



Rain-forest experience planned for Valley Developer eyes Scottsdale for Paradise Earth project

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"I guess I'm a little eccentric," David Calvin said. The Colorado and Arizona developer plans what some people might call a counterintuitive project for the Valley.

Calvin intends to build a rain-forest habitat the size of a football field somewhere in the Phoenix area. Already christened Paradise Earth, the 80,000-square-foot complex, designed by Estes Park architect Roger Thorp, would house a glass-domed aviary with tropical birds and flora, and an education and conference center. Tourists would pay about \$15 to watch and photograph birds, wander around elevated pathways throughout the forest and participate in educational features. A rentable conference center would accommodate 1,000, while free exhibit space would be offered to environmental groups.

The 65-foot-high aviary would provide a rain-forest climate, ranging from 60 to 95 degrees with rain and mist, much like the weather in the Amazon. Calvin promises the attraction would have as small a carbon footprint as possible, using solar power and water-conservation methods. The unlikely desert location plays into his educational mission.

"Most people here have never been to a rain forest. I'm bringing a message to a place that lots of people visit," said Calvin, who lives in Greeley, Colo., but has kept a home in the Valley for the past 25 years.

Sea World-like attraction -

He likens the proposed for-profit business to Sea World, the marine attractions in San Diego, San Antonio and Orlando, and believes his message is as urgent as saving the oceans. "If we destroy the rain forest, we destroy the Earth."

Calvin has dedicated much of his life to working with birds. He raised pigeons as a boy in Nebraska. As his business fortunes rose, he increasingly visited the corners of the Earth through the National Audubon Society and on his own to observe birds. Calvin now is breeding species threatened with extinction at Paradise Aviary, a 30,000-square-foot bird center at his home in Greeley, a non-profit operation for use by

hospice and other groups. Some of the winged denizens of his Valley rain forest would be Greeley-bred rarities, such as the red-legged honey creeper and the cotinga.

From oil to environment A former oil magnate who sold off his holdings and later developed the Kierland Corporate Center in northeast Phoenix, Calvin said he is neither looking for investors nor tax breaks from municipalities for the project, estimated to cost \$25 million. "I want to select the right place for the facility. It's a great tourist attraction to see a rain forest with birds in it, a real backdrop for conservation efforts," he said.

At the moment, Calvin is looking for a site. He claims he's talked to various Valley boosters, but he hasn't decided on a property. He wants to land the center in an area that already has a tourist focus, he said, citing Scottsdale, whose convention and visitors bureau recently adopted a, "ecotourism" initiative. "If you don't golf, shop or lie in the sun, Scottsdale doesn't have a lot to offer. It would be a great facility there," Calvin said. To be fair, Scottsdale does boast a nearly 20,000-acre swath of pristine mountains and desert known as the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, but the city has not one red-legged honey creeper.