

A photograph of three people standing in a laboratory or industrial setting. In the center is a man with short hair, wearing a white lab coat over a light blue shirt. He has his arms around two women on either side of him. The woman on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a green top under a light blue jacket. The woman on the right has shoulder-length brown hair and is wearing a light blue jacket with a colorful patterned scarf. They are all smiling at the camera. In the background, there are various pieces of equipment, including what looks like a large industrial machine on the left and shelves with various items on the right.

Samantha Gifford, Ryan Porter
and Lindsay Gifford-Skilling
Gifford's Ice Cream

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Portland in Renaissance:

Vital Statistics

Portlanders act younger, more cosmopolitan, and hungrier than ever.

FROM STAFF & WIRE REPORTS

THE LAST TIME anything like this happened in Portland, Maine, was never.

Sure, the Forest City enjoyed a sugar high in the 1860s; flickered into incandescence in the 1920s; and converted many of its warehouses into condos in the 1980s, a big ‘tell’ that we were moving from a manufacturing to a service economy.

But this is different. Call it a small-batch economy.

When you listen to people talking, you hear hyperbolic enthusiasms like “Can you believe what’s happening in Portland?” “There are

INSIGHTS

so many people here now!” “That building wasn’t here last month!” And the thoroughly unexplored “There is so much going on here!”

Yes, but what exactly? ‘It’ can be shown in photos (imagine a before and after of the old Joe’s Smoke Shop—transformed today as **Joe’s Variety**, topped by four floors of soon-to-be residential living space), even suggested by the effervescence of **First Friday Art Walk**, but that’s a national phenomenon. What is peculiar to ‘us,’ right now? And who do the numbers say ‘we’ are, exactly? Here’s a clue for you all. We’re younger than the rest of Maine—quite dazzlingly, actually. The median age for a Camden resident is 54.7 years. Lubec is 54.3, Eastport 56.1. Our median age in Portland is 36.1.* The difference seems even be more stark now that Portland’s sign is ascending.

Since we’re so young, maybe we’re thirstier, too. According to the vodka scholars at Drizly (think Deliveroo or 2 Dine in, with intoxicants), who chose Portland as their beachhead in Maine when they opened in April 2016, the statistical “we” may have been drinking Moscow Mules in December of

2015, but this second, we’re guzzling **Raspberry Mules**. But then, consumer numbers can be such a reproachful mirror.

Portland’s “thirstiest” neighborhood, according to Drizly order data, is zip code 04101, which includes Downtown, the East End, and Parkside. Following 04101 are 04102, 04103 and 04106.

**...And we’re really thirsty:
“Liquor makes up 37 percent
of purchases in Portland
compared to 24 percent
nationwide.”—Drizly**



Portland’s favorite items to have delivered by Drizly, and certainly subject to its inventory, are Tito’s Handmade Vodka, La Marca Prosecco, Pinnacle Vodka Original, Corona Extra and Bieler Pere et Fils Rosé.

To give you an idea of how this differs from the national average, Drizly’s top products overall are: Tito’s Handmade Vodka, Stella Artois, Oyster Bay Sauvignon Blanc, and Coors Light.

In the Drizly universe, liquor makes up 37 percent of purchases in Portland compared to 24 percent on average across all Drizly markets nationwide.

DRIVING THE ENGINE

For more subtle inquiries, there’s **Portland Research Group**, with offices on 1 Union Wharf. Here, Bruce Lockwood looks below the surface of demographics for clients like **IDEXX** and **Unum**, both of whom need to know what makes this city tick in order to match future employees to the area. He’s quick to point to craft-beer manufacturers as a key to Portland’s calculus of cool.

“The whole craft brewery situation in Portland may have begun in Boston with Sam Adams, but something about the independence of Portland drew people like **David Geary** to set up shop here,” and he has numbers to prove that.

Asked what he means by ‘independence,’ he says what the new micro-brewery startups were looking for here, and have so strikingly discovered, is a statistical hiccup: Portland’s near reverence for small businesses is etched into our subculture.

“When you look, we have more micro



breweries than most large cities.” (More, by the way, than Dublin, Ireland.) “That’s because Portland has some large businesses at the top of a graph of businesses above 500 employees,” viz. Maine Medical, Idexx, and UNUM, “but the drop to small businesses is very fast.” This energizes opportunity for new launches to answer demand from an incredibly cultural influx of new residents. “We may be unequaled as a great craft brewery launching pad.”

According to Lockwood, 60 percent of Portland’s businesses (the Portland, Maine, statistical area) have zero to four employees, greater than Boston’s 57 percent. In the middle ranges, Portland ever-so-slightly lags Boston in businesses with 10 to 19 employees; 20 to 99 employees; and 100 to 499 employees. The effect is a cliff-like drop from Portland’s 5 percent of businesses over 500 employees, which invigorates the customer base for Portland’s small businesses.

On the other hand, just because “we” have great craft beer to drink doesn’t mean “we’ve” found an apartment. A report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in October 2015 concedes, “The rental housing [in Portland] is tight.” According to



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According to the BMV of Maine, 386 Portlanders registered their mopeds for the road in 2015—up from 218 in 2011, an increase of 77 percent.

their data, the Portland rental housing market has a vacancy rate of only 5.5 percent, down from 8.3 percent in April 2010.” The report goes on to say that, “during the next three years, demand is expected for 2,000 new market-rate rental units.”

The report says things are even tighter in the apartment market, where vacancy rates have lowered rapidly in the past few years. “From the third quarter of 2014 through the third quarter of 2015, the apartment vacancy rate declined from 3.6 to 2.9 percent.”

The MaineHousing yearly Affordability Index from 2015 reports that, while housing continued to be affordable on a statewide basis, in

Portland rentals continue to be vastly unaffordable. Their report suggests the average cost for a two-bedroom rental has increased from \$1,023 in 2011 to \$1,426 in 2015. By this measure, 73.1 percent of renter households are unable to afford the average two-bedroom rent, based on the city’s median income.

OUR POINTS OF ORIGATION

Reporting on Portland’s cultural diversity, the *Portland Press Herald*, using U.S. Census figures, lists 28.2 percent of Portlanders “born away” in 1980, 40.9 percent of Portlanders “born away” in 2000, and 50.7 percent of Portlanders “born away” in 2015.

All of which is an indicator of how popular Portland is becoming.

Comparing Portland’s population to the rest of Maine: In Maine, the female/male ratio is 51.1 percent to 48.9 percent. (In 1790, Maine’s percentage of females to males was 48.8 percent to 51.2 percent. In 1990, it was 51.3 to 48.7.) In Portland, it’s 50.9 percent to 49.1 percent. Contrast this to Camden, which is 56.5 to 43.5. Portland’s population is increasing, too. From 64,358 in 1990, it rose to 66,881 in 2015.

The age of a Portlander, however young compared to the rest of Maine, has had a slight uptick over the last few years. This may have to do with luxury condos with price points that shut out many millennial buyers. These senior ‘new lifers’ are high-net-worth life learners here for the culture, for the restaurants, for the walkability and sense of community. Give up the mansion, have a yard sale, give up the second car (and buy a Vespa—see above), but for God’s sake, make sure there’s an elevator for the dog. ■

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