

Las Cruces on Top 10 List of Best Performing Cities

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To see the Milken Institute's "Best Performing Cities 2009" list, [click here](#).

While the nation deals with double-digit unemployment, Dona Ana County received some good economic news on Wednesday.

The Milken Institute announced that the Las Cruces metropolitan statistical area (MSA) - which includes the entire county - has made its way into its Top 10 list of 2009's Best-Performing Small Cities. The rankings - Las Cruces came in at No. 9 - are based mainly on job creation and sustainability, which means the independent think tank believes the Las Cruces area is moving in a positive direction.

Midland, Texas, was ranked No. 1, while three other Texas cities also made the Top 10.

It's the first time Las Cruces has made it into the Top 10 since 2004 when it ranked second.

The Milken Institute cited the impending construction of Spaceport America and the "low cost of doing business" as two benefits for the region.

"New Mexico State University, White Sands Missile Range and NASA White Sands Test Facility continue to be the economic engines of the region," the report states. "With the growing aerospace engineering program at NMSU attracting aerospace firms ... Las Cruces is becoming a major player and top location for aerospace and space related technology R&D firms."

The institute also points to Las Cruces' location near the consumer and business markets of border cities in Texas and Mexico, as well as its growing reputation as a retiree destination.

"Las Cruces makes the best-of list for a lot of things," said James Peach, who teaches economics and international business at NMSU. "So this doesn't surprise me. It's a nice-sized city without a lot of traffic problems; it's attractive both to people looking for a place to live and for clean industries."

Las Cruces has received a variety of high rankings in the past decade. In 2002, Forbes magazine named Las Cruces the best small metro area to do business. That same year, Money magazine named the city as one of the best places to retire. That was followed in 2005 when Money magazine named the city as one of the best college towns to retire.

Forbes tabbed Las Cruces as the No. 2 smaller metro area in the nation in 2006, and in 2007, Inc. Magazine ranked the city 15th on its list of "boomtowns."

"I think we kind of had a hiatus for a couple of years from these lists due to the economy," said Jim Berry, president and CEO of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce. "I'm not surprised that we're returning to some of those lists. As the economy and housing problems ease, we will resume that kind of recognition."

Las Cruces Mayor Ken Miyagishima said, "I was wondering when we would get back on it. Our gross receipts tax (revenue) is up about 2 percent ... We've got a good climate here, a good business climate, we've got great retirees; we're doing well."

Davin Lopez, president and CEO of the Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance, said that this kind of news helps his organization when it works to attract business to the county.

"Any time we're able to hit those lists, it helps us with companies and even individuals," Lopez said.

Santa Fe did not fare as well on the Small Cities list. The state capital fell to No. 35 this year from No. 14 last year. In the Best-Performing Large Cities category, Albuquerque fell to No. 42 this year from No. 31 in 2008.

El Paso fared better, jumping to No. 14 this year after being ranked No. 37 last year.

The Austin-Round Rock, Texas MSA was ranked No. 1 on the Large Cities list.

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