

Safety, services make Fox Cities top place to live

Post-Crescent, The (Appleton, WI) - March 18, 2007

Author: Post-Crescent staff writer ; The Post-Crescent

Ask for one good reason the Fox Cities is a great place to live and raise a family and you'll get many more.

Based on what residents and community leaders revealed in the 2006 Leading Indicators For Excellence, or **LIFE study**, the Fox Cities gets a big thumbs up as a great place to live, work and learn.

And it all starts with the kids.

For the second year in a row, the Fox Cities was named one of America's 100 Best Communities for Young People by America's Promise — the Alliance for Youth. It was based on a communities' commitment to providing caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education and service opportunities. The judges also looked at community efforts at cooperation, communication, expanding good ideas and progress in dealing with specific concerns.

And, when it comes to meeting the educational needs of families, the Fox Cities also rates high. Leslie Gerstl, a mother of three and middle school teacher at Appleton Christian School, has seen both sides of the coin.

"I have been a substitute teacher and a full-time teacher employed at a school and have experience in private schools and Christian schools and public schools, and there is such a plethora of choices for parents. And the high-quality choices we have. Our state has open enrollment, so you can even choose what school you want."

Although home sales are lagging nationwide and up only slightly in the Midwest, there are signs that the housing market is starting to recover, as new home sales rose 3.4 percent nationwide between October and November.

But to get your home to sell it should be priced properly and "staged," or presented in a way that makes it appealing to buyers, Dawn Christensen, owner of Century 21 Great America said.

Faith options

As a home to more than 180 church options from Appleton Alliance to Zion Lutheran in Fremont — and everything in between — spiritual health also is not a problem in the Fox Cities. Some of the newest worship options such as Inglesia Se da de Amor, which meets at Grace Lutheran in Appleton, have formed to meet the needs of the Fox Cities' diverse population, in this case, Hispanic.

"Our faith teaches us to get involved with people. To get involved in a way that shows the love of God." said the Rev. Paul Huxtable, associate pastor of Neenah's First Presbyterian Church. "In the Fox Cities, there are a number of organizations that provide that opportunity.

"One needs only to pick up the phone, and ask what can be done to help. Opportunities range from serving food, to mentoring, to providing rides, to constructing sheds. There are opportunities for all ages to serve. The faith community is active, it is alive, it is making a difference in the quality of life for others in the Fox Cities."

As for health care, respondents in the **LIFE study** said Fox Cities' offerings are more than adequate. Health care premiums and deductibles are another issue, which continue to grow faster than the rate of inflation, The Post-Crescent reported in December. And there's no end in sight.

Needing attention

While respondents on the **LIFE study** were pleased overall with life in the Fox Cities, there was one thing that scored poorly. Namely, meeting the self-sufficiency needs of poor residents. An estimated 21,600 residents live in poverty based on the 2006 federal poverty level for a family of four of \$19,350. Another 38,000 households ear from \$25,000 to \$50,000 a year, just above the poverty level.

"I the Fox Cities we have so many positive measures of what is going well with a better than average economy, better than average school systems and on and on," Debra Cro miller, executive director of the Emergency Shelter of the Fox Valley in Appleton, was quoted to say.

"In that context it is difficult to focus on what is not working well, namely we have an increasing number of people living in poverty."

Cheryl Sherry can be reached at 920-993-1000, ext. 249, or csherry@postcrescent.com.