

Inside

- 2 Escapes: *We're not in NoVa anymore*
- 3 Reliable Source: *Dissing brother Bush*
- 3 Book World: *Rasslin' with Jesse Ventura*
- 15 KidsPost: *Getting a basketball jones*

Style

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2000

C
The Arts
Television
Comics

DM VA M2

E-Village People

Many High-Tech Towns Have Large Gay Populations. Is There a Connection?

By JOEL GARREAU
Washington Post Staff Writer

You've heard the recipe: If you want your region to be a new-economy paragon, take one first-rate research university, add visionary entrepreneurs, season liberally with daring venture capitalists and double-click.

But that couldn't be right, thought Richard Florida, a distinguished professor of economic development. If it were, then how could his university, Carnegie Mel-

lon, be such a technology powerhouse while its city, Pittsburgh, remains such a low spot for high tech?

"I kept on meeting people who had left Pittsburgh for a great job," says Florida. "Lycos was incubated at Carnegie Mellon, and then moved to Boston." He threw wave after wave of data at the question—airports, weather, five-star restaurants, you name it.

The eureka moment happened when he saw numbers compiled by one of his doctoral students, Gary J. Gates, on concentrations of gays living in metropolitan areas—numbers published with another author last

May in *Demography*, a peer-reviewed journal of the Population Association of America.

Florida took Gates's rankings of areas. He compared them with the Milken Institute's "Tech-Pole" rankings of high-tech presence in metropolitan areas. He discovered to his surprise that the number one thing that correlates with a region's high-tech success is the concentration of gay people living there.

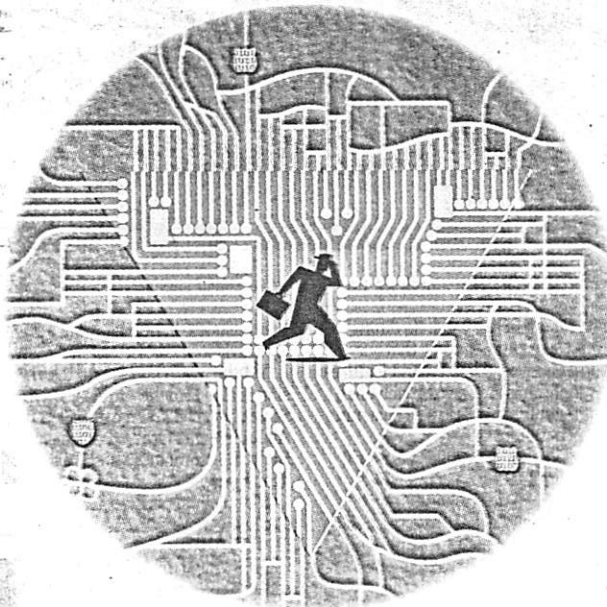
Close behind were concentrations of people with college degrees and people who fit into the Carnegie Mellon researchers' Bohemian in-

dex—people who identify themselves to the U.S. Census as artists, craftspersons and musicians.

But gay concentration led the list.

Could that be right? Could there be a connection between gays and high-tech success? Even if this idea turns into conventional wisdom when The Brookings Institution's Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy publishes the paper later this

See GAY TECH, C9, Col. 1



BY STEVE MCCrackEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Diversity and the New Economy, Hand in Hand?

GAY TECH, From C1

fall as part of its series on the new economy, the question still has to be asked:

What does this mean?

To be sure, the theory has its skeptics. Florida and Gates do not say that one group causes the presence of the other. Yet some regional economic growth analysts are deeply dubious of any cause-and-effect inference.

"High tech in Washington is a function of federal spending," says Stephen S. Fuller, of the School of Public Policy at George Mason University. "Federal purchases of technology services and products have grown from \$900 million in 1980 to \$14 billion in 1999. That's a pretty big inducement to come here. The biggest motivation for migration is economic opportunity."

Nonetheless, he acknowledges that there has been "a cultural transformation that goes with economic transformation. That has really been stark in the last 20 years. The Washington area during the '80s was the second-fastest-growing in the country after Los Angeles. There was a huge diversification of the population base. The new economy has been tied to new cultures and populations."

Robert Ady, former president of Deloitte & Touche/Fantus Consulting, who is credited with guiding more business relocations in the United States and around the world than any other person, says: "You've got to have the basic operating conditions to run your business. You're not just going to go to an area with a lot of amenities and hope to attract a lot of people into your business. It doesn't happen."

He says, however, that "the real driver has always been the availability of a qualified workforce. Nothing else comes close."

The original research being statistical, the picture starts out fuzzy.

For instance, Florida and Gates can't get their numbers down to small neighborhoods, only entire metropolitan areas. They can't tell you how high-tech any celebrated gay neighborhoods might be—like Dupont Circle in the District or the Castro in San Francisco. Neither can they tell how gay any illustrious high-tech area might be—such as the Northern Virginia area between Dulles and Tysons or Silicon Valley.

What they can say is that the Bay Area ranks first in both gay and high-

Gay Tech

Top 15 and bottom 10 metropolitan high-tech areas in the top 50, ranked by Milken.

Metropolitan Area	Milken Tech Rank	Gay Cluster Rank
San Francisco	1	1
Boston	2	8
Seattle	3	6
Washington	4	2
Dallas	5	19
Los Angeles	6	7
Chicago	7	15
Atlanta	8	4
Phoenix	9	22
New York	10	14
Philadelphia	11	36
San Diego	12	5
Denver	13	10
Austin	14	3
Houston	15	21
Greensboro	41	46
Oklahoma City	42	27
Las Vegas	43	48
Norfolk	44	37
Richmond	45	29
Buffalo	46	50
New Orleans	47	24
Honolulu	48	20
Memphis	49	33
Louisville	50	42

SOURCE: Milken Institute "Tech-Pole" Ratings; Gay Concentration study by Richard Florida and Gary J. Gates

THE WASHINGTON POST

tech categories, according to census figures and the Tech-Pole ratings generated by the new economy think tank, the Milken Institute. The Washington area ranks second in the concentration of gay people living there, as measured by those who say they are living with their "unmarried partner" of the same sex. It ranks fourth nationally as a high-tech region, according to the Milken method which combines two measures: a region's portion of the nation's high-tech output, and how many high-tech industries are concentrated there.

So what's to be made of the Carnegie Mellon work?

One possibility is that the numbers are just wrong. But that seems unlikely. Both the gay and tech lists sound right, notes Megan Smith, chief executive officer of Plan-



BY JUANA ARIAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Richard Florida, right, used Gary Gates's research to see why some cities are tech powerhouses and others aren't. The results showed a correlation between a region's high-tech success and the number of gay people living there.

etOut.com, the Internet media company for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals that has clients in more than 100 countries. "That's a good list. If we look at our member data, these cities skew," she says.

Meanwhile, the Milken Institute also publishes a list of fast-growing new places for business and career. In the 1999 list, the three hottest—Austin, Atlanta and San Diego—were places that right now rank higher as gay cities than as tech cities. Could that mean that being a gay place indeed does predict the future success of a tech hub?

"That's an intriguing question, whether it is a leading indicator," says Ross DeVol, the director of regional and demographic studies at Milken. "Anecdotally, it seems to fit pretty well."

So the numbers remain stubborn things. They stare back at you, demanding some explanation.

Perhaps the connection between gays and high technology is as Florida and Gates suspect: We're looking at places comparable to 17th-century Amsterdam at the time of Rembrandt and mercantilism—places that have figured out a way to translate open-mindedness and tolerance into economic dominance.

"Our argument is that this captures a diversity of thought," says Gates, who is now with the Population Studies Center of the Urban Institute in Washington. "You would expect that places that are welcoming to gays would be welcoming to other people who are different. It's a measure of a kind of tolerance that's appealing to the high-tech industry."

Robert Yaro is executive director of the Regional Plan Association in

New York, the nation's oldest civic planning organization. Like Florida, he has noticed that Carnegie Mellon has been "banging out these top-quality PhDs, and six out of 10 end up in Boston, New York, San Francisco, Seattle. Why didn't they stay?" (Pittsburgh ranks 39 on the gay concentration list and 25 on the tech list, well behind, for example, Indianapolis on both measures.)

Says Yaro: "The places they're moving to are the most unbelievably open and tolerant places on Earth. These are places that are hotbeds of immigration. They are academic centers that are drawing from all over the world."

In areas such as Washington, at least, there's anecdotal support for the proposition that high tech and gay show considerable overlap.

Check out the Reston Sheraton, just off the Dulles Access Road. Every Thursday it is the site of the weekly party of the Dulles Triangles. The Triangles turn out to be a predominantly techie social group for gays in the heart of Northern Virginia technogekdom.

The area toward the back of Bowmans Lounge is jammed.

"We call this Dupont West," says an architect. As drinks are passed and the conversation levels rise, the Triangles' intense monthly social calendar is discussed. There's the upcoming camping trip in the Catotins, the sushi night at No Da Ji in the Tall Oaks shopping center in Reston, boogie night at Badlands in the District, and the much-anticipated Halloween party in Sterling.

"Well of course tech is gay," says a balding engineer with a closely trimmed beard. His name tag reads



CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

"Richard."

He asks: "Who do you think was messing around in the middle of the night with all those mainframes way back when? People like me who couldn't get a date, back when I was straight."

"We don't have families, so we can stay late," says a man whose name tag reads "David." "You can travel at the drop of a hat if you have no partner," says Lee. Mike adds that he's going back to the office after the party. "We have a deadline," he explains.

"Writing code is sort of a left-brain, right-brain activity," Richard says. "It's incredibly tedious, but done right, it's artistic."

Some heavy-hitting corporations, many of them high-tech, are matter-of-factly named as particularly gay-friendly. AOL. Oracle. Sun. Booz-Allen & Hamilton. All of the airlines. Sallie Mae. AT&T. Verizon. Mobil. AMS.

"At IBM, their gay-lesbian group is called the Eagles," says Lee, who is in project management software implementation. "IBM has always been ahead of its time."

Later, Nicholas Graham, an AOL spokesperson, comments: "From the beginning AOL has been a voice for the gay community online as well as many other communities. One of AOL's great strengths is its diversity. That commitment to diversity is reflected strongly in our corporate policies as well."

Rob Edwards, manager of marketing communications at Cyveillance in Arlington, is gay. He sees overlap between techies and gays. "In the tech industry, the straight men are

much more accepting. Being nerds, they understand what it's like to be picked on. If everything reverts back to the scars of high school, gay men will tend to hang around the nerdy straight guys more than not. AOL wouldn't have survived the early years without the gay community."

Says Sergey Brin, the 27-year-old co-founder and president of Silicon Valley's Google.com, the Web's fastest-growing search engine, "I used to attend the lesbian-gay dances at Stanford because they were so much fun." Google has just created a benefit program that allows employees to transfer Google stock to domestic partners.

Gay males are sometimes capable of buying high quality of life, Gates notes. Two men are likely on average to make more money than a couple made up of a man and a woman. At the same time, a couple without children probably has more discretionary income than one with kids.

"Because they are so focused on finding great talent, tech companies are more flexible," says PlanetOut's Smith. "Whether it means pinball machines in the office, or working at 4 in the morning, or hiring a single parent, or a gay, they're looking to create a welcoming environment for a huge range of people. At IBM the corporate mantra is 'None of us is as strong as all of us.' That's such a tech thing. As long as people are effectively working as a team, people would really care less what they are doing at home."

"There are a lot of similarities between techies and gays sociologically," agrees Joel Kotkin, a senior fellow with the Pepperdine University Institute for Public Policy and the author of the forthcoming "The New Geography: How the Digital Revolution Is Reshaping the American Landscape."

"They both have much more latitude about where they move," Kotkin says. "They have skills that are transferable. They can choose where they want to live."

You can see the results in Northern Virginia, says John, a computer security specialist who was born in Washington, moved away, and has now come back as one of the Dulles Triangles. "The suburbs are a lot more accommodating than 30 years ago. I live in Cascades. There are six gay men on my street."

Mike, who lives in Chantilly, agrees. "When I got out of school, the first thing was: What kind of cities can I be gay in? I came here for the job. But I definitely decided to stay for the gay openness."

"Even the rednecks are nice here," he says.