

ERROR: Macro headerinfo is missing! Gainesville.com

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.gainesville.com

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published May 6, 2007

May 6, 2007

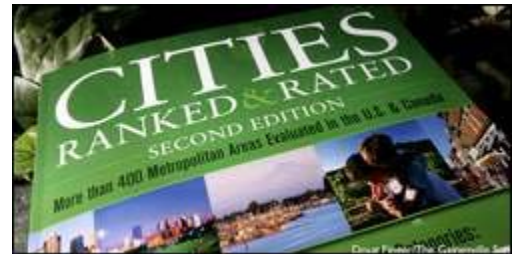
City ranked No. 1: Gainesville tops list of 400 cities in U.S., Canada

JEFF ADELSON

Sun staff writer

Why Gainesville is No. 1

The presence of "college town amenities" such as athletics and museums



Of the 400 cities in the United States and Canada cataloged, examined, analyzed and described in the 850-page book, Gainesville ranked No. 1.

Roland Loog had a good idea of what to expect as he pulled an advance copy of "Cities Ranked and Rated, Second Edition" from its shipping carton Friday morning.

But, even so, the director of the Gainesville/Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau couldn't help but gasp as he flipped open the phonebook-sized tome.

"There we are, first page," Loog said in his downtown Gainesville office. "Incredible. Just incredible."

Of the 400 cities in the United States and Canada cataloged, examined, analyzed and described in the 850-page book, Gainesville ranked No. 1.

"What a shocker," Loog said.

The book, written by Bert Sperling and Peter Sander and published by Frommer's, goes on sale Monday. And many involved in promoting Gainesville and Alachua County say the book and Gainesville's top ranking could be a powerful tool for bringing people and businesses to the area. It also provides an impressive addition to a list of top rankings Gainesville has already garnered.

"We'll make sure this is included in a lot of things that are sent to economic development prospects and people doing recruiting," Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce President Brent Christensen said.

"I can't imagine it not having a positive impact."

SUBHEAD IN COPY ¶ ¶ f=Garamond Bk *I* s=14 l=15 High quality of life

l%50

Sander and Sperling's ranking is based on a mixture of hard statistics, personal observations and

"bonuses" designed to reward or punish cities for particular achievements or problems.

Cities are rated based on statistics in nine categories: economy; cost of living; climate; education; health; crime; transportation; leisure; and arts and culture.

These are then modified by a subjective score gleaned from the way people feel about the city and other less tangible factors. Gainesville scored an 87 on this "quality of life" rating.

All the scores in the book are based on Gainesville's metropolitan area, which includes all of Alachua County and part of Gilchrist County.

Sander said he has traveled to more than two-thirds of the cities in the book and 84 of those in the top 100 - including Gainesville.

Adding a subjective element to the rankings is important, he said, to provide a sense of things not readily captured in statistics, like the way people who live in a community feel about their home.

"We do try to see what a place looks like and feels like and what they're trying to say," Sander said. "You get to talk to someone in a laundromat or a hotel lobby and find out what it's like to live in these places."

In the book's first edition, published in 2004, Gainesville didn't even break the Top 50. So how did it make it to the top?

One big factor was a strengthening employment picture, Sander said. The statistics used in the 2004 edition showed a loss of about 2.7 percent of jobs in the area, though the statistics also suggested the economy might rebound significantly in the future, he said.

With some of that growth realized, statistics in the new edition showed recent job growth at 3.8 percent. Thus one stumbling block was removed.

An increase in the number of people with four-year or graduate degrees - 45 percent, according to the new edition - also helped boost the scores, Sander said.

While seemingly small, slight changes to a score can mean a big difference on where a city ends up, Sander said.

"The difference between one and 10 or 10 and 20 or 30 and 50 are not really all that much when you're talking about the rankings," he said.

Gainesville also benefited from faring well according to a variety of measures used in the book, even if the city wasn't the best in any of them. The authors awarded extra points to cities with this kind of diversity, Sander said.

"Gainesville was not number one in any one category," he said. "But the fact that Gainesville scored well above average in almost every single category, that's the reason it jumped to number one."

What about those national championships?

Having successful sports teams are not reflected directly in the rankings, Sander said, though he said they can "get into the woodwork indirectly" by strengthening alumni loyalty and providing exposure for the city. College sports, in general, help the rankings by providing a leisure activity, he said.

SUBHEAD IN COPY ¶ ¶ f=Garamond Bk *I* s=14 l=15 College towns do well

I%50

In general, college towns did well in Sperling and Sander's study. Last edition's top city, Charlottesville, Va., is home of the University of Virginia, and 10 of the top 25 spots on this year's list went to cities that are the host to major universities.

This is common among many lists of cities, in part because university communities are able to offer cultural, athletic and educational amenities that otherwise would only be found in major urban areas, Sander said. A small college town, however, usually doesn't have to contend with the same levels of crime, congestion, pollution and other issues that plague urban areas, he said.

SUBHEAD IN COPY ¶ ¶ f=Garamond Bk *I* s=14 l=15 Forbes a fan, too

I%50

Gainesville is no stranger to "best of" lists. The last time it ranked No. 1 on such a prominent list, however, was in 1995 when Money Magazine declared the city to be the "Best Place to Live in America," an honor the city still touts.

More recently, the city has ranked eighth among the "Top Ten Value Towns for Those Considering Retirement in 2007," was No. 11 on an AARP list of "Best Places to Reinvent Your Life," and was ranked the "Most Technologically Advanced City" in Florida by Popular Science magazine.

And last month, Gainesville ranked 12th on a list in Forbes Magazine of the best places to do business and have a career.

Forbes' statistics drew on work done by Sperling's Best Places, an analysis company run by Bert Sperling, and not surprisingly resulted in some similar conclusions.

"Gainesville has a few very positive things going for it: a very educated labor supply, very strong income growth over the last few years, very low business costs," said Kurt Badenhausen, an associate editor for Forbes. "Those are very strong indicators of a healthy economy and an attractive place for businesses."

'A place to start'

While ranked lists have become a staple of modern media, some economists question whether these lists can provide a truly objective and useful evaluation of an area.

"There's nothing that everybody would agree on that reflects something like quality of life, because that's a fairly vague concept," said Stanley K. Smith, director of UF's Bureau of Economic and Business Research. "Even some specific factors one person might consider to be a plus and others might consider to be a minus, such as rate of growth, for example."

Sander said his book, intended to be used by those looking to move, those watching cities over the long-term as they plan retirement and businesses, should not be considered the definitive guide for all people, given differing tastes and preferences.

"This is a place to start," Sander said, who happens to live near Sacramento, Calif., which ranks 183rd in his book. "We would hope people are not moving to Gainesville just because they saw it in this book."

Impact is great

But for many of Gainesville's promoters, the ranking could be a way to pique interest or lure

residents and businesses who are on the fence about coming to the area.

This could be particularly true for a book with a three-year shelf life and which is expected to get heavy attention in the national media, said Christensen, the chamber president.

In Charlottesville, the ranking was used in promotional materials by economic development offices, said Timothy Hulbert, president of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce, who refers to his area as "American's Number One Community."

"To be selected first - there's only one number one - that's an accomplishment," Hulbert said.

Loog, with the Gainesville/Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau, was already preparing promotional material Friday afternoon. And, he said, he was already expecting an influx of calls from those who might suddenly develop an interest in the area."

"The impact is great, as soon as those lists come out, the phone responds," Loog said.
