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## Keller, Grapevine among best places to live

By BILL TEETER

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Three Tarrant County cities have made *Money* magazine's latest list of 100 best places to live -- a nod to the power of low crime rates, healthy incomes and easy access to restaurants, golf courses and movie theaters.

Keller came in 50th, followed by Mansfield at No. 83 and Grapevine at No. 97.

The magazine considered nearly 3,000 small cities in the U.S.

Though not on the best places list, Southlake was 25th in top 25 highest-income communities.

Keller Mayor Pat McGrail said the magazine's designation in the August edition reaffirms how city leaders and residents have felt all along about their community.

In the past 10 years, the city has experienced significant growth, especially with new businesses along Keller Parkway and in Keller Town Center.

"We have small-town charm, but the big-city conveniences, and I think that's what makes us unique," McGrail said.

Keller also has some of the best parks, recreational centers and schools in the area, he said.

"We also have diverse housing," McGrail said. "We have something for everyone."

Keller received the accolades from the magazine for its low crime rate, a high median family income and availability of movie theaters, golf courses and restaurants.

Mansfield was also helped out by its low crime rate, along with its job growth and family purchasing power.

Grapevine got on the list for its low crime rate, strong job growth, median income and family purchasing power.

No. 1 on the magazine's list was Middleton, Wis., near Madison.

### A bright future

Former Mansfield Mayor Mel Neuman said the national ranking shows that years of improving housing quality, attracting businesses and expanding parks is paying off. The city's population has tripled since 1995, to nearly 60,000.

"We must be doing something right," Neuman said.

Shanda Shoop was attracted to the city five years ago when she was looking for a new, family-friendly community.

"The area was nice, and we knew the schools were good," said the Arlington school district teacher, who has two school-age children. "Our boys play sports, and the sports [associations] are great. It was very convenient and a good fresh start in a growing community."

Mayor Barton Scott noted that the magazine's survey valued not only housing and commercial growth but also efforts to preserve an open atmosphere.

"If you look at the list, most of the cities you see are small towns with wide-open spaces," Scott said. "It reinforces ... that Mansfield has a bright future ahead of us as long as we don't ignore or neglect what made us a great place to begin with."

But some Grapevine officials think their city is better than its ranking.

"To me it ought to be rated higher," City Councilman Roy Stewart said. "With what we have here and what we offer here, it's a fabulous place to live."

Good schools, parks, tourist venues and the city's historic preservation efforts are all part of why people like Grapevine, he said.

"I've been living here since 1981, and if you can say you love a place, we love it," he said.

Grapevine Mayor William D. Tate didn't take issue with the ranking.

"I think they are right on; people enjoy living here," he said.

"The real test to me is people say how long they have lived here and how much they enjoy the community," Tate said. "We have a lot of out-of-town guests that want to tap into that. A lot of people visit

here because they enjoy the spirit, the amenities and the quality of life."

McGrail says the ranking should help draw companies to Keller.

"Hopefully, this will help us in attracting the type of restaurants and other businesses we want in Keller," he said.

#### **Impact hard to measure**

Northeast Tarrant cities often make lists in specialized, glossy magazines. Last year, North Richland Hills made *Money's* Best Places to Live list and Colleyville made *Money's* "100 Best Towns in America."

The impact of being on such a list is hard to measure, city officials have said. But business owners and residents say it helps them decide where to locate.

And it's an indication that communities are succeeding. Southlake Mayor Andy Wambsgans said Southlake's ranking as a high-income city shows that Southlake's efforts to encourage excellence in academics, sports and city services have worked.

"Our median income shows that we've attracted people who want to raise families here," he said.

"I get comments all the time from people moving here who say 'We love the downtown and schools. This is place where we feel safe and want to raise our kids.'"

Though proud of their designation, Keller officials are now looking to the future.

"I'm so proud to be a part of this city," McGrail said. "It's the citizens who make Keller what it is. We plan on this not being the last time we make the list. If anything we want to move up on it."

Staff writer Adrienne Nettles and correspondent Robert Cadwallader contributed to this report.

#### **How 'Money' chose the top 100**

A staff of eight reporters and editors and four interns developed the list from an extensive array of data, interviews and site visits. Work on the list began in April, said Jennifer Merritt, *Money's* special projects editor. This year's list measures 2,876 cities between 7,500 and 50,000 residents. On even-numbered years, the list includes larger cities, Merritt said.

#### **The magazine considered:**

Jobs, income and cost-of-living data

Housing affordability, school quality, racial diversity and healthcare

Weather, leisure opportunities and ease of living

Telephone interviews with community leaders and residents

Visits to the cities and more interviews. The magazine assessed the sense of community, natural setting, real estate and congestion.

#### **The magazine dropped:**

Retirement-oriented communities

Cities where the population is more than 95 percent white.

Cities with low education scores, projected job losses, declines or sharp increases in population, and lack of access to airports or teaching hospitals

#### **Texas rankings**

40. Schertz

44. Hewitt

50. Keller

51. Friendswood

83. Mansfield

97. Grapevine