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## Tucson Citizen

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### Youth drives high-tech economies

*A central area where young professionals work and congregate - such as in Austin, Texas - seen as key to attracting qualified work force.*

*Teya Vitu*

*Courtesy of the Austin American-Statesman FRANCISCO MEDINA/Tucson Citizen*

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AUSTIN, Texas - Younger adults drive the high-tech economy.

"All the major tech centers, the one common element is they have 35 percent-plus of their work force in the 25 to 44 demographic," said Angelos Angelou, an international economic development consultant based in Austin.

Austin checks in at 35.3 percent of its population in that age group. Tucson sits right in line with the United States average: 30 percent, with Pima County at 28.4 percent.

"Young people need to be feeling enthusiastic about their city," Angelou said. "It has to be a place that

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appreciates young professionals and not just considers them as young kids."

Austin is the "Live Music Capital" and nobody quarrels with its self-proclaimed designation. "Austin City Limits" is hugely popular on television and in recent years has even become a multiday festival in Austin.

Endless clubs provide edgy music in Austin. Live music is played every afternoon at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, and a live band performs at every city council meeting.

Steve Weathers, chief executive of the Greater Tucson Economic Council, notes the youthful flavor of the Gaslight District in San Diego, where he worked before coming to Tucson, along with the River Walk in San Antonio and other similar attractions in elite high-tech cities.

"Do we have that place, that town scene where everybody congregates?" Weathers said. "We don't have that. We need a cool place for the young workers. Rio Nuevo could bring that."

Not quite fast enough for Buffi Charron, 22, a graduate student at the University of Arizona, originally from central Illinois.

"I feel the night life is not really geared toward young people," said Charron, who has a bachelor's degree in psychology and is pursuing a master's degree in education leadership.

"In Illinois, the age is 19 to get into a bar. They do wrist bands (to determine who can drink). Here you can't hang out with your friends (if some are younger and others older than 21). You have to go to Applebee's. That's really lame."

Part of the Rio Nuevo redevelopment project for downtown focuses on making the central core more attractive to young adults, said Assistant City Manager Karen Thoreson.

"We're really focusing on housing for young people: rental, edgy lofts, first-time home buyers, affordable homes (defined as rent between \$600 and \$700 a month, and home prices between \$70,000 and \$100,000)," she said.

Downtown jobs may not be as quick to follow.

"People want to live, work, play in one place. We'll do it in a decade," Thoreson said.

Housing isn't the only thing missing in Tucson. Places to meet people are lacking, according to a Sperling's Best Places survey released in December.

Austin ranks as the best city for dating in the survey while Tucson comes in at No. 29.

"Austin scores relatively high in everything, from frequency of dating partners to the number of establishments to meet people," Sperling's reported. "Austin also has the highest percentage of 18-24-year-olds and knows how to have fun as they spent more money out socializing than any other area."

Tucson gets dinged in the dating venues per capita category and online dating score. This is especially stinging because Tucson is a heavily populated college town as are several Top 10 cities on the Sperling list.

Sperling's President Bert Sperling, in a Tucson Citizen interview, said Tucson and the Southwest in general suffer with the youth sector because the region lacks comprehensive public transportation and centralized areas.

"They want to have public transportation because they may not have cars," Sperling said. "The Southwest is spread out. It's hard to interest people to have a core area where people hang out. Living, entertaining and working all in one area. That's real attractive for young people. What I notice is when places are very spread out it's hard to come across young people."

Charron noticed Tucson's scattered nature right away.

"I was really surprised when I came to Tucson," Charron said. "I thought it would be more like a big city. I was used to getting around in a city where you can take a taxi or public transportation. Here you have to drive."

Michael Stevenson, 27, marketing director at **Breault Research Organization**, a Tucson optics firm, said, "When you're in Austin or Savannah, you park your car and walk the attractions. "Try that in Tucson and you'll wear out your shoes. ... Get enough of them within walking distance of one another



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and you'll draw young people."

Glenn West, president of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce during the city's emergence in the 1980s and 1990s, had a five-point sales pitch to attract high-tech companies. Point One: a readily available young and extremely well-educated work force.

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DEMOGRAPHICS

Percentage of population age 25 to 44:

Austin 35.3

San Jose 35.4

Raleigh 34.9

Seattle 34.1

Tucson 30.6

Pima County 28.4

United States 30.2

Census 2000

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