

Distant from other cities, Boise businesses are free to chart their own course, says Mayor David H. Bieter (right). Below, downtown Boise. Bottom, Boise State University football; the campus of Albertson College of Idaho.



the start-up city

In this valley, businesses grow.

BY MARGARET LITTMAN



FOOTBALL PHOTO: CARRIE QUINNEY / BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

J.R. Simplot's potato-processing company changed the way Americans eat when it introduced the first commercially available frozen French fry in 1953. But more significant to Boise has been the tradition of entrepreneurship he helped foster.

From the miners and loggers who settled the region to the next wave of firms like Ore-Ira Foods, Boise Cascade, and Albertson's to the tech boom that continues today, entrepreneurs have been a constant in Boise's history, says Mayor David H. Bieter.

"We are the most remote city of our size in the country," says Bieter, adding that the distance to other metropolitan areas (432 miles to Portland, Oregon; 345 to Salt Lake City, Utah) makes Boiseans both more self-reliant and more willing to help one another.

Caleb Chung found entrepreneurial gold in the Boise Valley when he relocated from Los Angeles to Boise more than a decade ago.

"Boise itself is a start-up," says Chung, who invented the toy craze Furby after moving to Boise and started a robotics toy firm, Ugobe, here. "Boise is the perfect blend of art and science. Innovation happens when you blend those two things. Once I was here I was able to focus. It is easy to go up in the

mountains and change from left brain to right brain quickly. I think the natural beauty knocks stuff loose."

Chung is working with Boise State University to encourage curriculum focused on the intersection of art and science. In addition, he and others say the existence of established tech companies produces more tech start-ups. Employees of other Boise-area tech firms, including Micron Technology and Hewlett-Packard's Boise divisions, often decide to launch their own local firms after spending a decade learning the ropes at established firms.

Also setting up shop in Boise is Dial 411, a free phone service that provides phone numbers and business referrals to residents in southwest Idaho. Similar to the Yellow Pages, but minus the paper, the company's four founders are bringing the phone book back to the phone.

Meridian-based Dial 411 targets users who likely don't keep a phone book in their car. "It's the new generation of the Yellow Pages," says Matt Lopez, founder

and senior vice president of sales. "Dial 411 emulates the experience of Google, only over the telephone."

Dial 411's founders relocated to Boise from Silicon Valley, California.

"There's a good entrepreneurial spirit here," says Lopez, pointing to the fact that Boise has been rated among the top places for starting a call center. "Moving to Boise was never an issue for us."

It is difficult to pinpoint why Boise is such a fertile start-up market. "There's something in the water here that it has become this tech innovation hot spot," jokes Chung.

But everyone has a theory. Bieter says he thinks that being small and a little bit "behind the times" can be an advantage because entrepreneurs are able to learn from the mistakes of others.

Chung and others are trying to continue the tradition of Boise being a "test tube" for entrepreneurs. The City of Boise has developed programs to streamline licensing and other governmental red tape that sometimes waylay start-ups with

limited resources.

"We think we have generational intellectual capital. We have a city that was built on that, and there is evidence of that continuing to occur," says Meg Carlson, board president of Kickstand, a 500-member organization that helps start-up tech businesses succeed in the city.

Kickstand is just 6 years old, but it's following a tradition of supporting start-ups. In 1978 J.R. Simplot contributed to the start-up funds for a little technology company. That firm's name? Micron Technology. Today Micron has more than \$5 billion in revenue and helps other tech companies get started in the city.

"Boise has had an advantage with these two monster technology companies—Micron and HP—that has given us the technology base," says Dean Klein, vice president of market development at Micron. "The same thing that happened in the Silicon Valley is happening here."

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Spud Hub

You know that it's pronounced "potato," not "potahto," and, unlike a former U.S. vice president, you know it isn't spelled with an "e" on the end. And, you know that Idaho is famous for its spuds: 12 billion pounds harvested annually. But here are three fun facts you might not know about the tuber that made the state famous:

1. Idaho's unusual climate—warm during the day, cool at night—helps the tubers bulk up, resulting in larger and fluffier potatoes.
2. Idaho's geological history as a volcanic region contributes to mineral-rich soil, making for tasty taters.
3. Idaho has perhaps the world's only marathon—the Famous Idaho Potato Marathon—after which runners are treated to a baked potato bar.

—Margaret Littman

School's in Session

Colleges and universities offer rich resources.

There's a spirit of cooperation that pervades Boise's colleges and universities. Educators, businesspeople, and the community work together to help students succeed.

Boise State University catapulted to national attention on New Year's Day 2007 when its underdog football team scored a come-from-behind victory over Oklahoma in the Fiesta Bowl. Boiseans are justly proud of the BSU football team and its unique blue-turfed stadium, but the university—Idaho's largest, with more than 18,000 students—is making its mark in many other fields, too. Robert Kustra, president since 2003, set a goal of building BSU into "a metropolitan research university of distinction."

Businesses are helping this happen. For

example, Micron Technology helped launch a new doctoral program at BSU's College of Engineering and has funded programs in the sciences and engineering. "Micron is strongly committed to investing in the future of education and in institutions like Boise State that support a spirit of innovation and execution," says Dee Mooney, executive director of the Micron Foundation.

Northwest Nazarene University, based in Nampa, reaches out to Boise and beyond. Its MBA classes are offered in both cities, via video link at the College of Southern Idaho, and online.

Bill Russell, who is in charge of strategic development for Northwest Nazarene's School of Business, has invited speakers including Idaho Supreme Court Justice Gerald Schroeder and state

Attorney General Lawrence Wasden to speak to students. They come, he adds, because even leading Boise citizens share a sense of community.

Albertson College of Idaho students enjoy a lovely campus in Caldwell, 28 miles from Boise, where they can earn degrees in the liberal arts and sciences. Like BSU and NNU, Albertson offers programs that benefit the entire community. In 2007, for example, Albertson hosted an exhibition of Pulitzer Prize-winning photos.

Two other state universities have campuses in the Boise Valley: The University of Idaho offers master's and doctoral degrees in education and engineering, and Idaho State University offers associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees, mostly in health-related fields.

Adding to the educational mix, voters approved formation of the College of Western Idaho in May. The community college will help students begin their college careers and adult learners gain new skills. —Julie Fanselow

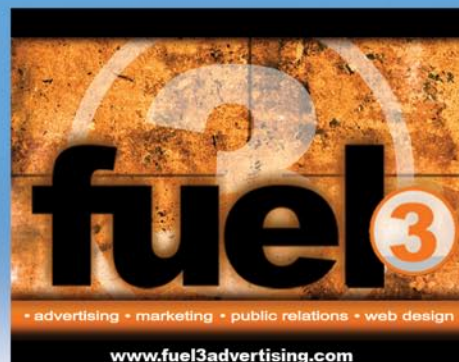


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Hidden Assets

Boise's airport gets global attention for what passengers don't see.

Art exhibits, natural lighting, and a colored depiction of Idaho's rivers embedded in the flooring are part of the Boise Airport's charm. Free Wi-Fi, a high-tech conference center, and award-winning concessions are among its perks. But it's what's hidden behind the scene that sets it apart.

Boise's airport was among the first in the world to install an in-line explosive

detection system. Luggage travels through a maze of belts from check-in to final carousel, filtering through high-tech screening points such as an Explosive Trace Detection along the way. The system draws attention from the world over, says airport representative Larissa Stouffer: "Many airports are just now installing these systems, and we were one of the first." — *Sydney Sallabanks*



Working Together

Business leaders cooperate on projects for the common good.

When the custom software development company where Daniel VanOrden worked was looking to expand outside of its home state of Alaska, Boise had a strong supporter. It was Phil Bradley, then CFO of ProClarity (now part of Microsoft).

"From a business perspective, there are all those articles in *Forbes* and *Money* about how this is a great place to work, but you do not just take those articles to be correct," VanOrden says. "[Bradley] and I met, and he told me that they turned out to be true."

Thanks to ProClarity's nudge, Resource Data Inc. opened an office in Boise and quickly grew from one local employee to nine.

While business entities may view each other as competition in other cities, the corporate culture in Boise includes a spirit of cooperation and loyalty.

"I have never seen anything like it," says Paul Hiller, executive director at the Boise Valley Economic Partnership. "I have never seen as closely knit a community in my life."

Hiller came to Boise from California less than a year ago to lead the partnership, a \$5 million initiative designed to bring new, high-paying jobs to the area. Of those funds, 80 percent came from the private sector, 20 percent from the public. Hiller says that in most cities, those ratios are the other way around.

Dee Mooney, executive director of the Micron Foundation, meets with leaders of

other corporate, community, and family foundations every month to discuss the city's non-profit needs. "Community giving is very collaborative," she says. "The community really benefits from all of the corporate energy that is put back into it. There is a sense of interconnectedness amongst the corporations."

At J.R. Simplot Co., employees are encouraged to volunteer for non-profit causes on their own and get the company involved in philanthropic projects. The company has a volunteer service committee of 20 employees who help choose projects, such as adopting a highway or working in a food bank. Because many of the nonprofits are homegrown organizations, the desire to support them is high, says Tom Ryder, head of Simplot's tax department and a community volunteer.

Ryder adds: "Because we can't drive an hour and go to the opera in Boston, we have had to grow our own arts community. It is very high-quality, and the big companies in town want to support those resources." — *Margaret Littman*



Professional Development Center



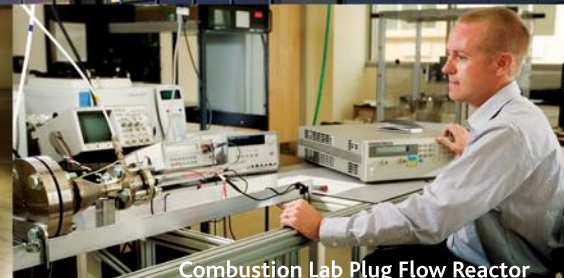
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