describes itself as "a public country club," and the oxymoron seems entirely fitting. The gabled roof of the 50,000-square-foot clubhouse looms over the fairway, and the club boasts a full-service restaurant and bar, a parquet dance floor, a boardroom, and even suites for overnight visitors. On a sunny afternoon, a group of ladies in bright-green golf shirts emblazoned with the Lone Tree logo sip iced tea and nibble on salads in the restaurant, watching men in khaki trousers tee off on the driving range just outside the window.

Lone Tree looks and acts like a private country club ("Men's Shirts Must Have a Collar" warns one sign) because that's exactly how it started. The club was the centerpiece of an early 1980s real estate development that wrapped hundreds of homes, some selling for as much as $600,000, around a golf course designed by Arnold Palmer. When the club's developer went bankrupt in Denver's end-of-the-decade real estate rout, the South Suburban Park and Recreation District was lucky enough to purchase the golf club for $4.7 million, giving area residents one of the poshest public courses in the country. But Lone Tree's lucky streak is really just beginning. To understand why, all you have to do is look down the fairway toward the northeast.
The golf club sits on a hilltop, and duffers have picture-perfect views of the massive Park Meadows mall now under construction at I-25 and County Line Road. The shiny copper roofs sparkle against the blue sky, and signs are already up for the Nordstrom and Dillard's department stores that will anchor what developers insist is not a mere shopping mall but Colorado's first "retail resort." Across the street from Park Meadows, the Incredible Universe store already has a full parking lot, and a jumble of bulldozers and concrete foundations herald the future homes of superstores like Home Depot, Barnes & Noble and Bed, Bath & Beyond.

This retail explosion, coupled with a bit of wily maneuvering by residents, has given birth to Colorado's newest municipality. And the city of Lone Tree, which will hold its first city council election next month, will soon be one of the richest. The enclave takes up little more than one square mile and is home to just 2,500 people. But Lone Tree has a retail bonanza at its doorstep. The tiny city is poised to collect millions of dollars in sales tax from the thousands of metro residents who will come to shop in the area. Residents can expect to see their property taxes slashed as the sales-tax revenue pours in. And that will be just the beginning of Lone Tree's good fortune.

The city's neighborhoods will likely be among the safest in the metro area, as five full-time police officers patrol two dozen quiet streets. Hundreds of new trees and shrubs will shade those boulevards, as lavish landscaping goes in on residential streets and along County Line Road, Yosemite Street and C-470. Welcome signs with a distinctive Lone Tree logo will greet the public, and elaborate fountains will splash in the summer sun at major intersections.

If Lone Tree's founders have their way, the city will no longer be a semi-obscure subdivision on the south side of County Line Road. Instead, it will take its rightful place as one of the Denver area's premier destinations. "I'd love to be in a position where this community is not looked at as just another suburban community," says Kevin Maiman, an activist in the incorporation effort who is now running for city treasurer. "The [elite] communities that are successful, like Beverly Hills or Seaside, Florida, have an established image. There's all sorts of things we can do to make Lone Tree a place you recognize on the map."

Boosters of the incorporation campaign told Lone Tree voters last November that the new city could collect $1.8 million a year by assessing a 1.5 percent sales tax. Those estimates were based on sales at
existing stores within the city limits, including Incredible Universe, Sam's Club and Denver Sports. When Barnes & Noble, Pier 1, Home Depot, Bed, Bath & Beyond and several other stores open this fall, Lone Tree revenues will skyrocket.

So far, the Hahn Company, the developer of Park Meadows, has refused to allow its shiny new mall to be annexed into Lone Tree. But if town officials can change Hahn's mind--and they plan to try--they'll truly hit the mother lode. With projected sales of $300 million in the first year, the 1.5 million-square-foot mall could be raking in as much as $400 million a year by the turn of the century. Foley's and Joslins will open at Park Meadows next year, and J.C. Penney and Macy's are both rumored to be in discussions with Hahn about going into the mall. If Park Meadows is ever brought inside the town boundary, Lone Tree might collect as much as $6 million per year in additional sales-tax revenue.

Park Meadows is expected to draw shoppers from all over Colorado as well as neighboring states such as Wyoming and New Mexico. Many of those consumers will also patronize the superstores in Lone Tree, across Yosemite Street from the mall. That means the people paying Lone Tree's bills will almost entirely be residents of other communities. "The people shopping in the stores are the ones paying the sales tax," says Maiman, clearly buoyed by the prospect. "The tax burden goes to a different source than Lone Tree residents."

But Maiman and the other Lone Tree founders say it's only right that they should benefit from all the commercial development. After all, they say, they will bear a burden as thousands of cars stream along the edge of their neighborhood and the once laid-back area along County Line Road is transformed into a retail mecca to rival Cherry Creek. "We are lucky," says Maiman. "But those businesses came to our doorstep. People will be driving on our roads, and there's a criminal element that comes with that development.

"We have a unique opportunity here," he adds. "It's not being selfish. We're a small area with a group of people who've worked diligently to see this thing through from start to finish."

If a historian ever sits down and writes up the saga of the city of Lone Tree, Jane Staebell will be the story's Martha Washington. A young wife and mother who favors floral prints and sandals, Staebell has worked hard for the past two years to bring Colorado's newest city into being. Like Lone Tree's other
founders, she wants the area to be more than just another suburban subdivision, and she hopes that fistfuls of sales-tax dollars will buy Lone Tree an identity it's been missing.

"There's been a lack of cohesiveness," she says. "In the residential area of Lone Tree, we have thirteen or fourteen homeowners' associations. There are medians with landscaping that haven't been maintained. There needs to be some sort of plan for the retail area instead of a hodgepodge. With a city, you can address those issues."

Lone Tree's boundaries stretch only from County Line Road on the north to East Lincoln Avenue on the south, and from Highlands Ranch on the west to South Yosemite Street on the east. But like many residents, Staebell often compares Lone Tree with its huge next-door neighbor.

Lone Tree denizens sometimes see their community as a stray cat that lives next to a development dragon. Whereas Lone Tree was developed in pieces by developers who came and went, Highlands Ranch has a master plan that gives the huge project--now home to 35,000 people--a feeling of order and symmetry Lone Tree residents envy. "Highlands Ranch is huge, but it all looks nice," says Staebell. But smallness has its virtues. Staebell and others who pushed for cityhood were able to hold dozens of intimate meetings with Lone Tree residents, getting to know their neighbors as well as any big-city ward heeler. Initially, most homeowners were skeptical of the virtues of incorporation, believing it would simply add another layer of government. Staebell and her fellow activists asked residents to hold their tongues while they made presentations. "During the meetings, we wouldn't let people talk until they'd heard the whole thing," she says. "Once we put the pieces together, it all fell into place. It's all very logical once you get it all put together."

Last November residents voted in favor of incorporation by a margin of 676 to 165. Creation of the new city government was delayed when Tandy Corporation, owner of Incredible Universe, filed suit in December, challenging the election on procedural grounds. Tandy feared that a higher sales tax might hurt sales of big-ticket items at Incredible Universe. Douglas County District Judge Tom Curry threw out most of the Tandy suit in January but said the city founders had erred by publishing a notice of the charter election in the Rocky Mountain News instead of in a Douglas County newspaper. Because of that ruling, which delayed the first municipal election until June 4, Lone Tree for now is a city without a city government.
Most of the elected offices will be filled without opposition next month. Staebell is unopposed for one of just two city council seats, as are mayoral candidate Jack O'Boyle and treasurer candidate Kevin Maiman. The only contested offices will be for city clerk and the other council seat. The new city council will quickly propose a 1.5 percent sales tax, which residents will have to okay in next November’s general election.

Lone Tree's existence is all about taxes, but it was the voters' rejection of another tax that helped bring the city into being. After first proposing to build a new mall in 1993, Hahn asked voters in the Park Meadows Metropolitan District to approve $12 million in bonds for road construction around the shopping center. Lone Tree is included within the boundaries of the district, which maintains roads and provides other basic services for several subdivisions in the area. Staebell says it was Hahn that first floated the idea of creating a new city surrounding the mall, a concept the developer introduced while campaigning for the bond issue.

District voters defeated the bond proposal by a 2-to-1 ratio in November 1993. But Staebell says she believed a new mall would benefit the area, helping to transform Lone Tree's image the same way the Cherry Creek shopping center turned Cherry Creek North into one of Denver's most fashionable addresses. She and others decided that creating a city would be the best way to pay for Hahn's infrastructure, she recalls. "We started doing various scenarios with the mall included. It was very viable."

But Hahn, fearing rival proposals for new regional malls, was in a hurry to break ground. The company raised the money for the infrastructure costs privately and will pay off its debt by assessing a 1 percent fee on all purchases at the mall.

Still, the temptation of cityhood proved hard to resist. Lone Tree residents watched while barren land that had gone unnoticed for years was suddenly snatched up by developers eager to put up "category killer" stores across the street from Park Meadows. Some of that property had once been owned by notorious ex-Denver real estate operators Bill Walters and Ken Good, who played a key role in the $1 billion collapse of the Silverado thrift. Many Lone Tree residents had already lived through one real estate boom and bust, and they recognized a new boom when they saw it. As each new project was announced, Staebell and her friends estimated the sales tax that would be generated and soon realized
there would be more than enough to support a small city, even without Park Meadows. "Once we saw something coming out of the ground, we put the sales-tax projections into what we needed for revenues," she says.

By last summer, the residents were ready to make their civic dream come true. In August, sixty people carried petitions door to door down the drowsy streets of Lone Tree, asking for signatures to put the incorporation proposal on the ballot. The campaign stressed that cityhood could be paid for with taxes paid by other people. The persistence of the activists was rewarded in November, when they garnered almost 80 percent of the vote.

Lone Tree's founders insist they're not interested in creating a new bureaucracy. The five new police officers patrolling Lone Tree will be Douglas County sheriff's deputies under contract with the town. The county will also continue to provide zoning and planning services. Lone Tree's roads will still be maintained by the Park Meadows Metropolitan District.

But the city's residents will see payoffs other residents of the county can only dream of. The first will come when the $100 annual charge the owner of a $200,000 home in Lone Tree is now assessed for law enforcement is eliminated next year. (In affluent Lone Tree, few houses are worth less than $200,000--and several are worth $1 million.) When the proposed sales tax goes into effect next January, Maiman says, Lone Tree will have annual revenues of $1.5 million to $2 million. And he says that forecast is on the low side. "We chose to be conservative," notes Maiman. "If anything, we underestimated revenues."

As soon as those revenues start streaming in, Lone Tree will likely surpass Glendale as the metro-area city that collects the most sales tax per resident. Ski-resort towns like Breckenridge are tops in the state in per capita sales-tax collection, according to figures provided by the Colorado Municipal League. That Summit County town draws more than $2,250 per resident. But on the local front, Lone Tree is expected to easily surpass the $510 per resident Glendale now collects from its own string of big-box retailers along Colorado Boulevard. Surprisingly, the former mayor of Glendale is a critic of small cities like Lone Tree being formed to collect sales-tax revenue.

"It's not illegal, but it smacks of abuse," says Steve Ward, who is now running for Arapahoe County commissioner. "Theoretically, when you annex land into a city, there should be a reason you do it. I
think revenue-driven annexations drive cynicism toward government. People can form the size cities and towns they want to, but we could use some stronger guidelines in terms of where people are allowed to annex." Ward adds that he's also critical of the way Glendale was laid out thirty years ago; the city takes up about one square mile and is entirely surrounded by Denver.

But Lone Tree's civic pioneers say they are simply taking advantage of a rare chance to improve their community. If Lone Tree hadn't become a city, they believe Littleton or Greenwood Village—or a yet-to-be-created city of Highlands Ranch—would have annexed the commercial area along County Line Road. "All Highlands Ranch would have had to do is look east, and Greenwood Village is making efforts to come south to County Line Road," says Staebell. "If Highlands Ranch had taken that area, they wouldn't have included the residential areas. They would have taken the money, and we'd have the same traffic and zoning problems."

Since the city council hasn't taken office yet and sales-tax collections can't begin until next year, no decisions have been made about what to do with Lone Tree's bounty. But there are plenty of ideas. When voting for incorporation, "most people looked at the quality-of-life issues, with law enforcement and landscaping the streets," says Staebell. "Douglas County is really stretched thin. They don't have the money to pay for those things." Staebell hopes Lone Tree will rebuild certain streets and landscape major thoroughfares. "Projects in the future may be some improvements along C-470," she adds. "There's little to no landscaping. When you drive through a place like Greenwood Village, it has lots of trees. That's one of the areas we'll look at."

Other possibilities include property-tax rebates and refunds to Lone Tree residents for the sales tax they pay on purchases at stores within the city. Free trash pickup and vouchers for golf and swimming at the Lone Tree Golf Club are also under discussion. Staebell would like to see some kind of architectural review board to make sure new commercial development is well-designed. Maiman envisions new signs greeting visitors at the city limits, outdoor fountains, and a public festival that could be held on Arbor Day.

"There's a lot of events that could draw people here for other things than just shopping," Maiman says. "We'd love to have this as a destination for people from Denver and Colorado Springs."
The retailers who'll help pay for this municipal extravaganza seem resigned to the higher sales taxes that will fund the city of Lone Tree. Even Incredible Universe, having failed in its legal effort to fell Lone Tree, apparently has decided that the retail chain reaction now transforming County Line Road will bring in so many new customers that few will notice the higher sales-tax levies. "With all of the building going on around here and the traffic, the sales tax will have a very minimal effect," says Skip Dwyer, general manager of Incredible Universe. "The sales tax will still be lower than in 95 percent of the area."

Once Lone Tree voters approve the 1.5 percent municipal sales tax next fall, the total sales-tax rate in the city will be 5.5 percent. That's less than the 6.8 percent rate in Littleton, 8 percent in Aurora and 7.3 percent in Denver. On the other side of Yosemite, sales tax in the Park Meadows mall in unincorporated Douglas County will be just 4 percent, but that doesn't include the 1 percent surcharge Hahn will tack on to every purchase to pay off the debt it took on to build roads to the shopping center.

The players in Lone Tree's new city government are still hoping they can win Hahn over and get the company's consent to annex Park Meadows. Hosting a regional shopping mall--and garnering millions in new tax revenue--is every city's fondest dream. State law, however, says that a piece of property over forty acres can't be annexed without the permission of the property owner. "There's always been a hope of ours that at some point in time we could negotiate with them to come into Lone Tree," Staebell says. "We could take over some of their infrastructure debt. There could be benefits to both sides."

At the moment, Hahn isn't interested. Company executives say Douglas County is taking care of their needs, and the mall would have little to gain from signing on with Lone Tree. "Throughout the development of the property, we've worked so well with Douglas County," says Pam Schenck, general manager of Park Meadows. But Schenck adds that, whether or not the giant mall does a deal with Lone Tree, it will benefit the community by serving as a buffer between residents and the interstate.

While there's every indication Park Meadows will be successful, the history of some other regional malls shows how one decade's retail star can turn into another era's black hole. Cinderella City in Englewood and the Northglenn Mall were once retail hothouses, drawing shoppers from all over metro Denver. Today both shopping centers have been reduced to mostly empty hulks, and the cities of Englewood and Northglenn have suffered from the loss of sales-tax revenue. Both are now struggling to come up with redevelopment plans for the malls.
Staebell is confident Lone Tree won’t ever face those problems, even though its superstores will be dependent on Park Meadows to draw shoppers. “Cinderella City was never at a prime location,” she says. “It was never easy to get to.” Lone Tree is also in an area of town "that has a higher socioeconomic base than Cinderella City had," Staebell notes. "I just don’t see this mall having the problems they did."

But predicting the fate of a mall twenty years down the road is virtually impossible. Englewood, for instance, was once convinced it would have a perpetual money machine with its now-empty regional mall. "Every mall has a date of obsolescence, and no mall is immune from that," says Eileen Byrne, a Denver retail consultant who has advised local cities on how to revive dying malls. "Cinderella City was a prime location in its day. In 25 years, any number of things could change. The southeast could become too congested and people won’t want to live there. But Park Meadows is designed perfectly for today's market needs."

For now, Lone Tree's financial future looks secure, to say the least. But the city will still face the eternal suburban challenge: the struggle simply to be noticed by one's neighbors. Schenck recently bought a home on the golf course in Lone Tree and says she found out firsthand just how far the town has to go before it has some name recognition in metro Denver. "It's my perception that unless you live in Lone Tree, you don't really know that it exists," she says. "When I registered at my church under Lone Tree, they called me back and said, 'It has to say Littleton.' I said, 'I think it can say Lone Tree or Littleton,' but they said, 'It has to say Littleton.'" Lone Tree only recently got permission from the post office for its residents to use the town name in their mailing addresses.

But Lone Tree's civic boosters are hoping the town's obscurity will soon be a thing of the past. Plans are already in the works for T-shirts and baseball caps with a Lone Tree logo that proudly proclaims Lone Tree as "Colorado's newest city." Maiman wants to work with Lone Tree's retailers to market the area to shoppers. "We're at the intersection of I-25, C-470 and County Line Road. You can't beat the location." Indeed, even as many Coloradans deplore the suburban sprawl now spreading through Douglas County, Maiman celebrates Lone Tree's geographical good fortune. "There's no place in the metro area with more explosive growth in such a concentrated area," he says.

Maiman moved to Lone Tree a year ago from Texas, and he and his wife took an immediate liking to the place. "Our realtor showed us around," he says. "We looked at everything from Cherry Creek south. We
saw our house and fell in love with it. The Park Meadows mall was under construction; that was all we knew."

As for that mall, which for now will continue to sit, siren-like, just out of reach of Lone Tree's tax collectors, Maiman waxes philosophical. "You can take it two ways. You can say, 'That's a big mall and I don't want to be near it,' or 'That's an opportunity we can take advantage of,'" he says. "Some communities would love to be able to do that but can't. We have an opportunity here, and people are excited about it.

Reference

2002 Aerial Photo of Lone Tree
The Mall, the Manager, and My Wardrobe

My first impression and prior knowledge of Lone Tree was all centered on the giant Park Meadows Mall complex. It was the place I used to go to complete my wardrobe needs. One time around 2005 I lost my car there for several hours! It is an enormous development to walk around in circles! Fortunately, security drove me around and we found my car.

An emergent theme in Lone Tree’s history is the fundamental role of women in its creation. Since so many cities (and the US Government) were incorporated in more male-centric eras, the popular lexicon is rife with references to “founding fathers.” However, it interested me that Lone Tree has many stories of its “founding mothers,” influential women such as Pam Schenck-Kelly.

Parker: Park Meadows has had 15 years, one woman at helm

By Penny Parker, Denver Post Columnist

_Denver Post_

September 1, 2011

Fifteen years ago, Pam Schenck-Kelly had to miss one of the pivotal moments in the birth of Park Meadows mall.

Nordstrom opened with a sold-out gala that attracted the area's biggest bigwigs, but Schenck-Kelly (then just Schenck) had to miss the fine-feathered festivities.

She ditched her gold-beaded Nordstrom dress in favor of work clothes to help out some retailers who were having construction issues.

"It's the only real regret I have about opening," Schenck-Kelly said.
Since opening day Aug. 30, 1996, Schenck-Kelly has helmed the mall management as senior general manager. She's survived through three owner-management changes with seven chief executives.

The Hahn Co., which also developed Larimer Square and the Tivoli, built and opened Park Meadows, labeled Colorado's only retail resort (gag). Hahn merged with Trizec to form TrizecHahn. The Rouse Co. acquired Park Meadows and then, in the largest real-estate transaction in the United States, Rouse sold all of its holdings to General Growth Properties in 2004.

As the retail reporter for The Denver Post back then, I covered Park Meadows' arrival in the marketplace ad nauseam, some would say.

Being the first shopping center to bring Nordstrom and Dillard's to the area was no small feat. Park Meadows had many department stores in its heyday: Nordstrom, Dillard's, Joslins, J.C. Penney, Foley's, Macy's and Lord & Taylor. That number has shrunk to five, including Dick's Sporting Goods, after the consolidation of department-store companies.

Park Meadows celebrated its 15th-anniversary milestone Tuesday with a pancake breakfast for the community. It fed 500 folks and donated some of the proceeds to charity.

"I worked my entire career to get to a property like Park Meadows," Schenck-Kelly said. "I've always protected the brand and believed in what I do."

Reference
And the Rest is History...

After 20 years, Lone Tree is setting the bar with incredible potential

By Colleen O'Connor

The Denver Post

August 8, 2014

LONE TREE — Lone Tree, once known only by stereotype — suburban bedroom community with supersized mall — is crafting a sleek new image, attracting trophy companies like Charles Schwab and Cabela's, along with millennials who want urban lifestyles at suburban prices.

When Anna Dreiling, 22, and her fiancé, Michael Gorka, 23, recently looked for a place to live, they chose Lone Tree.

"Everything was clean and new," Dreiling said. "All the businesses, not just the tech industry, are drawing a lot of young people. We saw lots of people our age."

This April, they moved into new luxury apartments called The Vue at RidgeGate.

"It's kind of hip," Dreiling said. "It has all these amenities, and a gorgeous pool with fountains, at a price that's so much lower than you can find in a similar atmosphere downtown."
Two decades after Lone Tree incorporated as a municipality, it's emerging as a prime example of the "edge city" phenomenon — a form of urban growth cropping up near suburban freeway interchanges with clusters of business, entertainment and retail in landscapes that were once rural or residential.

"Edge cities are like satellites in orbit around a big metropolitan city center that's developed its own walkability and downtown transportation," real estate expert Mark Samuelson said. "Lone Tree represents that about as well as any place does."

Since 1995, the city has grown from about 3,000 people with less than $7,000 in annual revenues to 12,000 residents with annual revenues of more than $36 million.

The future looks bright, because in July RTD approved the Southeast Rail Extension that would add three new stations in Lone Tree, unlocking the potential for developing the city's east side, along with transit-oriented developments.

Restaurants are popping up, the Lone Tree Arts Center is thriving and real estate prices are rapidly rising.

A new health services hub includes Kaiser Permanente's new specialty center, along with a $117 million expansion of Sky Ridge Medical Center with a new women's wellness center, and the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine, one of the top fertility clinics in the nation.

Schwab recently opened a new retail branch in Lone Tree, the first building of its new 32-acre campus that will be completed in 2015, and TW Telecom — a Fortune 1000 company just bought by Level 3 Communications — moved to Lone Tree last year.

The city might look like an overnight success, but observers say it's more a tale of toiling away, quietly, for nearly two decades.

"I've really enjoyed watching Lone Tree grow and develop as a city," said Sam Mamet, executive director of the Colorado Municipal League, who credits the city with developing a strong sense of community. "They work hard at what they do. They're not show horses, they're workhorses."
They've also got a strong tax base — fueled by sales from Park Meadows mall — along with prime real estate and smart stewardship.

"They're a smaller town with big leaders and a big vision," said Lynn Myers, vice president of economic development for the Denver South Economic Development Partnership. "You don't always get all those components together. A lot of people have good plans, but they can't get there."

It's the municipal equivalent of being born with good genes and wise parents.

Lone Tree started in 1981 as a tiny group of homes with a golf course designed by Arnold Palmer. A decade later, when Douglas County hit its rapid growth spurt — growing 140 percent between 1980 and 1990 — Lone Tree residents became concerned about the quality of development, so they decided to incorporate in 1995.

The city's first mayor, Jack O'Boyle, was among the new residents who swelled Douglas County's population growth. He moved to Lone Tree in 1994 after Martin Marietta acquired General Dynamics' space system unit, where he'd worked in San Diego.

While making rockets in Douglas County's growing aerospace industry, O'Boyle also served as mayor, working with the City Council to craft a vision. The first hurdle was creating a revenue stream.

"We raised money by selling T-shirts, ball caps and license-plate holders," he recalls.

They also landed two bank loans.

But five years later, they hit an obstacle that could undermine their future success: Highlands Ranch was considering incorporation as a municipality, and O'Boyle got a look at their map.

"Their planning area went through my planning area," he said. "That got my attention. I asked them what was motivating them, and if they knew what they'd done. They just wanted access to I-25. I said, 'That's a smart thing to do, but we have a problem here.' "
The coveted land — a 3,500-acre chunk of prime real estate now known as RidgeGate — stretched east and west of the freeway. Managed by Coventry Development Corp., the land had been purchased in 1972 by a European family that paid with cash, so there was no debt and no rush to develop.

Keith Simon, the company's executive vice president, recalls the tug of war over that property.

"Highlands Ranch had reached out to us and said, 'Why not come in with us, and we'll make a big city," he said. "Lone Tree was very young and small, and they felt like it might be better for us to come in with them."

In the end, Coventry and Lone Tree shared a similar vision, so Lone Tree annexed the land.

"In terms of strategic value, it was our most important annexation," O'Boyle said.

"It's been a very good partnership," Simon said.

The planned light rail extensions will go through that land, and Coventry will donate rights of way worth about $10 million to $15 million.

It took nearly a decade to develop the first part of RidgeGate, which is 1 square mile west of the freeway and nearly complete.

The second part, on the east side of the freeway, is four times as large. "If 1 square mile took 10 years to develop, this could take another 40 years," Simon said. "We're very patient."

Much depends on the construction of the Southeast Rail Extension. Mayor Jim Gunning is confident that RTD will land the $92 million in federal funds needed to extend the light rail farther into Lone Tree. "We're very excited about light rail moving forward," he said. "The minute they get the federal grant, we know that will start activity on the east side."

Those three new light rail stations will be cogs for transit-oriented development.
"There's the opportunity for more density around those stations with the kind of housing options that millennials will look to in the future," City Manager Seth Hoffman said.

And the city will finally have a center, with mixed-use transit-oriented development, a future City Hall and an adjacent Central Park.

"The heart of Lone Tree will shift over," Simon said. "There will be a grid of streets, much like downtown Denver — the blocks are actually modeled on that size."

Much has changed from when sportscaster Susie Wargin moved with her husband to Lone Tree in 1999, after falling in love with the bluffs that edge the city.

"I love living here, and it's growing like absolutely crazy," she said. "I'd love to have it be a small town forever, but a good town can't stay small forever."

Reference

Epilogue

There is an officially designated “lone tree” in Lone Tree; however, there are two trees in the Bluffs Regional Park – which is technically not in Lone Tree but abuts it – that I like to think of as the inspiration behind the name. There is a Lone Tree Creek, starting somewhere near where the current Centennial Airport is, that flows generally northeast into the Cherry Creek system. There is a bit of a Lone Tree Creek trail and even a sign for it where it crosses Arapahoe Road just east of the South Revere Parkway intersection.

My guess is that some of the original developers were playing golf or having drinks and came up with a safe marketing name for their new development. What’s in a name anyway? Maybe nothing, maybe everything. Isn’t America a place where you can invent yourself, an airplane, or maybe even a city? In the search for Lone Tree, I found a story more interesting than the origin of the name. I guess it’s the journey, not the destination, that matters.
The first official place “Lone Tree” appears in the current City limits is on the original subdivision plat, recorded with Douglas County, for what would become the Charter. It is titled Lone Tree Filing No. 1, dated September 29, 1981.

My connection to Lone Tree as a place become a little more than merely intellectual and professional during evening runs of the Bluffs Regional Park trail loop – a grueling, up-hill run no matter which direction you take. Looking down upon the lights of Denver, like stars at your feet, one gets the sensation of flying when running along the mesa ridgeline. The bluffs, as they are locally known, are the fingered edges of a large mesa extending along Lone Tree’s southern perimeter. As a kid growing up in Loveland, I was always fascinated with the idea of the first thunderstorm of the year and the last. These electrical events often bookended the warmer spring, summer, and fall months. The final electrical storm presaged school and the long winter – the first electrical storm, the coming of spring and summer vacation. On one dusk run in November of 2015, I saw lighting flashing and dancing in the distance across the northeastern plains. I knew, due to the radar application on my smartphone that the storms were out towards Sterling – fully 100 miles distant. Such is the view from bluffs.
I thought about the ancient people who came before and how they may have marked the changing of seasons the same way. They would have looked out upon a wild, treeless, high-plains landscape much like one finds in present day Wyoming. The night would have been a dark one, save for campfires and the vast, endless expanse of the stars. One would have been able to see the spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy across the heavens. Today, you have to go somewhere like the Great Sand Dunes National Park for that experience. Still, the view is a grand one. You can look down on all of Lone Tree, see the Denver Tech Center, watch airplanes in the pattern at Centennial airport (actually look down from above as they land), and all the way to Downtown Denver. On clear days, you can see the Flatiron rock formations west of Boulder, Longs Peak’s towering presence in Rocky Mountain National Park, the side profile of Horsetooth Reservoir’s iconic rock, and the tapering hills along the Wyoming – Colorado border.

I also think about what future people will see. Likely, they will see a new skyline directly east in Lone Tree’s planned city center. Many of the dark spaces in between the city lights will be filled in. Who knows what the aircraft and vehicles of the future will look like. Perhaps the world will become fully virtual and the night sky dark again. That view, and the people I worked with and citizens I worked for, were my emotional attachment to Lone Tree. The Bluffs were the basis for my sense of Lone Tree as a place. It provided my center for planning for the future while preserving the past.

My “Lone Trees” in the Bluffs Regional Park on Rainy Spring Run