



THIS WEEK'S SPEAKER

March 30, 2021

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David Erdman: Insights and Ideas for Charlotte

By Suzanne Bledsoe

In 2009, David Erdman added to his bucket list the goal of visiting the largest cities in the U.S.; over the next ten years, he visited, photographed and documented examples of ways in which these cities have built their brand through public art, tourist attractions, special events and a variety of other visible and outward signs of the historical and current cultural attributes of the cities' identities.

Today, David took us on a whirlwind, virtual journey to the 50 largest cities in the United States. He shared sights and scenes from several cities that he visited, and shared comparisons and insights as to how cities have built their identities. He shared several ideas of how Charlotte could invest in similar attractions. For example, a structure like the Parthenon in Nashville might find a welcoming home in uptown Charlotte. The Seattle Space Needle would fit perfectly in any number of green spaces in Charlotte and the Water Garden in Fort Worth would be the perfect attraction for Marshall Park. The Houston Water Wall would look great in Southpark and there might be a place for an expanded light rail system, similar to the one in Portland, in Ballantyne. Conversely, we could share our story of the US National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, a one of its kind attraction that might be welcome in any of these cities.

Charlotte could learn from Wichita with its bike pumps and tools creatively hanging from lines around the city, Dallas with its wi-fi benches, Jacksonville with its stadium swimming pool and Des Moines and Oakland with historical tributes to coal and gold mining, respectively. Charlotte, as we all know, was an early site for gold mining; why not showcase that?

San Francisco has revived the facades of older buildings to encase modern,

luxurious amenities like condominiums owned and managed by the Ritz Carlton; Detroit has followed suit with similar preservation work on the Fine Arts Building. How about a refurbishment and alternate use for the Barringer Hotel in uptown Charlotte?

Public Art can be found all over Charlotte. But, how much of it can be tied back to the history or unique identity of the city? The relatively new Firebird sculpture uptown is a very popular sight for tourists and locals, but what connection does it have to the city of Charlotte other than its location? Consider the deep history referenced in the Tulsa oil man statue and the King Neptune sculpture at Virginia Beach. What structure would serve the same purpose in Charlotte?

And, lastly, as David pointed out, we are proud to call ourselves the Queen City, but we are not the only city in the US with that nickname. Would we be better served to be the Crown City? If so, how about we “build” a crown to identify ourselves? The water tower in Elizabeth, with lights atop its dome, would send the signal for miles around that the Crown City is alive and well, thriving as always.

David’s guided tour around the US is a welcome balm for this past year we have spent at home. Many thanks for sharing!

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/530917434>
Introductions begin at the 17:55 minute mark.