



## West Allis, Waukesha score high on best places for retirees

By Paul Gores of the Journal Sentinel  
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Living in West Allis? Getting ready to wind down your career? Thinking about moving to a good place for retirees?

Don't go anywhere.

You're already living in the second-best city for retirees in the Midwest and 16th best overall in the U.S. — at least according to a report released Monday by the personal finance company Bankrate.com.

While a sunny community with lots of beaches might seem like a more logical place to retire than a cold-weather, high-tax former industrial powerhouse Wisconsin community, an analysis by Bankrate of six factors suggests that career-ending workers shouldn't turn up their noses at the Milwaukee suburb.

When measures such as the cost of living, crime, well-being, walkability, taxes and health care are weighed against 171 other communities big enough to have adequate data to scrutinize, West Allis comes out looking pretty good, Bankrate determined.

Still, even West Allis Mayor Dan Devine was initially surprised at the news his city ranked near the top of a "best cities for retirement" list.

"I'm sure our new skateboard park has something to do with it," Devine wisecracked.

But then he quickly cited considerations like the proximity of the 61,000-person suburb to cultural amenities in other communities, its walkability to places to eat, an active senior center, a good farmers market and its local hospital.

"It's a little surprising until you dive into it a little deeper," Devine said.

Actually, a couple of factors that favor Wisconsin in general — health care and sense of well-being — were at play in Bankrate's analysis and likely helped another Milwaukee suburb, Waukesha, rank high as well. Waukesha ended up as the 20th-best city in which to retire in the United States and fourth-best in the Midwest in Bankrate's report.

"I'd say in Wisconsin, if it wasn't for the weather, you guys would be ranking much, much higher because your health care system is one of the great ones if you look at government rankings of health care," said Chris Kahn, research and statistics analyst for Bankrate.

The detailed data for health care quality was derived from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare and Quality Research.

"Not just the doctors and the hospitals, but the way they interact and keep residents healthy — gosh, Wisconsin does extremely well," Kahn said.

The well-being category, based on data that comes from the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index and measures residents' general happiness in their surroundings, also receives good marks in Wisconsin, Kahn said. Well-being scores of Wisconsin folks 65 and older are "extremely high," he said.

"It really is a good recommendation when you can find people of that age living there already who are happy," Kahn said.

West Allis was rated "great" in health care and "good" in well-being by Bankrate. West Allis was found to be "average" in cost of living, "average" in crime, "good" in walkability and "very high" in taxes.

Devine said that West Allis has had an issue with higher property taxes since the demise of farm equipment maker Allis-Chalmers Corp. — once Wisconsin's largest employer — in the 1980s, but that he's working to keep increases to a minimum.

Many of the people who are retired in West Allis today probably have direct or family ties to Allis-Chalmers, Devine said.

The top-ranked city for retirement in Bankrate's report — Phoenix, including Mesa and Scottsdale — was rated "great" for weather, "average" for cost of living and for health care, "low" in crime and taxes, "good" for well-being and "below average" for walkability.

Milwaukee came in 48th nationally and seventh in the Midwest, apparently held down by a "high" rating for crime.

New York City was deemed the worst place to retire.

Kahn said Bankrate's first retirement rankings were narrowed down to 172 cities from thousands. Some communities didn't have adequate data for the company to develop a good ranking, and some "hidden gems" may have been left out, he said.

"Every city has pluses and minuses, and we're just trying to gather up the pluses and minuses in a way that makes a good conversation," Kahn said. "It's not to say there's a utopia out there. There certainly isn't. But there's some places you could move to where your dollar is going to stretch a little bit further, you're going to get into a good health care system."

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