

'Small-city feel with the benefits of big-city life'



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J.P. Knapp (center), his fiancée Sara Levi (left) and Julius Blackmon listen to Jennifer Boland (back to camera). The group gathered at Wild Wing Cafe. Knapp, 31, moved to Charlotte in June 2005 from Indianapolis.

'The young and restless' flocking to Queen City

Jobs, climate, access to amenities pull in professionals, study says

BY GREG LACOUR

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Two years ago, Jignesh Shroff and his wife looked for houses in what Shroff thought was his dream city, San Diego.

Shroff woke up from the dream once he saw listing prices. He looked for other cities with saner real estate costs and ended up in Charlotte. He and his wife,

Kathryn, live in a \$327,000 home he said would have cost \$1.5 million in San Diego.

Home value wasn't the only consideration. Shroff, a 32-year-old international tax manager for Ernst & Young, wanted to live in a city with a booming economy and temperate climate.

They're all attributes that are drawing college-educated professionals ages 25 to 34, perhaps the nation's most coveted demographic, to Charlotte.

A recently released Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce study ranks metropolitan Char-

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Courting the 'Young and Restless'

A study last month by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce shows the Charlotte area ranking high in its ability to draw 25-34-year-olds with at least a four-year college degree - a critical demographic for urban economies as the baby boomers reach retirement. Charlotte's statistical area includes Gastonia and Rock Hill, S.C.; raw data came from the 2000 U.S. Census.

INCREASE IN YOUNG AND EDUCATED POPULATION BY PERCENTAGE, 1990-2000

1. Las Vegas, 105
2. CHARLOTTE, 57
3. Austin, Texas, 56
4. Portland, Ore., 50
5. Atlanta, 46

YOUNG AND EDUCATED SHARE OF THE OVERALL POPULATION, 2000

1. Austin, 18.2 %
2. Atlanta, 17.6 %
3. Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, 17.5 %
4. Dallas-Fort Worth, 16.8 %
5. CHARLOTTE, 16.6 %

'Young, restless' pick city

Professionals *from IB*

lotte among the nation's leaders in attracting the young, professional and educated - "the young and restless," as demographers are calling them.

Among the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas, Charlotte ranks second, behind only Las Vegas, in that population's growth rate from 1990 to 2000, and fifth in its share of an area's overall population. Nearly 17 percent of Charlotte-area residents are young professionals.

"It was unbelievable," Shroff said recently, "to see what we could get for our money."

Why it's important

Success in drawing young, college-age professionals is becoming a critical measure of an urban area's economic health. As baby boomers hit retirement age, the young represent a restocking of a dwindling work force, experts say.

Also, studies show the "young and restless" grow less restless as they grow less young: Professionals tend to relocate far less often once they hit 35.

They're attracted to Charlotte because of the area's natural features - climate and access to outdoor recreation - and those government and business have created, such as a growing banking industry, an increase in dining and high-end shopping options and professional sports, said Chamber of Commerce President Bob Morgan.

Those developments are in part both a reaction to the influx of young professionals and an



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J.P. Knapp (left) jokes with Robin Wodarski (center) and Dean Ruppe (right) while gathering with friends at Wild Wing Cafe.

enticement for more - although, he added, "I would underscore that it all begins with the job."

On one level, the city's merely part of the well-documented "macrotrend" of population movement from Rust Belt cities in the Midwest and Northeast to the Sun Belt, Morgan said. Also ranking high in the study are Atlanta; Nashville, Tenn.; and Austin, Texas.

But location wouldn't matter nearly as much without available jobs - and the Charlotte area's economy created more than 150,000 from 1996 through 2005, according to Chamber statistics.

Recent Census data indicate the overall trend continues. The median age of the estimated 80,000 newcomers who moved to the Charlotte region last year is 29, compared with 38 for non-newcomers, according to the Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey.

Out-of-state newcomers are also more likely than non-new-

comers to have at least bachelor's degrees, if not higher. They tend to be men or minorities, and more rent than own their homes.

Establishing a pipeline

Ten years ago, fresh from a snowy graduation day, St. Bonaventure University alumnus Joe Ryan and nine of his fellow graduates passed through Charlotte on a scouting trip for places to live. They wanted to move from cold upstate New York to the Sun Belt yet still stay within a day's drive of home. Atlanta was too big and Raleigh too cliquish, he said. Charlotte was neither.

Ryan, 33, now works as a recruiter for Wachovia. He and his friends started a flow of St. Bonaventure graduates to the Queen City - more than 200, he said. The group tailgates for Panthers home games.

"I'm sure every one of us thought we were going to go back," Ryan said. "But the longer

we stay, the tougher it gets to leave because of all the things the city has to offer."

J.P. Knapp likes his sports, too. The 31-year-old sales representative for Verizon Business moved to Charlotte in June 2005 from Indianapolis. Knapp isn't a huge Panthers or Bobcats fan, but he goes to games often, and pro sports mix well with the city's other benefits, he said.

"The city has a good mix of small-city feel with the benefits of big-city life," Knapp said. "It's got a large airport that can get you anywhere, so you can stay close to the people you left behind ... and you don't have a thing like Atlanta, where the city is just so ginormous you can live your whole life there and go downtown three times."

Young professionals like living in, or at least close to, city centers, said Carol Coletta, president and chief executive of CEOs for Cities, a Chicago non-profit that helped conduct the Atlanta study. CEOs for Cities has done numerous studies and polls to find out what drives young people to certain cities.

In May, Coletta said, CEOs for Cities polled young professionals on this question: If you were offered your dream job, and you could live anywhere in the United States, what would your top three choices be? Charlotte ranked 12th, just behind Portland, Ore.

"Charlotte has a reputation nationally," she said, "as being a good place, a place where things are happening, a place that's on the move." - STAFF WRITERS LEIGH DYER AND TED MELLNIK CONTRIBUTED.

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