

## REVERSING BRAIN DRAIN

# Showcasing what the state has to offer

Companies want interns to get a taste of scenery, social events

BY ANUSHA SHRIVASTAVA  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

KENT — Riding around Lake Waramaug on a pleasant summer day, Monica Villarreal couldn't help but appreciate the rolling hills, the greenery and the quaintness of rural Connecticut.

"There are so many unique towns and unique stores in Connecticut," said Villarreal, a first-time visitor. "It's just so beautiful."

Villarreal's bike ride was not a tourist outing, it was a field trip sponsored by Day, Berry & Howard, a law firm with offices in Hartford and Stamford where the 26-year-old from Texas is a summer intern. The Bicycle Tour Co. of Kent had been assigned the task of organizing a day out for a dozen summer associates, complete with a 7-mile bike ride, a picnic lunch by the lake and a wine tasting tour at a local vineyard.

"We want people to have fun and see a part of Connecticut they otherwise wouldn't," said Lori Johnson, professional development coordinator for Day, Berry & Howard, who was riding with the group.

Companies across the state are trying to show off what Connecticut has to offer to draw and retain young talent to work and live here. It may be a worthy effort, given that in the 1990s, Connecticut had a 23 percent decline, the largest of any state, among the 18- to 34-year-old age group, according to data from the Connecticut Economic Resource Center.

Citing data from the 2000 census, Alissa DeJonge, an economist with CERC, said there were 451,640 25- to 34-year-olds in Connecticut, comprising 13 percent of the population. The estimate for 2005 stood at 412,297.

The number of 20- to 29-year-olds in Connecticut, though, has increased from 386,291 in 2001 to 405,643 in 2004, after steadily declining throughout the 1990s.

Even so, between 1990 and 2000, Connecticut ranked 47th in population growth — 3.4 percent, versus 13.1 percent nationally.

"There's definitely an out-migration as young people look for good entry-level jobs, affordable housing and fun things to do," DeJonge said. "People tend to locate in the area where they attend college, so if someone went to Boston or New York or Rhode Island, they would stay there."

This could become a problem for firms in the state that need

fresh blood.

Tim Egan, a partner with accounting firm KPMG in Stamford who is also in charge of recruitment, said the firm interacts with faculty at local universities and colleges, attending their career fairs to ensure access to the graduating classes. As for summer interns, he said the goal is to "help them identify things about the geography and why it is important to be in Stamford."

They get to be close to New York, they can take advantage of the client base the company has developed in Connecticut and they have access to a high quality of life right here, Egan said.

Summer interns have been taken to a ball game in Bridgeport and will partake of a cruise on Long Island Sound at the end of their stint at the firm. "The social activities help them see what they could be doing here," he said.

The pitch law firm McCarter & English makes is that they have offices in several large cities in New England, so employees can be connected to offices in Boston or Philadelphia while working in Hartford or Stamford.

"They can have the pace of life and shorter daily commute in Connecticut, and then also have access to our other offices," said Tim Fisher, office managing partner for the Connecticut offices of McCarter & English. "They can live here long-term, raise a family, send their children to good schools and be within day-trip range of business and cultural opportunities in New York and Boston. It really could be the best of both worlds."

Single people mention the lack of a social life in smaller cities, Fisher said, but that is a preference they need to weigh against housing costs in the more metropolitan areas.

To meet this challenge, KPMG says it helps young staffers connect with others who want to live in Stamford. This way, they can share an apartment with another employee if they choose to.

"Our compensation is also competitive, and we keep in mind the high housing costs," Egan said, adding that starting salaries are likely to be in the \$51,000 to \$57,000 range this year.

If people do want to move after a year or two, KPMG tries to accommodate employees by placing them at the firm's other offices. "We don't want to lose good people," he said.



PHOTOS BY JAMISON C. BAZINET REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

A recent field trip sponsored by Day, Berry & Howard, a law firm in Hartford and Stamford, included a bicycle ride around Lake Waramaug in Kent and a picnic lunch on the lake shore. A dozen of the firm's summer associates were taken on the trip.



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