

The Hottest  
Startups of 2011

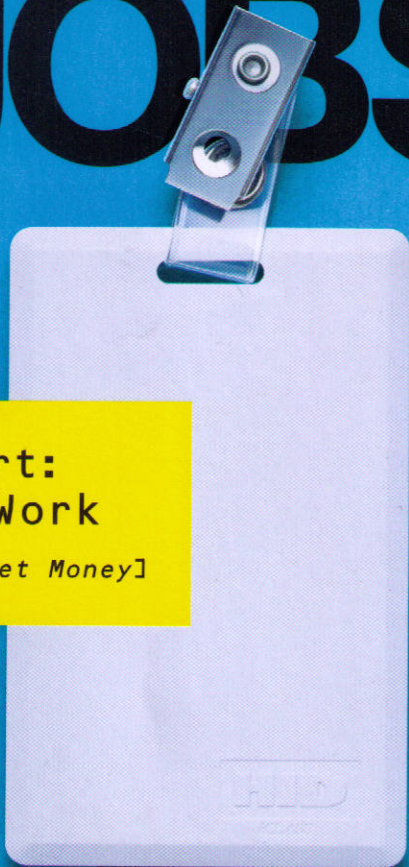
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# WIRED

APPLY YOURSELF | JUNE 2011

# THE SMARTEST JOBS



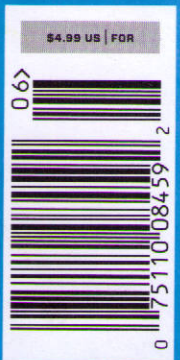
Special Report:  
The Future of Work  
[Produced with NPR's *Planet Money*]

WHAT  
THEY ARE

WHERE  
THEY'RE  
GOING

WHO'S  
GETTING  
THEM

# IN AMERICA



**29.8%**  
INTERNET

**29.1%**  
ONLINE PUBLISHING

UNEMPLOYED AMERICANS IN 2006:  
7 million

# As the US economy and the smoke charred capital can discern the years of job growth economy unlike

The recovery needs to be revolutionary, because our most recent financial meltdown laid bare a fundamental change in the US economy. Since sometime in the 1970s—economists generally agree on the trend, if not the exact date—the US has been increasingly divided into two groups: those whose economic fortunes grow and those whose wages stay stagnant. This divide has many potential causes, including the rise in global trade, technological advances, the decline in unions, and slowing growth in education. But the full impact of these shifts was long masked, first by the stock market bubble and then by a massive credit and housing bubble, which flooded the economy with money we hadn't really earned. For nearly 20 years we felt richer than we were.

Now, as the economy slowly rebounds, it is doing more than just gaining jobs. By looking closely at data from both government and academic sources, we can see the gradual emergence of a whole new category of middle-class jobs: a realm of work that (given time and luck) could begin to close the chasm in American employment. These new middle-class jobs are what you might call smart jobs. They're innovative and high tech, but most of them are located far from Silicon Val-



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Get the WIRED app for audio interviews,  
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UNEMPLOYED AMERICANS TODAY:  
**13.5 million**

# omy slowly rebuilds from four years of starts to dissipate, we shape of the next 20 wth. What we see is an e any we've ever known.

ley or New York. They're specialized, but that doesn't mean you need a PhD or even (in some cases) a college degree to get them or to do them well—though they do require some serious training, whether on the job or in a vocational program.

Smart jobs tend to scramble the line between blue-collar and white-collar. Their titles tend toward the white (technician, specialist, analyst), but the underlying industries often tend toward the blue, toward the making of physical stuff. Smart jobs can involve factories and machines, plastics and chemicals, but operating those instruments and manipulating those materials demands far more brains than brawn. Even though some of these jobs are nominally in old-fashioned industries, visit the factories and shops and fields and you'll find that these industries are in the process of being utterly transformed.

These new, innovative middle-class jobs are cropping up all over the country, in regions where you'd never expect to find them. Dayton, Ohio, is a hot spot for radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology, while Cal-

casieu Parish, Louisiana, has become a hub for PVC and synthetic rubber. In information technology, job growth is flourishing from Richmond, Virginia, to Provo, Utah. Once these pockets of innovation gain a foothold, they can grow; the employers subdivide, multiply.

As you might expect, smart jobs tend to cluster in cities—but not always the cities you'd imagine. The same forces of urban renewal that relaunched New York and Boston and San Francisco as bastions of livability during the 1990s have now taken hold in smaller municipalities. Even former industrial cities, without a big college or university, are finding that revived downtowns can help keep their most creative young people from moving away.

WIRED has spent six months working with NPR's *Planet Money* to investigate the current state of employment as it rebounds from a particularly nasty recession. With 6.5 million more Americans unemployed today than in 2006, it's still too early to declare an end to our national jobs crisis. But it's not too early to glimpse the contours of what the recovery will look like. What follows is our attempt to document the currents of job growth that promise, for the first time in two generations, to replenish the ranks of the American middle class.

**ADAM DAVIDSON** (@pm\_adamdavison) is a cofounder and cohost of NPR's *Planet Money* ([npr.org/money](http://npr.org/money)).

**56.8%**

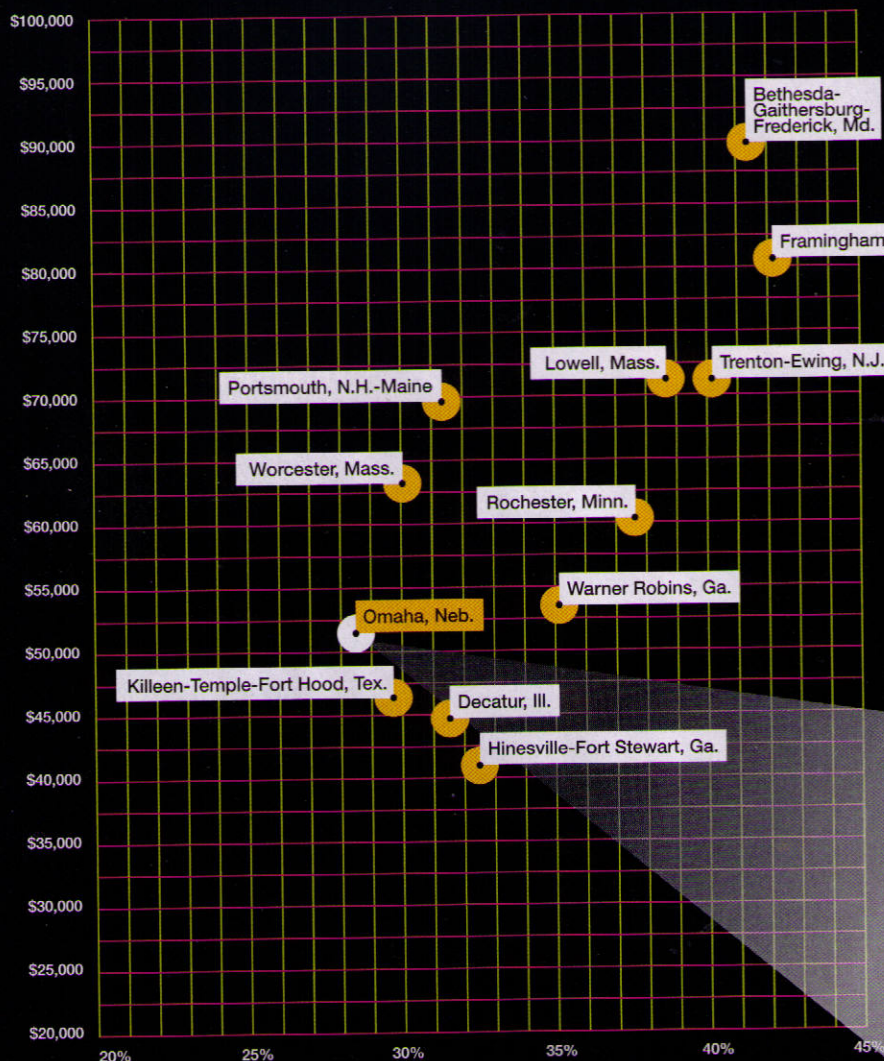
**RENEWABLES  
AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT**

# The Reviving Downtowns

Smaller cities and towns are remaking themselves as hubs for the knowledge economy.

Map illustration by Bryan Christie

Livable cities draw creative people, and creative people spawn jobs. Some places you'd never expect—small cities not dominated by a university—are learning how to lure knowledge workers, entrepreneurs, and other imaginative types at levels that track or even exceed the US average (30 percent of workers). Here are some surprising destinations from the data of the Martin Prosperity Institute, directed by Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*.



Median household income (2005-2009)  
Projected percentage of creatives per city, 2018

SOURCE: MARTIN PROSPERITY INSTITUTE (MARTINPROSPERITY.ORG) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO'S ROTMAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT. LOCATIONS BASED ON METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS.

Marcus Midtown Cinema  
MOVIES

Délice European Bakery  
RESTAURANTS

## Midtown Crossing

unveiled in 2010, is the culmination of a five-year effort to revitalize midtown, which had been home to Mutual of Omaha and Berkshire Hathaway but not much good housing. Mutual put up the funds for the project, a million-square-foot bet that upscale condos and retail could lure young professionals.

## CASE STUDY:

It's only the 42nd-largest city in the US, but over the past two decades, Omaha has been transformed into one of the Midwest's most vibrant cultural hubs. Here's how the rebirth happened, starting in the '90s.



**Downtown**  
for years was a tiny oasis of urban cool: an overstuffed used-book shop, some fancy restaurants, even (starting in 1984) a hopping gay club. But sometime in the early 1990s, new gourmet restaurants like Vivace and the Flatiron Cafe began to draw the suburbanites—and tempt them to consider moving closer in.

**The Slowdown development,** as this complex is known—after the indie-rock club that anchors it—was completed in 2007 on an abandoned lot owned by Union Pacific Railroad. Funding for the \$10.2 million project came from Saddle Creek Records and the city; in 2008, *Esquire* called Slowdown the best club in America.

Buildings not to scale.

# Omaha, Nebraska

**PHASE 1**  
**1991-1994**  
It all started with better food. For decades, Omaha had few gourmet destinations aside from its musty old steak houses. In the early '90s, though, new restaurants—and a revitalized farmers' market—brought foodies back.

**PHASE 2**  
**1995-2001**  
This was when the arts really took off downtown. The new permanent home of the Bemis Center, a work and gallery space, helped to draw artists downtown—while west on Leavenworth Street, the Cog Factory became a punk-rock mecca.

**PHASE 3**  
**2002-2007**  
Omaha learned to cater to the younger set: North of downtown, an extraordinary collaboration between Saddle Creek Records (home of Conor Oberst) and the city brought a new infusion of culture, with a club, an art-film theater, and a skate shop.

**PHASE 4**  
**2008-2010**  
Lately the city has added more grown-up pleasures, particularly in the Midtown Crossing area: eco-eatery the Grey Plume (which *Time* called the "greenest restaurant in America") and Jazz on the Green, a summer series in Turner Park.