

100 BEST PLACES to LIVE and LAUNCH 2008

FORTUNE
SMALL BUSINESS



And the winners are...

FSB scoured the country for towns that combine a great business environment with alluring leisure offerings. We looked at economic conditions such as local taxes rates alongside natural beauty - and easy access to museums, hungry gamefish, and more.

Are job worries tempting you to start your own company? We canvassed the country to find towns with the best mix of business advantages and lifestyle appeal. Check out our 100 top picks and find the perfect place to build your dream.

3. Buford, Ga.

Population: 13,576

Pros: Affordable housing, scenic environment

Con: Aggressive competition for labor force

Safe neighborhoods, affordable real estate and a relaxed pace, along with easy access to major highways, draw Georgians to lakeside Buford, 35 miles northeast of Atlanta. Besides being home to an artist colony with 40 working painters, photographers, sculptors, and other creative types, Buford also draws entrepreneurs: about 30 new startups launch every month in this 16-square-mile city, according to Buford's occupational tax clerk.

As part of Gwinnett County, Buford is involved in the region's greater effort to develop its presence in industries such as healthcare, information technology, distribution and trade, and advanced communications. Depending on the business, owners may find tax exemptions (for instance, a 100% sales tax break for qualified manufacturing equipment), tax credits (such as the job tax credit for certain tech industries creating at least 25 jobs in a single year), and assistance in permit acquisition and hiring. Active small business organizations, such as the nonprofit Buford Business Alliance, bring member owners together for networking events and to promote tourism in the area.

Besides lakeside activities such as boating and fishing, the area downtown bustles with restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries. There's also the Mall of Georgia, the largest in the Southeast, with 15 million visitors a year. -Peter McDougall

Direct link to the article:

http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2008/fsb/0803/gallery.best_places_to_launch.fsb/3.html

For More Information on the Buford Business Alliance:

www.VisitBuford.com

Buford is No. 3 on list of top U.S. cities

By Rebecca McCarthy
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
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With its small, well-funded school system, proximity to Lake Lanier and easy accessibility, Buford has enjoyed steady commercial and residential growth for years.

Now, the city of 13,576 people has been named the third best place in the country in which to live and launch a business.

The designation was given by CNNMoney.com, a service provided by CNN, Money and Fortune. No. 1 and 2 on the list are Bellevue, Wash., and Georgetown, Texas. The national survey done by Fortune Small Business listed only one other Georgia city — Savannah, at No. 99.

"It's great, but we like to stay hid," said longtime City Commission Chairman Philip Beard. "We think we're the best-kept secret around and we'd like to keep it that way. But somebody got out of Buford with that information."

Fortune Small Business looked for places that "combine a great business environment with alluring leisure offerings." Lake Lanier, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods and a mix of artists and business people make the city attractive, the report said.

"I talk to people in other parts of the country, and they talk about the crime and how expensive it is to live, but we don't have the crime and expense here," said artist Mavis Stevens, a Buford resident. "There's a wonderful blend of a hometown and a sophisticated city all in one that's completely welcoming to artists."

Buford has an abundant supply of entrepreneurs and, as part of Gwinnett, offers tax incentives to various businesses. The report credits the Buford Business Alliance for bringing members together to network and support tourism.

"Some businesses have done extremely well, and we're happy it's worked out that way," Beard said. "We're still selling commercial permits for new buildings and business licenses. They're still lined up, and we haven't seen a decrease yet."

The Buford City Schools drew artist Barbara McGuire and her family to the area. She sells her unique jewelry at Carisma, a gallery on Main Street. The report mentioned the city's renovated downtown.

"There's a huge opportunity here because of the ability to be a start-up business," McGuire said. "You can use your imagination and begin relatively easily, but you need to be a destination business to do well."

> To read the CNNMoney.com report about Buford, go to:

http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2008/fsb/0803/gallery.best_places_to_launch.fsb/3.html

For more information on the Buford Business Alliance go to: www.VisitBuford.com

Honor catches Buford by surprise

He learned about the honor in an e-mail from City Hall.

"I was thrown back," said Tim Koenning, president of the Buford Business Alliance. "It still hasn't sunk in yet."

The word is out about Buford, thanks to CNNMoney.com, a service provided by CNN, Money and Fortune magazines. The north Gwinnett town was named the third-best U.S. city to live in and launch a business. The March 26 online profile praised the community of 13,576 for its affordable housing (median home price of \$195,493), scenic environment (Lake Lanier) and business acumen.

What makes the ranking so sweet is how it came about. Civic leaders and town officials had no idea the town was even in the running. No one contacted Koenning, and he didn't seek the publicity, though the article praised the nonprofit alliance for its work in the community.

The unsolicited ranking fell like sugar from the sky. Bufordites I came back in on Wednesday on the Badie Tour in the sweetness. Truth be told, some are a little perplexed, too.

If CNN knows how great the town's business and leisure mix is, why do so many people right in its backyard appear clueless?

"It's amazing how so few people know about this," said Petra Hope, co-owner of Sperata, an upscale restaurant in historic downtown where Koenning and I ate lunch.



Tim Koenning, standing by the Buford sculpture near Tannery Row, said he was surprised by the city being ranked the third-best place in the U.S. to live and launch a business by CNNMoney.com.

RICK BADIE / Staff



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MY OPINION

businesses together as a con. It's not just to network, ever the alliance gives business opportunity to do that."

Despite lack of an amplifier the town makes do.

An arts and jazz festival May 10, will take place in the Bona Allen Mansion. (The mansion, built in 1912-13, was torn down in 1912-13, a leather nery magnate). The work is associated with the artists in Tannery Row will be on during the festival. Local big jazz bands will perform during the day, then turn the stage over to "professionals" at night.

It's too early to say how, but Koenning says the town will capitalize on the national exposure granted by CNNMoney.com ranking.

"I don't know how the town is, but I'm thankful for it," Koenning says. "People are excited."

"We're proud Bufordites."

For more information, visit www.visitbuford.com.

► Rick Badie's column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Contact him at 770-263-3875 or email: rbadie@ajc.com.

Soon, more people will. The business alliance, in conjunction with City Hall, has produced a TV commercial that will soon debut on the local cable channel. The ad shows various scenes in the "Leather City" as a narrator encourages viewers to "live, work and play — the Buford way."

Long term, Koenning envisions Buford creating signature events that help define the town as a destination. Think the Duluth Fall Festival. Buford has held some events that have proved attractive, but it

lacks a venue that can hold masses of people.

"Right now with our amphitheater, we'd be lucky to hold 1,000 people at a time," said Koenning, a history buff and managing partner with Magnolia Financial Advisors in downtown Buford. "There are discussions about doing something with the greenery across from City Hall. The vision is definitely here. [City Hall] has embraced the alliance as a marketing arm, and the alliance's vision is to bring the civic groups, schools and

that have proved attractive, but it