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# Without jobs, R.I.'s place on livability lists is weak

All of us like to know and be part of the best places, whether this be restaurants, hospitals, colleges, golf courses, or whatever, so we rank them. These range from the international, where we rank levels of corruption by countries, to the local, where we rate the best clam shacks. And though we may not agree with some of the rankings, we find most of them useful in terms of making comparisons with places we know.

Magazines which do these rankings claim that these are their most popular and best selling issues. And thus it is with *Money* magazine which recently completed its eleventh annual issue of Best Places to Live. So popular is it that *Money* puts out a special edition, at \$7.95, with more detailed information on these places.

It is important to note that the *Money* rankings are of the 300 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas, a large city together with its suburbs. In the case of Nashua, N.H., ranked number 1, that means an additional 13 suburbs of the city. At no time does *Money* call them cities. Rather, it carefully calls them spots, areas, regions and places.

Since these metropolitan areas are named by the major city or cities within them, it is common in writing about them to use only the city name, and that is what happens here. It can get tricky because these metropolitan areas can also be primary or consolidated, so some considerations need to be made.

An additional complication is the changing nature and boundaries of these metropolitan areas. Locally, Providence was officially called the Providence-Pawtucket-Fall River Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area before the 1990

census but now the name is the Providence-Fall River-Warwick Metropolitan Statistical Area. So one can see why publications simply call it Providence rather than using the official cumbersome full title each time. But realize that this Providence, the one being ranked, covers most of the state as well as Fall River and some of its suburban communities.

Finally, because counties are the major form of government below the state level in most of the country, but not New England where towns and cities have traditionally provided local services, metropolitan areas are defined by counties, and the 3,141 counties in the country, on average, cover more area than the entire state of Rhode Island.

Why do we use metropolitan areas anyway for such comparisons rather than the cities themselves? Simply because better and more data are available as gathered by the Census Bureau which seeks to gather information on population clusters. Cities and the suburbs which are socially and economically linked to these central cities (called Metropolis, or mother city by the ancient Greeks) comprise these population clusters and are considered as one entity.

Although Providence has recently been listed as one of the ten best places to live by *Swing* magazine, whoever they are, the *Money* ranking gets a bigger play because of its circulation and the fact that after 11 years of doing these ratings, it has more credibility. Unfortunately, under this ranking, the Providence Metropolitan Area doesn't do well.

Ranked 240 of the 300 listings in the country, Providence dropped from last year's ranking of 198. These large gyrations often occur because of major changes in jobs, housing and taxes.

Locally, there are reasons to doubt the rankings. Among the 21 places ranked in New England, only four score lower than Providence: they are New London, Burlington (from my experience a nice community), Springfield and Hartford. Such places as Brockton, New Haven, and Bridgeport being ranked higher certainly raise questions as to criteria used.

Some clues as to Providence's low rank

appear in the special extra edition of this places ranked *Money* issue. Its rankings in different areas include the following: housing appreciation - 264; future job growth - 228; unemployment rate - 214; and job growth - 193. Working at home - 141 and doctors per capita - 55 are good scores but our total annual tax per household at \$12,398 means that 46 other states pay a lower tax than do we. And on a typical 2,200 square foot home, only New Jersey homeowners pay a higher property tax than in this Providence Metropolitan Area which covers most of the state.

Rhode Island, with its small town ambience, is a pleasant and comfortable place in which to live. But without work what can you do? How else can you explain that ours was the only state in the nation to lose population every year for the first five years of this decade? The jobs were someplace else. □

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## AMERICA AT WORK



"There's a bug going around...  
so all the computers went home sick."

### LETTERS POLICY

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