

PLACEMAKING AND PARKING

By **Isaiah Mouw, CAPP** and **Brent Matthews, CAPP**

In the 1950s and '60s the City of Chattanooga, Tenn., was one of the leading manufacturing cities in the U.S. With that success came the typical unintended consequences for a manufacturing city: pollution, smog, and ugly industrial plants. In 1969, network news anchor Walter Cronkite announced to a national television audience that Chattanooga was the dirtiest city in America.

The unfortunate accolade was something of a wake-up call for the citizens of Chattanooga. They responded in 1985, when a group of citizens formed the Chattanooga Venture Committee and hosted public forums that focused on places, work, play, and government. Open to everyone, these forums established a blueprint for city improvements and revitalization that has yet to cease. Fast forward to present day: Chattanooga boasts one of the most beautiful downtowns in America and is considered something of an outdoor mecca. In 2011, it was named the best town ever by *Outdoor* magazine and in 2012, was named "Best Outdoor City" by Blue Ridge Outdoors.

Rock climbing is one of the fastest growing sports in America. And with Chattanooga being one of the finest outdoor cities in the nation, it was only a matter of time before a premier rock climbing facility would be built. But where would it go? That's where parking comes into play.

Climbing a Garage

Shuttle Park North Garage was built in 1992 by the Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) to serve as a shuttle hub and parking garage for the Tennessee Aquarium and other riverfront area downtown attractions. When the garage was originally built, the ground-floor retail area included a 12-screen movie theater. As Downtown Chattanooga continued to grow, a new theater was built, leaving the garage retail space open until CARTA signed a lease with developers River City Company. In January 2013, High Point Climbing and Fitness broke ground; today, it is a state-of-the-art, 23,000-square-foot climbing and bouldering gym. The best part of it is the 11,000-square-foot public art piece that has 5,000 square feet of functional climbing anchored to the façade of the garage. Climbers can literally climb the façade of the garage!

This is what urbanists and community leaders are now referring to as placemaking. Placemaking is a movement



that inspires people to reimagine public spaces as the heart of the community. It is a process that pays close attention to the social, cultural, and physical identities of the area when designing public spaces. The High Point Climbing Gym is a wonderful example of parking and placemaking.

Parking garages should serve as community gateways, not only providing parking spaces but a hub for information and connectivity with the community. And what better way to do that than by installing a rock climbing wall on the outside of a downtown garage in the city known for its outdoors?

Parking professionals, planners, engineers, and architects should do everything they can to match the character of the community and add vitality to street life when designing parking garages. As Fred Kent, founder of the Project for Public Spaces, often states, "If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places."

Motorists are more likely to become both occasional and regular cyclists and pedestrians when these sorts of considerations are taken for streets, parking, and transportation. Every parking organization has the ability to make a significant impact in this area. What can you do with your garages to add to your city's vitality? **P**



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