



50

THE

BEST

CITIES

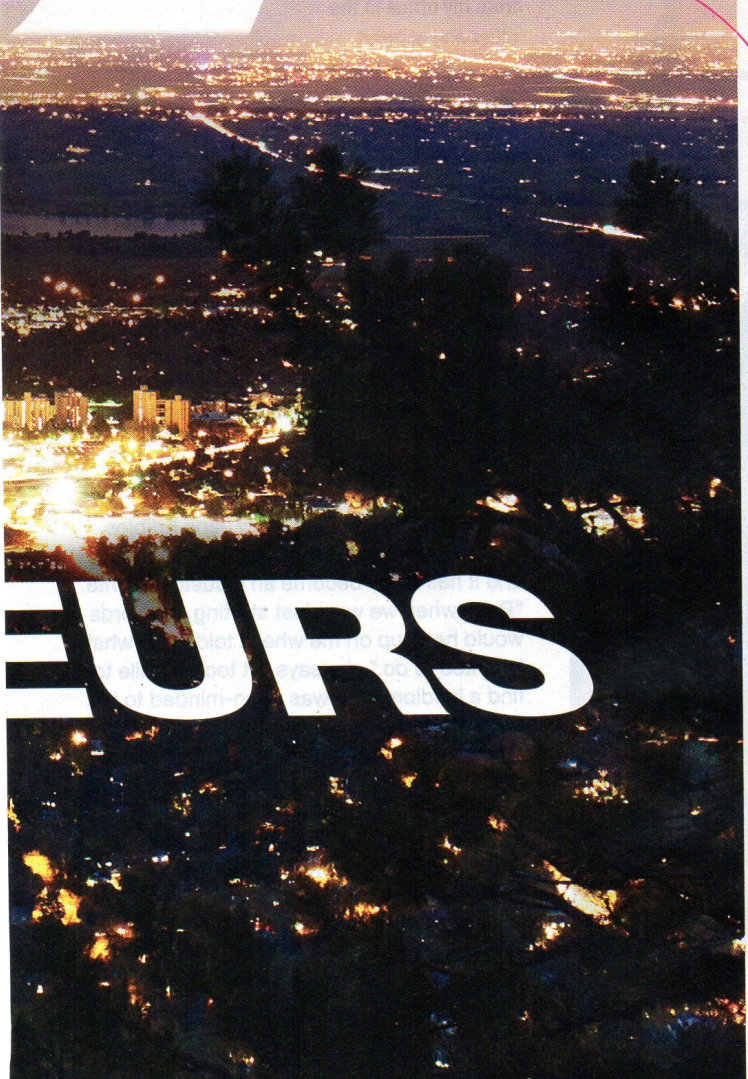
FOR

ENTREPRENEURS

50/BEST/CITIES



Yes, there's life for entrepreneurs outside New York and San Francisco—and we've got the proof! To identify the best places in which to launch and operate a business, we partnered with Livability.com, which studies small and midsize cities. Matt Carmichael, the site's chief trend analyst, developed the ranking, crunching a wide range of data, including the number of businesses and employees between 2011 to 2015; unemployment rates; number of VC deals in the past 10 years; business tax rate; value of SBA and 7(a) loans; percentage of college-educated locals; cost of living; commute time; accessibility of high-speed broadband; projected household income and population increase from now to 2020; "leakage and surplus," which charts whether people spend their money outside a city on goods and services rather than in it; the growth of good jobs and high-income positions; and Livability's own LivScore rating of overall quality of life. The end result: We have 50 of the nation's most livable, viable cities for entrepreneurs to be successful and enjoy life. Come take the tour.

- 
- 
1. BOULDER, COLO.
 2. AUSTIN, TEX.
 3. PROVO, UTAH
 4. CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.
 5. CHAPEL HILL, N.C.
 6. ANN ARBOR, MICH.
 7. FARGO, N.D.
 8. COLUMBIA, MO.
 9. FREDERICKSBURG, VA.
 10. STATE COLLEGE, PA.
 11. DECATUR, GA.
 12. SALT LAKE CITY
 13. MINNEAPOLIS
 14. ALEXANDRIA, VA.
 15. ORLANDO, FLA.
 16. SILVER SPRING, MD.
 17. COLUMBUS, OHIO
 18. LINCOLN, NEBR.
 19. KANSAS CITY, MO.
 20. ITHACA, N.Y.
 21. SIOUX FALLS, S.D.
 22. SEATTLE
 23. LAWRENCE, KANS.
 24. WASHINGTON, D.C.
 25. GRAND RAPIDS
 26. DENTON, TEX.
 27. OMAHA
 28. PORTLAND, OREG.
 29. NEWPORT, R.I.
 30. BLOOMINGTON, IND.
 31. CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
 32. MANHATTAN, KANS.
 33. MIAMI BEACH, FLA.
 34. TEMPE, ARIZ.
 35. FORT WORTH, TEX.
 36. NASHVILLE
 37. ROCHESTER, MINN.
 38. CINCINNATI
 39. CORVALLIS, OREG.
 40. MADISON, WIS.
 41. RENO, NEV.
 42. ASHEVILLE, N.C.
 43. IOWA CITY, IOWA
 44. ALBANY, N.Y.
 45. NORMAN, OKLA.
 46. TALLAHASSEE, FLA.
 47. HOBOKEN, N.J.
 48. OKLAHOMA CITY
 49. BOISE, IDAHO
 50. BELLEVUE, WASH.

REPORTING BY CLINT CARTER, JEFF CHU,
MATT MCCUE, KATE ROCKWOOD,
STEPHANIE SCHOMER AND AMY WILKINSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRÉDÉRIC LAGRANGE

1

BOULDER

WHAT
MAKES
BOULDER SO
GREAT

When Livability's Carmichael crunched our data and saw the result, he wasn't surprised to see that Boulder sat at the top. "Boulder always seems to be the perfect storm of everything," he says. It has 300 days of sunshine a year, Flatirons mountain views, a foodie culture with a killer craft beer scene, universities, a tech-savvy government and, according to a 2013 New Engine/Kauffman Foundation research report, the highest density of tech startups in America.

So what's it like to work there? That's what we asked Brad Feld, a longtime resident and cofounder of the \$1 billion investment firm Foundry Group.

DEMOGRAPHICS

"The town is very progressive," says Feld. "It's a highly educated population—30,000 people are affiliated with the University of Colorado and another 5,000 with government and research labs. When you smash together people in college, people with deep technical knowledge and a bunch of creative people doing art and music in a small physical area, crazy, amazing stuff happens."

DENSITY

"Downtown is highly concentrated with startups, so you essentially have an extended campus for businesses. If I walk from my office to the other end of Pearl

Street, about five blocks, I'll pass 10 companies we're investors in. Techstars, which we invested in and was founded here, is across the floor from our office."

DIVERSITY

"Boulder is the origin of the natural food industry, and the lifestyle, outdoors, health and sustainability [known as LOHAS] marketplace started here. And you have stuff with robotics—in 2012 we invested in Sphero, and last year they came out with the BB-8 robot that was front and center in *Star Wars*. Now they are a very profitable, 200-person company."

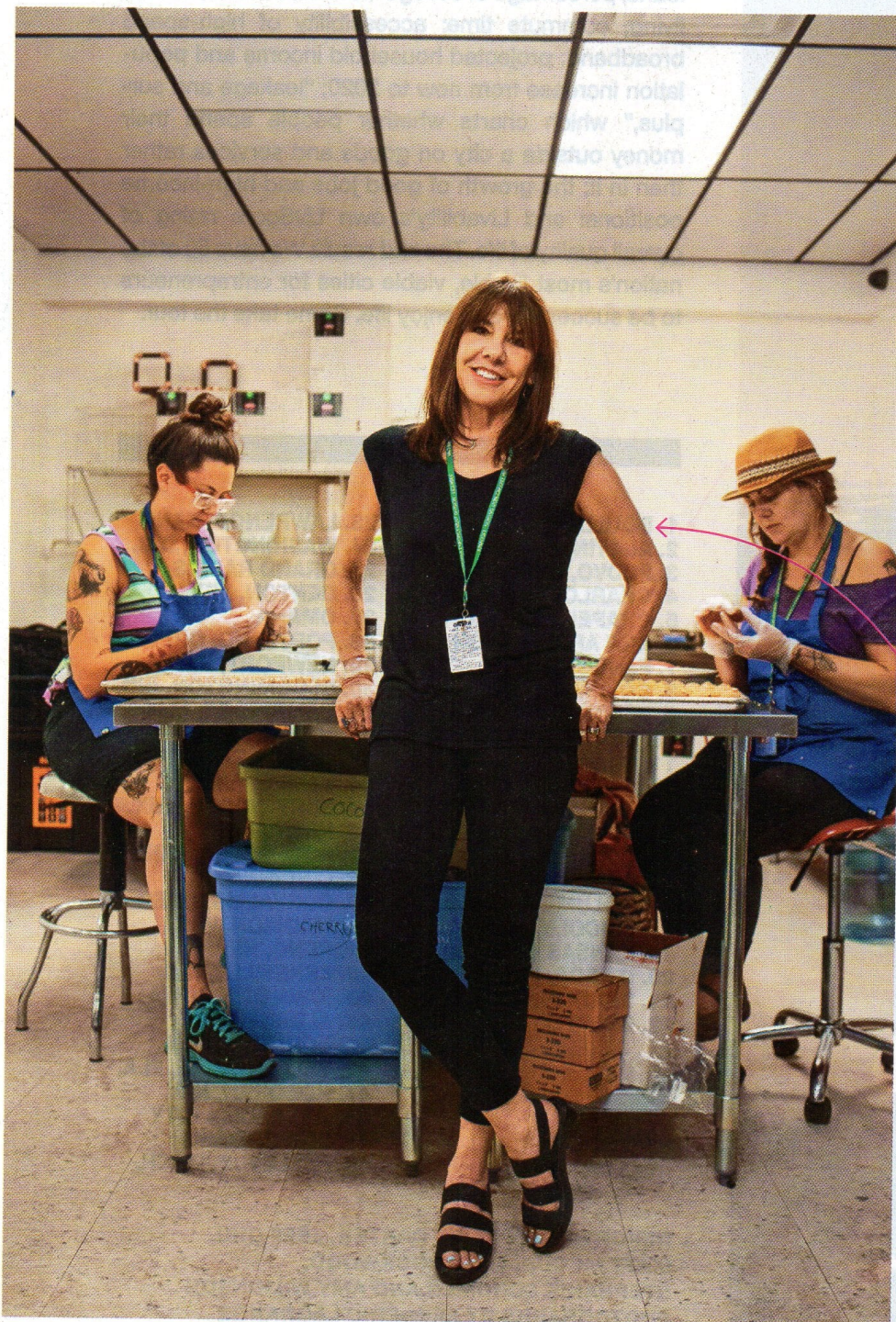
A HIGH AND MIGHTY INDUSTRY

Karin Lazarus knows how to talk up her treats, and she especially loves her Keylime Kickers: "White chocolate truffles made with key lime oil and rolled in graham cracker crumbs," she says. "It's our most popular product."

Oh, and it's cannabis-infused. But so is everything she makes.

Lazarus owns Sweet Mary Jane Edibles, a wholesale bakery she launched in 2010, and it has since become an industry favorite. "Back when we were just starting, landlords would hang up on me when I told them what I wanted to do," she says. "It took a while to find a landlord who was open-minded to the cannabis industry." But today, Boulder is the go-to spot for entrepreneurs dealing in legal pot. The county government is welcoming ("You feel like they've got your back," Lazarus says), and so is the community.

The industry even has its own local accelerator, called CanopyBoulder, which is laying a foundation for the fast-growing world of weed. Cofounder Micah Tapman is



optimistic that the cannabis business can boom; in the past year alone, Colorado saw a 40 percent industry growth rate. The next challenge: He wants to attract people with solid business bona fides, rather than just a passion for the plant. "We need better entrepreneurs, better skills—MBAs, JDs, people with years of experience at Fortune 500 companies," he says.

Ideally, that will speed up the professionalization of the industry, says Roy Bingham of BDS Analytics, a firm that analyzes cannabis sales data. "This industry will hit \$30 billion in a matter of years, and mainstream business is tuning in," he says, though he understands their initial hesitation. Bingham is a former investment banker who was first encouraged to work in cannabis by two of his friends (who just happen to be the cofounders of CanopyBoulder). "It took them months to persuade me that it wasn't career suicide," he says. "But then I realized the tremendous growth opportunity."

Other local startups are now carving out old-school niches in this New Age industry. Adistry helps navigate compliant advertising, and Tradiv's marketplace connects cultivators and dispensaries. (Both are graduates of CanopyBoulder.) "We don't grow anything," says Meghan Larson, CEO of Adistry. "But we can help people figure out the topics that aren't always sexy but are important."

Why set up shop in Boulder when Denver is just 25 minutes away? "I've lived in Boston, London, Chicago, Rhode Island," Bingham says. "I've never known a community as energized around new businesses as Boulder is." Larson echoes the sentiment: "It's the Boulder bubble," she says. "There's a lot of support for people who quit cushy jobs to try to change the world." But for all the blue skies, yoga and, well, weed that Boulder has to offer, the city isn't some hippie utopia—and the business guys here can feel comfortable being business guys. "I'm as boring as I've always been," Bingham says. "People look at me and it's like, 'Who's this stiff?'"

PATRIOT BOOT CAMP WANTS YOU!

Longtime tech and finance guy (and Boulder resident) Taylor McLemore is the grandson of career airmen and got to wondering whether the tech community could do more to help veterans. In 2011, he tweeted his thought to Techstars cofounder David Cohen—and a year later, the first Patriot Boot Camp was held in Washington, D.C. (#24 on our list).

The boot camp is a three-day intensive of education and mentorship, and McLemore believes veterans are uniquely suited to take advantage of its lessons. "They're dynamic problem solvers," he says. "They know what risk is. They know how to achieve a mission. And they know that dedication to the team is the only way to be successful." In just a

few years, vets and their spouses have proven that true: More than 500 have taken the boot camp, collectively raising \$31 million in capital for their tech startups.

The training is valuable, but McLemore says that making it work in any city is also a critical component. The boot camp has also traveled to Chapel Hill, N.C. (#5 on our list), Phoenix (next door to Tempe, #34) and Detroit—giving vets outside Silicon Valley and New York a local network to lean on. "Location can be a competitive advantage," says McLemore. "Especially if you have a very flexible mental perspective, rely on local advantages and connect nationally."



FARGO WELCOME TO THE CRASH PAD

Fargo's tech renaissance lured native son Miguel Danielson back to North Dakota in 2014, and the attorney wasted no time lending a hand, cofounding the startup resource group Emerging Prairie and launching Fargo's very own (and rent-free!) startup house.



DRONES? YOU BETCHA!

Once a month, the best minds in drone making gather in Fargo to talk all things airborne. Drones, you say? Yep. Drone Focus is a meeting for everyone interested in the space—from developers to clients—to powwow about the fast-growing industry. And Fargo is just the spot to do it. There are currently 18 drone-related companies in North Dakota, and the state has invested \$34 million

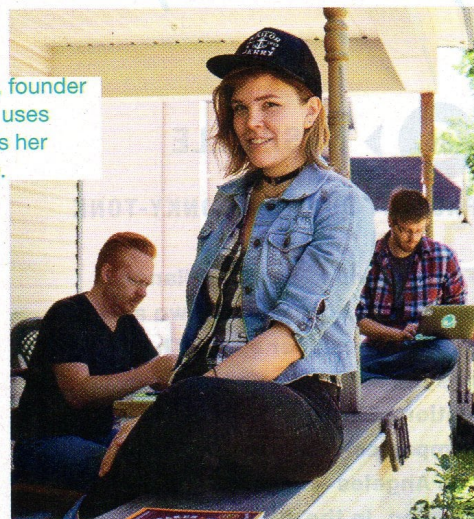
in growing unmanned aircraft operations, research and businesses. "What makes Fargo unique is that the end user sits next to the entrepreneur and they solve the problem together," says Greg Tehven, cofounder of local networking hub Emerging Prairie, which hosts the get-together.

Joey Schmit, for example, is the founder of the year-old drone services provider Flight Pros, and

he meets directly with Nolan Berg and Adam Spelhaug of Peterson Farm Seeds to hash out how the technology can better aid Peterson's operation. "It's pretty much the perfect match to work directly with a customer," Schmit says. "They're informing you of exactly what they want in their deliverables."

Fargo has another thing going for itself: "Unencumbered airspace

Emily Swedberg, founder of Lucid Bakery, uses Startup House as her networking base.



HOME, A LOAN

Funded by Danielson and a small grant from the state of North Dakota, the Fargo Startup House is based on the idea that “working and living with people who have common goals and problems can help solve them,” Danielson says. In addition to covering rent and utilities, Danielson provides mentorship, meeting with the entrepreneurs once a month over dinner to review goals. The house can support four entrepreneurs at a time; when we visited in June, there was one bed available.

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Minnesota native Matthew Sullivan moved into the house in April to work on his ride-sharing app, Jumpr. “Jumpr connects drivers with riders headed in the same direction for long-distance ride sharing,” explains Sullivan. “Drivers have the opportunity to make money, and riders receive rides that are cheaper than buses, trains and airplanes while still being faster and more direct than buses and trains.” Sullivan has already launched a beta version.

BAKE IT TILL SHE MAKES IT

Danielson aims to admit one nontech entrepreneur each year. Enter Emily Swedberg, founder of the vegan sweet shop Lucid Bakery. (She rents a commercial kitchen and sells her treats to wholesalers.) “Hosting community events and dinner parties at the Startup House allows me to share my love of food and connect with passionate people,” says Swedberg, whose ultimate goal is to open a brick-and-mortar outfit in Fargo.

THE ROVING ENTREPRENEUR

Ask the house's newest tenant, Michael Ryan Norton, about what he's working on and, well, the answer is a little harder to pin down. He's been traveling across the country facilitating Startup Weekends, in which entrepreneurs attempt to launch a business in 72 hours. But his plans for the house are many and varied—everything from drone marketing to songwriting. “I have a hundred ideas,” he admits. “The Startup House provides a stable environment, access to a mentor network and the very real sense that people are rallying around me.”

five minutes outside of town,” says Terri Zimmerman, CEO of Fargo-based drone company Botlink. In other words, it's real quiet out there, which makes the local skies perfect for testing, refining and actual work. “Our users, primarily in agriculture and construction, can collect data on their businesses in real time,” says Zimmerman, whose cloud-based platform allows clients to watch

over extensive acreages, such as oil fields or farms. Now she's looking to build clients beyond state lines, including Europe, Australia and the Middle East.

Sure, Fargo does have some downsides—like its guaranteed annual snowstorms. But after a blizzard hits, city officials might now send a drone out, not humans, to check on downed power lines and unsafe roads.

36

NASHVILLE

PROJECT RUNWAY: HONKY-TONK

The Nashville Fashion Alliance is giving this honky-tonk town a shake of designer spice. The city has the largest per capita concentration of independent fashion companies outside New York and Los Angeles—seemingly a repeat of when, in the 1980s, music industry rebel types fled the big cities and built Nashville's scene. "We're very inspired by that," says Van Tucker, CEO of the Alliance. Here are three local designers to watch.

ATELIERSAVAS

Designer: Savannah Yarborough

"I picked Nashville to open my bespoke leather jacket studio in 2014. Now everyone comes to me. We work with a lot of musicians, but also Wall Street and tech guys. The hardest thing has been finding another person to help sew—very few people here have the skill to make a leather jacket. We're going to have to move more here!"

CAVANAGH BAKER

Designer: Cavanagh Baker

"Nashville allows me to be more versatile. I get to design ready-to-wear for the everyday client and also create custom pieces for country music performers. I recently worked with Kelsea Ballerini on a jumpsuit for her 'Peter Pan' music video. New York and L.A. are important, but everyone there is doing the same thing, on the same schedule. I wanted to be somewhere where I could be truly hands-on with my clients."

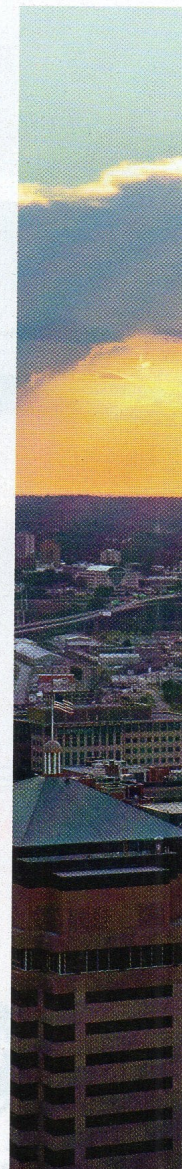
ELECTRA EGGLESTON

Designer: Andra Eggleston

"I moved here after living in New York and L.A., where people say they want to support you, then disappear. Here, when people said they would connect me with someone, I half-believed them. But an hour later, I'd get an email from them. When people think of Nashville fashion, they think cowboy boots. But people now wear a hip urban dress with cowboy boots. I don't think that anyone has departed from the old Nashville—they've just adapted it into their own."



KC's Google Fiber pipeline is the furnace driving the city's startups.

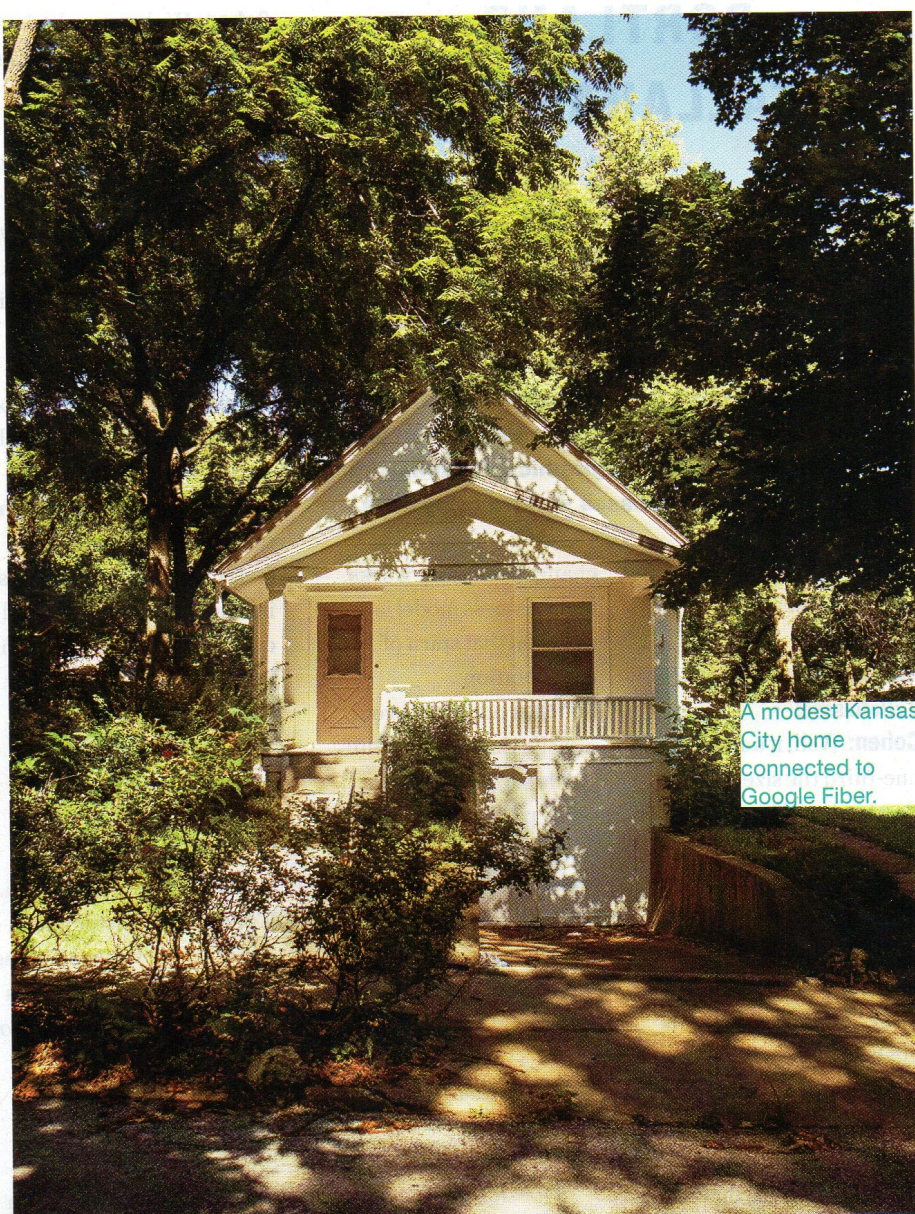
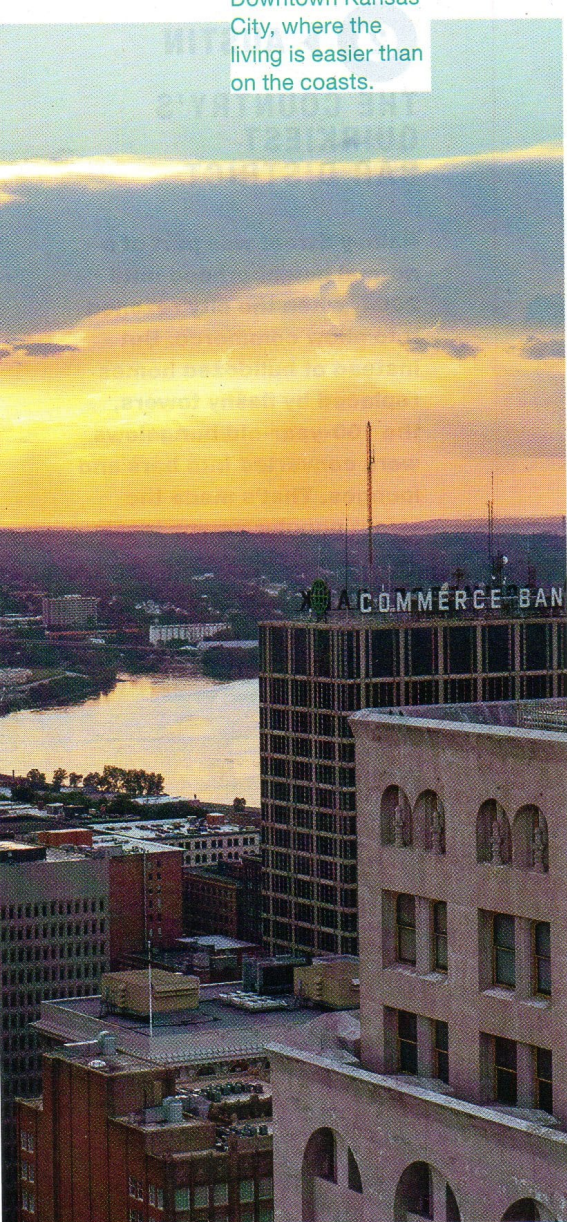


KANSAS CITY

FIVE REASONS STARTUP VILLAGE COULD ONLY HAPPEN HERE

Startup Village is a residential block that has been home to as many as 32 startups at once. It began with no funding or master plan but has evolved into an incubator and, as of last year, an official 501(c)3 nonprofit. Other cities may try to replicate the magic, but it won't be easy. Here's why.

Downtown Kansas City, where the living is easier than on the coasts.



A modest Kansas City home connected to Google Fiber.

1. IT WAS BLESSED BY GOOGLE.

In 2012, Startup Village's street was ground zero for Google Fiber, the tech giant's superfast broadband service that's said to be 80 times faster than the national average. Matthew Marcus, one of Startup Village's co-leaders, owns the house that first received service.

2. HOUSING IS AFFORDABLE.

When Fiber launched, the median listing price for a house in Kansas City was just \$112,000. (That's \$52,000 less than in Austin, Tex., the second city to receive Fiber—and also cheaper than Nashville; Provo,

Utah; and Atlanta, all three of which are now on Fiber's grid.) That made the city a gift to cash-strapped startups. Before Fiber's installation, software developer Ben Barreth purchased a home in Kansas City for just \$50,000 and dubbed it "Homes for Hackers."

3. MIDWESTERNERS ARE NEIGHBORLY.

Barreth and Marcus lived six doors down from each other and hit it off. At the same time, a third house was beginning to harbor startups, which

put about half a dozen businesses on their block. "When we put it all together, we couldn't believe it," Barreth says. "We knew we had to start organizing."

4. THE CITY STRADDLES TWO STATES.

Startup Village covers a mile radius from its focal point on State Line Road, which lies on the border between Kansas and Missouri. Startups can take advantage of whichever state's policies serve them best. "On the Missouri side, they usually have to pay income tax but can deduct losses," says Marcus. "On the Kansas side, they

can't deduct losses, but they can avoid paying income tax and take advantage of angel tax credits."

5. OPTIMISM IS EVERYWHERE.

Kansas City has new public transportation initiatives (like a trolley system) and a general sense of impending greatness—affirmed by the Royals' World Series victory. "Kansas City's time has come," says Barreth. "And that's true with so many aspects of the city—not just the startup community."

PORTLAND TALLAHASSEE

A TALE OF TWO ICE CREAM CITIES

How can something as simple as ice cream be impacted by its city? Salt & Straw's Kim Malek (of Portland) and Lofty Pursuits' Gregory Cohen (of Tallahassee) dish on demographics, local flavors and how hot-weather businesses survive rainy days.

Cohen: Let me start by saying I've never been to Portland.

Malek: I've never been to Tallahassee!

Cohen: Well, it's about one-third the size of Portland, and it's also really isolated, with no big cities within two or three hours. The city was a whole bunch of plantations, and some of them still exist, so we have these long, diagonal roads lined with trees that are hundreds of years old. You can drive for an hour without seeing the sky overhead, just sunlight dappling down through these old oak trees.

Malek: Sounds dreamy. Portland is small, with a very entrepreneurial spirit, but we're also in one of the most incredible agricultural areas in the United States. Of course we were going to work with local dairies and farmers. But after my cousin, Tyler, and I started Salt & Straw, we realized we could take it one step further, and we started partnering with local artisans to make unique flavors. Now we work with local beer brewers and cheese makers and charcuterie houses and tea makers, and our flavors

change every four weeks. Our business model is based on that spirit of collaboration.

Cohen: I noticed on your website that you have dill pickle sorbet. Are you really plating it on top of dill pickle spears?

Malek: No! [laughs]

Cohen: I have a jar of pickle juice in my fridge, and after this call I'm going to have to see exactly what pickle juice does to my churn.

Malek: I love it. It's pretty awesome.

Cohen: We have a salted sundae with olive oil and sea salt, in a rotating menu of about 230 flavors. But we keep 12 to 15 flavors constant. Many of our customers are 10 to 12, so it's also important to maintain blue as a flavor.

Malek: I think a lot of kids in Portland are down for ordering something complex. But we keep a good number of core flavors on the menu, too, because some customers want to count on those. The seasonal menu feels more like sand art—it's insane to keep up with, and customers have to see them before they're gone forever.

Cohen: Some of the glassware we use in the dining room dates back to the 1940s. We use a five-gallon wooden churn that was used by the Amish. It's part of the history here, and I like the texture it gives the ice cream, because it's a vertical churn. What kind of churn do you use?

Malek: I'm slipping on the name—brain freeze! Oh, Emery Thompson.

Cohen: That electric churn is probably the best in the country, and the company is based here in Florida.

Malek: I envy your sunshine in Florida. It rains nine months of the year in Portland.

Cohen: My sales drop by almost 30 percent when it rains. So I have a rainy day special—20 percent off. That would bankrupt someone in your location.

Malek: It's definitely busier when it's sunny here. But people still eat ice cream in the rain, too. If you didn't go out and live your life in the rain in Portland, you wouldn't see much.

2 AUSTIN

THE COUNTRY'S QUIRKIEST BAR DISTRICT

Rainey Street was part of a normal neighborhood until 2004, when the city rezoned it to allow commerce. But instead of bulldozed homes replaced by flashy towers, the 100-year-old bungalows were converted into bars and lounges. That's made the street popular among locals and tourists alike.



Bar 96

"The big money guys always want to do something grandiose, but that's not necessary. I opened my first bar on Rainey Street without a lot of money. I saw the potential in what was already there."

—Bridget Dunlap, owner, Clive Bar, Bar 96, Lustre Pearl, Burn

28

46

“There are obvious reasons why entrepreneurs come to Texas: low taxes, low cost of business, favorable weather. But in Austin we also have the whole Keep Austin Weird thing, which started in the early 2000s to encourage small-business growth. While everything else was going global, we were focused on keeping things local.”

—Donny Padda, co-owner,
Bungalow and Parlor Room

“BACK IN THE '90S, AUSTIN HAD LOTS OF MOM-AND-POP SHOPS AND A REALLY GREAT MUSIC AND ARTS SCENE. AS THE CITY HAS GROWN, THE CULTURE HAS SHIFTED, BUT FOR THE MOST PART, WE'VE MANAGED TO HOLD ON TO THOSE OLD IDEALS.”

—Matt Rade, general manager,
The Blackheart Bar

22

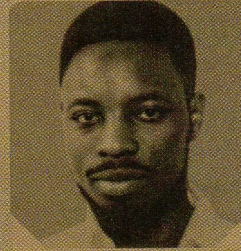
► SEATTLE

MOVING HISTORY FORWARD

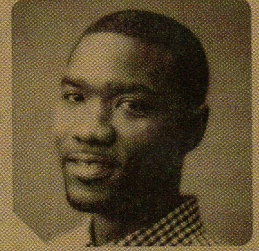
Black Dot, a startup resource center nestled in Seattle's historically black Central District, aims to mentor and connect the city's African-American entrepreneurs. Three of the organization's cofounders talk us through their plans.



ARAMIS HAMER



MUJALE CHISEBUKA



K. WYKING GARRETT

How did Black Dot get started?

K. Wyking Garrett: We grew out of Seattle's Africatown Community Development Initiative and Hack the Central District Startup Weekend. We asked, "How does the African-American community reinvent itself in the face of displacement with gentrification?" After the startup weekend, aspiring entrepreneurs really wanted to continue building their ventures, and they needed consistent community, access to resources, networking and a space.

Why was the Central District an important location to you?

Garrett: Twenty-third and Union has been an epicenter of the African-American neighborhood. My grandfather was a cofounder of one of the first black banks west of the Mississippi, and it was right there on that commercial strip. It's also ground zero for a lot of new development, which has been displacing historic African-American small businesses. We're on one of the last large full-block tracts of undeveloped land, so we're part of efforts to acquire, purchase and redevelop that block in a way that is inclusive of our community.

Mujale Chisebuka: We decided to operate Black Dot on a membership

model because it makes everyone feel even more involved. When you come into a place and you're a member and you're paying a fee, it gives you that feeling of ownership.

And your members are far more than just tech startups.

Aramis Hamer: I'm really proud that we give artists opportunities. We'll help them get business cards, establish an appropriate artist statement. We hold events for writers—we had one called Writers Unblocked and had quite a few self-published authors come and speak to members about how to publish their books.

You've been up since November. Any success stories so far?

Garrett: The Seattle Filmmakers of the African Diaspora collective formed through Black Dot—it's a network of film professionals that have come together and are now working on a number of projects, hiring each other for different jobs. Another is a black urban farmers collective, which secured a plot of land in downtown Seattle to create an urban farm and food enterprise. So it's not even just individual entrepreneurs but the connection and creation of communities within the community.

43

IOWA CITY

NOT JUST ANOTHER HOMETOWN JOCK

When an NFL player retires, it's not uncommon for him to return to his old stomping grounds and open a sports bar—specializing in cheap beer, memorabilia-littered walls and nostalgia of glory days past.

Former San Diego Chargers kicker Nate Kaeding, however, had more ambition than that. When the Pro Bowler retired in 2013 after nine seasons, he returned to his native Iowa City and enrolled in the University of Iowa's Tippie Executive MBA program. Along the way, he helped start...well, OK, he started a bar. It was Pullman Bar and Diner, a locally sourced joint that uses Iowa farm ingredients. But he also launched Tailgate Clothing's Iowa City store, a vintage T-shirt shop that American Eagle purchased for \$11 million in 2015. Then last fall, he went large—becoming the retail development director of Iowa City's Downtown District.

"I am a big believer in a vibrant, street-level culture," Kaeding says. "The cool coffee shop, the unique, independent retail store—these businesses represent a city." He has a bit of home-field advantage: There are already 280 businesses in the downtown corridor.

Now Kaeding's mission is to convince entrepreneurs outside his hometown that Iowa City is a welcoming place for business. He can make a strong case. "Our local banks are good about taking active risks in small businesses that need a \$50,000 to \$100,000 loan," he says. And he's also gone out of his way to help fund companies himself, by writing seed checks. He did so with Higher Learning Technologies, a mobile study solution platform whose app has been downloaded two million times, and Big Grove Brewery, an area craft brewer setting up shop in the Riverfront Crossings district next year. It's all part of a plan to help the town grow, diversify and, like he did in the NFL, compete against other cities.



COLLABORATION 101: A UNIVERSITY AND ITS TOWN

Penn State University is the lifeblood of State College, Pa., but its 46,000 undergrads rarely interact with the township that encircles it. In 2010, a group of graduates set out to change that. Here's how coworking space and networking group New Leaf Initiative brings everyone together.

Set Up Shop

The campus and downtown are divided by College Avenue. "Getting students to cross was the first challenge," says executive director Galen Bernard. "But we secured a space downtown and started helping turn student ideas into action. The community downtown saw what we were doing and said, 'Hey, we could use some of that, too.'"

Change the Perception

"The focus here is often on frats, football and finance," Bernard says. "But New Leaf works with students and young adults in the community—and people who move to State College from Philly and Brooklyn—who want to innovate. It's easy for the town to think young people are just here to party, but we're changing that."

Bridge the Gap

New Leaf schedules informal meetings with community organizations to discuss their members' work and ask for support, or a chance to collaborate. "It's a transient town for twentysomethings," says Bernard. "We have to tell residents about our members who are planting long-term roots in State College."

Keep Their Attention

Once New Leaf had proven itself, the city pledged its support—the mayor even invited Bernard to a party at her house. As the organization grew, its staff learned how to let members know of the city's interest. Says Bernard, "Local leaders want to know about any person doing something cool."

Nate Kaeding
at downtown's
Tailgate Clothing.

BOISE

YES, BOISE HAS A CREATIVE CLASS

The Treefort Music Fest began in 2012 as some music fans' passion project. It's since grown into a massive community event that celebrates Boise-grown technology, yoga, beer, food, comedy and film. Cofounder Lori Shandro Outen (who is also owner of local insurance agency the Shandro Group) explains what makes it so special.

What makes Boise a great place to be an entrepreneur?

The spirit of the people.
The size of the community.
The ability to effect change.
I grew up in large cities, and I never felt there was anything I could do to effect change.
A lot of things aren't perfect here, but there are enough of us who love what it is, and if we keep participating and doing what we love, I believe it will get even better.

That's not really the stereotype of Boise.

I think people expect boredom and small minds and a lack of much to do. And instead, it's green and lush and vibrant. There are plentiful things for everyone to do, and it's full of really nice people to do them with.

Treefort began by attracting bands en route to the Pacific Northwest after performing at South by Southwest in Austin. How did it come to include so

many other disciplines?

We kept meeting people who felt the same way as we did about Boise and creativity, except about a different aspect—yoga, film, technology, story. It was easy to fold them into our infrastructure and let them do and curate what they love. My favorite thing about Treefort is the collaboration across the disciplines. There is so much more crossover than we realize.

How has the festival changed Boise?

It's legitimized the creative class here. My father-in-law says that Idaho is for the doers. That's meant in the traditional sense—people who can produce material, money-worthy things. But the creative class adds so much. Typically, creative people here have to work a "real" job before they can be creative. So now the question is, Can we provide opportunities for the creative class to earn a living year-round? □