

URBANDALE
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Urbandale businesses affirm *CNN Money's* "Best Place" designation

DATE (Urbandale, Iowa)—Urbandale small business owners can explain why the city was designated one of *CNN Money's* "Best Places to Live" in 2005. Urbandale ranked 53rd out of 100 finalists in *CNN Money's* annual ranking, based on an extensive analysis of data related to economics, safety, education, arts and leisure, environment, housing, taxes, job market, income levels and other factors. Both long-time businesses that are expanding and companies relocating from other spots are choosing the booming area for several reasons. One most often cited is its unique strategic location in the heart of the Midwest with abundant land nestled against the Interstate 80-35 corridor, providing easy access to markets and suppliers in every direction.

Manufacturing, Warehousing and Distribution

The location has attracted many businesses in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution. One growing company, Pivot Works, began in 1994 by wholesaling motorcycle parts to distributors throughout the world. This year it is constructing a 45,000 square foot headquarters on Justin Drive and is adding 12 new positions to its current staff of 30. CEO Curtis Leaverton has loved being an Urbandale resident and said his company "grew up here," so it was a natural location for expansion. He said, "Urbandale's elected officials and policy makers make the environment conducive to business and make decisions based on

the long-term integrity of the community. They are genuinely interested in the legacy they leave for future generations."

A newer business, Factory Direct, recently moved to the area from Kansas City and in November formally opened its new showroom and warehouse in the Meredith Business Park to display appliances and other products for home building contractors. Wayne Jones, General Manager, had previously lived in Urbandale and was glad to have the opportunity to return. He said, "The area fits our business plan because we can hop right on the Interstate and deliver to our central Iowa builders. Plus, the non-retail location allows the end user, the homebuyer, to see us from the Interstate, take the Douglas exit and easily come in to look over the appliances." Jones also said Urbandale was a desirable area because it has many other businesses in the home products industry.

Financial Services and Information Systems

Urbandale hosts several firms that help establish the Des Moines area and Iowa as a nationwide leader in insurance and financial services, including banking, investment firms and mortgage companies. Urbandale is therefore ideal for Mortgage Hub, an information technology company that serves the mortgage lending industry. Founded by Iowans, it has relocated from Pennsylvania and is leasing a 5,000 square foot building space at 118th Street with state-of-the-art infrastructure to support its Web services platform. The company is hiring for 23 positions and will be opening new markets and designing a second generation of products. It is a portfolio company of Blue Ocean Ventures, a venture capital firm also located in Urbandale.

Another information technology company, Prairie iNet, is a growing five-year-old broadband communications provider located in the Aurora Business Park. It offers Internet access and Web hosting to business and residential customers in 120 communities in Iowa and Illinois. The company is privately owned by a national institutional investment group and is led by Neil Mulholland, CEO, from Denver. "Urbandale is a

wonderful place to do business," he said. "We found an excellent employee base from which to hire and trained our people, and the majority of them have stayed with us." The company has 21 employees and has invested millions of dollars in its wireless network operations. Mulholland also found high quality, well managed real estate at a good rate, and needed the easy access to the airport and hotels for the investors, customers and guests he regularly brings in from across the nation.

Coventry Health Care of Iowa also chose the Aurora Business Park for its Iowa headquarters to enable further growth and to manage its costs of doing business. Mike Teachout, President and CEO, said, "Being in health care, it is important to us to have affordable rent to help keep our policyholders' cost structure as competitive as possible." He added he appreciates the free advertising with their signage in view from the Interstate, the ability to get to customers easily, and the excellent city services. "Urbandale has everything you need," he said.

Business-Friendly Environment

"We do have something special here," said Roberta Shine, President of Shine Construction Services, who leases properties to several businesses that have moved into Urbandale. "Once someone starts a business here, the community rallies around them to help them succeed. The location is a terrific asset for retail businesses, as well, since we have approximately 86,000 vehicles traveling through on the Interstate every day."

"Our officials have consciously created a reputation as a business-friendly community," said Brad Long, Vice President of Strategic Development, Mid-America Group. "It goes all the way from Mayor Bob Andeweg and the City Council, to Bob Layton, the city manager, to the engineers and street maintenance workers, to the city clerk. They are caring individuals truly looking out for the best interest of

Urbandale residents and businesses. They have made things like zoning and building codes easy to understand, and if you need to get something done quickly, they will work with you to make it happen," he said.

In the *Money* survey, Urbandale beat the "Best Places" averages in: household income, sales tax, auto insurance rates, median home price, student/teacher ratio, air quality and crime. Officials cite other advantages, such as:

- Potential for growth in 15 business parks with shovel-ready land, buildings ready to own or lease, and existing infrastructure.
- Comprehensive planning that incorporates business needs, neighborhoods, green spaces, trails and public facilities.
- Six top-notch school districts and access to numerous higher education options in central Iowa, contributing to a quality workforce.
- Growing population, increasing by about 1,000 people a year, providing new markets and a skilled workforce.
- Proximity to economical business services, such as financial institutions, utilities, medical facilities, transportation, hotels and technical services.
- A wide range of housing choices and about \$100 million per year in new construction, or about 300 new homes.
- City of Urbandale, Urbandale Chamber of Commerce and Urbandale Development Association partners committed to making government easy for businesses to work with.

Tom Gayman, President of the Urbandale Chamber of Commerce, with R&R Realty Group, said, "*CNN Money* not only recognized Urbandale's positive economic indicators, but also sensed the excitement here because of our growth mode and community spirit, which create the energy and vitality that businesses are looking for."

With population projections of 40,000 to 50,000 residents by 2020, Gayman and other business leaders appreciate *CNN Money's* recognition of the activity and enthusiasm in Urbandale, but are not satisfied being number 53, and are working to soon be in the list's top 10.

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Sidebar

Urbandale Business Facts

- Population: 35,904 (Source: 2005 Special Census), projected to be over 40,000 by 2010 (Source: City of Urbandale)
- Urbandale educational attainment: 8.4% Associates Degree; 30.9% B.A.; 12.8% M.A. or professional degree (Source: 2000 Census data)
- Median age: 35.9 (Source: 2005 Special Census)
- Average household income (households with earnings): \$70,735 in 1999 (Source: 2000 Census)
- Median housing value: \$133,100 (Source: 2000 Census)
- Property tax: Urbandale has six school districts, so tax rates range from \$32 to \$36 per thousand of assessed valuation
- Largest employers: Wells Fargo Financial, U.S. Postal Service, MidAmerican Energy, Continental Western Insurance Company, Nationwide Insurance, Compressor Controls Corp., Rain and Hail Insurance, Pepsi Americas, Yellow Transportation, Homemakers Furniture, Lennox Industries, Inc.
- Geography: 22 square miles in Dallas and Polk Counties, with northern boundaries at Grimes and Johnston; southern boundaries at Hickman Road in Clive and Windsor Heights; eastern boundaries at Merle Hay Road and 67th Street vicinity in Des Moines; and western boundary at Clive and at 184th Street next to Waukee.

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