

**YOUR TOWN GOT YOU DOWN?
WE'VE GOT YOUR ESCAPE
PLAN. THESE 20 STARS OF
AMERICA'S 21ST-CENTURY
RENAISSANCE ARE RIDING
A WAVE OF CIVIC REINVEN-
TION AND FRESH IDEAS.**

**BEST
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GRESSIVE
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**THE WORD ON THE STREET: ITHACA**

“Where else in the U.S. does the Dalai Lama have a residence?”

—JENESS RUHANEN, SUBSCRIBER

town. The pace of change has only escalated in the past ten years, with a much-needed spiffing up along Cayuga's shores. Two miles of paved waterfront trail have already been finished, with four more to go, and local visionary Mack Travis and his son, Frost, are cleaning up and transforming the Ithaca Gun factory (a crumbling brick structure with a lead-contaminated field next to 150-foot Ithaca Falls) into condos. Downtown, the old Woolworth building is now the library, an abandoned printing plant is now live/work, and the EcoVillage is adding another 30 homes.

THE LIFE: Locals cycle centuries around Cayuga, trail-run portions of the 562-mile Finger Lakes Trail, and hike to Lucifer Falls, in nearby Robert H. Treman State Park. The legendary veggie Moosewood Restaurant has been a Seneca Street landmark since 1973. —K.A.

THE STATS:

Pop. 30,000

Median age: 22

Med. household income:

\$21,400

Med. home value: \$183,500

Avg. commute: 14 mins.

Largest employers: Cornell U., Ithaca College, BorgWarner, Ithaca City School District, Cayuga Medical

Bright Idea**Make the Switch**

CORVALLIS, OREGON (POP. 49,800)

Corvallis is far from the undiscovered jewel it once was—it's within 90 minutes of world-class skiing, the Oregon coast, and blue-ribbon salmon fishing—but in recent years the city has picked up verve from a new promenade on the Willamette River and a steady transition to renewable energy. In 2006, Corvallis became the second U.S. city (after Moab) to be named an EPA Green Power Community. Thanks in part to Pacific Power's Blue Sky Program, 15 percent of power users—from the city government to businesses—are participating in the purchase of renewables like wind and geothermal power. The green push began in 1997 as part of the town's 20/20 Vision Statement, a blueprint guiding all aspects of the town's growth until 2020. The new riverfront park, completed in 2002 as part of the vision statement, has helped attract more than a dozen new cafés, restaurants, and spas, proving that being farsighted isn't so bad after all.

—R.K.

Bright Idea**Return to Your Roots**

WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

(POP. 95,900)

A famed railroad town and ship-building port during WWII, Wilmington suffered mightily after the war effort ended. But Port City recaptured its past glory by turning to... its port. The state's ports authority purchased skyscraper-size cranes to handle cargo containers, and the city invested millions to preserve historic buildings along the waterfront. The efforts helped attract new businesses, diversify the economy, and make Wilmington one of America's fastest-growing cities in the nineties. With nearby beaches along the Cape Fear coast, an ever-expanding Riverwalk, a National Register historic district comprising more than 230 blocks, and a renewed economy that has been fueled partly by an active filmmaking sector, “Wilmywood” has become much more than a shadow of its former self.

—R.K.

7. Louisville, Kentucky

THE REVIVAL: Louisville, a hub for higher education, horse culture, and bourbon distillation since the 19th century, never quite hit bottom. But this independent-minded, even-keeled city on the Ohio River—it's not quite the South, not quite the North, and not quite the Midwest—took a turn for the worse in the '70s and '80s, when locals fled town for the 'burbs and urban rot set in.

As luck would have it, though, back in the 1890s prescient city fathers hired landscape guru Frederick Law Olmsted's firm to design more than 1,500 acres' worth of urban parks. In 2005, longtime mayor Jerry Abramson announced ambitious plans to create 4,000 acres of new greenspace and link all city parks with a 100-mile walk-and-bike trail. To date, 23 miles of the Louisville Loop have been completed, winding through woodsy, historic neighborhoods dating back 150 years. The cyclist mayor has also added 40 miles of bike lanes to city streets and required that all new roads be built with designated lanes. Downtown is rebounding with a vengeance, fueled by a surge in the local logistics business—UPS moved some

THE WORD ON THE STREET: LOUISVILLE

“Big-city action, small-city price, hometown feel!”

—ANDREA HIGGINS, SUBSCRIBER



The Kentucky Derby, above, cult music shop Ear X-tacy

BEST TOWNS 2008

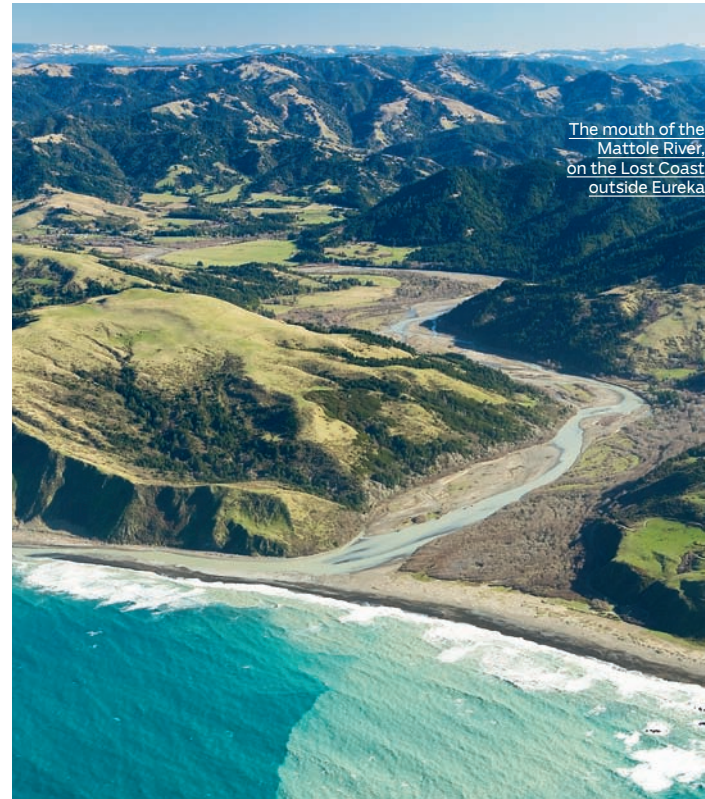
of its operations here in the early '80s, and in the past decade more than 100 other companies have followed—and over \$2.5 billion in new construction.

THE LIFE: Proof on Main, in the new 21c Museum Hotel, is the city's hippest address, with contemporary art on the walls and 50 Kentucky-made bourbons on the menu. Located almost entirely within city limits—who knew?—6,200-acre Jefferson

Memorial Forest offers easy-access hiking, fishing, camping, and horseback trails. —K.A.

THE STATS:**Pop.** 701,500**Median age:** 39**Med. household income:**

\$43,400

Med. home value: \$141,600**Avg. commute:** 21 mins.**Largest employers:** UPS, Ford, Norton Healthcare, Humana, Jewish Hospital & St. Mary's Healthcare, GE

The mouth of the Mattole River, on the Lost Coast outside Eureka

THE WORD ON THE STREET: EUREKA

“Great atmosphere, and you can travel from five to 30 minutes and be completely surrounded by wilderness.”

—CINDY SHERER-HORN, SUBSCRIBER

8. Eureka, California

THE REVIVAL: Four hours north of San Francisco, Humboldt County is home to half the world's old-growth redwoods, so for much of its 155-year history, timber was king. With the remaining trees mostly off-limits, Eureka's economy has been in dire need of diversification these past few decades.

Counterculture roots (wayward San Fran hippies have long found refuge here) and prime real estate on Humboldt Bay, however, have helped make Eureka an emerging NoCal arts capital. Last year saw the reopening of the 1920 Sweasey Theatre, in Old Town, a historic district dotted with hundred-year-old Victorians. Small independent businesses and boutiques that had fled for the malls in the seventies, depressing downtown in the process, are moving back. Long a haven for more traditional painters, Eureka's gone mod in the past few years, with the

opening of contemporary-art spaces like Accident Gallery, in an old warehouse/roller rink. A five-block boardwalk has breathed new life into the waterfront along Humboldt Bay, which still generates about two-thirds of the state's oyster harvest and is kept clean by Humboldt Baykeeper.

THE LIFE: A bridge connects Old Town Eureka to Woodley Island, which shelters an egret rookery and has a marina that rents sea kayaks. When the harvests are bountiful, crabbers sell their catch right off the boat for \$4 a pound. Head south 30 minutes to Humboldt Redwoods State Park to mountain-bike or 20 minutes north to Trinidad to surf. —K.A.

THE STATS:**Pop.** 27,000**Median age:** 37**Med. household income:**

\$29,600

Med. home value: \$262,250**Avg. commute:** 15 mins.**Largest employers:** City of Eureka, Schmidbauer Building Supply, SN Servicing, Costco, the Times-Standard**Bright Idea****Start at the Top****SEATTLE**

(POP. 582,500)

Want a green city? Elect a green mayor. Want a green planet? Elect Seattle's mayor, Greg Nickels. Since taking office in 2001, Nickels has been at the forefront of fighting global warming, convincing more than 850 U.S. cities to sign on to his U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which aims to meet or beat Kyoto Protocol targets. Not surprisingly, Nickels is just as devoted to his own constituents, doing everything from installing hundreds of bike racks around the city to backing a \$75 million renovation of iconic Pike Place Market. As with his national agenda, it's his green initiatives here that get the most attention, like bringing the city's fleet of hybrid vehicles to 330 (plus the one Nickels traded his Town Car for), and his newest planet-saving brainstorm: placing a 20-cent “green fee” on all paper and plastic shopping bags, with the city providing free reusable bags for residents. For Seattleites, grassroots are great, but it also helps to have a good head on your shoulders. —R.K.