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Portland ranks a lowly No. 40 for young professionals

A study finds that Portland may not be a great place for younger workers after all

Portland Business Journal - by [G. Scott Thomas](#) Contributing Writer

Nate Beaty doesn't live in Chicago by choice. He'd rather be in Portland.

Beaty, a graphic designer, couldn't find consistent work here. He relocated to Los Angeles and then Chicago, where his freelance graphic design business is thriving.

"It's just hard to make a living (in Portland)," he said. "At some point, I'd love to live there again."

Though Portland is among the top five cities in the country for in-migration of college-educated, 25-to-34-year-olds, a new study pegs it a lowly No. 40 among the nation's best places for young adults.

Portfolio.com/bizjournals analyzed the 67 U.S. metros with populations above 750,000, searching for qualities that would appeal to workers in their 20s and early 30s.

The study's 10-part formula gave the highest marks to places with strong growth rates, moderate costs of living, and substantial pools of young adults who are college-educated and employed.

The Southwest has become the new frontier for young Americans — the region where men and women in their 20s and 30s have the best chance of establishing themselves in a recession.

Five Southwestern metropolitan areas, led by No. 1 Austin, rank among the nation's eight best places for young adults.

Two-thirds of the nation's major markets have fewer jobs now than five years ago, but Austin added 99,200 jobs during that span. Its annual employment-growth rate of 2.8 percent is the fastest in America.

Austin also has the strongest concentration of young people among the 67 metros. Twenty-eight percent of its residents are between the ages of 18 and 34. The median for the study group is 23.1 percent.

Washington, D.C.; Raleigh; and Boston are the three runners-up in the study's rankings of the best places for young adults. They're followed by four Southwestern metros — Houston, Oklahoma City, Dallas-Fort Worth and Tulsa — that occupy fifth through eighth place.

Portland, in contrast, recorded 0.0 percent annual employment growth from 2004 to 2009. Cost-of-living was relatively high. Its jobless rate among 18-to-34-year-olds was 9.6 percent, ninth-worst among the top 40 cities.

Portland economist Joe Cortright wasn't familiar with the survey, but said the Portland region is still experiencing an influx of younger, educated workers. That's one reason why the unemployment rate is high.

He cautions against “oversimplification.”

“If somebody wanted to move to a place with low unemployment rates, they would move to North Dakota,” he said. “People are not moving to North Dakota. You need to ask why people are moving here, rather than assuming that we know what makes a place attractive. It's not a one-size-fits-all that causes people to move.”

Beaty relocated from Portland after six years for purely economic reasons: He couldn't find steady work in Portland.

“I knew so many people who were unemployed,” said Beaty. “People with degrees couldn't find anything. They were taking whatever they could get.”

The top 5

Here's a quick look at the top five metros for young adults.

1. Austin: The Texas capital's attractiveness to young adults is broadly based. Austin ranks among the 10 leading markets in five of the 10 categories that were analyzed.
2. Washington, D.C.: Educated young adults flock to Washington, where 35.8 percent of all 18-to-34-year-olds hold bachelor's degrees. The study group's median is 23.2 percent. Per capita income (\$56,510) is well above average.
3. Raleigh: This is the fastest-growing major metro in the nation. The population of the Raleigh area is increasing by 3.9 percent per year. That's more than triple the pace for the typical market, 1.2 percent.
4. Boston: Elite universities such as Harvard and MIT give Boston its intellectual cachet. The local share of young adults with college degrees (37.6 percent) is the highest in the country.
5. Houston: Employment opportunities abound in Houston. Its job-growth rate (1.7 percent per year) ranks among the five best in the nation. And so does its annual upswing in per capita income (6.6 percent).

The least desirable market for young adults, according to the Portfolio.com/bizjournals study, is Detroit, which shares the pain of the major automotive corporations based there.

Detroit is saddled with the nation's worst unemployment rate for young adults, the slowest rate of income growth, and the biggest decline in overall employment. A total of 343,700 jobs have disappeared from the Detroit area during the past five years.

Two Midwestern industrial markets and two Sunbelt metros round out the bottom five. These areas may differ in geography, but they share a lack of attractiveness to young adults: Cleveland (66th place), Dayton, Ohio (65th), Tampa-St. Petersburg (64th) and California's Riverside-San Bernardino area (63rd).

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