

"I believe living in the Triangle allows you to enjoy a balance between your personal and professional life." -Ken Hibbard, vp of product development & East Coast operations

net app : it's all about balance

written by Amy Lorenti

Early this fall, the Triangle was first in a "best place" ranking. In "Projections 2006-Daring to Compete: A Region-to-Region Reality Check," the Silicon Valley Leadership Group lists the Triangle as the number one technology area in which to live and work, topping Boston, Ma., Seattle, Wa., San Diego, Ca., Austin, Texas, Portland, Or., Fairfax County, Va. and Silicon Valley itself.

In its report, the Silicon Valley Leadership Group of San Jose, Ca. cited unemployment rates, housing affordability, traffic congestion costs, eighth-grade math achievement, electricity costs by kilowatt-hour, the percentage of the population with health insurance and state tax rates as the issues most critical to the cost of doing business, cost of living and employee quality of life. The Triangle ranked first or second in six of these issues, earning it the top spot of most hospitable

places to run a technology business.

It is no surprise to those who already work and live here that RTP would receive this honor. Network Applications (NetApp) sums it up this way, "It's all about balance."

Hoovers says NetApp knows, "storage backward and forward...a leading vendor of network-attached storage systems designed for medium-sized to large businesses." Its headquarters is in Sunnyvale, Ca.

Ken Hibbard, NetApp's vice president of product development and East Coast operations here in Research Triangle Park believes, "There seems to be a rich value system here. Couple that with a lower cost of living and the opportunity to enjoy cultural, sports and educational activities. I believe living in the Triangle allows you to enjoy a balance between your personal and professional life."

"The quality of life here is appealing to people in other geographies as

well," Hibbard says, "making it easy for us to attract top talent from all over the country." Ken Hibbard joined NetApp in 1998 to manage its software organization in Sunnyvale, Ca. "The company was growing rapidly and in the late '90s we realized it would be necessary to expand somewhere outside Silicon Valley. There was a great demand for good people and the competition was fierce," he notes. "Also, it is hard to convince middle to upper level people to come into the Valley from other geographies because the cost of living in that area is so high."

Hibbard says the company began its search for a location in a different time zone to serve its European customers. NetApp looked at several areas including Boston, Ma. and Texas. "Though RTP was on the list, at first it was not at the top of that list." Hibbard then visited RTP with NetApp's CTO, Steve Kleiman, to conduct interviews. They were impressed with the high-level talent pool. Within a few weeks, they decided to open a new facility in RTP as the company's East Coast development and support center. "The talent pool, and the fact the area is a desirable place to live for people in other geographies to be recruited into, made the decision an easy one for us."

NetApp opened the doors in RTP in September of 1999 with 12 employees, growing to 30 or 40 within a few months. "We're up to 350 engineering and support personnel now in the RTP Global Support Center—up from the 100 who were here when I arrived in 2001," Hibbard remarks.

"NetApp's RTP Global Support Center is the faster growing part of the company now," Hibbard adds, "So much so that eight months ago we decided to consolidate all four of the company's support centers into RTP." The NetApp RTP Technology Center includes departments in global technical support and engineering along with human resources, facilities management, accounting and marketing.

The areas talent pool was not the only reason for NetApp to choose RTP. "Labs and data centers use up a lot of electricity—we're running at 24/7 in three shifts—and as electricity costs less in this part of the country, savings from an energy consumption standpoint becomes very attractive," explains Hibbard.

In 2004, NetApp was outgrowing its original leased facility on Davis Drive and looking to expand. Cisco Systems' extra sites filled the bill. NetApp acquired three buildings from Cisco and moved into the first one this past August.

Hibbard lives in Chapel Hill with his wife, Nora and youngest child, Andrew, who is at East Chapel Hill High School. His daughter, Ashley, is a senior at N.C. State University and his son, Chris, is a sophomore at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. He and his family enjoy the balance their lives have achieved living in the Triangle area.

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