



## PITTSBURGH Magazine **Feature Article**

# To Have & To Hold

## Pittsburgh Strives to Attract and Retain Young People.

By Joyce DeFrancesco

Look around Pittsburgh. Chances are you'll see more gray hair than pink, purple or orange. We're not getting any younger - and that spells trouble for Pittsburgh's future, not to mention its hopes to become a high-tech mecca.

"We'll die if we don't [attract young people]," says Dr. Richard Florida, H. John Heinz III professor of regional economic development at Carnegie Mellon University. "They're our future." Florida has made a study, and a reputation, of what makes bright young workers tick, and has specific recommendations on how to hold on to them. Given that Allegheny County, among

That doesn't mean that all young people are Asian, gay, or pierced and tattooed. Some might be, but what's important is that when these people are present, you know a region is open and accepting. And being known as an open place is vital to a community's high-tech success.

In fact, the presence of a vibrant gay community is the leading predictor of high-technology success in a metropolitan area, says Florida. The five metropolitan areas with the highest concentration of gay residents are all among the nation's top-15 technology areas. That includes San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Austin, Atlanta and San Diego.

According to Florida's research, gays not only predict the concentration of high-tech industry; their presence is also a predictor of its growth as well. Gays are often a signal of a diverse environment that allows and fosters the creativity and innovation necessary in the high-tech industry. A place that is a comfortable home to gays is

the nation's most populated counties, has the second largest elderly population in the United States, Pittsburgh has been paying serious attention to Florida and to the need to hold on to its young people.

The problem has been a long time in the making, and so are its solutions. Young people hitting working age have been leaving Pittsburgh in droves since the mid-1960s (see "Boomerangs," May). Census data show, for example, 198,000 people between the ages of 15 and 19 in the Pittsburgh statistical area (Allegheny, Beaver, Washington and Westmoreland) in 1980. By 1990, as that group aged 10 years, there were only 155,000 people ages 25-29 - or 22 percent fewer. The loss of about 170,000 manufacturing jobs, mostly in the '80s, has usually been cited as the culprit, but it doesn't explain the constant 30-plus-year drain of young people.

What attracts young people to a region? According to data from focus groups conducted in 1999 by downtown-based Campos Market Research Inc.: a lifestyle that is youth-friendly and supportive of diversity; large numbers of visibly active young people; easy access to a variety of outdoor activities; a vibrant music and performance scene; a range of nightlife experience, including nonalcoholic choices; and a

likely to be open to all types of people.

While Pittsburgh may not be ready to be called a "gay Mecca," it's definitely not as bad as you may think. The city has had a gay-rights ordinance on the books since 1990 that prevents discrimination based on sexual orientation. The University of Pittsburgh announced in May of this year that, after a seven-year legal battle, it would conduct a study on the feasibility of providing same-sex domestic-partner benefits to its employees. CMU and Chatham College already do so, as do dozens of other companies (editor's note: including this one).

Pittsburgh is home to a popular annual Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and a thriving gay publication, *Out* magazine, among other institutions of its gay community.

Gays are not the only population that young people want to see in a region. "Bohemians" - Florida's term for people in the creative and performing arts - and immigrants are also indicators of a region's openness. Writers, designers, painters, sculptors, directors, dancers and photographers are a vital part of a youthful, hip city. Their presence signals that the region supports and showcases creativity and artistic expression.

On the plus side, artists are

clean environment and a commitment to preserving it.

Recent statistical data show some good news. The Center for Social and Urban Research at the University of Pittsburgh estimates that Pittsburgh isn't losing young people anymore. But we're not racking up a net gain - not quite, anyway.

A survey conducted by Carnegie Mellon University shows that 20 percent of its graduates in the past five years elected to remain in the Pittsburgh area to work or attend graduate school. On average, only about 5 percent of the graduates each year are originally from the Pittsburgh area, meaning that Pittsburgh is winning over some out-of-towners. It's a small number, but it shows that fresh blood is being transfused into the region.

Pittsburgh looks to be doing some things right, but there's plenty of room for improvement, as we shall see.

### **Melting Pot**

Throughout Florida's research on attracting and retaining young people, one thing comes through loud and clear - young people demand diversity. "They want to see people who look different or are different races or ethnicity, of different genders," says Florida. "They want to see people who look weird.

increasingly making Pittsburgh their home, with national estimates considering it among the largest communities in the United States. The efforts of various grassroots groups, like the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative, encouraging artists to live and work in the Penn Avenue corridor has spilled out with new art galleries and opportunities throughout the East End. Two major art-supply stores serve growing communities in the East End and South Side. The national and international envelope-pushing reputations of the Warhol Museum and Mattress Factory emphasize that the business of art is booming in Pittsburgh. An economic-impact study commissioned by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust in 1997 shows area arts organizations, their employees and audiences had a direct and indirect economic impact of \$368 million on Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

On the minus side, Pittsburgh, which was once a hot spot for immigration, doesn't even have a spot on the top 21 "Melting Pot Metros" list put together by the Milken Institute, an economic think tank. Research by both the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University place Pittsburgh at or near the bottom of rankings among large metropolitan regions in the areas of annual immigration and the percentage of the workforce

People with spiked hair, earrings and tattoos. And they want to see that a place is open to the gay community."

that is foreign-born. Cities like Columbus, Ohio, Atlanta, Minneapolis and Kansas City have had twice the influx of immigrants that Pittsburgh has had in the past 10 years.

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