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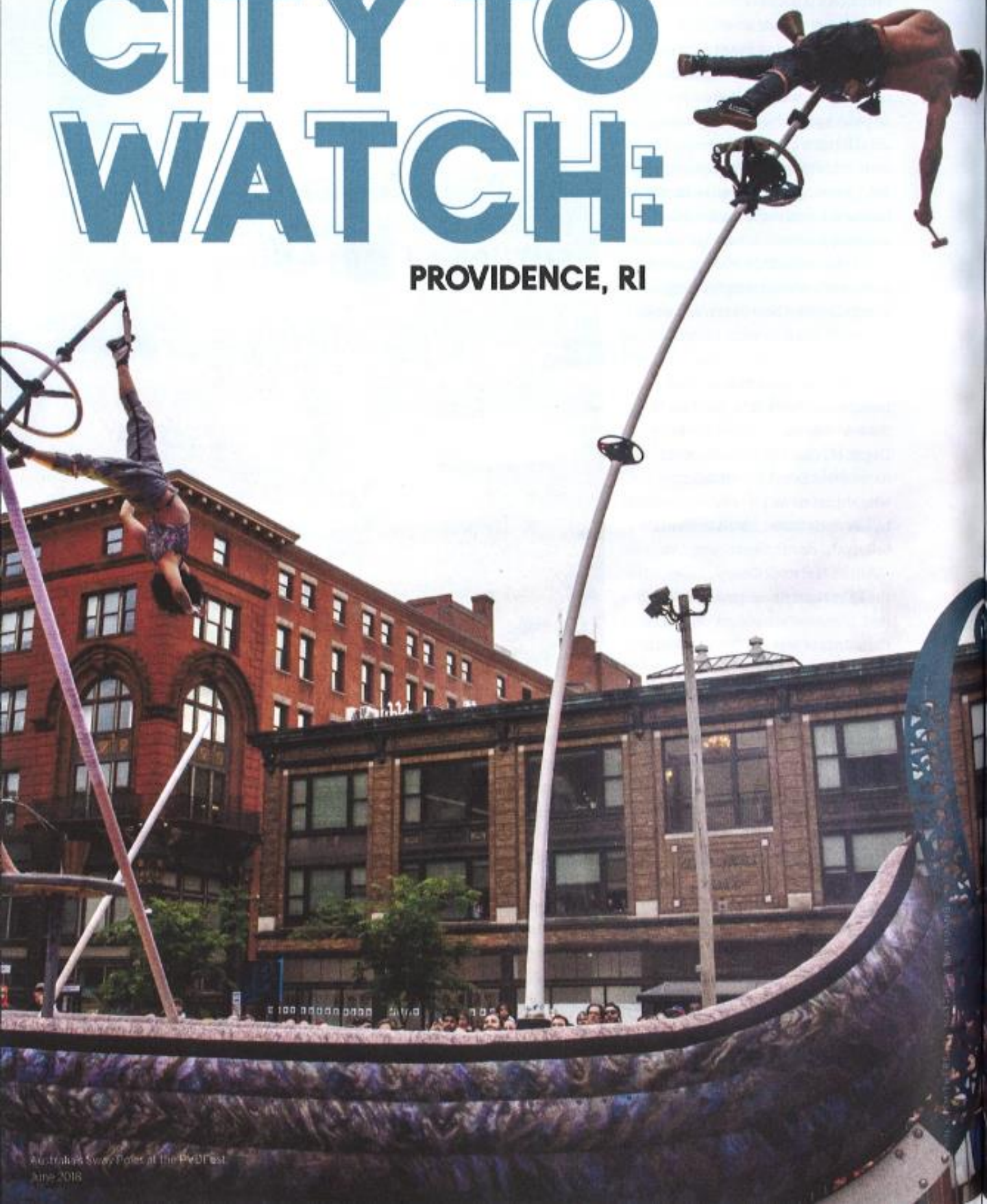
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CITY TO WATCH:

PROVIDENCE, RI





A BOUT FOUR YEARS AGO, PROVIDENCE, R.I., STARTED A LOCAL FESTIVAL CALLED PVD FEST. BECAUSE PROVIDENCE, POPULATION 179,000, IS A SMALL CITY THAT IS OFTEN OVERSHADOWED BY NEARBY BOSTON, YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T HEARD OF IT.

But this year's four-day festival was remarkable for its breadth and ambition. Some of it, like the daylong session on "Cyborg Cities," spoke to Providence's intellectual bona fides and the policy-wonk interests of its mayor, a former law professor named Jorge Elorza. Then there was a day of Latin and African American dance and art installations and a gallery tour. You could have spent a few hours happily bashing your friends in the free bumper cars. And throughout, there was constant music from local bands and food from the many diverse influences—Italian, Caribbean, Central American, Portuguese, African, Chinese, Cambodian—that help create one of the finest small-city food scenes in the country.

Outsiders typically think of Providence as a college town, home to Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, among others. If they know anything about Rhode Island, they may think of Providence as the capital of a state whose politics have long been marred by corruption

and waste and dubious financial commitments. Both things have been true—but luckily for Providence, the waste and corruption part is changing. Mayor Elorza has a lot to do with that. For one thing, the man he beat in 2014, former Providence mayor Buddy Cianci, was a convicted felon who'd done time in federal prison. Under Elorza, Providence has gotten its finances under control and begun modernizing its government, digitizing records, bringing business license applications online and creating a chief innovation officer position. Steady economic growth has also helped. Financially speaking, Elorza says, "We've stopped the bleeding, we've stabilized the patient and now we can talk about long-term health." The end result: economic development, numerous corporate relocations and startups, and a resurgent downtown, thanks in large part to an influx of young people—and not just ones who went to college here.

—Richard Bradley

