

From top: The Atlanta Streetcar (free through 2015) began service this year and is the first part of a new system of transportation for the city; Sparkspace in Columbus has a variety of unique spaces for local businesses to meet.



ATLANTA

GEORGIA

Atlanta is a wired metropolis, with tech all-stars from media, business and recreation thriving within city limits. Thanks to research institutions like Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology and Georgia State University, Atlanta has some serious Southern brainpower.

The Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International brought 7,000 people to Atlanta for its Unmanned Systems 2015 gathering, which focused on the future of the unmanned systems (aka drones) industry. AUUVSI chose Atlanta partially because of the thought leadership in the city. "The Atlanta area has strong ties to the unmanned systems industry, including a thriving local chapter of AUUVSI," says Leslie Hinton, senior conference manager. "Atlanta is also a central location for many of the companies in the precision agriculture sector of the industry."

Atlanta is home to global media networks CNN and The Weather Channel, as well as corporate tech heavyweights Delta Air Lines, Equifax, Southern Company, SunTrust Bank and UPS. Google also has developed quite a presence in the city: The company will soon undergo a \$300 million expansion to its existing data center in the metro area to bring fiber to the city.

Several entrepreneurial tech companies in Atlanta are renovating interesting workspaces, such as Ponce City Market, an old Sears, Roebuck & Co. factory transformed into office space for companies such as Athenahealth, Cardlytics, HowStuffWorks and MailChimp. Similarly, more than 800 entrepreneurs and 230 startups work in Atlanta Tech Village, a commercial office building that was converted and redesigned to house tech companies with up to 30 employees. ATV has a fully wired 3,000-sq.-ft. event center, a 4,000-sq.-ft. rooftop patio space, a boardroom and conference rooms available to rent by the hour.

Atlanta's professional sports teams are setting trends in technology as well. Plans for the new NFL Atlanta Falcons stadium, slated to open in 2017, include a circular, five-story-tall, high-definition video display board, which will be the first of its kind in the world. Comcast is partnering with MLB's Atlanta Braves to ensure high-tech elements for the design of the team's in-the-works stadium, SunTrust Park. Comcast will relocate its Southeast regional headquarters to a building with an innovation lab for new technologies adjacent to SunTrust Park. The 60-acre project that includes the stadium and surrounding mixed-used development will be all fiber and have multiterabit capabilities, according to Comcast.

COLUMBUS

OHIO

"Columbus is a thriving technology community," says Warner Moore, conference chair of Ohio LinuxFest, an annual software conference with international attendees. The city has received accolades for its recent strides in the tech industry, being named a Top Seven Intelligent Community from 2013-15 by Intelligent Community Forum. Forbes ranked Columbus third on its list of best U.S. cities for technology jobs.

The surge in tech growth in Columbus is new. A recent Kauffman Foundation study revealed the city had the largest jump in entrepreneurial activity out of all U.S. cities tracked from 2014-15, rising from 22nd to 12th place. Similarly, Praxis Strategy Group reported Columbus' technology industry has grown by 31 percent over the last decade. So why are so many young innovators choosing to launch their companies in Columbus right now? "The availability of capital is a big part of it," explains Moore. "It's helped fuel the growth and allowed companies to accelerate their scale."

The amount of capital investment added to Columbus from 2010 to April 2015 totals \$5 billion, according to economic strategy group Columbus 2020. Powerhouse resources such as venture development organization Rev1 Ventures and Drive Capital mentor and boost the success of tech entrepreneurs in the area as well. Moore says these factors—along with the low cost of living and favorable tax climate—make the area appealing to entrepreneurs willing to take the risk of launching a business. Biosortia Pharmaceuticals, CoverMyMeds, Sage Sustainable Electronics and Updox are some of the thriving tech companies in Columbus that have put the city on the map in the tech space.