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## Improving Creatively

By Seth Slabaugh

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MUNCIE -- Has the repeated loss of manufacturing jobs got you feeling gloomy about Muncie's future? Well, cheer up. Money magazine rates Muncie as one of the nation's 'Up and coming cities,' right up there with Napa, Calif., Saginaw, Mich., and Salem, Ore.

In an article in its June edition headlined, 'What Makes a Place Hot,' the magazine includes Muncie as one of 18 cities to watch over the next 10 years. 'I believe we are way ahead of the ball game and have a great story to tell,' said Brian Lough, director of downtown development. 'We're building a place where this creative class would like to live.'

Kevin Stolarick, who teaches information systems at Carnegie Mellon University, examined jobs of the future; growth in high-wage jobs of the future; sprawl; per capita income growth, and other measures in 331 cities for the magazine. The findings? Of 149 cities under 250,000 population, Muncie ranked fourth, behind Bremerton, Wash., Hagerstown, Md., and Monroe, La. The only other city to qualify as 'up and coming' in that population category was Clarksville, Tenn. The phrase 'jobs of the future' is synonymous with what Stolarick and his collaborators call jobs of the new 'creative class,' as opposed to jobs in the 'working class,' the 'service class' and agriculture.

Jobs in the creative class include scientists, conservationists, psychologists, planners, computer programmers, architects, engineers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, trainers, librarians, artists, designers, entertainers, recreational jobs, media jobs, managers, business and financial jobs, and high-end sales jobs. Muncie ranked way above average in the growth of high-wage, creative class occupations. It also ranked well above average in per capita income growth. It ranked above average in controlling sprawl. In the other categories, Muncie ranked average or below average.

According to the magazine article, hot cities or up and coming cities possess some of the following attributes: young, educated workers; high-tech industries; a pleasant environment; open-mindedness; a good image; excitement; buzz; affordable real estate, taxes and rent; a thriving counter-culture; a robust urban environment; a music scene; an art scene; a gay scene; an entrepreneur scene; diversity; night life; people moving to neglected neighborhoods; a progressive political culture, good schools; and a friendly atmosphere for immigrants and youths. 'I think that article is fabulous,' Lough said. 'I think it recognizes exactly what Muncie is doing. If you look at the projects happening in Muncie, we are way ahead of the game.'

For example, Muncie's downtown is no longer dysfunctional, thanks to facade restoration, historic preservation, new apartments, restaurants and stores, and events such as Mardis Gras, Ribfest, Enchanted Luminaria Walk, and End of Summer Jam, Lough said. 'We welcome all kinds,' he said. 'One Thursday we had the ArtsWalk. The next weekend was Motorcycle Madness with people who want to ride their Harleys. They were held in the same place. This is great. This is open-mindedness.'

Examples of other creative-class projects here include the Millennium Place and Howard Square inner-city housing revitalization projects; the way-finding signage program welcoming visitors and directing them to assets; Cardinal Greenway and White River Greenway; beautification of gateways and traffic islands; clean-water projects; and the quiet zone to address train-noise pollution downtown. 'Vision 2006 is our plan on how to go about attracting these new kinds of jobs,' Lough said. 'These are examples of some of the projects that address exactly what Money magazine is talking about.'

Bruce Geelhoed, director of the Center for Middletown Studies at Ball State University, is not as optimistic as Lough that Muncie is an up and coming city. 'I think it's too soon to tell,' Geelhoed said. 'We are probably adopting the correct strategy, but I can't say we're an up and coming community when we are losing jobs and we lost population in the 1980s and 1990s and we continue to lose population.'

Mayor Dan Canan said: 'In Muncie, everyone is working together to ensure that Muncie is attractive to existing and prospective businesses and individuals. If we maintain a city with a strong quality of life, striving educational system, tolerance of differences and one that is affordable to the young and the wise, we will stand out from the rest. Current efforts such as downtown development, diversity and other initiatives in Muncie are gaining momentum and recognition.'

How does Muncie compare to the other small, 'up and coming cities' identified by Money? Clarksville, Tenn., boosters say Austin Peay State University, Fort Campbell military base and a developing downtown river district are key drivers to attracting a young, tech-oriented, creative labor pool. Clarksville and Hagerstown, Md. -- like Muncie -- sit in the middle of nowhere, but are only an hour or so drive from Nashville, Washington, D.C., and Indianapolis. Close to Antietam National Battlefield, Hagerstown is home to Frostburg State University, a business college and a junior college. The Washington County Health System and the state of Maryland are the community's two largest employers. Monroe, La., home to the University of Louisiana at Monroe (enrollment 9,000) is also located in a rural area. Bremerton, Wash., sits on the opposite side of Puget Sound from Seattle. According to the Bremerton newspaper, the city's high ranking by Money probably stems from its many highly skilled government employees at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, which employs nearly 10,000 people, along with the creative-class employees at Harrison Hospital, the largest private employer in town with about 1,700 workers.

In Muncie, Cardinal Health Systems, Ball State University, Ontario Systems, Minnetrista Cultural Center and other organizations symbolize efforts to position Muncie in a new economy that is shifting away from farms and factories, Geelhoed said. Chris and Myranda Piche are representative of Muncie's creative class. Along with their 14-month-old son, Andrew, the couple live in an historic home in the East Central Neighborhood. Chris, 35, manages the bar at Vera Mae's Bistro, a locally owned, downtown restaurant that serves creative food including locally, naturally grown vegetables in season. Myranda, 29, who earned a master's degree in information and communication sciences from Ball State University, is a supervisor of technical communications at Ontario Systems, a software company. With nearly 400 employees, Ontario provides innovative technology to help companies manage their accounts receivable. 'We are real close on a lot of things,' Chris says of Muncie being an up and coming city. 'Playing politics and tolerance are something we need to work on. Also, I sling drinks for a living, but as a new father, I think we need to focus on more events that are not alcohol based.'

The Carnegie Mellon researcher who ranked cities for Money magazine collaborated with fellow Carnegie professor Richard Florida on Florida's best-selling book, 'The Rise of the Creative Class.' The book maintains that economic prosperity comes from the '3 T's': technology (as in high-tech industry), tolerance (as in tolerance of gays, Bohemians, and foreign-born people), and talent (as in the number of people holding higher education credentials and employed in creative occupations). 'All my measures are best used as tools to focus strategic effort,' Florida wrote. 'For instance, [communities] might see how they score on each of the 3 T's and turn attention to areas in which they are weak.'

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#### UP AND COMING

Money magazine named the following cities as up and coming cities to watch over the next 10 years:

<b>Over 1 million</b>	<b>250,000 to 499,999</b>
Oakland	Saginaw, Mich.
Buffalo	Brockton, Mass.
Baltimore	Salem, Ore.
Indianapolis	Charlestown, W. Va.
San Antonio	Madison, Wis.
<b>500,000 to 1 million</b>	<b>Below 250,000</b>
Napa, Calif.	Bremerton, Wash.
Ann Arbor	Hagerstown, Md.
Harrisburg, Pa.	Monroe, La.
	Muncie
	Clarksville, Tenn.