

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Wednesday, May 26, 2010:](#)

## **C'mon now, is Bakersfield really that bad?**

When Bakersfield makes national news, it's usually not for anything especially flattering. We're often the butt of jokes, some of them unfounded, but occasionally the charges are right on. Sadly, that's probably the case with the latest zinger coming our way.

Online business journal Portfolio.com has positioned our fair city 67th in overall quality of life -- dead last, and one tick below Fresno -- in a recently published ranking of U.S. metro areas. Portfolio measured the cities in 20 categories, and Bakersfield was at the bottom in six.

Bakersfield, according to Portfolio, "has the highest poverty rate of any major market, as well as the lightest concentration of management and professional jobs, weakest inventory of big houses, and smallest percentages in the three educational categories that track adults with high-school diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and advanced degrees."

Other cities on Portfolio's skid row are New Orleans, Memphis and Riverside-San Bernardino. Top of the list? Raleigh, N.C., Washington, D.C. and Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Portfolio's findings are skewed by the fact that the Bakersfield metropolitan statistical area is essentially all of Kern County, a New Jersey-sized chunk of California with many pockets of poverty. That's not the same thing as Bakersfield, the state's 11th largest city, but some of the study's charges are undeniably still true.

We're not going to argue the merits of cities on the "good list" (San Jose? Really?), but what about the factors that torpedoed Bakersfield?

- Our economy stinks. True -- Kern's ag-dependent jobless rate is right around 16 percent, and poverty remains a serious problem.
- Cost of living. Debatable -- Bakersfield is cheaper than the coastal metro areas of California, particularly in terms of home ownership. But our monthly power bills and volatile gas prices represent negatives, and there's no arguing that in many states you can get a lot more house for the money.
- Traffic. True -- It doesn't quite compare to the southbound 405 in west Los Angeles at rush hour, but ever try to get from Oak Street to Calloway Drive on Rosedale Highway in peak traffic hours? How about creeping along 23rd and 24th streets in the late afternoon? With some 511,000 people in the metro area and an estimated 402,000 vehicles, it's clear that our road systems are woefully inadequate.
- Impressive housing stocks. True -- We've got too many houses on the market, too many foreclosures weighing down a real estate recovery, and too many unemployed builders.
- High-powered educational systems. True -- With low test scores, high dropout and teen birth rates, it's obvious we could be doing better. But rest assured we have good people on the case, making sure our high schools don't acknowledge Harvey Milk Day.

Interestingly, environmental concerns didn't figure into Portfolio's rankings. Had air quality been a factor, Bakersfield would likely have been knocked even lower. Wait -- you can't get worse than last, can you?

It appears no one from Portfolio bothered to ask Bakersfield residents about their quality of life. We hear daily from locals who say they love living here -- friendly people, great food, proximity to the coast and natural beauty in the mountains. That must count for something.

Sure, Bakersfield has some areas that need improvement. But if it's really so bad, why are we still growing?