

Photos courtesy Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau

Shoppers walk and mingle at the Pearl Street pedestrian mall in Boulder, Colo. The Wildcats travel to Boulder Nov. 20 to face the Buffaloes, who next year will be part of the Pac-10 Conference.

AWAY-GAME
TRAVEL GUIDE
COLORADO

OFF THE BEAT

BILL FELBER



BFELBER@THEMERCURY.COM

Is media bias always bad?

In the news business, you get schooled early about bias, mostly your own. One of the sure takeaways from j-school is the notion that reporters ought to be unbiased. Even sports guys understand that rule: witness “no cheering in the press box.”

Lots of media entities, this one among them, include sections on bias in their company manuals. For the most part, these sanctions are aimed at one particular form of bias, the political form. Here’s part of what The Mercury manual says on that topic:

“Work for a politician or political organization, either paid or voluntary, is forbidden. ... There is no quicker source of misunderstanding and suspicion in our profession than the area of politics. We must not give any person reason to suspect that our handling of a story, editorial or picture is related in any way to political activity by a member of the staff.”

That’s not the whole policy, but it gives you the gist. My guess is that our policy is a lot like policies in place in many news organizations. I cite it as background for kicking around the Keith Olberman suspension — and subsequent reinstatement — by MSNBC this past week. Olberman was suspended for two days for making donations to political candidates he had interviewed on his TV show, the donations being in violation of MSNBC policy.

Codified policies of these sorts arose before my coming into the journalism world — or pretty much any world, for that matter. But it’s safe to say that there was a time in journalism when reporters and editors were not assumed to be biased. In fact, they were assumed to be biased. You had a Republican newspaper and a Democratic newspaper in most towns of substance, and the subscriber picked the one he (or occasionally she) felt most attuned to.

The driving force away from accepted bias wasn’t political but economic. Over time, competition for advertising revenues drove newspapers to consolidate, reducing two- or three-newspaper cities to one-newspaper cities. In a one-newspaper city, that newspaper had better position itself pretty much toward the political center or risk alienating a significant portion of its readership. In the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s, that’s what newspapers did.

Television, nascent at the time, accepted the principle of non-bias for several reasons, one of which was the “Fairness Doctrine,” which more or less mandated doing so. But again market considerations and the desire for mass appeal played a part. There were, after all, only three networks.

The current media environment is sort of a flip-flop of long ago. Instead of a lot of newspapers and a handful of electronic options, there are uncoupled other electronic options and a handful of newspapers. The practical impact has been to open television and other electronic media forms to subtly or overtly biased presentations because a more fragmented market permits it.

MSNBC more or less blatantly fits into that model. Thus the fairest question being asked by Olberman’s supporters is whether by prohibiting campaign donations the network’s policies aren’t running afoul of its own marketing strategies. Is there even any point in requiring Olberman to masquerade as objective when the network’s own marketing doesn’t present him that way?

For the record, as long as I am employed as a journalist, you have not and will not read my name among a list of contributors to or endorsers of any candidate for office. There are several reasons for this.

1. I don’t have the money.
2. My understanding of company policy is that doing so is prohibited.
3. It would compromise the appearance of my objectivity with my audience.

Olberman plainly has the money. Beyond that, he is overtly trying to compromise the appearance of objectivity. That’s what advocates do. So his case reduces the problem to his company prohibiting what he did. Even in the world of advocacy media, you can’t do what your bosses tell you that you can’t do. That’s why Keith Olberman was suspended.

Why, then, was he reinstated? Two answers fly immediately to mind. The first is that Olberman remains a highly marketable on-air commodity.

The second is that MSNBC executives get the privilege of setting the penalty for defiance of their orders. They did so: two days. Now we all know.

BOULDER, COLO.

Brave the chill in colorful Colorado when K-State plays next week

Kimber Wallace
kwallace@themercury.com

If you’re willing to face the cool air of Boulder, Colo., this Saturday, Nov. 20, to watch the Kansas State University Wildcats take on the University of Colorado Buffaloes, you’re in for a treat. Not only will you witness the last football game between K-State and CU as Big 12 foes (the Buffaloes head to the Pac-10 next year), but you’ll also get a taste of local Colorado flavor, whether you’re in the mood for shopping, hiking, drinking or sight-seeing. Plus, you might spot some snow-capped mountains nearby.

Getting There

From Manhattan to Boulder is a solid 500 miles (plus a few), so if you’re driving, settle in for an eight-hour ride.

Remember, Colorado is in Mountain Standard Time, so you’ll essentially get one extra hour of padding for your drive there. (Still, if possible, leave Friday morning so you can take a leisurely pace: This drive is basically a straight shot on I-70, so you might want to break up the monotony with a stop here and there.)

It’s also worth noting that Boulder is a measly 35 miles northwest of Denver, which puts it in the hub of Colorado. If you’re ahead of schedule, take a detour around the Denver area. Here’s what you’ll find (other than the big city, of course):

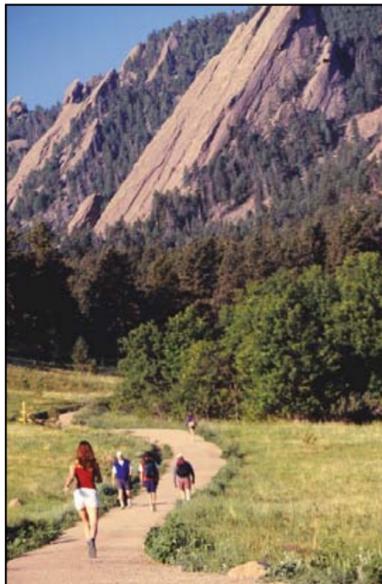
- **The mountains**—You could venture to Rocky Mountain National Park (10 miles northwest of Boulder), or you might just want to view the scenic Rockies from afar.

- **Central City and Black Hawk (35 miles southwest of Boulder)**—These two historic mining towns from the 1870s were once termed the “richest square mile on Earth.” Now, they offer more than 30 ‘round-the-clock casinos.

Braving the Chill

Forecasts call for clear skies and highs in the 40s this weekend in Boulder. If that sounds pleasant (enough) and you’re eager to explore the outdoors, Boulder has plenty of options.

- **Chautauqua Park**—With its numerous hilly trails, this park is one of the most popular destinations for outdoor enthusiasts in Boulder, said Kim Farin, projects manager for the Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau. Nearby mountains, called the Flatirons, are part of Boulder’s “Open Space”: 45,000 acres of land owned by residents of Boulder to



Hikers take a trail at the foot of the Flatirons, a rock formation near Boulder.

enjoy and protect.

- **Boulder Creek Path**—This popular path winds through historic downtown and runs for five miles along Boulder Creek.

- **Eldora Mountain Resort**—There’s already snow on the ground at this ski resort, located 21 miles west of Boulder. Call 303-440-8700 for resort information and weather updates.

Exploring Boulder

Locals recommend these highlights:

- **Pearl Street**—Farin calls this “the heart and soul of Boulder.” Its unique shops, galleries and restaurants are almost all independently owned, and some are wind-powered. Farin’s favorite stops include Pharmaca and Boulder Arts and Crafts Coop. (There’s also a Boulder Information Center nearby, at the corner of Pearl and 13th streets.)

- **The Dushanbe Teahouse**—Technically, this is a restaurant (serving breakfast, lunch and dinner), but Farin said it’s perfectly acceptable to just stop in for a peek. And you might want to: The building was assembled using colorful hand-carved, hand-painted pieces that artists crafted in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (Boulder’s sister city), and shipped to Colorado. Check it out at 1770 13th St.

Watch the Wildcats on TV

Watch the Kansas State University Wildcats as they travel to Boulder, Colo., to take on the University of Colorado Buffaloes at 1:10 p.m. CST (12:10 p.m. MST) Saturday, Nov. 20.

Eating and Drinking

Boulder is proud of its foodie reputation, having been recognized by Bon Appetit magazine and The Wall Street Journal this year for its great meals. The city also has a thing for breweries and wineries. Eat (and drink) up:

- **“Boulder Sliced and Diced: A Chef’s Guide for Visitors”**—For a quick look at the top restaurants in Boulder (and interesting things to do and see), visit www.bouldercoloradousa.com/slicedanddiced for some area chefs’ suggestions. Top of the list: Jax Fish House, home of Top Chef winner Hosea Rosenberg and considered one of the best seafood restaurants in the state. (Find it on Pearl Street.)

Rosenberg will also be cooking at the K-State/CU game Saturday; look for him in his “StrEat Chefs” bus.

- **Drinks**—There are 10 breweries and five wineries in town. Check out Boulder Creek Winery for the best self-guided tour in the state (according to Farin), or head to Boulder Beer or Avery Brewing Company for one of their regularly scheduled tours.

- **Farmers’ Market**—Saturday is the last day for the Boulder Farmers’ Market this season. It’s the largest outdoor market in the state, and a few years ago, it was voted the No. 6 farmers’ market in the country by EatingWell magazine. Get there Saturday morning on 13th Street next to Central Park in downtown Boulder.



Biking—especially mountain biking—is a popular pastime for outdoorsy Boulder residents.