

## 2009 BEST CITIES

### Best Cities: It's All About Jobs

*Stable employment and new career opportunities give these cities an edge.*  
From *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine, July 2009

What a difference a year makes. Last summer, the energy and finance sectors of the economy seemed to be thriving, and manufacturing was going strong.

Today, many cities are relying on government programs, universities and stalwart industries, such as health care, to bolster employment in a weak economy. Those factors appeared frequently when we assembled candidates for our 2009 Best Cities list, which focuses on places that have stable employment plus the talent to create new, well-paying positions. A robust job market makes these cities safe havens during the recession and will give them a head start toward growth when the recovery takes off.

When our numbers guru, Kevin Stolarick, evaluated U.S. cities for their growth potential, he looked not just at the overall number of jobs, but also at the quality of those positions and the ability of cities to hold on to them when the economy softens. ([See our Methodology](#)) Says Stolarick, who is research director at the Martin Prosperity Institute, a think tank that studies economic prosperity: "Although downturns are felt by everyone, our research has shown that the impact is less severe for those in the creative class -- people who are paid to think."

One key indicator of such heartiness is the presence of people who work in professional occupations, such as science, engineering, architecture and education. And given that many of you, our readers, work in such professions, these are places where you may find not only a job but also the company of people like yourselves.

We included the cities' greater metro areas because the suburbs and surrounding communities contribute to job stability. And big cities don't have a monopoly on vitality; this year we considered smaller metro areas as well.

**Take a spin through our 2009 Best Cities** to see which places have the right stuff in these tough times.

**No. 1: Huntsville, Alabama**

**No. 2: Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**No. 3: Washington D.C.**

**No. 4: Charlottesville, Virginia**

**No. 5: Athens, Georgia**

**No. 6: Olympia, Washington**

**No. 7: Madison, Wisconsin**

**No. 8: Austin, Texas**

**No. 9: Flagstaff, Arizona**

**No. 10: Raleigh, North Carolina**

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## No. 1: Huntsville, Alabama

By Jane Bennett Clark, Senior Associate Editor

From *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine, July 2009

### FLYING HIGH

**Population:** 378,057

**Income Growth:** 9.7%

**Cost of Living Index:** 91

**Median Household Income:** \$51,275

**Percentage of Workforce in Creative Class:** 40%



Talk about a bulletproof economy. This northern Alabama city represents critical mass for the nation's missile-defense and aerospace industries. The medical and life-sciences industries are thriving, too. Thousands of new jobs are pouring into town. With a few exceptions, business in Huntsville is so healthy that Mayor Tommy Battle has a pleasant problem: "We have more jobs than we can fill."

Huntsville owes much of its red-blooded vitality to the U.S. Army, which employs more than 14,000 people, mostly civilians, at the 38,000-acre Redstone Arsenal. "If a soldier drives it, eats it or shoots it, we're involved -- beans to bullets," says Dan O'Boyle, arsenal spokesman.

As part of an ongoing consolidation of army bases and personnel -- known as BRAC, the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process -- the arsenal will hire 5,000 more people over the next few years, and another 5,000 jobs will be added indirectly to the area.

As for aerospace, Huntsville isn't called Rocket City for nothing. The giant rocket replica that pierces the Huntsville skyline not only makes a handy reference point for out-of-towners but also represents Huntsville's storied -- and still strong -- role in space exploration. The site of the historic test launch of the Saturn V rocket, which put the U.S. space mission one step closer to the moon, Huntsville houses an original Saturn V at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center and hosts thousands of students each year at the center's Space Camp. The Marshall Space Flight Center, part of NASA, employs 2,500 scientists, many of whom are working on the next moon launch.

All those scientists and engineers create a bubbling brew of brainpower that attracts other intellectuals. Says Rick Davis, director of Cummings Research Park, "Smart people come here." Huntsville encourages the influx by offering companies below-market real estate prices and room to grow at Cummings, which encompasses 3,800 acres. The HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, a recent arrival, represents Huntsville's foray into the next frontier. HudsonAlpha translates the results of the Human Genome Project into the development of new, targeted medicines. Says director Richard Myers, "In five years, we will all be taking our genomic sequence with us to the doctor's office."

Not every sector in Huntsville is booming. Car sales have plummeted in recent months, and home sales have slowed, especially for houses priced at \$300,000 and up. Still, Huntsville's otherwise strong economy, combined with a scenic, mountain-view setting, a historical downtown, top-quality museums and a 110-acre botanical garden, encourages residents to stay put and newcomers to stream in. Says Battle: "This place never misses a beat."