

*The Seattle Times*, April 11, 2006

## **Seattle ranks as nation's best-educated big city**

By Eric Pryne, Seattle Times staff reporter

College graduates are flocking to Seattle, lured by a captivating combination of work and what's available after work.

It's the best-educated big city in America, according to Census Bureau estimates: 51.3 percent of all Seattle adults 25 and older hold bachelor's degrees or better.

Between 2000 and 2004, according to the bureau, the number of Seattle residents with college degrees increased by 11 percent -- three times the rate of the city's overall population growth.

What's happening in Seattle is part of a national trend, according to an Associated Press analysis. Educated Americans are gravitating to the country's big cities, chasing jobs and culture and driving up home prices.

Though many of the largest cities have lost population in the past three decades, nearly all have added college graduates, according to the analysis.

"The largest predictor of economic well-being in cities is the percent of college graduates," said Ned Hill at Cleveland State University. To do well, he said, cities must be attractive to educated people.

The numbers suggest few cities are more attractive than Seattle -- especially to young grads, said Karin Zaugg, spokeswoman for the city's Office of Economic Development. "They're looking to challenge themselves intellectually, and then go play hard," she said.

They come for the jobs at cutting-edge companies such as Microsoft and Amgen, she said, but also for the city's diversity, international flavor, outdoor recreation opportunities and arts scene.

Her colleague Brian Surratt, the office's industrial-sectors manager, is an example. He moved to Seattle six years ago, after getting his degree in Oklahoma, with no job lined up.

"I picked up a magazine and read that Seattle was the most livable place in the country," he said. "I was young and single ... It was definitely a lifestyle choice.".....

..In Seattle about one in six adults in 1970 had at least a bachelor's degree, among the national leaders for big cities then. By 2000, that figure had jumped to nearly one in two adults. And over the next four years, according to Census Bureau estimates, the number of college graduates in the city increased from 193,000 to about 215,000.

The increase is "quite remarkable, even extreme for a large American central city," said Richard Morrill, University of Washington geography professor emeritus. "I doubt many other large cities experienced an increase like that."

He attributed the surge in part to a change in the city's economy. Many manufacturing firms and warehouses have moved to the suburbs, he said, and been replaced by software and biotech companies, drawing "the intellectual types who like the excitement of the city and deliberately locate there."

What's more, Morrill said, many workers at Microsoft and other suburban tech firms choose to live in the city and "reverse commute."