

**YOUR TOWN GOT YOU DOWN?
WE'VE GOT YOUR ESCAPE
PLAN. THESE 20 STARS OF
AMERICA'S 21ST-CENTURY
RENAISSANCE ARE RIDING
A WAVE OF CIVIC REINVEN-
TION AND FRESH IDEAS.**

**BEST
TOWNS
2008>**

**PRO-
GRESSIVE
CANDIDATES**

BEST TOWNS 2008

10. Columbia, Missouri

THE REVIVAL: Before the University of Missouri was established, in 1839, Columbia—in the rolling foothills of the Ozarks—was just a stagecoach stop en route to California. As it grew, it became a hub for higher education (downtown boasts three colleges) and insurance firms but gained a rep as a staid, boring, and straitlaced community in need of a makeover.

Done. CoMo is swinging these days. In 2000, local filmmaker David Wilson, 33, helped open the Ragtag Cinema, a small indie-film house downtown. Four years later, he co-founded True/False, an annual documentary-film festival that draws international raves and is at the forefront of Columbia's creative revival. Developers have retrofitted old meatpacking warehouses into SoHo-style lofts and art spaces. Nearby, you'll find "the Diaper Factory," which houses a dance troupe, artists' studios, and a café. This summer, the 1928 Tiger Hotel will get a boutique facelift, complete with requisite mod eatery. Columbia recently scored a \$22.5 million



The 63 Diner

THE WORD ON THE STREET: COLUMBIA

"My stress level is half what it was on the East Coast, and so is my rent. Heaven for cyclists." —EMMA MARRIS, SUBSCRIBER

federal grant to develop a city-wide trail system to add to its 65 urban parks, including 32-acre Capen Park, with its limestone top-rope routes.

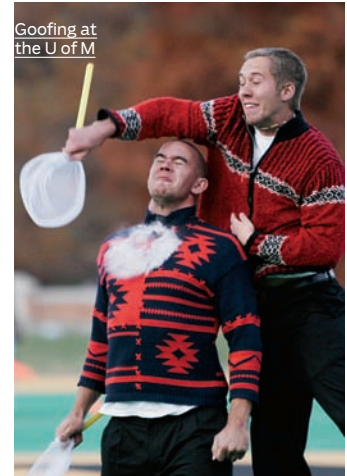
THE LIFE: The nine-mile, run-or-ride MKT spur links down-

town Columbia with the Katy Trail, a 225-mile rails-to-trails traverse that follows Lewis and Clark's route along the Missouri River. Nearby Easley Hill is central Missouri's toughest bike climb, and boaters float the mighty Missouri from Catfish

Katy's to Cooper's Landing, 90 minutes downstream. Back in town, fresh-obsessed Sycamore sources its ingredients from local farms and growers, and Shakespeare's is the locals' pick for pizza. —K.A.

THE STATS:
Pop. 92,900
Median age: 28
Med. household

income: \$38,300
Med. home value: \$164,700
Avg. commute: 15 mins.
Largest employers: U. of Missouri, Columbia Public Schools, Boone Hospital, City of Columbia, MBS Textbook Exchange



Goofing at the U of M



The Columbia Festival of the Arts



The Twilight Festival

Bright Idea

Grow Your Own

BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT
 (POP. 11,700)

Even for dedicated locavores, the 100-mile diet is mostly an idealistic notion. But for the residents of Brattleboro, buying local is a way of life. The small town hosts one of the largest farmers' markets in New England, with 50-odd regional vendors; is home to more than half a dozen Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, farms, selling shares of everything from apples to pork; and has a local-food co-op that boasts more than 4,500 members, almost half the population. Nearly every store on Main Street is locally owned, stocks local products, or markets itself as fair trade. Brattleboro nonprofit Post Oil Solutions promotes community gardens for residents and organizes weeklong locavore challenges in which participants source all of their food from within the state. Farms sell starter kits for the event, restaurants serve special entrées, and residents even hold nightly potluck dinners. In Brattleboro, the best stuff is always just around the corner. —R.K.



Nearby Shelburne Farms

READERS' CHOICE Survey Says...

What U.S. city do our subscribers lust to live in the most? What makes or breaks a place? Check out the results of our dreamtowns recon at outsideonline.com/townssurvey2008.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: AILOR/FINE ART; KATIE BARNES; DALE HOCK/CITY OF COLUMBIA; CARRIE GARTNER; WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ/ART + COMMERCE