

# 'Mr. Jefferson would be proud': Charlottesville is No. 1

By Bob Minzesheimer, USA TODAY

Charlottesville, Va., where Thomas Jefferson founded and designed the University of Virginia, is the best place to live in the USA, according to a book out today. (**Related story:** [See which cities are emerging as great places to live](#))

*Cities Ranked & Rated* (Wiley, \$24.99) gives high marks to several other college towns, including Ann Arbor, Mich. (No. 6) and Corvallis, Ore. (No. 10).

At the bottom of the rankings of 331 metropolitan areas are Laredo, Texas (No. 331), Stockton, Calif. (No. 330) and Newburgh, N.Y. (329).

The 820-page book by Bert Sperling and Peter Sander rates cities in 10 categories but give the most weight to three categories they say most affect daily life: cost of living, climate and one subjective measure: quality of life.

The book says Charlottesville's high housing prices are the only "negative and directly reflect the quality of life and resistance to sprawl. ... Mr. Jefferson would be proud."



But Laredo's "bustle, lack of intellectual stimulation, poverty, high crime rate and heat will try anyone's patience."

Sander, who lives in a suburb of Sacramento (No. 85) says statistics alone can't measure "good planning and livable infrastructure. A good place is

*Cities Ranked & Rated's* top 10 cities and metropolitan areas:

1. Charlottesville, Va.
2. Santa Fe
3. San Luis Obispo, Calif.
4. Santa Barbara, Calif.
5. Honolulu
6. Ann Arbor, Mich.
7. Atlanta
8. Asheville, N.C.
9. Reno
10. Corvallis, Ore.

not only pedestrian-friendly but has something worth walking to."

Sperling, who lives in Portland, Ore., (No. 12), notes that cities with the most resources, such as New York (No. 40), Los Angeles (No. 54) and Chicago (No. 155) don't top the list. The high ratings of smaller cities such as Santa Fe (No. 2), Asheville, N.C. (No. 8) and Reno (No. 9) reflect "an increasing trend of people searching for alternatives to the big-city lifestyle."

As for Laredo, he hopes residents realize that "the conditions which contributed to this ranking are not permanent."

In 1986, Sperling created *Money* magazine's first Best Places to Live list, which ranked Flint, Mich., as the worst place to live. That became fodder for

Michael Moore's film *Roger & Me*, but Sperling says Moore recently told him, "It was the best thing that could have happened. That was exactly what I had been trying to tell people: that Flint had become a wasteland."

In the new book, Flint is ranked No. 234 and praised for creating a broader economy and cultural attractions.