La. cities rank among best places

Seven Louisiana cities ranked in the top 100 best places to live in America in a recent study by Money magazine.

An eighth Louisiana city ranked in the top 200.

The sister cities of Provo and Orem, Utah, were ranked as the best place to live in America in a recent study, which came as no surprise to the mayors of those two cities.

"The country is just finding out what we've known all along," said Orem Mayor Joyce Johnson.

"We saw it coming," said Provo Mayor Joe Jenkins.

The communities, with a combined population of 125,000, topped Money magazine's annual survey of the nation's 300 largest metropolitan areas.

Last year's leader, Bremerton, Wash., slipped to second place. Provo was ranked 11th last year.

Most of the top 10 in the 1991 rankings are in the West, the Midwest and Texas. Nine are new to the top 10.

Following Provo-Orem and Bremerton; are: Bryan, Texas; Boise, Idaho; Lubbock, Texas; Billings, Mont.; Fayetteville, Ark.; Madison, Wis.; Austin, Texas; and Lincoln, Neb.

The Louisiana cities in the top 100 are: New Orleans at No. 23 this year, and 18th last year; Houma-Thibodaux, 31 this year, 134 last year; Monroe, 33 this year, 96 last year; Baton Rouge, 40 this year, 53 last year; Alexandria, 47 this year, 94 last year; Lafayette, 62 this year, 254 last year; Lake Charles, 91 this year, 196 last year.

Shreveport, which ranked 262 last year, came in at 197 this year.

Money extols Utah's Provo-Orem as "an area known for unabashed fertility — of its farmland, its Mormon inhabitants, and more recently its industrial development."

Jenkins said that wasn't always true. Five years ago, "The mall closed down and the city center was blighted."
The city couldn’t attract investors for a proposed high-tech industrial complex, so it developed the East Bay Business Center itself. Now, the area is home to computer giants WordPerfect and Novell along with more than 80 other software companies. The companies employ more than 10,500 people.

More than 5,000 people have moved to the area since 1988. They were lured by jobs, easy commuting and affordable housing — a typical three-bedroom house costs $81,000, 18 percent below the median price of an American home.

Money describes the bottom five on the list as “a battered cadre of New England cities grievously wounded by the collapse of manufacturing, real estate and financial services.”

They are: Manchester, N.H.; Fall River, Mass.; Pawtucket, R.I.; New Britain, Conn.; and dead last at No. 300, Waterbury, Conn.

In ranking the metropolitan areas, Money asked 252 subscribers (median age: 46; median household income: $61,000) what they valued in a place to live. Their top priorities were clean water, low crime, clean air, abundant medical services and strong local government.