

IdahoStatesman.com

The Idaho Statesman • Always Idaho

Statesman Homepage | News | Entertainment | Idaho Outdoors | Classifieds | Jobs | Homes | Apts | Cars | Shopping | Customer Service

The Idaho Statesman

IdahoStatesman.com • Always Idaho

Newspaper archive powered by **NewsBank****Archive Search > Buy > Print**[» New Search](#) [» Pricing](#) [» Help](#) [» FAQ](#)[Return to results](#) [Printer Friendly](#)

January 31, 2010

Section: Editorial**Memo:** This ranking of the five finalists was just one of Mike's relocation checklists. **Cities** followed by numbers of miles indicate the nearest town with the service or store. The blanks are categories Mike intended to rank while visiting.

becoming boiseans

A Texas couple was coldly systematic about choosing the right place to retire. Then, when they got here, it was love at first sight.

*Mike Smith's checklist**Maria Smith*

Blame it on the heat. And the Trey McIntyre Project. We are now Boiseans.

We lived in Dallas for more than 30 years (transplanted Yankees), and although I had wanted to move to a new **city** for a while, my husband wasn't yet ready. Dallas had been good to us - we both had our own businesses and then, in retirement, we became travel writers, easy with the commodious DFW airport at our (distant) back door. It would be especially hard to leave our friends of so many years. And inertia, too, played a part. Pulling up stakes is not easy!

Our quest started in September 2008. That summer had been another miserable Texas endurance slog - high heat, humidity, and ozone. We hibernated from May until the end of September, as usual. On Sept. 14, 2008, an article in the Sunday New York Times detailing the relocation of Mr. McIntyre's dance company from New York **City** to Boise, sent a jolt through my husband. He leaned over and said, out of the blue: "What would you think about moving?"

And so it began.

We filled out a couple of online questionnaires that purported to show where one should live, but we were horrified at some of the results. Way too many in Michigan, West Virginia and Florida. Clearly, we needed our own checklist.

My husband is a facilitator, an expert at designing decision-making processes, and a bit compulsive in the bargain. He designed a checklist for us.

'must-haves' and 'important's'

It was simple, really. For about a month, we brainstormed all of the things we wanted in any new **city** and in this next stage of our lives. Then we ranked the results. Our "must-haves" included decent climate (four seasons, low summer humidity, little or no shoveling in the winter), a state college or university with a theater/arts school, affordable cost of living and relatively low taxes, economic viability, lots of outdoor activities (even in the summer) and highly rated health care.

Our "important" items included a Costco (hey, it's our list and we know ourselves), a great **public** library, decent air and water quality,

http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_action=doc&p_docid=12DAEA466F080DE8&p_docn... (2/5/2010)

and the ability to ship wine into the state (again, it's our list).

We eliminated whole regions of the country right away: New England and the Northeast (too cold and too expensive), the Southeast (summer humidity), Florida (puh-lease), the Southwest (too hot), the Great Lakes (weather) and California (did anyone buy a ticket for the Titanic after it hit the ice?)

winnowing the list

Our initial pass produced 14 possibles, from Bloomington, Ind., to Corvallis, Ore. We began our detailed research. **City-data.com** (how did we survive without the Web?) is a treasure trove of statistical information about nearly everywhere, USA: climate, schools, housing, economics, demographics, taxes, crime, government.

Using that data and others, we culled our list to five **cities**. Gone were places with snow in May, big tax bills, lousy or no bike trails, unfriendly wine policies and rocky economies (rocky became a relative term, of course, as 2008 progressed into 2009).

We were left with five semi-finalists: Boise; Fort Collins, Colo.; Corvallis and Eugene in Oregon; and Laramie, Wyo. (We cheated and added Laramie despite the weather because it is in an income-tax-free state.)

Down to two

Our next item was health care, which required quite a bit of digging. Again, the Web was invaluable. After much research and discussion, we were down to Boise and Fort Collins.

By then it was early January 2009, and we began more detailed examinations of our two "targets." We started reading the online versions of the local newspapers, ordered Chamber of Commerce relocation packages and registered with real estate agents in both **cities**.

We began getting detailed housing information from Trulia.com, an outstanding consumer-friendly real estate Web site that provides MLS listings on houses in an area, by ZIP code, according to criteria you provide. And we read everything we came across about each area.

Our plan was to visit both places in 2009, Boise in April and Fort Collins in October. We would then make what we expected to be a tough decision, and put our Dallas condo on the **market** in the spring of 2010. Best laid plansÉ

Our first day in town

We arrived in Boise on a sunny Saturday April afternoon. We were dazzled by the efficient, close-in airport and the view - the foothills and the State Capitol are impressive calling cards. We headed Downtown and wandered, enjoying 8th Street and environs, the friendly crowds (families, teens, older couples - a great mix) and the weather. And bikes everywhere, even on the streets, with no apparent risk to life or limb. After a couple of hours, we were walking around with stupid grins on our faces.

Our list of "must-haves" and "important" had an identity. And it was Boise.

We spent a week exploring the museums and tourist attractions, discovering restaurants and coffeeshops, looking at real estate and learning about the neighborhoods. We reconnoitered grocery stores and the Library! (love the exclamation point!), biked the Greenbelt and hiked the Foothills, explored the BSU campus, attended a couple of student recitals, sipped our way through the Snake River Valley wine country. And we walked, morning and evening, Downtown and through the North End and Warm Springs.

We were sold. (Fort Where?)

The economy craters

We got back to Dallas, and crammed months of additional research, preparation and condo fix-up into four weeks. On June 1, in the midst of the worst real estate **market** in decades, we listed our place. We waited, sweated through another Texas summer É and pined for Boise. We also watched the cratering economy and recalculated everything. Boise still looked good - our checklist helped us through the lousy economic statistics and kept us focused. The only change in our plans was deciding to rent rather than buy after we moved, at least for a while.

Homesick before the home

We came back to Boise in September for a long weekend - we were homesick for a place we had never lived. We visited old friends (the Red Feather Lounge and Goldy's) and discovered some new ones (Chandlers for killer martinis, Pho Nouveau, and the Keith Richards coffee cardio electro-shock equivalent at Java). And the **Capital City farmers' market**! My husband does the cooking, and he was dazzled. If we had seen the **market** during our April trip, we might never have left.

Finally, in October, a nibble, an offer, the real estate dance, and, in December, finally, we closed on our Dallas condo. It was the best early Christmas present ever!

And here we are, car-free, in a Downtown apartment, out and about every day on our bikes or walking and impatiently awaiting the spring return of the farmers' **market**. We love our new lives - the outdoor focus and the friendly people, the volunteer opportunities, our daily visits to the Y, frequent stops at our library, and the constant discovery of new things in a place we picked because, finally, we know what we want and who we are: Boiseans.

Maria Smith and her husband Mike Smith are travel writers who, as of December, live blissfully in Downtown Boise.

Copyright 2010, The Idaho Statesman

[About IdahoStatesman.com](#) | [About the Real Cities Network](#) | [Terms of Use & Privacy Statement](#) | [About Knight Ridder](#) | [Copyright](#)