

TECH

HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, LOWER RENTS, AND A BRILLIANT WORKFORCE ARE LURING START-UPS TO THE EAST BAY. MEET THE FEARLESS PIONEERS WHO ARE STAKING THEIR CLAIM. BY ETHAN FLETCHER

BOOM



L

LONG-LASTING

batteries made of wire mesh that can fit any device imaginable. A low-cost diagnostic tool that detects cancer via a drop of blood. A robotic exoskeleton that allows paraplegics to walk. ¶ If these sound like something you'd see in a sci-fi movie (didn't *Star Trek's* Dr. McCoy have that cancer screening tool?), they're not. Each one of these seemingly futuristic technologies is currently being researched and developed, and in some cases made, right here in the East Bay. ¶ And there are hundreds—thousands—of other ideas with world-changing potential percolating in labs, universities, office parks, and start-ups from Richmond to Livermore, fueling the next wave of jobs and an East Bay business boom.

SITTING PRETTY

Riding the wave of high-tech-fueled innovation, the Bay Area has emerged from the dark days of the Great Recession with a vengeance.

The East Bay has seen significant upticks in several sectors—namely tech, construction and housing, health care, hospitality, and retail. But the truly exciting news is that the region is starting to catch up to San Francisco and the Silicon Valley, NorCal's booming economic centers, which have recently come into unprecedented levels of wealth.

With beautiful open space, relatively affordable housing, and good schools, the East Bay has always been a great place to live, attracting the best and the brightest. Which now gives it a natural selling point for businesses: a highly educated workforce. Combine this with the skyrocketing commercial and housing prices in San Francisco and the Silicon Valley, and the East Bay is looking very attractive to start-ups.

Also, the East Bay is tapping into its entrepreneurial spirit and taking advantage of the wealth of brainpower at its three national labs and world-class university, all of which means the East Bay is poised to capitalize on good economic times.

MOVING IN

YapStone, an online payment platform for international companies like vacation rental website VRBO, is one of the Bay Area's fastest-growing companies. Founder Matt Golis moved the company to Walnut Creek from San Francisco in 2011 and says it's one of the best business decisions he's made yet.

"The amount we saved just on office space is one thing, obviously, with commercial rents in San Francisco and the Peninsula going through the roof," Golis says. "But we also recognized the tremendous concentration of talent out in the East Bay, and being located in Walnut Creek has actually been a huge asset in recruiting, especially in technology positions."

YapStone has been able to lure employees from San Francisco and the Peninsula. They are attracted to the reverse commute and that YapStone's offices are right across from the Walnut Creek BART station. Some employees have even moved to the area.

And the company continues to grow: YapStone is currently at 145 employees, and Golis anticipates hiring 80 more in the next year. The company foresees a possible IPO in the not-too-distant future.

Similarly, in 2011, General Electric chose to locate its new GE Global Software headquarters in San Ramon's Bishop Ranch. The industry titan is betting heavily on its new hub with the futuristic goal of creating software to help industries tap into the vast amount of data produced by today's modern machinery. Company vice president William Ruh calls this "the largest opportunity since the Internet was created."

S.F. to W.C.
Golis moved YapStone to the East Bay.



East Bay Draw

THE LOCATION



CHEAPER RENTS, GOOD SCHOOLS, BEAUTIFUL OPEN SPACE, AND ROOM TO GROW.

GE is investing a staggering \$1.5 billion in its Bishop Ranch office, which has already grown to more than 800 workers, many in high-tech fields and engineering. Choosing San Ramon was no accident. Ruh says it was a strategic decision based on one thing: "A majority of the engineers who create value in places like the Silicon Valley actually live in the East Bay."

Ruh sees more companies pursuing the same strategy as GE in locating to the region.

"To be honest, we wish they wouldn't, because we've been able to get a leg up on hiring great talent," he jokes. "It's a hidden gem from that perspective."

LIVERMORE POWER

It's sometimes overlooked that Livermore is home to two Department of Energy national laboratories, Lawrence Livermore and Sandia, both on the cutting edge of research in fields such as advanced robotics, nuclear energy, photon sciences, and high-performance computing. That's a lot of pioneering research and development, and it's creating businesses and opportunities for the city.

I-Gate in Livermore is a new Silicon Valley-style incubator designed to grow tech start-ups. POC Medical Systems could be one of its first big success stories.



Things are opening up. And you can just imagine the potential of the incredible technology that sits behind those lab's gates." —GREG HITCHAN

POC Medical Systems is developing an affordable device to diagnose life-threatening diseases—from breast cancer to Parkinson's—at an early stage. This tool could save lives and reduce spiraling health-care costs, and can be traced directly to Livermore's labs.

I-Gate gave POC founder Sanjeev Saxena affordable office space and helped him license the technologies that form the backbone of his company. Saxena licensed technology out of Lawrence Livermore that uses markers in the blood to screen for diseases with up to 90 percent accuracy, and combined this technology with diagnostic tools developed at Sandia.

"By themselves, they had tremendous value, but it turns out they also worked well together," Saxena says.

East Bay Draw

THE PEOPLE



TOP TALENT, INCLUDING ENGINEERS WHO ALREADY LIVE HERE AND GRADUATES FROM UC BERKELEY.

FOUNDED 2007 • LIVERMORE

COOL EARTH SOLAR

DEVELOPS, DESIGNS, AND INSTALLS AFFORDABLE COMMERCIAL SOLAR TECH.

Founders: Rob Lamkin, CEO, plus three others. **A two-part business:** The company has been developing solar technology at Sandia National Labs in Livermore for the last five years; it also installs solar technology on commercial industrial rooftops. **Why it matters:** Access to clean, renewable energy is good for the environment and the economy. **Recent projects:** Installed solar panels at All American Label in Dublin, a U.S.-owned manufacturing company. **Why East Bay:** Quality of life, lots of sunshine, top laboratories, and access to engineering, science, and technical talent. **The future:** "It used to take eight, 10, 15 years for a business to break even [after going solar]. Sometimes, the payback is in as little as three years now," Lamkin says. —Stacey Kennelly

PREVIOUS PAGES: COURTESY OF EKSO BIONICS; THIS PAGE: (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM) SHUTTERSTOCK; PAOLO VESCIA; SHUTTERSTOCK (3)

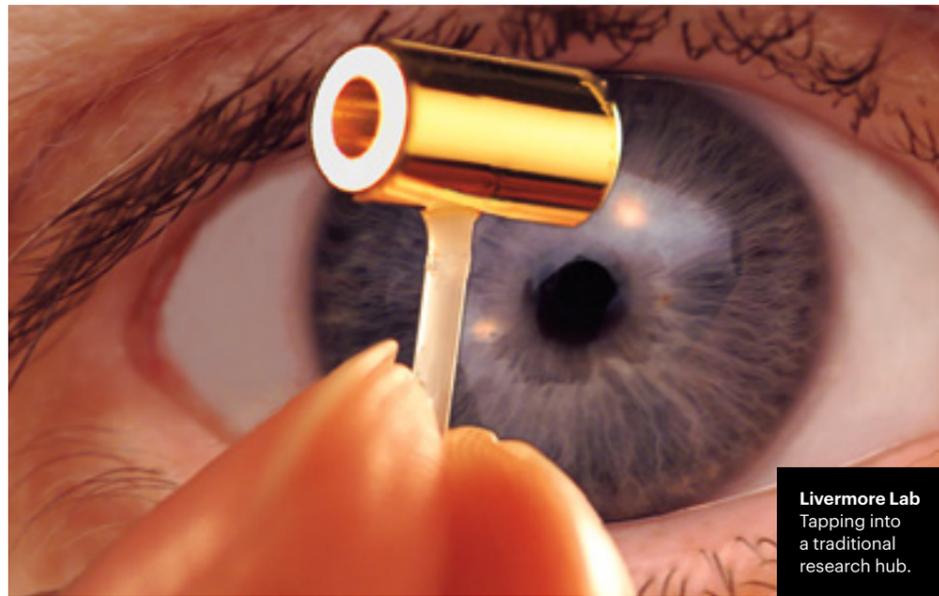
SHANNON MCINTYRE

FOUNDED 2013 • ORINDA

ZIPLOOP

DEVELOPED AN APP THAT ORGANIZES RETAIL RECEIPTS AND TRACKS REWARDS AND PROMOTIONS.

Founders: Peter Jackson, Sandra Breber, and Paul Martinelli. **What's Ziploop?** The first software company to convert receipts with bar codes to a digital format that works in stores. **Where to use it:** The app is accepted in every store in the United States and supported in 24 countries. **Why now?** The cloud—or storing information in cyberspace—is cheaper than ever. Combine that with a growing mobile culture, and Jackson saw an opportunity. **Why East Bay?** This is Jackson's third successful start-up in Orinda. Staying in the East Bay means he and his employees don't have to commute. "I believe people need to be with their families at night," says the father of four. **The future:** The company hopes to grow its 10,000 users to 100,000 by July, and 1 million by early 2015. There are also plans to add more features to the app. —Stacey Kennelly



Livermore Lab Tapping into a traditional research hub.

“There are all kinds of opportunities that are presenting themselves now because the cloud is so cheap.”

—PETER JACKSON



East Bay Draw

THE COMMUTE



A REVERSE COMMUTE, AND A RISE IN COMMUTE PROGRAMS, INCLUDING ALL-ELECTRIC CITY CARSHARE.

Also at I-Gate is KalpTree Energy. Greg Hitchan, a local investor who spent 15 years working for private equity firms in the Silicon Valley and San Francisco, is one of its investors.

“Things are opening up. And you can just imagine the potential of the incredible technology that sits behind those labs’ gates,” he says.

KalpTree is developing a lithium ion battery on malleable wire mesh to conform to the shape of a given product, making it potentially applicable for use in devices ranging from cell phones to electric vehicles.

“When you think about the design implications in which a product designer wouldn't have to worry about building around a bulky battery pack—it's innovative, potentially transformative technology,” Hitchan says.

TRI-VALLEY RISING

The Tri-Valley as a whole has emerged as a significant hub of novel businesses, with a whopping 657 tech companies in Pleasanton, San Ramon, Livermore, Danville, and Dublin, says Dale Kaye of Innovation Tri-Valley, a business leadership association.

In 2011 alone, the region attracted more than \$500 million in venture capital, according to the Bay Area Council Economic Institute, more than the entire state of Virginia (in fact, more than all but six states in the country).

Those tech companies include industry giants Workday, Oracle, and Sybase, and innovation-focused

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY; DARREN BRODE/SHUTTERS TOCK; SHANNON MCINTYRE

“Students don't have to pay thousands of dollars for a personal tutor or class.”

—BHAVIN PARIKH



FOUNDED 2009 • BERKELEY

MAGOOSH

HELPS STUDENTS PREP FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS (GRE, GMAT, SAT), WITH AFFORDABLE ONLINE VIDEO-BASED CLASSES.

CEO and founder: Bhavin Parikh, MBA, UC Berkeley. **Expertise:** Teaching, marketing, software engineering, product design. **How the company got its start:** Parikh and two classmates in the UC Berkeley MBA program developed the company while in school, using feedback from their peers. **Why it's a big deal:** The company strives for good content, employing more teachers than programmers, and has hundreds of online videos explaining tough test concepts. Students can also contact a real human when they get stumped: In 2013, the team responded to 19,000 student questions. **The company culture:** Diverse and passionate about education. “Our lunch conversations might be about mythology or the latest pop trend,” Parikh says. **What's next?** Expanding its SAT and Test of English as a Foreign Language services. —S.K.

LEFT TO RIGHT: MITCH TOBIAS; COURTESY OF KALPTREE



KalpTree Developing wire mesh batteries.

REVAMPING THE BUSINESS PARKS

While trailblazing companies see the East Bay as an appealing place to be, the area's traditional job hubs, business parks, can still be a tough sell. The isolated, car-oriented islands of office space that first lured corporations to the burbs are less appealing to today's young workforce, who want urban-style amenities, including proximity to public transit and restaurants. So the parks are adapting.

Walnut Creek is working with the 1970s-era Shadelands Business Park to develop 25 acres zoned for retail shops and restaurants. The idea, says Walnut Creek Economic Development Manager Ron Gerber, is to create a commercial center within Shadelands—which currently has a 25 percent vacancy rate—to make it more attractive to new companies, particularly those doing groundbreaking research and development.

Pleasanton's 32-year-old Hacienda Business Park is home to roughly 550 companies with more than 17,000 employees. The park's owners are continually working to create what General Manager James Paxson calls “more of a suburban center.” That includes adding 1,250 housing units.

The owners are also working with the city of Pleasanton to develop commute programs, the latest of which is a City CarShare program using all-electric vehicles.

“That type of dynamism that we're building into the project is something that's very desirable to the type of more contemporary workforce our businesses are trying to attract,” says Paxson.

Similar things are happening at Bishop Ranch in San Ramon. Initiatives there include biweekly farmers markets and food truck gatherings, movie nights, and a free bike share program. Management also has big plans to redevelop the 2-million-square-foot property recently purchased from AT&T into a Google-style campus complete with on-site amenities. (See profile on page 44.)

TAPPING BERKELEY BRAINPOWER

Like Livermore, Berkeley is now focusing on capitalizing on its traditional research hubs: Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory—with its cutting-edge research in such fields as advanced biofuels, genome coding, and supercomputing—and UC Berkeley, which attracts some of the brightest students from around the world.

“When I started 10 years ago, there was zero collaboration between the university and the city of Berkeley, or even the East Bay in general, in allowing research and innovation to drive job growth,” says Michael

500 MILLION DOLLARS

Amount of venture capital the Tri-Valley attracted in 2011.

research and development facilities for companies such as Clorox, GE, and Chevron, as well as an increasing number of smaller, fast-growing “gazelles.”

Innovation Tri-Valley formed in 2010 as a partnership between businesses, research labs, educational institutions, and government agencies to leverage the advances coming out of the area. The organization works on a variety of fronts: from streamlining permitting processes for new tech businesses, to working with Chevron Energy Solutions and Bridgelux (a local LED lights company) to install energy-efficient lighting in Dublin and Livermore, to adding computer coding to the curriculum for local fourth- and fifth-graders.

“The industries have always been here, but I think there's been a shift in attitude toward creating an entire ecosystem for innovation,” says Kaye. “And it's incredibly important. We're part of a global economy now, and we need to embrace that race at every level to move ahead and be competitive into the future.”



FOUNDED 2008 - OAKLAND

FATHOM

SELLS 3-D PRINTERS,
AND OFFERS 3-D
PRINTING SERVICES.

Founders: Rich Stump, Michelle Mihevc.
Expertise: Graphic design, IT, and electrical, industrial, and mechanical engineering.
What's 3-D printing? 3-D printers make custom products, from medical devices and automotive parts to toys and sporting equipment. **How the company got its start:** Cofounders Stump and Mihevc started out in a San Ramon garage, where they became one of the first U.S. distributors of 3-D printers made by a company in Israel. "The timing was right in the industry," Stump says. **Why it's a big deal:** The technology has life-saving applications. Fathom recently printed an exoskeleton for a girl who was born without use of her arms and legs, and a skull for a child with bone disease. **Company culture:** Young, chaotic, fun, and fast, plus yoga on Fridays. **The future:** "We see ourselves doubling in size before the end of 2014," Stump says. —**Stacey Kennelly**

“
Whatever you can
dream up, you can print.”

—RICH STUMP

MITCH TOBIAS

300
START-UPS
Number operating in
the Berkeley area.



Tesla Motors
The company's factory is in Fremont.

East Bay Draw

THE BUSINESS PARKS



BISHOP RANCH AND HACIENDA BUSINESS PARK ARE INCREASINGLY EMBRACING LIVE/WORK CULTURE.

Cohen, UC Berkeley's director of innovation ecosystem development.
"As a result, we kind of squandered a lot of economic development opportunity. I called it innovation drain, where a lot of the innovation that came out of the campus and the national labs ended up being commercialized in the South Bay, 50-plus miles away."
To change that, Cohen spearheaded efforts to get start-ups spinning out of UC Berkeley and Lawrence Berkeley National Lab to locate in and around Berkeley. Initiatives include the East Bay Green Corridor, to foster clean tech industries in the 880-80 corridor from San Leandro to Richmond, as well as start-up incubators Berkeley SkyDeck and the Berkeley Startup Cluster. At last count, roughly 300 start-ups now operate in and around Berkeley.
Anson Tsui, a UC Berkeley engineering grad who founded the smartphone-based food delivery service SpoonRocket in Berkeley last year, says the East Bay offers natural advantages. The cheaper cost of living has allowed him room to rapidly ramp up his business, which now delivers locally made, sustainable meals in 10 minutes or less to residents in Berkeley, Emeryville, Oakland, and most recently, San Francisco.
"When I went to Cal, not many people thought about entrepreneurship. Everyone just wanted to graduate and land a good job across the Bay," Tsui says. "But I think that culture is changing."

GROWING INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

The East Bay is also developing niche industries—advanced manufacturing, clean and green tech, software, and biotech—partly because it has the room to grow them.
Biotechnology is among the East Bay's most dynamic subsectors, and it has continued to advance locally, even as it's slowed in other parts of the state. A lot of that activity is coming out of Berkeley.
A prime example is the Energy Biosciences Institute created in 2007 as a partnership between energy giant BP, UC Berkeley, and Lawrence Berkeley Lab. The institute is researching potentially transformative biofuels and is the largest public-private venture of its kind.
Another fast-growing field is biomedical devices, according to the Bay Area Council (continued on 94)

Ask an Expert

JOB HUNT PREP

Brush up on tech skills before you fill out that application, with these tips from **ROBIN RESHWAN**, founder of Collegial Services in Alamo. *BY STACEY KENNELLY*

- ADD TECH TO YOUR TOOLBOX**
Expand on what you're already good at by incorporating tech. If you're in public relations, consider learning to code a website or run a social media campaign. If you're in construction, read up on how engineers, working with information technologists, can make buildings and roads safer.
- JOIN THE CONVERSATION**
Take advantage of all the ways to learn about an industry by watching webinars, reading blogs, and contributing to message boards. Sign up for e-newsletters and web feeds. If social networks apply to your area of interest, like Instagram, GitHub, or The Engineering Exchange, get on those, too.
- BUILD YOUR BRAND**
Self-promote with a personal website, and keep your social networking profiles robust, especially LinkedIn. Consider starting a blog where you discuss your field, and develop a voice that differentiates you. Make yourself recognizable by using the same logo and head shot across the web.
- BE SMART ABOUT SCHOOL**
If you're headed to college, pick a field like management information systems, which combines business and tech skills, or a practical degree like accounting, math, or finance. If you're further along, research online certification programs, or take a position where you can learn on the job.
- DON'T GO AFTER GOOGLE**
With UC Berkeley, Stanford, and Saint Mary's close to home, it can be hard to stand out from the crowd. Consider smaller companies and offshoots of larger companies. They will benefit from your experience, and you will benefit from experiencing their growth.

Q&A: Alexander Mehran Jr.

INSIDE BISHOP RANCH

THE OFFICE PARK GIANT IS MORPHING INTO A CAMPUS-STYLE CULTURE. BY ETHAN FLETCHER

When Bishop Ranch debuted 35 years ago, it was among the first wave of office parks in the Bay Area designed to lure businesses away from cities and out to the suburbs. Since then, the San Ramon office park has grown to be the biggest one in Northern California and boasts some Fortune 500 clients. Now, it is developing into a campus-style economic hub to attract hip, new companies. ¶ Alex Mehran, the grandson of Bishop Ranch's founder, returned from New York City five years ago to help run the family business. *Diablo* talked to him about how business has changed and what he's doing to entice the next wave of companies.

Tell us about the history of Bishop Ranch.

My dad bought it with my grandpa in 1978, and they built two buildings consisting of about 100,000 feet. At the time, there really wasn't a 100,000-foot block of offices anywhere out here. Then, all of a sudden, rents in the city spiked, and people said, "Gosh, why don't we cut our rent in half and move to San Ramon?"

We brought in businesses like Beckman instruments and Toyota. Then we sold [office space] to Chevron. That was a huge transaction because they bought 143 acres and really planted the Chevron flag out here, and moved a ton of people out of the city. Then, the same thing happened with Pacific Bell, now AT&T, and they built this beautiful campus out here.

All the while, we were able to continue to expand. We've added 30 buildings between the early '80s and the early 2000s.

The AT&T campus was recently sold, right?

Yes, AT&T decided to sell their campus, so we reacted by purchasing it. It's a unique building, about 2 million square feet, of which AT&T will occupy around 1 million. We're planning to renovate it over the next six to eight months to get it ready to lease.

It's a beautiful space, pretty different than your normal suburban office campus, and we think it's some of the best office space in the East Bay. There are 10-foot ceilings, floor-to-ceiling glass. It's LEED certified, with access to on-site amenities such as the park, two lakes, a conference center, the kitchen, and cafeteria.

We think it'll really be a playground for a big tenant, whether it's a household legacy name or a tech start-up.

How is Bishop Ranch changing?
We try to provide what most people would consider to be a campus opportunity. Like how Google has their campus, and they provide amenities to their employees—we try to do the same with our tenants.

TIMELINE

1978: Sunset Development Company purchases the 585-acre parcel known as Bishop Ranch. Construction begins on 100,000 square feet of office space in 1980.

1982: Chevron decides to move its administrative offices from San Francisco and buys 143 acres. Construction starts on Chevron Park, a 1.2-million-square-foot complex that debuts in 1984.

1985: The Pacific Bell complex opens, transferring 7,500 employees from S.F. to San Ramon.

1989: Marriott opens a 375-room hotel in Bishop Ranch, the largest hotel in the I-680 corridor.

1994: Target opens a store at Bishop Ranch.

1995-1999: Construction on nearly 2 million square feet of office space, bringing in GTE, AT&T, Nortel, and others.

2001: The Shops at Bishop Ranch open, adding 250,000 square feet of retail and dining anchored by Whole Foods, Borders, and Peet's.

2003: Chevron moves its international headquarters to Bishop Ranch. Construction is completed on a new office building that is fully leased to Chevron, ADP, Lennar, and GE.

2007: Sunset gets the green light for a 2.1-million-square-foot downtown center design containing retail, residential, and hotel space, plus additional office space.

2009: Robert Half International relocates its regional offices, and 950 employees, to Bishop Ranch.

2012: GE locates its new center for Global Software, and 800 employees, at Bishop Ranch.

We've been bringing out food trucks, which three or four years ago was kind of a modern concept. At first, we had people who said, "Oh, that's gross; it's a roach coach." [Laughs] But pretty quickly we saw an impact. As these new tenants moved in, people would be on Yelp and social media talking about their taco.

Next month, we're starting a shared bicycle program with 100 bikes that we're going to manage. We do a two-day-a-week farmers market; we do a newsletter, offer exercise classes, host events and movie nights—things to try to activate the community of office workers and make it a fun place to be.

We also make sure all our buildings are environmentally friendly. That stuff matters so much to people now, and the companies like it because they are focused on attracting and retaining the best workers.

Are you seeing more tech companies move in?

Absolutely. A lot of the space we've been filling recently employs more knowledge workers. In the last five, six years, we went from having a lot of call centers and mortgage servicing type services, to businesses like Robert Half International, Bank of the West, PG&E, and General Electric Technologies.

Do you think this trend will continue?

I see it as sort of a paradigm shift. There's such a huge employee base here, and companies are locating here because of that. There are a lot of engineers that live in San Ramon and the surrounding area, because it's really the best quality community in terms of home pricing, quality of life, and schools that you can find outside of living in Mountain View.

Hey, it's great to be working at Google and making a big salary, and riding a bus back and forth to work, and having fun on Fillmore Street. But when they get to be married and have kids, eventually they're going to move out here. And whether that workforce is here now or coming out here, companies are recognizing that trend and moving offices here.

I think GE Technologies' coming in was telling: They had to pick a place to start a new company where they could attract the best talent, and they chose San Ramon.

You're also building housing?
We have 500 units down at Bollinger, and we're looking at 1,000 more that we can build. The goal is to have a stable base of people that can work here and live here and shop here. Whether they live in a big house on the hill, or they live down in one of our units, I think this is the first step towards that.

SHANNON MCINTYRE



“Our goal has been to create a stable base of people that can work here and live here and shop here.”

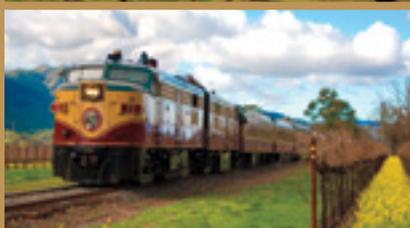
—ALEXANDER MEHRAN JR.



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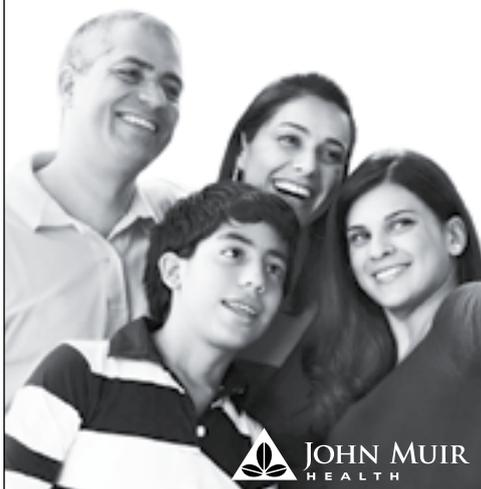


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tech boom

(continued from 43) Economic Institute. Much of that activity is in Pleasanton and includes companies such as TriRem Medical, which is developing cutting-edge, minimally invasive vascular instruments.

Perhaps some of the most exciting business inventions are happening in the field of advanced manufacturing, which is seeing a resurgence in the East Bay.

"Products need to be developed," says Tom Terrill, president of the East Bay Leadership Council. "It's one thing to come up with an idea. It's another for it to actually be built. And the East Bay has an opportunity to be where these things are actually built."

The Tesla Motors factory in Fremont is the best example, but there are others just as exciting. Fathom is an industry leader in 3-D printing in Oakland; Pleasanton's Adept Technologies develops and makes industrial robots for precision manufacturing; Ekso Bionics in Richmond creates robotic exoskeletons that help paraplegics walk.

CAN-DO SPIRIT

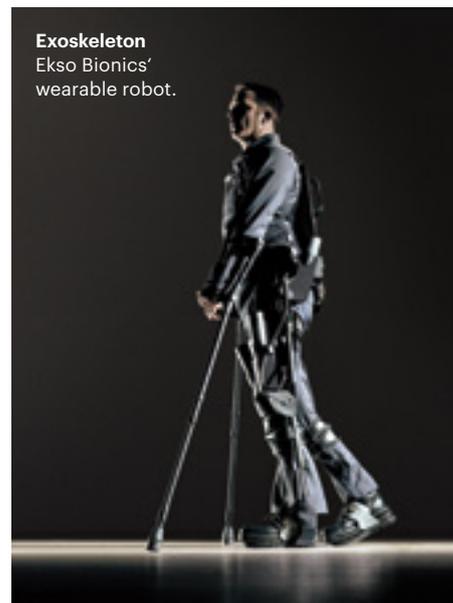
Indeed, the East Bay's innovative, entrepreneurial outlook is perhaps best portrayed by its strength in making things, not just Facebook widgets or social media apps. It's a legacy that Russ Angold, chief technology officer at Ekso Bionics, points to as a source of inspiration.

"The historic Richmond location is probably best known as the birthplace of Rosie the Riveter, and the 'We Can Do It!' motto," Angold says. "Those are words we still live by."

Robert Morris, cofounder of TerrAvion, moved across the country to Livermore to start his company, which uses state-of-the-art aerial imagery from planes to help wineries efficiently monitor their vineyards. Yes, the city's strategic location between Northern California's coast and Central Valley winegrowers helped. He already counts Wente and Francis Ford Coppola wineries as clients. Just as important has been the region's culture of innovation.

"Out here, there's still the literal and figurative space to build companies that do real things that can change the world," Morris says. "You have car factories and solar panel plants, and 3-D printing and biotech. If you want to do something real, you come to the East Bay." ■

Exoskeleton
Ekso Bionics'
wearable robot.



COURTESY OF EKSO BIONICS