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Denver just unveiled one of its most interesting public spaces in recent memory

Arkins Promenade is a 400-foot-long elevated walkway along the South Platte River in RiNo



DENVER, CO – JULY 14 : City officials, project partners and the community celebrate the Grand Opening of the Arkins Promenade in Denver , Colorado on Thursday, July 14, 2022. Arkins

Promenade created a new space along South Platte River for open space, recreation and leisure activities, along with improved visual and physical access to the natural resources and regional trails. (Photo by Hyoung Chang/The Denver Post)

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PUBLISHED: July 15, 2022 at 8:10 a.m. | UPDATED: July 20, 2022 at 4:43 p.m.

For generations, the South Platte River has been Denver's dumping ground, so the people and businesses that nobody wanted have ended up alongside its banks: smelters that processed ore during the gold and silver mining days, post-World War II factories that dug in later, and junkyards and auto industry companies in more recent times. Immigrant families lived nearby in previous decades, while the unhoused find places to sleep near the river today.

But on Thursday, the city took a small, if somewhat soaring step, to bring the waterway back into people's lives, not as a dumping ground, but as a place to sit and stay for a while.

Denver Parks and Recreation cut the ribbon on the three-block-long Arkins Promenade and its centerpiece, a winding 400-foot-long elevated walkway, complete with benches, a picnic table, porch swings, overlooks and a suspended net for kids to play in.



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“It’s not an object for people to look at and say, ‘Wow, that is really cool.’ It’s a place for them to get off of the main path, rest, hang out and have a different experience,” said Michael Moore, founder of Tres Birds, the architectural firm that designed the walkway. “The intention was to give people a different perspective on the river and connect them with nature in a deeper way.”

In addition to the gangway, Arkins Promenade also includes a stage-like platform, public art from well-known Denver artist Pard Morrison, landscaping and seating. It’s part of a mile-long riverfront pedestrian corridor that will run between 29th and 38th streets, connecting Globeville Landing Park, the new RiNo ArtPark and several other new amenities.

The \$5.5 million project was primarily funded with money from the Elevate Denver Bond, which voters approved in 2017, with the rest coming from the parks department.

Tracy Weil, the co-founder of the River North Art District, said at the ribbon cutting that when he moved to the area, the space where the promenade is now was a street, Arkins Court, that was used by 150 buses a day, coming and going from the former RTD parking lot nearby.



Arkins Court was a street used by RTD busses and the banks of the South Platte were a dumping ground. (Provided by Denver Parks & Recreation.)

Weil, who lived and worked for 20 years on Arkins Court in a distinctive studio and house with a castle-like turret offering 360-degree views, was one of the first people to see the potential of closing off the street and connecting the burgeoning neighborhood with the river. An artist and gardener who hosted a much-loved annual tomato seedling sale there, Weil later sold his property, which is now offices overlooking the Arkins Promenade.

It's not the only building that overlooks the Promenade, however. Condominium and apartment complexes are being built in all directions behind the river, so while the elevated walkway offers views of nature geese and herons on one side, it's all cranes on the other.

"When you are on the raised walkway, to the west is the river and wildlife corridor and old natural system. Then on the east is all new largescale construction. It is a moment of heavy and interesting juxtaposition," said Moore of Tres Birds.

"I believe in density and in doing these larger residential buildings so we can keep our city corridor dense. But I also believe that what was already green should be left green," he added.

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