

Don't brush them
aside: nebraska cities
are building
burgeoning startup
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Entrepreneur is on the road with startup platform Rise of the Rest. Check out for stories from the October road trip as well as for insights from thought leaders and community leaders showing there's an entrepreneurial world outside Silicon Valley.

My great-grandfather, Joseph Bubas, immigrated to the U. S. from Vukova Gorica, a hilltop town in rural Croatia. Like many Eastern Europeans in the early 20th century, he found his way on a steam ship, arrived at Ellis Island, and, spoke no English. He walked around New York with a sign on his neck written in Croatian that read: " Hello. My name is Josip Bubas. I speak no English. I am going to Omaha, Nebraska."

I was in Nebraska yesterday, arriving to celebrate the kickoff of the fifth , a celebration of technological revitalization outside Silicon Valley. The day was packed with reminders of how far the city has come, from our start at the joining of the transcontinental railroad to a breakfast held at Exchange Building, a place where grain stock traded nearly a century ago.

Startups we met were exploring new technologies like virtual reality and robotics. Some merged traditional fields like woodcraft with 3-d printing. And that grain exchange? Today, it's the home of a startup collaborative.

This Nebraska I saw is a world away from the place my grandfather finally arrived after Croatiandoctorbought him a one-way train ticket. But so much still remains the same. In my grandfather's time, it took incredible risk to come so far and build a thriving community. And today, Omaha is still a city

of risk. It's just that today those risk takers, those pioneers, are called entrepreneurs.

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Since 2014, Rise of the Rest has visited 21 cities and across these communities are a few common themes. Capital is a problem everywhere. Big institutions don't understand startups. Talent for scaling companies is an issue. The problems don't change, but the results do.

Some communities complain about these problems -- and don't move forward -- but in Lincoln/Omaha, we saw an optimism that did. A decade ago, the civic leaders of Lincoln shared with us, the business community got together and created a "Vision 2015." The city was stale and self-satisfied, they thought, and they had goals around infrastructure, urban development, engagement with the university, and startups.

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Today, the university has hit nine of their 10 goals, with astonishing results that we saw. A growing startup, Hudl, that has nearly every pro and college sports team on a film and data analytics platform recently raised \$71 million, led by blue-chip venture firm Accel, and is creating an emerging "sports tech" cluster of startups. And a food lab in the University of Nebraska is building on a long-running agriculture industry and creating terrific companies such as Diversified Ag, a "fitbit for cows."

All of this hardly existed five years ago. In 2011, there was not a lot of venture capital investment in the Omaha-Lincoln statistical area. In 2016, there has been millions poured into it. There's still a ways to go. In the past year, Omaha-Lincoln lost one of its Fortune 500 companies, ConAgra, to Chicago. The other five were all founded decades ago. It's far more likely that Omaha-Lincoln—and all the cities we visit in the West—will build their next Fortune 500 from within.

Seem unlikely? Building a Fortune 500 company in Lincoln, Salt Lake, or Phoenix is no less unlikely than building a quality life in Omaha, Nebraska after you traveled 10, 000 miles speaking no English with only a sign among your neck. But if the frontier optimism of Omaha and Lincoln is any cue to the rest of the week, the rest will rise in the West.