

Dallas Morning News - November 21, 2019

Bob Metcalfe: Texas innovation beats Silicon Valley in many ways, except one

The problem with comparing innovation between Texas and Silicon Valley is that everybody in Silicon Valley is moving to Texas. Well, maybe not everybody, but more Californians move to Dallas-Fort Worth each year than residents of any other state, according to NerdWallet. And that isn't even counting migration outside of North Texas.

In fact, according to data from the American Community Survey, between 2007 and 2016, a net of 1 million residents, or 2.5% of the state's population, left California for another state due to an increased cost of living and scarcity of affordable housing. California's Legislative Analyst's Office cites Texas as the most popular destination, which attracted more than a quarter of them. Among the arrivals are a good many "founderati," the glamorous people involved in growing startups. I like to think I beat the reverse California tech rush. In 2011, I left the coasts to become professor of innovation at the University of Texas at Austin. I got to Texas after 23 years as a student and early-career engineer in Boston, and then another 23 years as a scientist, engineer and entrepreneur prospering in Silicon Valley.

After working to advance the Texas startup ecosystem for nine years, I'm now leading a conference that will celebrate, critique and catalyze how research in the lab ends up as products in the marketplace: "Innovating Texas: Research to Commercialization." Texas innovation started well before Silicon Valley earned its name, and there is much to celebrate. From the Nobel Prize-winning Texas Instruments engineer who invented the integrated circuit in 1958, to the first artificial heart transplant at the Texas Heart Institute in 1969, to the innovative horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing technologies of the '80s and '90s that are making Texas the star of the energy industry today. While Silicon Valley innovates mostly with bits of information, Texas does so with atoms that matter, including microcircuits, aortas, shale deposits, batteries and immune systems. Those last two won Texas scientists Nobel Prizes.