

A Positive Outlook

What is it that makes a community great?



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include Iowa State University, American Packaging Corporation and Bethany Life Communities. According to the Ames Economic Development Commission, the region ranks high nationally in terms of best places to retire (8th), best places for college graduates (25th) and best small cities for job growth (56th).

Perhaps the best measure of greatness is a community's ability to innovate. From this perspective, Santa Clara County, California would be the clear frontrunner, reporting nearly 143,000 utility patent grants between 2000 and 2015. This rate dwarfed the next closest community, San Diego County, California, which reported only 45,500 utility patent grants during the same period.

Maybe greatness is less about economic prosperity and more about the health, well-being and quality of life. Should this be the appropriate measure, greatness would be assigned to places like Highlands Ranch, Colorado, routinely ranking among the healthiest places in America as a result of having its lowest obesity rate; Minneapolis, Minnesota, where an outdoor lifestyle is credited with lowering rates of diabetes, heart disease and asthma; San Jose, California, where life expectancy is a nation-leading 83 years; Logan, Utah, where the overall death rate is a remarkably low 4.2 per 1,000 population; or Naples, Florida, which *Esquire* called the happiest city in America.

Perhaps there is no single thing that makes a community great; rather, there are many ways to both define and achieve greatness. For me, the best measure of a community's greatness can be summed up in a single word: *opportunity*. This is the simple idea that the true measure of a community is its ability to provide a foundation for those who would build, a canvas for those who would paint and a classroom for those who would teach.

I don't know, or particularly care, where southern Nevada is listed in national rankings of the greatest communities in America. What I do know is that this community has created the opportunity for a better life for countless families during the past 50 years and that should be the primary measuring stick used to evaluate our success or failure during the next half century.

Is it the wealth or prosperity of its people? If so, this would make Loudoun County, Virginia the nation's greatest community. According to the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Virginia, is home to three of America's five wealthiest counties, with Loudoun County placing atop the list with a median annual household income approaching \$118,000.

Is it the quality of the community's education system that best indicates greatness? If so, the greatest community in the nation would likely be Tredyffrin Township, Pennsylvania, home to the Tredyffrin-Easttown School District. With an average student-teacher ratio of 16:1, the District reports a reading proficiency rate of 88 percent and math proficiency rate of 72 percent. The District spends \$16,800 per student, with teachers earning \$95,000 on average. The result is a 99 percent graduation rate and an average SAT score of 1,290. Notably, if this were to be the best measure of a community's greatness, it would be pretty exclusive; Tredyffrin-Easttown has only 6,500 students.

Job prospects are often used to measure one community against another. If this were the case, the greatest community in the nation would be Ames, Iowa, where the unemployment rate is a mere 1.7 percent. Key employers in Ames, population 59,000,

