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Fresno's Brain Drain Has Left the Town Smarting

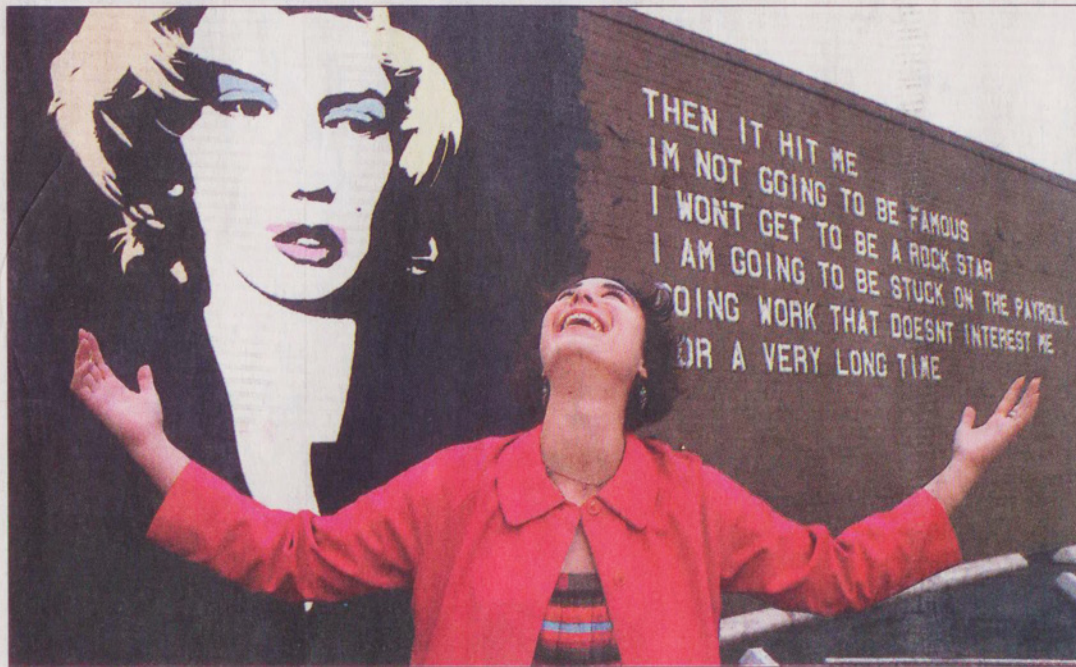
Young people with good educations are leaving the struggling southern San Joaquin Valley in a search for better prospects elsewhere.

By MARIA L. LA GANGA
Times Staff Writer

FRESNO — George Raney is a mix of pride and chagrin as he talks about his four grown children here in his cluttered office at the local university. Smart kids, one and all, they did everything a parent could ask: Earned good grades, graduated from college, found careers that make them happy.

They also broke their father's heart. The crime? Putting Fresno in the rearview mirror at the earliest possible moment and never looking back.

Carolyn, a 36-year-old teacher, lives close to the beach in San Clemente with her lawyer husband and two young sons. Louisa, a 34-year-old graphic artist, can't imagine being anywhere but La Jolla. Kevin, 31, is in the mortgage business in Huntington Beach. And Leanne? The 26-year-old actress is clawing her way to fame and fortune in Chicago, waiting tables to pay the



MARK BOSTER *Los Angeles Times*

GIVING IT A SECOND CHANCE: After working in New York City, Jarah Euston, 26, returned to Fresno, where she runs a website dedicated to making her hometown "less boring with every issue."

rent.

But Raney, a linguistics professor at Cal State Fresno, has worries beyond his own parental predicament, for his children are not the only ones who've left the struggling southern San Joaquin Valley. The region suffers from a brain drain unlike any other in

California. The loss of its best and brightest is felt from Fresno south to the Tehachapi Mountains.

When the area's most educated residents leave, "it takes away from the culture and intellectual life of the valley," said Raney, 67.

It also hampers the economy, strains the social fabric and puts a damper on the quality of life here in California's agricultural heartland.

Although the Fresno metropolitan area is growing as newcomers take advantage of com-

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