We hear it and we hear it often. Attracting talent to the Waterloo Region is a challenge. And as most recruiters will tell you, the challenge isn't Downtown vs. the UW Tech Park, or even Kitchener vs. Waterloo - the challenge is KW vs Toronto/Brooklyn/Boston/Silicon Valley/Melbourne. You get the idea.....

You can imagine the conversation between recruiter and recruitee: "if I can work anywhere in the world, why would I choose Kitchener-Waterloo? It's cold, you have no ocean, no mega-skyline. What does your city have to offer me?"

We could, of course, rhyme off umpteen reasons we think we're an awesome place to live (and we do, on page 57's Insider's Guide to DTK!), but we thought it would be better for you to hear it from those who know firsthand. So we invited seven relatively new KW residents together for a chat. These super-talented minds, all of whom currently work in the Downtown tech scene, told us "here's why."

Meet Gavin, Marine, Divam, Terrence, Laura, Vance and Umar:

You have all come to KW from other parts of the world. How were the first few months of your experience?

Marine - Canadians are notorious for being super nice and it's true. My first year, I had seven different invitations to go to people's homes for Thanksgiving dinner.

Terrance - I was nervous at first, but after about six months, things started to click. Working at Vidyard, I found people in the same situation as me. They aren't originally from KW either and were looking to build long lasting friendships.

Laura - When I took my job I only expected to stay a few months, but I've quickly grown to love this community.

Divam - I grew up in New Delhi and eventually moved to Toronto. In comparison, Toronto already felt slow to me. So coming to KW was no big deal. It may be smaller, but everything is still so accessible.

How did you find integrating into the Downtown tech scene? Easy? Challenging?

Gavin - There is so much support for tech in this community. You can develop an idea and someone here will want to help you build it.

Marine - Working for a start up, you never feel alone. Everyone around you is also working for a company where everything is moving so fast. We're all doing 17 different jobs at once.

Laura - It's so easy to talk to other people in tech - and quickly - and they instantly understand what you're working on.

Vance - There are a lot of resources available. The University of Waterloo has expertise in different areas. We can talk to professors anytime we run into a problem. Other tech companies are always willing to help out.

Now that you've all been here a while, what do you love about this community?

Umar - I love the commute, you can get anywhere you want in 15 minutes. In Toronto, you can lose 15 minutes of your day with one subway delay.

Gavin - I love how well connected the tech community is. Every month, 200 people will attend a meet up. You find that this person knows this person, who knows this person. Everyone is connected to someone.

Laura - It's almost like you can be a big fish in a small pond. Your company actually gets to grow with the community.

Vance - Coming from a small island, I appreciate the size of KW. You can live in a neighbourhood outside Downtown but still be really close to the core. It's not Toronto-big and it's not tiny. Yet the cost of living here is so much more affordable.

KW is growing and urbanizing, Downtown Kitchener is evolving into an international tech hub. What excites you about building your career here?

Terrance - Whether it's at your company or in the community, there's a tonne of opportunities to contribute to something meaningful.

Umar - This is the right time to come here because we're in that growing phase. Five years from now, we're going to look back and say "we just lived through a pretty special time".

Divam - When you think of San Francisco there is an image you get in your head. Kitchener is still evolving. We are establishing an identity and we get to be part of that process. It's like lightning in a bottle. You're going to see how Silicon Valley came to be. KW's not perfect, but you can watch it grow and you can help shape it. You're not going to get this anywhere else in the world today.

We asked all seven about their favourite places and what they would like to see... just turn the page.

WRITTEN BY LINDA JUTZI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN LIMOYO
Gavin Kendall  
*Developer at Igloo Software originally from Australia*

**How did you end up in Kitchener from Oz??**  
My journey is very simple. I met a Canadian girl on the internet, fell in love and came over here. Ever since then I have been watching hockey and snowboarding and becoming a natural Canadian.

**Favourite part of KW?**  I love that there’s a ski hill in town…it’s right there! [sorry Vance!]

**Best way to get connected?**  Lots of groups and meet ups to share ideas with. There is so much cross pollination of knowledge.

**Biggest misnomer about Kitchener’s tech scene?**  The notion that we’re insular is a complete fallacy. Everyone is trying to get out. Everyone is trying to get connected.

Laura Brodie  
*Director, Marketing & Communications at Bridgit, originally from Ottawa*

**What has surprised you about living in KW?**  
For the first little while I spent a lot of time going back to Toronto. I soon came to realize that this community has a lot to offer and started having friends come to visit ME for the weekend.

**From a marketing perspective, what’s one benefit of having a company in KW?**  Marketing exposure. You can get a lot more recognition as a company here than if you were in a big city. You can be praised as the best in Canada and use that as a spring board for success internationally.

**What surprised you about this community?**  The first time I walked into KW ARTZLAB, people I already knew were hanging out there. I love the quick access to the countryside for hiking, or kayaking or cycling.

Divam Jain  
*Software Engineer at Google, originally from New Delhi*

**You moved here from one of the busiest cities in the world. That must have been a bit of an adjustment?**  It’s all perspective. I came to UW for grad school and I was amazed at how different life was here. What I love is that you can actually get most of the same things as a bigger city…maybe not as many choices but everything is here.

**What do you look for in a great city?**  It’s the community. That’s pretty much the bottom line. You can have nice restaurants, but if you don’t have a good community of people, it doesn’t matter.

**What do you love best about KW?**  One of the most under-appreciated places is The Working Centre - Queen Street Commons.

**Favourite place in Downtown Kitchener?**  Pupuseria Latinos

Terrance Kwok  
*Sales Development Manager at Vidyard, originally from Brampton*

**What would you tell someone considering moving here?**  After finishing my schooling at UW, I moved to Downtown Toronto. I really did not plan on coming back to KW. I was nervous about what it would be like without being part of the University support system. For the first little while, I would go back to Toronto on weekends. But then something really clicked and I realized everything I need is right here.

**Best advice you could pass along?**  Initially it was hard to find the really good ethnic restaurants but they’re here. BTW - The Easy Earthen Restaurant has the best Szechwan in town.

**One thing you’d like to see more of?**  Independently owned retailers and restaurants.

**Favourite Part of Downtown Kitchener?**  I love the vibe of the old brick buildings.
Marine Dumontier Web Marketing Manager at Igloo Software, originally from Paris, France

What would you tell someone who’s considering taking a job in KW? I chose Kitchener after working in Montreal first. This is a community that you’ll be welcomed into. People truly embraced me as a foreigner. I have never had that experience before.

Favourite parts of KW? I love that the City transformed an old garbage dump into an awesome usable place with a skate park, dog park, BMX bike park and a toboggan hill. I go running there all the time. I also love that the downtown restaurants are putting a lot of effort into serving local food and involving all the area vendors and farmers.

One thing you’d love to see improved? Public transit.

Favourite place in Downtown Kitchener? The Kitchener Market is my happy place.

Vance Morrison Research Scientist - Advanced R&D at Thalmic Labs, originally from PEI

What do you appreciate the most about KW? You get all the benefits of living in a community that appreciates tech, without the downsides of living in a big city. I enjoyed living in Montreal for school but I wanted a smaller sized place. Kitchener is the perfect in-between.

One thing you’d love to see improved? I wish we had a bigger ski hill.

Favourite place in Downtown Kitchener? Victoria Park.

Umar Tanwir Product Management Director at NetSuite/TribeHR, originally from Montreal

What would you tell someone who’s considering taking a job in KW? It’s the right time to come here while it’s still growing. The changes that have taken place in the past two years are really awesome.

What do you love best about KW? The affordability relative to the scale of the opportunities to work in tech. It’s half of what it would cost if I were living in Toronto or San Francisco. I’m not sure you can find that anywhere else in the world.

How would you make the community better? What people want in a city will never change. A good quality of life, low cost of living, safety, great things to do, and a cool city image. These wants are as true today as they will be 10 years from now.

CONNECT WITH PLUGIN!

Plugin, a bi-monthly mixer created by downtown tech companies, strives to create charitable, fun, and memorable events that unite the area’s professionals. Meet people, have fun, help the community!

www.pluginkw.com