

| IDAHO FALLS, ID

Where the World Meets the High Desert

by Colleen Birch Maile

At first glance, Idaho Falls, Idaho seems like many other rural American communities. There are feed stores, farm implement dealerships and plenty of pickup trucks. Traffic is sparse. People are neighborly. The pastoral patina is genuine. It also belies the fact that this is no ordinary farm town. Idaho Falls, home to one of only ten U.S. Department of Energy multi-program laboratories, the Idaho National Laboratory, benefits from an uncommon small-town populace. Its citizens come from across the nation and throughout the world to enjoy purposeful work, easy living and abundant recreational opportunities.

Lifelong Bostonian Kara Gallagher met her future husband, a New Yorker, on the slopes of Jackson Hole, Wyoming in 2004. Together they made the decision to move west. Both now work at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) and relish the high-desert lifestyle. Gallagher, INL manager of human resources, recalled her first encounter with her new hometown. "The ease of living here really impressed me. In Boston I lived downtown and worked outside the city, so I conducted my life from my car in the midst of the "big dig" [a massive construction project re-routing Boston's main highway into a 3.5 mile tunnel]. Here, the ability to leave my house, stop for a really good cup of coffee and be at work in 20 minutes, was amazing.

"In Boston an annual parking pass costs more than \$100,000. A starter home in Idaho Falls is about the same price. Here you can have two homes for the price of a Boston condo. We have a toddler, and it's a wonderful family environment. We have a four-bedroom home on three acres for a third of what a condo would cost in Boston."

Gallagher and her family do own a condo. It's in Driggs, Idaho near the Grand Targhee Ski Resort where they hold season passes. "I've always been a skier," she explained. "Grand Targhee is a very easy drive from Idaho Falls. It takes about an hour-and-a-half to get to Driggs, and there are two stoplights the entire way. It's so easy to ski here



Kara Gallagher enjoys easy living.



and the winters are actually easier than they are out east. It is a dry cold so we get snow packed roads as opposed to sheets of ice." Gallagher, who traded her Jetta for a four-wheel drive Subaru, touts easy access to cross-country and skate-skiing trails as another Idaho Falls plus.

In the summer Gallagher and her husband mountain bike in the hills surrounding Idaho Falls and camp in the nearby mountains. Their son enjoys short jaunts to hot springs. "The whole stress level of getting ready to do something fun is reduced here. We can take off at a moment's notice; you need not worry about campsites. They're everywhere."

Gallagher's east coast visitors are amazed at her ability to access so much recreation. "My parents like to walk the Idaho Falls Greenbelt and play golf. The community courses are amazing and you can play at a moment's notice. We also tend to use our Idaho Falls home as a base to see other parts of Idaho and Wyoming." It takes a few hours to drive to Yellowstone National Park and Jackson Hole, Wyoming over a scenic mountain pass.

Joel Duling also enjoys Idaho Falls' recreational bounty. The INL program director for the specific manufacturing capability moved from Columbus, Ohio 12 years ago. Back then he was a big city guy.

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"I'd grown up in Detroit, lived in LA and Tampa and traveled a lot. At first I thought 'this is a really small town.' But, after just a little while we were in love with it. There are so many activities you can enjoy here that you just don't have back east. The outdoor recreation is incredible. I like to ski and go snowmobiling during the winter and camping during the summer. I also go adventure riding, loading everything into an off-road vehicle and heading into the mountains."

Last summer, Duling spent three days on his KTM 625 motorcycle riding along Idaho's Forest Service roads and backcountry trails. He covered 1,000 miles through pine-covered mountains punctuated by tiny towns and rushing rivers. "I hit the middle, north and south forks of the Salmon, all forks of the Payette, the Boise and the Selway rivers. It was incredible scenery and very few people. We met a state worker doing backcountry patrols as we went over Elk Summit. It's high—around 11,000 feet—and he said 'give me a call when you get to the other side.' Everybody here is so friendly; they really look out for you."



Jennifer Jorge who moved from Florida finds Idaho Falls friendly citizens refreshing.

and friendly. That's very refreshing." In terms of fun Jorge enjoys driving to Yellowstone and Jackson Hole where last summer she took a whitewater raft trip down the Snake River. She notes that her excursions aren't limited to major attractions. "There are also wonderful small mountain towns in Idaho like McCall that are absolutely beautiful but people have to tell you about them because you don't know they're there."

A seasoned resident of the world, Jorge's work has taken her to posts in Sweden, Ghana, the Dominican Republic, Panama and Brazil. She finds

Jennifer Jorge, a relative newcomer, concurs. The INL department manager for environmental stewardship and water management moved from West Palm Beach, Florida 18 months ago. "When I first got here I had to run around with a map. I kept getting lost and people were so helpful



Joel Duling, a former "big city" guy loves Idaho backcountry.

the quality of Idaho Falls life unparalleled. "I don't think there's ever been a traffic jam. Even though it is a small town, because of the breadth of the professionals the INL brings, we have a worldwide mix of people. We have a lot of culture. There's a very nice theater downtown and a wonderful museum. The Museum of Idaho is not large but it has some very exciting exhibits. I recently attended one on dogs and their kinship to human kind and their progression from wolf to dog. The museum director gave us a guided tour."

Joel Duling agrees "One of my first impressions was that we might be deprived of art and culture. But the truth is I have seen more art and culture up close in Idaho Falls than I did in places like Cincinnati and Los Angeles. In those places I didn't want to fight the crowds. Here we go to the Colonial Theater and see great performances and it's so easy. It's really fantastic."

Kara Gallagher, the human resources manager, offered an explanation for Idaho Falls multi-faceted lifestyle. "It is a very warm and welcoming community, and it is also interesting to see the impact that the INL has on the town. We recruit internationally and that mixes things up a bit. The lab has a very positive influence on the diversity of Idaho Falls. Because of INL, it is a major research center. Idaho Falls is also home to a medical center serving a 200-mile radius and it remains a farming community. It's a very interesting blend. I can't imagine living anywhere else," she said. ■

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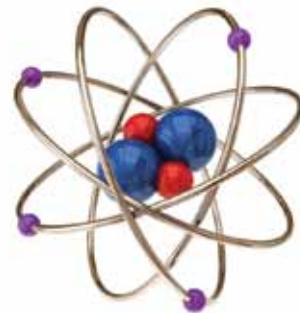
Idaho Falls is a reasonably priced launch pad for a wealth of adventure. Yellowstone National Park is just an hour and a half to the north. Jackson Hole, Wyoming lies over the Teton Pass. Exceptional fishing and hunting opportunities are even closer.



Richard Boardman

Richard Boardman
Energy Security Initiative Lead

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