

## Ann Arbor's On The List

By: Constance Crump, 7/31/2008



Even if you don't win, it's an honor to be nominated – isn't that what the losers say on Oscar night? Ann Arbor is the second healthiest place in the country to be pregnant ([BabyFit.com](#).) The city is also the fourth smartest city in America ([Forbes.com](#).) but one of the worst places to find a job ([Forbes](#), again).

It's one of the 10 brainiest places to retire (US News) and one of America's greenest cities (24th, according to [Popular Science](#).) Their Main Street is the purportedly the best Main Street in Michigan (Automobile Club of Michigan.) They're the third best walking city in America ([Prevention Magazine](#).)

And that's just so far this year.

"We should actually get some sort of ranking on the most-listed list," laughed Elizabeth Parkinson, managing director of marketing and public relations for [Ann Arbor Spark](#), the economic development group.

More than anything else, lists help sell magazines. And now they help sell cities, according to Samir Husni, PhD. Husni's alter ego, [MrMagazine.com](#), ranks new magazine launches and publishes an annual guide to new magazines. His home page touts a list of 30 notable magazine launches of 2007.

"Anytime your name appears on a list, it gives your PR machine ammunition. People love lists. When something is on a list, it's easier to remember, easy to relate to," Husni said. Husni is chair of the journalism department at the University of Mississippi and the editor of *The Future of Magazines*.



Husni notes one big change in the list-making game: "We no longer have worst lists. Fifteen years ago, there were all kinds of best and worst lists... now nobody talks about the worst."

That's the job of a new medium for list-publishing, said Mary Kerr, president of the Ann Arbor Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Blogs are the new best and worst lists," she said.

Like blogs, lists have something for everyone.

"Lists help us less in attracting meetings and conventions and more in leisure travel because the national rankings raise our profile – they're taking a look at our community. We believe a great place to

live is also a great place to visit," Kerr said.

That may be true, but Michael Harmon, general manager of [Dahlmann's Campus Inn](#), believes that even Best of lists have a hard time trumping the realities of our current economy.

"It's a nice attaboy – but that's about all. At the moment, the economy is the reason people do or don't book rooms," Harmon said. "It's nice to read in a magazine article that Ann Arbor is a great walkable city – which it is – but the economy is more of an issue. Tourism is down overall and that affects Ann Arbor."

Are we appearing on more lists now than ever before? Spark's Elizabeth Parkinson says yes.

"Until very recently, the Ann Arbor and [Detroit Metropolitan Statistical Areas](#) (MSAs) were combined. Then Ann Arbor received its own MSA – it's a small MSA, but statistically it's huge because of the large concentration of well-educated people: engineers, life scientists and so forth. We're a condensed area with a lot of desirable attributes. When they were combined, it used to be more difficult to stand out," she said.

Being a standout in some areas doesn't hold quite the same weight as it does in others.



For example, [Zingerman's](#) (which appears on any number of best lists overall, including a 2004 designation from [Food & Wine Magazine](#) as one of the world's best food markets) was singled out on Oprah Winfrey's list of [Best Sandwiches in America](#). The sandwich



that got the nod was #97, Lisa C's Boisterous Brisket. Some people might find that less significant than Ann Arbor being named on the Top 21 Cities for Cyclists by [Bicycling Magazine](#).

Similarly, some might snipe that while Ann Arbor was third in the US in Internet usage, it only means that we were

surfing when we should have been working.

True to Mr. Magazine's observation that nobody does "worst" lists any more, it's slim pickins in the negativity department. A search for negative Ann Arbor listings turned up only two true baddies - last year [USA Today](#) gave Ann Arbor a dishonorable mention for speedtraps and last April, [Forbes Magazine](#) rated The Deuce as the 10th worst city in the country for getting a job with a 5-year annualized job growth rate of minus .4%. The good news? We were ahead of Detroit (2nd worst), Flint (3rd), Warren (5th) and Lansing (7th.)

Still even those surveys failed to consider 1099 or contract workers. A not insignificant part of the local economy.

And then there are 'honors' that most Treetowners would prefer to ignore -such as [High Times](#) 2006 listing of Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan as the sixth most stoner-friendly campus/community in the nation. Hardly the stuff of convention bureau brochures.

Other than those black marks on the city's sterling record, the worst you can scrape up is that it's 308th out of 359 US metro areas based on salary growth. Oh yeah, and on the cost-of-living index, where 100 equals the national average, their index is 107. (Both rankings from Sperling's [BestPlaces.com](#).) Hardly the kind of stats that elicit shame.



While some lists are laughable, others make a real difference in recruiting new businesses, Parkinson said. No list ranking alone is going to bring an entrepreneur to the City of Trees, but a decent ranking on a key factor – such as an educated workforce - can reinforce marketing efforts.

"The rankings are more an exclamation point than a stand-alone – they're tied to our key selling points. It's showing, 'Hey we're not the only ones who think this,' " Parkinson said.

For a near-comprehensive listing of Ann Arbor on lists, please visit the [Downtown Development Authority](#) web site:

We may have rated only 25<sup>th</sup> on Money Magazine's 2006 Best Places to Live list, but we have some important win, place and show rankings to brag about:

- Best Place in Michigan for Business and Careers (Forbes, 2008)
- #42 on the 100 Best Places to Live and Launch a Business ([Money Magazine](#), 2008)
- #1 Knowledge Worker Metro in the country ([Expansion Management magazine](#), 2007)
- One of the Top Five Cities to Retire (Corcoran Group real estate, 2005)
- One of the Top 25 Art Destinations in the US ([American Style](#) magazine, 2006)
- [The Ann Arbor Film Festival](#) was named as one of [Variety](#) magazine's Top Ten Film festivals We Love (putting it on the same list as Cannes)
- [The Ann Arbor Art Fairs](#) were seventh in the Ten Best Art Fairs in the US (American Style magazine, 2006)

That last ranking is a biggie.

"It's important, because it encourages people to stay longer, or even to visit Ann Arbor and stay overnight. There are so many outstanding art fairs, (being highly ranked) really brings the spotlight to the Ann Arbor Art Fairs," Kerr said.

Kerr also boasted Ann Arbor's top ranking in health from AARP, the retired Americans' lobbying and educational group (story [here](#)). Chosen as the 'Healthiest Hometown' in America, the survey rated coverage on NBC's the Today Show.



Although the city's most important ranking is not a first place, Sperling's BestPlaces rates Ann Arbor as the fifth best city to live in in the U.S. --a key win because so many other rankings depend on it: .

"So many different publications look to Sperling's based on the criteria they use. Ann

Arbor is the only one in top 10 in the last two years to have remained in the top 10. Many other places take data pulled from Sperling's to create their lists," Parkinson said.

Will the lists keep on rolling? Absolutely, says Professor Husni.

"The popularity of lists is unbelievable. There's no chance that rankings will ever vanish. No – because this is America, the country of beauty queens and contests. It's human nature to rank everything," he said.

If you still can't get enough lists, visit the [Sperling's BestPlaces](#) web site. Sperling's brags that it's responsible for more "best places" studies and projects than any other single organization. It's loaded with lists, including Best Airports to Make a Connection (to that special someone, not your next flight - #7 Detroit Metro), Most Secure Places in the US (#139 Ann Arbor) and America's Drought Riskiest Cities (Detroit area -moderately wet.)

Ultimately, for locals who could care less what magazines, web sites and blogs rank them, Ann Arbor is simply "The Best Place To Call Home."

---

***Constance Crump is an Ann Arbor writer whose work has appeared in Crain's Detroit Business, The Ann Arbor News, The Detroit Free Press and Billboard Magazine.***

*Photos:*

*Zingerman's-Home of Oprah's Favorite Sandwich and One of the WORLD'S BEST MARKETS-Ann Arbor*

*A Good Main Street and a Good Place to Retire-Main Street Ann Arbor*

*One Of the Greenest Cities-The Solar Panels on the Leslie Nature Center-Ann Arbor*

*We've Got Some Smarts Here in the A2-U of M Law School*

*Lucky Number Seven-Ann Arbor Art Fairs Ranked the Seventh Best in the US*

*Even Though We're a Good City to Walk We Also Rank Up There for Biking*

**All Photos by [Dave Lewinski](#)**

**Dave Lewinski is Concentrate's Managing Photographer. He's just a statistic so he relates well to this story.**