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A new reality for Denver: MTV's "Real World" coming

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"The Real World" - a true story of seven strangers picked to move into a house, work together and have their lives taped - is going to change things, Denver.

It took 14 years and 17 seasons, but MTV's pioneering reality television juggernaut will start filming in Lower Downtown in the coming months, the network announced Monday.

And the arrival of "The Real World: Denver" - the 18th installation in the longest-running reality TV series, which attracted nearly 100 million viewers in its last incarnation - could spell a mammoth shift for Denver's image in the eyes of young people, who have made the show an enormous hit.

Never mind Colorado's cameos in Travel Channel documentaries and reality TV shows. Forget about 2005's NBA All-Star Game, which brought the crème de la crème of the sports, hip-hop and media worlds to the Mile High City for a weekend of indulgent fun.

"The Real World: Denver," already cast for a months-long, 24-episode stint at a renovated living space inside the old B-52's Billiards on the 1900 block of Market Street, will be the city's bona-fide close-up.

"It's a truly unique opportunity in that sense that one of Denver's and Colorado's greatest strengths is its appeal to young people - and here's the No. 1 show for young people in all of cable TV," said Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, who learned March 8 of the city's selection. "The thing that's so appealing about it is that they consciously let the city become a character in the show. Every city has its own personality and idiosyncrasies, and they come out in the show."

MTV crews will trickle into Denver in the coming months and eventually wrap production work here before the season premieres toward the end of the year. The series, which began in 1992, has previously focused on cities such as Los Angeles, Boston, Seattle, Miami and New York City.

In the wake of lackluster international outings in London and Paris, the series is focusing on smaller markets, with a 2005 season in Austin, Texas, and 2006 runs in Key West, Fla., and Denver.

"It's awesome"

Colorado has a lot going for it. MTV will help showcase its many landmarks and vibrant entertainments.

Supporters say Denver makes sense, citing the lifestyle, youth and vibrancy.

"It's a status thing," said Rich Grant of the Denver Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau. "They wouldn't go to a city where there isn't a lot going on."

Plus there's the locus of Denver's premier entertainment district and the show's host neighborhood: LoDo, which is preening for its 15 minutes (or 24 episodes) of fame.

"I think it's awesome, and not only because I watch every reality TV show known to man," said Danielle Mashuda, a manager at the Downtown Tavern, which opened last week across from what will come to be known as "The Real World" house.

Colorado is already an appealing place for MTV and its family of networks. The network's high-definition TV music channel, MHD, broadcasts from a studio near Vail's Eagle's Nest summit, and it has taped big-name concerts in the surrounding area.

And CBS's "The Amazing Race" began this year's season at Red Rocks Amphitheatre.

As "The Real World: Denver" picks up steam, local landmarks such as Coors Field and the 16th Street Mall will become familiar to fans, who are part of the 12- to 34-year-old range that gives "The Real World" franchise such potent staying power. Imagine the cast working at REI or Colorado Outward Bound School, cruising the Tattered Cover or grabbing tacos and Everclear margaritas at Wahoo's.

Asked if she was worried about an influx of crowds, the Downtown Tavern's Mashuda laughed.

"Worried? Of course not. Bring them all on. We want that for our business."

Staff writer Julie Dunn contributed to this report.

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