

116. AMBER ROSE: For July 4th, I like to be at home in L.A. listening to loud music, swimming and having a BBQ with my family.

Rose is an actor, model and designer

117. NICK SPITZER: New Orleans Rock 'N' Bowl is a family-friendly honky-tonk. On Thursdays, walk past the Catholic saint's altar and Carnival decor to join a dance floor of Creole cowboys who zydeco two-step and waltz *en français* ... or you can bowl to the music!

Spitzer, a New Orleans resident, is the host of public radio's American Routes



118. BLAKE SHELTON: It's kind of a tie for me: I love the Ar buckle Mountains, near where I live, because it's one of the oldest mountain ranges in the U.S. But the Wichita Mountains have buffalo and elk in a really cool setting—a mountain range on the Plains.

Shelton, an Oklahoma native, is a coach on *The Voice*. His latest album is *If I'm Honest*

119. Our midsize cities are having a renaissance

BY JACK DICKEY

GENERAL ELECTRIC'S FirstBuild microfactory, a sprawling glass, brick and steel complex that opened in 2014, touts itself as a place where ideas come to life. In this case the hype is true: over the past two years, the facility, equipped with 3-D printers and heavy machinery, has spun several moon shots into real products, including a pizza oven that needs no ventilation and a machine that speeds up cold-brew coffee. They were dreamed up not by GE's engineers but by enterprising locals with big ideas.

This is the type of free-wheeling innovation that's supposedly the specialty of our coastal capitals of tech and culture. But FirstBuild is not in Seattle or Silicon Valley. Rather, it calls home Louisville, Ky., the Ohio River shipping and manufacturing hub where the Midwest meets the South. Though the city may be best known for hosting the sybaritic festival and horse race the locals just call Derby, there is newly quite a lot going on—year-round. The Census Bureau estimates its metro area has grown by 20,000 people since 2010 while adding, per the St. Louis Fed, 80,000 jobs.

Not that numbers say it all. Look at the city's thriving bourbon scene. (Louisville is probably the only place where the mayor can display his collection of brown liquor as a civic emblem.) Or

the city's brisk business in artisanal coffee. At the table, chefs make liberal use of Kentucky sorghum, bacon and, naturally, bourbon. At 610 Magnolia, Brooklyn-born chef Edward Lee has earned a national profile by infusing Korean elements into traditional Southern cuisine, bringing something new to his adopted hometown.

And Louisville has company. All over the U.S., from Pittsburgh to Fresno, Calif., to Birmingham, Ala., to Sioux Falls, S.D., metro areas are stirring with new energy. America's midsize cities have long compensated for any cosmopolitan deficit with affordability—living in Louisville is 59% cheaper than living in Manhattan; Chattanooga, Tenn., 58% cheaper; and Oklahoma City 60%, according to the cost-of-living index. But now residents can spend some of those savings on what you once might have expected to find mainly in places where rents were higher and buildings taller.

This urban renaissance is remaking the character of America's midsize cities. In 2011, for the first time in years, the growth rate of urban areas outpaced that of the suburbs, according to Census data. This constituted a break in the decades-long trend of U.S. suburbanization and the

attendant decline in the tax base and education funding in cities. Though suburbs in 2012 reassumed their position as the fastest-growing counties, the gap is no longer what it once was.

AS METROPOLITAN AREAS capture an increasing share of American economic activity, what's under way is a broader remaking of the way we work, live and interact. Not all of it is positive. As economist Jed Kolko has noted, the people flowing into cities to enjoy the new amenities are largely educated, white and high-earning. And their financial success has not trickled down. From 2009 to 2014, median wages fell in 80 of the largest 100 metros, according to the Brookings Institution.



But the back-to-the-city movement has brought a host of other benefits that come with density. In his 2013 book, *The Metropolitan Revolution*, Bruce Katz, a Brookings scholar who studies urbanization, argued that the changes afoot constitute nothing less than, well, a metropolitan revolution. "I've been in 20 midsize cities over the last year," Katz says, "and there's been a downtown revival in almost every one."

Over the past 15 years, Katz says, two trends have converged to boost cities, and downtowns in particular. First, Americans now want to live, work and play in the same part of town. Corporations, for their part, have traded their secluded suburban campuses for urban offices that encourage cross-

LOUISVILLE'S WATERFRONT PARK HAS BEEN A MAGNET SINCE OPENING IN 1999

pollination with neighboring businesses and universities.

These revived downtowns manage to have architectural character too. Abandoned factories now present as ideal conversions to chic lofts. In Louisville, the developer Bill Weyland has salvaged 13 old buildings; the city's West Main district is said to boast more cast-iron facades than anywhere except New York City's SoHo neighborhood.

In development and other realms, the relative pliability

of midsize city governments has proved useful. "We're big enough that we're internationally recognized but small enough to get things done," says Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer.

"The national government is dysfunctional, and many state governments are too," Katz says. "Cities have become the vanguard of problem solving." Washington's loss is Louisville's gain.

Like other metros, Louisville hired a chief innovation officer: Ted Smith, who cites as his favorite program a partnership that linked GPS-enabled inhalers to the computing cloud. Anytime an asthmatic puffs, the city's real-time air-quality map registers a new trouble zone.

Innovation of a different sort is the province of Teddy Abrams, the tousle-headed 29-year-old conductor who recently finished his third year directing Louisville's symphony. Before his arrival, the orchestra had fallen on hard times, including bankruptcy and a long labor dispute. Abrams changed the program: "People tend to think of an orchestra as baroque string quartets in a patrician environment. We shouldn't be a music museum." And so while the symphony still plays Bach and Mozart, on other nights Abrams incorporates elements of hip-hop and electronic music.

A genre-defying orchestra in Louisville? Believe it. The locals do. Abrams has conducted and performed all over the world, in halls as historic as they come, yet he says he will never forget when last year he got to tell a hometown crowd, "Please welcome DJ Glittertitz to the stage." □

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120. WHY IS THERE SO MUCH CARDBOARD?

Thanks to the rise of on-demand shopping and shipping, we can buy nearly whatever we want whenever we want from wherever we happen to be. We don't have to wait in line. We can easily compare prices across online stores. But those virtual shopping carts are yielding a growing heap of real-life cardboard boxes—and boxes inside boxes inside boxes—that come with costs of their own.

In the past decade, the dollar value of the shopping we're doing online has almost tripled, according to the Department of Commerce. In the first quarter of this year, e-commerce sales were nearly \$93 billion, up 15% from the same time in 2015. "People in the U.S. are receiving way more home deliveries than before," says Cara Wang, an assistant professor at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute who studies transportation. That boom in shopping dollars may be good for business, but it's linked to increased delivery-truck trips, which means gas costs, emissions and congestion—and more packaging materials that end up in the local dump.

Right now about two-thirds of paper and board waste gets recovered in the U.S., but the rest gets discarded—25 million tons (of 69 million total) in 2013. The European Union, with more people, generates less and recycles more. E-commerce giants like Amazon are aware of the issue and may well be willing to change their packing practices, Wang says. But that will only happen, she adds, when consumers' demand for instant gratification, delivered right to their doorsteps, is matched by their demand for businesses to consider the environmental costs.

—Katy Steinmetz