

# Triangle is young, but not very hip

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Call them YUSPs, (Young, Upwardly mobile, Suburban Professionals) or maybe just TYPs for Triangle Young Professionals.

By day they write computer code, do research or attend grad school. By night they shuttle home to walk the dog, catch some must-see TV and then, (if they don't have kids) go out.

If these maturing Gen Xers seem to be everywhere, there's good reason: There are more 25- to 35-year-olds here than there are students or baby boomers or retirees - or anyone.

The latest census numbers show that in 1996, roughly 186,000 of them worked, played and slept in our midst. That's 18.5 percent of total Triangle residents.

This makes the Triangle one of the most youthful metro areas in the country. Places like Jacksonville, Fayetteville and Iowa City, Iowa, have slightly higher percentages. But in cities with a million people or more, the Triangle ranks first. Atlanta, Boston and Washington all have a lower percentage of 25- to 35-year olds than the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area.

The No.1 demographic group is having its impact on the area. Economists say they are a driving force behind an increase in luxury apartments, gourmet supermarkets and trendy specialty shops. But if this age group has such strength in numbers, some of its members ask: How come there's not enough to do?

Despite its relative youth, the Triangle falls behind other metropolitan areas in many of its arts and leisure offerings, a point noted by Money Magazine four years ago even as it dubbed the Triangle the best place to live in the country.

"There's nothing to do here," says Keba Wynn, a 29-year-old accounting supervisor walking along Ninth Street in Durham for lunch. "I'd love to see some nice jazz environments. We need more creative activities, more arts."

The reason behind the Triangle's relatively young population might seem obvious to some. There are, of course, many top graduate-school programs here that attract 20- and 30-somethings. The low unemployment rate acts as a magnet. There is Research

Triangle Park. And until recently, a young family with children could find a relatively inexpensive house close to work.

But to others, this is a fact that has never before been pointed out with such clarity. Young singles and couples might have wondered why the lines at their favorite movie theaters were so long or why they could never score a table at the neighborhood pizza joint, but they say they seldom thought: "Could it be that there are too many of me?"

"I didn't know that," says Shannon Phillips, a 28-year-old who has lived in Raleigh for 3 1/2 years, when she was told she's in the age-group majority.

"I really like Raleigh because it feels like it's young," Phillips says. She moved to the Triangle from Tampa, Fla., after college. "But we could use some more places like this," she says of Lilly's Pizza in Raleigh's Five Points area, where she's eating dinner. She says she and her fiance groaned when they recently heard a radio ad for Lilly's. "We were sad because that means it's going to get even more mobbed."

For some TYPs, it's not the crowds or the distance but the fact that places they like to go haven't developed in the Triangle. Chapel Hill has long been known for its music scene, but some young singles and couples say they get tired of traveling around the Triangle.

"What I'd like to see in Raleigh is a more centralized district of restaurants, bars and pool halls," says 27-year-old Sean Herbert. He has lived in Raleigh for nine years, since he entered as an undergraduate at N.C. State University.

"I wish we had something like a Buckhead," he said, referring to the trendy Atlanta entertainment district. "There are things to do here, but they're so spread out."

The area is, however, beginning to respond to some of the demand: During the past two years, for example, more than 40 restaurants, clubs, museums, galleries, shops and other businesses have sprung up in the warehouse district in downtown Raleigh.

Many business owners there say they are trying to capitalize on a desire by young adults and transplanted residents to gather in a hip urban setting.

In some ways, the area's shortfalls are puzzling.

The 25- to 35-year-old age group has dominated since the late '70s when, demographers say, the Research Triangle Park first began attracting young professionals to the area. According to census data, 1990 was the year this age group peaked. A full 1 of 5 Triangle residents was between the ages of 25 and 35 then. Triangle Young Professionals have had more than a decade to turn the area into the kind of place they'd like it to be.

But sheer volume isn't always all it's cracked up to be: Susan Goetcheus, the 31-year-old owner of the Vertigo Diner in downtown Raleigh, can attest to that. When she moved to Raleigh from Richmond, Va., in 1995 looking to open a funky new restaurant, she was turned down by nine banks before she finally got the loan she needed.

"They didn't believe I could make it," she says. She said her diner struggled at first, but is thriving now.

Time is also not on the young professional's side. "You want to know what young people are doing?" asks David Shapiro, a 31-year-old computer systems operator at Duke University Medical Center. "They're working. They work late, then they go home, then they go to work again."

That's not to say the group has not left its stamp on the Triangle.

Economists point to the growth of upscale specialty shops such as those in Cameron Village and gourmet offerings in the grocery stores as evidence of the presence of TYPs. Those who don't have children have money to spend in bistros and pottery stores and stationers, says Michael Stegman at the Kenan Institute in Chapel Hill. One example: Paint the Earth, a do-it-yourself pottery shop that opened recently in downtown Chapel Hill.

The housing sector is where this demographic group has made the biggest splash, he says. This impact can be summed up in two words: luxury apartments.

"All over the Triangle, you're seeing the construction of high-end rental housing and really, that's a product of the age group you're talking about," Stegman says.

To drive down Duraleigh Road in Raleigh is to witness this phenomenon. There, luxury complex abuts luxury complex, all of them offering perks like car-washing centers, Xerox and fax machines and even pool halls in the club houses.

But in the end, perhaps a dearth of hipness is a small price to pay. Because along with the gripes and the wish lists comes this sentiment from the Triangle's young professionals: We wouldn't be here if we thought it was so bad.

"I thought about living in New York or a bigger city," Shapiro says. "But then I look at my sister. She lives in a little flat in New York City. It's small, it's dirty. It's on the top floor and she's got to walk up.

"Here, you get some of the nice features of a bigger place AND a better quality of life."