Wish You Were Here?

10 Towns for HIVers

May 1, 2004 By Liz Highleyman

Wanna start your life over in a new body? Sorry, we can't help you. But we can offer you this list of cities some HIVers choose to call home, sweet home.

Birmingham, Ala.
Elea Mitchell grew up in Alabama, moved to LA, then back to Birmingham. **"Doctors and staff are more personal here, and the HIV community is more like a family,"** she says. The university hosts a world-class team of HIV researchers and clinicians. Drawbacks in the land of drawl? Mitchell says HIVers languish on the ADAP waiting list, and "we're always scrounging for money."

Boston
Excellent docs, great clinical trials, good services… if you know how to find 'em. The Search for a Cure founder David Scondras says Mass. faces budget cuts, but "people don't die for lack of drugs. The struggle is about whether we'll continue to have acupuncture and free dental care." Talk about state of the art.

Boulder, Colo.
New Agey Boulder has **cutting-edge medical and HIV care services**, according to Robin Bohannan, executive director of the Boulder County AIDS Project. But "the number of people with HIV is small, so there's not a real sense of community," she says. Protease mountain climbers, take note: the Rockies!

Madison, Wis.
PWA Mike Wonders ditched San Fran for cheaper digs—and found funky Madison, with "strong public service and community involvement." It's health-conscious, he adds, with **"a treatment adherence program that rocks,"** government-supported needle exchange and no ADAP waiting list. Big chill: big winters.

New York City
This culturally diverse city has **superb medical care and HIV services.** "It can be difficult to navigate the system," says NAPWA board member Michelle Lopez, but navigating the city by bus and subway is a snap. HIVer communities abound, NYC's Ryan White bucks have soared—plus a nightlife to take your mind off the virus!

Philadelphia
Activism can be healing, and Philly's got it, says Jose De Marco, of the country's most active ACT UP chapter. It's also home to university medical facilities and Philadelphia FIGHT, Project TEACH and the Philadelphia Coalition for Prison Health Care. "Activist groups here can be wildly inclusive, multicultural, multiracial, pansexual," says AIDS Policy Project's Kate Krauss.

San Francisco
The care-and-research pioneer remains on the front lines. Despite the "perception that white gay men get better services, which might be true because they were the hardest hit initially and the first to activate a response," says Derrick Mapp, the city now boasts HIV services for every community and a spirit of cooperation. Plus: alternative therapy, harm-reduction programs—and the area is "most relaxing." But Arnold may slash Cali's ADAP.

Santa Fe, N.M.
Bob Munk, of New Mexico AIDS InfoNet, circled the U.S. before landing in Santa Fe. "It was about reducing stress," he says. The state's innovative managed-care model centralizes HIV services—from medical care to food banks—in four cities, including Santa Fe. Plus—300 dry and sunny days per year.

Seattle
Seattle is "relatively queer-friendly and progressive," says Fred Swanson, director of the Gay City Health Project, with many HIV services, nationally known docs and cutting-edge clinical trials. The geography encourages an active, healthy lifestyle. Swanson says, "Those drug-company mountain-climber ads could have been shot here." But it does rain from time to time....

St. Louis
Excellent docs and a top-notch HIV research program at Washington University Medical Center make St. Louis a cozy HIV spot in the heartland, says Sharon Maxwell. There's a community of HIVers, and housing is "still very affordable," she says. Good news for HIVers who want to play house.

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