LOS ANGELES

THE CITY’S ECONOMY—ALONG WITH TECH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP—are booming, fueled by world-class universities and a civic commitment to workforce development.
WHEN THE CITIZENS OF LOS ANGELES VOTED ON NOV. 8 last year, they had more on their minds than presidential politics. A resounding number of Angelenos—just shy of 70%—gave their support to Measure M, authorizing $120 billion in infrastructure investment that will build Metro mass-transit lines connecting far-flung parts of the city, ease traffic congestion, and create 466,000 jobs.

Strongly promoted by Mayor Eric Garcetti, who’s running for his second term, Measure M adds a positive note to an already upbeat narrative about L.A.’s economy and its growth. Since 2013, when Garcetti took office, the city has added 135,000 jobs, and its unemployment rate has plunged. L.A. now has more jobs than it did before the Great Recession, and it’s expected to add tens of thousands more over the next five years.

A key focus of the city’s economic expansion efforts is innovation, and underpinning it, education. “The future of entrepreneurial innovation is right here in Los Angeles,” said Garcetti in December, announcing the winners of the 2016 Mayor’s Cup, a competition for young entrepreneurs at L.A. universities to pitch creative solutions to L.A.’s challenges. “Our colleges and universities are full of creative people with ideas that can change lives.”

The city courts tech companies and entrepreneurs with incentives that include tax subsidies and loans, and Garcetti has identified clean technology innovation as one of his primary growth strategies. In October, that strategy achieved a milestone with the opening of the La Kretz Innovation Campus downtown, a joint venture of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator (LACI).

Los Angeles is increasingly recognized as a leading technology and innovation hub. Last October, TechCrunch called the city “a powerhouse in transportation technology,” with SpaceX, Hyperloop One, Faraday Future, and other cutting-edge ventures headquartered here. The 2016 Kauffman Index of Startup Activity ranked L.A. third in the country, up from fourth place in 2015 and ahead of San Francisco and San Jose.

Silicon Beach is booming, growing and expanding throughout L.A.’s Westside. But when advertising marketplace Rubicon Project first moved into its offices in Playa Vista nearly four years ago, “it was a ghost town,” says CEO and Founder Frank Addante. “Since then, buildings and offices have popped up everywhere around us, putting us right at the center of the action.”

Addante says his mission in founding the company 10 years ago was “to do for the buying and

AS TECHNOLOGY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP BOOST THE ECONOMY, THE CITY’S UNIVERSITIES AND COMMITMENT TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT HELP POWER THE TREND.

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The Internet era began at UCLA in 1969, when the first online message was sent from our campus. In fact, Los Angeles has turned to UCLA for technological innovation for nearly a century. The university manages almost 1,000 patents and just under 3,000 inventions, and UCLA students, faculty and alumni have launched more than 140 startups. Just some of the ways that Bruins break through barriers and make the world better for businesses and people every day.

HOW WILL YOU SHAPE THE FUTURE?
selling of advertising what Nasdaq did for stock trading, or Sabre for travel reservations.” Today, Rubicon Project operates one of the largest exchanges for advertising in the world, reaching over 1 billion consumers across more than 50% of the entire Internet and connecting to approximately 1 billion unique mobile devices. The company auctions off impressions to some 500,000 advertisers in a speed-of-light process that’s completed each time a mobile or desktop page or app loads.

Having founded a number of companies in Silicon Valley earlier in his career, Addante “purposely decided” to launch Rubicon Project in L.A. “Playa Vista is absolutely the creative hub of America—from engineering the product to creatively focused innovators. The area has long been a hotbed for top-tier tech talent with the California Institute of Technology, USC Viterbi, and UCLA Samueli all being just a stone’s throw away. And, of course, the weather isn’t too bad either.”

Most observers agree that L.A.’s tech scene could not have exploded the way it has without a steady flow of skilled graduates from the area’s highly regarded academic institutions. Los Angeles graduates more engineers than any other metro area in the nation.

UCLA is a major supplier of those engineers and other top talent, but it also generates significant innovation on its own. Among its array of programs, organizations, and incubators aiding student, alumni, and faculty entrepreneurs are Startup UCLA, the Anderson Venture Accelerator, and the UCLA Technology Development Group (TDG). The university first established an office to commercialize innovation in the early 1990s. Since then, according to Amir Naiberg, associate vice chancellor and CEO and president of UCLA TDG, its breakthroughs have led to a succession of products including an oral medication for treating prostate cancer and a desalination membrane used worldwide to purify drinking water.

Already the recipient of more than $1 billion in research funding annually, the university recently received another $2.2 million that will support educational entrepreneurship programs and early-stage startups, aiming to bring more UCLA inventions to the marketplace, says Naiberg. “Our goal is to be a cornerstone of L.A.’s ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship,” he says.

Of course, not everyone is going to be an engineer or launch a startup, but industries vital to the city going forward, including advanced manufacturing and healthcare, still require skilled employees. “Nearly 25% of our population has less than a high school education,” says Jan Perry, General Manager of L.A.’s Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD), which provides a broad range of training, funding, and technical assistance in the areas of business and entrepreneurial support, employment, and youth development. “We must align workforce training and education with workforce needs.”

The EWDD partners with L.A.’s Unified School District and the L.A. Community College District to upskill job candidates and prepare them for STEM and STEAM jobs. “Community colleges are nimble and can adapt curriculums quickly,” says Perry. “They also offer affordability. You can receive training in something specific and do it in components with stackable degrees, and that opens the door for a lot more people.”

Last year, Mayor Garcetti announced $2.4 million in new job-training initiatives to help struggling Angelenos find work in high-demand industries. In September he launched L.A. College Promise with a number of local and national partners, making Los Angeles the largest city in the nation to guarantee eligible high school graduates beginning in the Class of 2017 at least one tuition-free year of higher education through community colleges.

“We’re committed to continue building a strong pipeline,” says Perry, “for employers, residents, and for our future.”

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