

Tri-Cities consistently ranked among the best

In the past couple of years, the Tri-Cities has made several magazines' "top lists." Top 100 Best Places to Live. Top 10 Affordable Places to Retire on the Water. Best Cities for New Jobs.

There are two common themes among the lists we made — job growth opportunities and low cost of living. These themes seem ironic given the economic downturn the country is experiencing this year. But they're also an indicator that the Tri-Cities' economy has weathered the storm better than most.

For example, our job market continues to grow. Just two months ago, the Tri-Cities ranked second on Forbes' "Best Cities for New Jobs." Our net employment outlook, which is calculated by subtracting anticipated job losses from job openings, is 11 percent. The No. 1 ranked city was Lincoln, Neb., with a 17 percent net employment outlook.

The Tri-Cities also jumped to sixth place, from 29th, in the 2009 Milken Institutes' index for Best Performing Small

Cities. The index ranks U.S. metropolitan areas by how well they are creating and sustaining jobs and economic growth. Components include job, wage and salary, and technology growth.

This year the Tri-Cities also made a list for Rising Residential Markets in the nation—we were ranked number one in a list of the top five. The ranking came at the same time that our real estate market was starting to make a comeback.

"In March we experienced a surge in home buyers," said Chris Willson, a local Windermere Real Estate agent. "It was a welcome change from the halt that we saw in the market from October 2008 until the end of February 2009.

"The saying 'what you focus on expands,' is exactly what happened in the Tri-Cities. All of the reporting about the economy was gloom and doom. And even though this area was not experiencing what the rest of the country was going through, we bought into it, so our market was negatively impacted," continued Willson.

Willson says families are relocating here due to the strong job market and quality of life, which includes affordable housing.

CNNmoney.com ranks Richland No. 51 on its Top 100 Best Places to Live. According to the site, the city's job growth

between 2000 and 2008 was 18.59 percent, just a 1 percent below the average growth rate for all cities in the top 100. In addition, the median home price is listed as \$182,000, which is \$80,000 below the average of the other cities.

Compared to the averages of other cities on the list, this area also has a better air quality index, shorter commute time, and warmer weather.

Kris Watkins, President and CEO of the Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau, agrees that this area is a great place to live.

"We are delighted that the Tri-Cities continues to be recognized as a 'best place' in the U.S. time and time again. We have beautiful waterfronts, award-winning wines, premier golfing, and a low-cost of living. All of these attributes make the Tri-Cities an attractive destination to live, work, and play."

More good news for those living or moving here — it's a great place to retire, according to a list by USNews.com. I'm not surprised by the positive recognition. I, for one, already plan to hang my dentures here.

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