

CITY EXPECTED TO THRIVE

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“Home of Lee University, less-famous Cleveland is quietly

benefiting from strong growth in jobs in professional and business services, health care, retail and hospitality.”

— KIPLINGER NEWSLETTER

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The city of Cleveland has jumped to the top of another national economic chart, this time with the projection it will be one of the nation’s most successful (thriving) midsized municipalities during 2017.

The city has already been selected as the No. 1 community in the nation in jobs growth, and among national leaders among communities where people are considering a change of residence, affordable living, and an opportunistic job market.

The community’s industrial growth with Wacker, Whirlpool, and Amazon (and the soon-to-be-open Spring Branch Industrial Park south of Cleveland) have

all contributed to a Kiplinger Newsletter report that lists Cleveland among the top 11 mid-range communities expected to thrive in 2017.

The report emphasizes it’s been a slow climb back from the 2007 Great Recession for the nation’s major metropolitan areas, but points out job seekers often overlook the small and medium cities located near or relatively near the big hubs.

Cleveland Mayor Tom Rowland, once again, spoke up in pride for his city and community.

“I am extremely pleased that our city has received even more national accolades, but at the same time I’m not surprised,” he said. “It’s gratifying to realize that people across the nation know what Cleveland has to offer, and that we are not resting on past successes, but looking ahead for even greater things in 2017.

“The story mentions Lee University as an outstanding part of Cleveland, but that’s an understatement,” the mayor said. “Lee means so much in the progress and the beauty of the city.”

He went on to add, “It’s so rare that a city our size would have two institutions of higher learning. Our citizens certainly enjoy a great quality of life and I invite more people to come and enjoy Cleveland and the spirit that dwells here.”

Gary Farlow, president and CEO of the Cleveland/Bradley County Chamber of Commerce, agreed with Rowland’s assessments of this latest tribute to the city.

“This is another in a string of accolades Cleveland has received recently,” said Farlow. “It signifies a lot of hard work by a lot of people, and it’s still nice to hear these things about our community.”

As the big metro areas recover, the report says smaller “satellite” cities — like Cleveland — benefit from spreading regional business growth, while offering lower housing and commuter costs, putting less of a squeeze on employee salaries than more expensive, congested places a few hours away.

That can mean both abundant job opportunities and budget-friendly home prices for folks looking to relocate. They say job markets are hot in these 11 communities across the nation, but the cost of living won’t eat all of your paycheck.

The job markets in these cities have been growing faster than the national average, most have lower jobless rates than the national average, and all are expected to continue to outperform economically this year.

Cleveland is the only Tennessee city on the top-11 list. Joining Cleveland are St. George, Utah; Bend/Redmond, Ore.; Prescott/Prescott Valley, Ariz; Savannah, Ga.; Reno/Sparks, Nev.; Athens, Ga.; College Station/Bryan, Texas; Salem, Ore.; Boise, Idaho; and Spokane, Wash.

The article also paid tribute to Lee University and the national recognition the school has recently received. It says, "Home of Lee University, less-famous Cleveland is quietly benefiting from strong growth in jobs in professional and business services, health care, retail and hospitality."

It points out that Cleveland is just a few miles north of Chattanooga, and only 120 miles from Atlanta — major metropolitan hubs.

It lists 2016's employment growth at 4.9 percent, unemployment rate at 4.4 percent, and median home price at \$165,000 (up 10 percent from the previous year).

Major employers include Whirlpool (it has a premium kitchen-appliances division and distribution outlet here), Tennova Healthcare, Amazon.com and Wacker. Cleveland's 800 acres of industrial parks include manufacturing facilities and outlets for Volkswagen, Duracell, Mars and Bayer. It emphasizes that Cleveland is in Tennessee, which has no state income tax.

Among criteria used in determining cities expected to thrive are two categories where Cleveland is far and away well placed on the chart — population and the median range in housing costs.

Cleveland's population of around 56,000 residents could actually be considered more of a small city in comparison to the other 10 on the list. The second smallest community is Prescott, with approximately 82,000 residents. The remainder range from 114,000 for Redmond and 123,000 in Athens, Ga., to the more populous Reno (334,000) and Boise (324,000).

Housing prices are a huge bargain in Cleveland with a median range of \$165,000. The next lowest cost of housing is \$195,000 in Savannah and Spokane. The highest home costs are in Redmond (\$360,000), and St. George (\$345,000).

Cleveland is in the mix in employment growth and unemployment, but is not at the top of the chart. St. George had the highest employment growth at 6.1 percent. Redmond was second at 5.3, and Cleveland third at 4.9 percent.

In unemployment rates, St. George led the way at 3.2 percent. Boise, Idaho, and College Station/Bryan, Texas, were at 3.4 percent. Four others were less than Cleveland's 4.4 percent, which was tied by Redmond.

A diversity of businesses and industries were listed for the collection of prospering communities, much of it determined by location and community size.