

BY FRANK KUZNIK

# Boulder: A pillar of correctness

If you visit Colorado's eco-oasis, plan to bike (not drive), eat healthy foods and sip herbal tea

**W**ELCOME TO Boulder, the most politically correct city in America. Environmentalism, health, animal rights — name the latest lifestyle or cause, and Boulder's out there on the cutting edge. Or just out there.

But don't laugh. With the new emphasis in Washington, D.C., on the environment and health, Boulder's trends may hit your town next.

For now, though, "Boulder is the ultimate health-and-fitness town," says Norman Ford, the author of a book about the best places to live (see box, right). "I've looked at a lot of towns and didn't find any that compete."

If you want to check out the Republic of Boulder (as the city is known elsewhere in Colorado), don't drive: One-passenger car trips are frowned upon. Take a bus 26 miles from Denver. Leave smokers and meat-eaters at home, and pack your sweats and your in-line skates.

## WHAT TO SEE

Start your tour at the Boulder Theater, a nifty art-deco concert hall that's home to *E-Town*, an environmentalist music and talk show that is recorded live and aired over 100 public radio stations weekly. Where but here could host-producer Nick Forster put politicians preaching environmental correctness on the same stage with singers like Lyle Lovett and Randy Newman?

Boulder has a history of environmental responsibility dating to 1898, when the city began buying land to preserve the pristine Rocky Mountains backdrop. In 1967 it became the first U.S. city to pass a sales tax for the purpose of buying land to block development. Today Boulder is ringed by 23,000 acres of fields,

mesas and mountains, all *au naturel*. "And they'll stay that way forever," says Delani Wheeler, assistant director of the city agency Open Space.

Elbow room in town is another matter, particularly along Boulder Creek Path, where strollers, skaters, runners and bicyclists vie for space like fitness storm troopers. "When friends are visiting and stray onto the path, we have to grab them and say, 'Come back here! We want you alive,'" says Patricia Limerick, a history professor at the University of Colorado. (The school is the city's

major employer and a force behind its liberalism.) Path traffic has grown so thick that the city posts a speed limit: 15 mph in congested areas. "We have police on bikes with radar guns in the summer," says Public Works director Dave Rhodes.

Not that Boulder wants to discourage cyclists. Far from it. It spends more than \$1 million a year to subsidize bike paths, bus passes and other alternatives to autos.

From the creek it is just a short walk to *Alfalfa's*, the premier health-food store in a town brimming with

them. Pick up some goat yogurt and wheatgrass juice as you browse the cornucopia of organic produce.

"Boulder is such a tofu town," *Boulder Daily Camera* food writer John Lehdorff wrote recently, updating the city's earlier reputation as a "sprout town" and, before that, a "granola town." It's not unusual to see bumper stickers reading: "I eat tofu and I vote." Lehdorff is under constant barrage from readers he calls the "nutrition police." They were furious over recipes calling for cream and butter. "That stuff is just really, really bad for you!" one reader railed.

## Where the living is healthful

Boulder's tops in *The 50 Healthiest Places to Live and Retire in the United States* by Norman Ford (Ballantine, \$4.95), which ranks cities by climate, air quality, crime and more. The top 10:

1. Boulder
2. Eugene, Ore.
3. Ann Arbor, Mich.
4. Madison, Wis.
5. Chapel Hill, N.C.
6. Santa Fe
7. Colorado Springs
8. Davis, Calif.
9. Gainesville, Fla.
10. San Diego



Boulder is correct both environmentally and politically. (Above, a creek-side path draws a variety of non-motorists. Left, the cast of the 'green' radio program 'E-Town.') Residents voted 3-1 against the state's anti-gay-rights amendment, which takes effect this month, and the city joined Denver and Aspen in a lawsuit challenging it.

And you're never too young to be politically correct. Children at one Boulder elementary school decided not to observe politically incorrect Columbus Day last fall.

You'll want to hike the Boulder foothills, but don't stray from the footpaths (ecologically inappropriate) or disturb the animals (they have rights, too). After a woman wrote to *The Daily Camera* to complain that her poodle, left outdoors overnight, had been eaten by a mountain lion, a reader wrote in to say that's what happens when you leave lion food lying around.

No Boulder tour would be com-

plete without a stop at Celestial Seasonings, fountainhead of the natural-foods biz. Tea impresario Mo Siegel, who got his start in the late 1960s picking wild herbs in the Rockies, runs an outfit with \$55 million in annual sales and a new plant with a tasting room and a gift shop.

Being politically correct was hard early on. "We had a rule that no Ph.D.s could work on the assembly line," Siegel says. "Too many smart people wanted to change the world through our company. We were like: 'This is not the third party of American politics. Would you just put the teabags into the box?'"