

Tri.ang.lites

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Jamie Nunnelly rouses herself from her Cary bed every weekday morning and battles Interstate 40 to the Research Triangle Park for work.

After work, Nunnelly meets with her women's group in either Raleigh, Cary or Durham (they alternate). She attends church in North Raleigh. On the weekends, she and her husband like to hike - along the Eno River and in Chatham County - and visit potters in Nash and Moore counties.

Nunnelly thinks of where she lives in such a large way that she's apt to drop in at any of the branches of her gym, Spa Health Clubs, whether in Raleigh, Cary or Durham.

"I normally don't even think about, 'Oh yeah, I'm in Durham now,' or 'I'm in Raleigh now,'" she says.

If this rings true, consider yourself a Trianglite.

Yes, Trianglite. As in, not a Raleighite or Caryite or Chapel Hillian. You, who live in South Durham, work in downtown Raleigh and play in Chapel Hill are a true resident of the Triangle, squeezing the most out of what this region has to offer and stitching together the area's very different parts into a very real whole.

You've taken a close look at your maps and you know it's often easier to grab a bite to eat in South Durham than in North Raleigh if you live in Garner or Apex. You wouldn't think of missing your favorite band because they're playing at the Ritz in Raleigh and you live in Chapel Hill - or if you live in Raleigh and they're playing at Carrboro's Cat's Cradle.

You check out movie listings for the whole region, basing your plans not on where you and your significant other live or work, but on where and when the movie you want to see is playing.

"I've always used the whole Triangle," says Edgar Murphy, community relations manager for Nortel Networks, who moved to Durham from Detroit 20 years ago. "That was my attraction for coming here."

Newcomers are Trianglites

That's a refrain heard again and again from Trianglites. It seems that those who think of and treat the Triangle as a whole tended to move here from other places. They were lured here for a host of reasons - college, work, family or for the area itself - and some have been here for decades. But they all thought of the Triangle as the Triangle before they arrived.

"I moved from Tampa four years ago," Nunnelly says. "I had heard so many good things about the Triangle area. When I came to visit, there was no question."

Trianglites also often include families in which one spouse works in one city and the other works in another. And many work in the Park. Which makes sense: If you can't live where you work, your world is naturally expanded.

"I definitely think of the region as a whole," says Reid Maness, who lives in southern Wake County and works at Research Triangle Institute in RTP. "If you limit yourself to one community, you miss so many possibilities."

Maness can hardly be accused of missing out on what the region has to offer. He has attended all three major universities in the area, starting at N.C. State University, transferring to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and later earning his MBA from Duke University.

"It does make it really interesting during basketball season," he says.

From an idea to a lifestyle

The Triangle has Romeo Guest to thank for its nifty moniker. According to local legend, the then-Greensboro businessman was taking part in heavy-duty talks with Gov. Luther Hodges about how to pave a new economic way for the state when Guest whipped out his map, trained his eyes on the area's three universities and connected the dots to form a three-sided shape.

That was 1953. Needless to say, the observation stuck - and grew. Now the Triangle refers not only to the three universities or the research park built in the midst of them, but to a six-county region where many residents think little of living in one county, working in another and shuttling through those in between.

To no one's surprise, there's a lot of moving about going on. According to 1990 census figures, 6,715 Durham residents drove to Orange County for work and 6,800 commuted to Wake County. More than 12,000 Orange Countyites commuted to Durham for work every day and 25,533 Wake County residents worked in Durham.

That's a lot of back and forth. And seeing as how Triangle residents in 1990 commuted nearly twice as much as they did in 1980, the future could hold even more Trianglites than it does today.

Triangle life not for everyone

There are, of course, many who live in Raleigh, Durham, Cary or Chapel Hill and seldom step over their city's limits. They've lived full and happy lives where they are and have no need to go traipsing around this so-called Triangle.

"I don't like to drive in Raleigh," says Johnny Evans, a lifelong Durhamite who retired from Liggett-Myers just a year ago. "And why would you go anyway? There's not much difference between Durham and Raleigh, except Raleigh's larger."

Gretchen McLauren seconds that sentiment. She lives in Carrboro, works as an artist out of her home and spends a good bit of her down time just a block from there, at Weaver Street Market.

"I love the small-town feel and the culture and arts that are here," she says of Carrboro.

But here's a dirty little secret. Even those who say they seldom leave their home city and certainly do not consider themselves Trianglites do hop on I-40 when the mood hits them.

"I work in Chapel Hill. I was raised in Chapel Hill. I think of where I live as Chapel Hill, definitely," says builder Peter Spinarski during a break at Weaver Street Market in Carrboro.

So when was the last time Spinarski traveled to Raleigh? "Within the past week; to go out to dinner," he confesses.

Trianglites defy traffic

But living the Trianglite life is not without its downside. Each person who points his or her car toward I-40 exacerbates the area's brewing traffic disaster.

"Do I get tired of driving? No. I get tired of not driving, of sitting on I-40," says Carol Sloan, who lives in Hillsborough and works in Research Triangle Park.

The long commute hasn't yet forced her to shrink her world, though. Sloan has settled in Hillsborough because she likes the feel of it. "You walk in a place and you know people," she says. She's also fond of the specialty shops and antiques stores downtown Hillsborough offers.

But for a haircut, she heads to Chapel Hill. And on the weekends, she's likely to travel to her favorite jazz clubs in Raleigh or attend whatever folk festival is scheduled throughout the area.

"If people ask where I live, I say the Triangle," she says.

So does Nortel's Murphy, who chose to live in Durham because of its rich African-American history. But, since Durham is a part of the Triangle, Murphy is not limited to any one set of cultural offerings.

"I've been to Carolina ball games in the afternoon and North Carolina Central games at night, and neither one was about football," he says.

Murphy is passing his attitude about the region on to his daughter, as well. He says she doesn't think of her friends only in terms of who she sees at school. When attending a camp at Duke last summer, she befriended a girl from Raleigh and now they regularly visit.

"It's all in your attitude," Murphy says. "It's just a matter of which way you drive."