

Published: July 16, 2009

Top 10 Times Two

Pueblo ranks among top 'next generation' cities, No. 2 in affordability

By DENNIS DARROW
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Pueblo and the rest of the Front Range scored well with a marketing group that promotes top cities for young adults.

Pueblo, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs and Denver all made the Top 10 in their population divisions in the annual Next Cities nationwide rankings.

Pueblo ranked No. 9 for cities with a population 100,000 to 200,000.

Fort Collins ranked No. 1 in the same division. The rankings are published by Madison, Wis.-based Next Generation Consulting, a marketing group that works with cities to boost their appeal to people aged 20 to 40.

The consulting group examined 250 cities nationwide and based its rankings on seven criteria: affordability, salaries, environment, nightlife, college offerings, social life and congestion.

The scoring was done from the perspective of young adults.

Elsewhere, Pueblo's affordability led to the city ranking second in the nation in a chamber of commerce research group's latest Cost of Living Index. Pueblo tied for No. 2 with Fort Smith, Ark.

Pryor Creek, Okla., held the top spot.

In the "Next City" rankings, other hot spots in Pueblo's category Ñ dubbed "mighty micros" in the rankings Ñ include Charleston, S.C.; Eugene, Ore.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and Springfield, Ill.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE -- Low cost of living is among the factors causing Pueblo to gain attention in a pair of national rankings. One report lists Pueblo tied for No. 2 in affordability.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE -- Students walk on the campus of Colorado State University-Pueblo. A Wisconsin consulting group ranks Pueblo among the Top 10 small cities in the nation for future generations.

"I'm not surprised," Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce President Rod Slyhoff said when told of the results. "Just in the last four or five years we've seen things develop in Pueblo with the kayak course, mountain biking and fishing pools on the Arkansas River" that appeal to the younger generation.

"You couple that with affordable living and the livability piece, and then you add to that the arts center, symphony, state-of-the-art library, two great hospitals . . . and a university that's growing and a community college.

"In all those categories (cited in the rankings) Pueblo has improved itself in the last four or five years. I think that we're being discovered. And I think people who see us from afar see that we have a lot to offer," Slyhoff said.

Historically, Pueblo has attracted few young workers. Its population has changed little since the 1970s and, if any trend dominates, it is the trend of young people moving away from the city to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

Slyhoff said he hopes such rankings as Next City help serve as a catalyst to draw young families.

He noted another recently released report, the annual Council for Community and Economic Research's ranking of most affordable cities, should also help Pueblo make a bid for more young families.

Pueblo tied with Fort Smith, Ark., for No. 2 on the list, also known as the ACCRA Cost-of-Living Index, he said. ACCRA stands for American Chamber of Commerce Research Association.

One test of Pueblo's appeal to the younger set is now under way.

Fort Carson this summer is welcoming an additional 6,500 soldiers and their families as part of a base expansion, and the Pueblo business community is waging a major marketing push in a bid to get many of the soldiers' families to reside in the Pueblo area. The next coordinated push comes later this month when a Pueblo delegation led by the chamber of commerce will visit Fort Carson as part of a two-day outreach visit. Slyhoff said the Pueblo group will take with them the results of the Cost-of-Living Index study and also the Next City rankings to help sell Pueblo to the young military families.

Among larger cities on the Next City list, Colorado Springs ranked No. 3 among places with a population of 200,000 to 500,000, called "midsize magnets" in the rankings. The top ranking in the division went to Madison, Wis., followed by Minneapolis.

Denver ranked No. 4 among "super cities" with a population greater than 500,000. The top slot went to San Francisco followed by Seattle, Boston and Washington, D.C.

Specific scoring breakdowns by category were not available.

Overall, the rankings seek to identify "the 60 hot spots for young, talented workers," according to a Next Generation Consulting statement accompanying the release of the rankings.

"Next Cities are places with the assets and amenities that attract and keep a young, educated work force," the consulting group said.

Slyhoff called the rankings a boon for the entire Front Range. "I would bet that there isn't any other state that have four cities within 180 miles (on the list,) just boom, boom, boom, boom," Slyhoff said.