

THE REGION

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Grand Rapids near middle on list of top cities to raise kids

By Geoff Kimmery
The Grand Rapids Press

Grand Rapids is often touted as a great place to raise a family — but a survey published by a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying group says there are better places in the nation to raise kids.

Thirty-nine better places, in fact.

Zero Population Growth, which strives to slow the increase in world population while protecting the world's resources and environment, ranked Grand Rapids 40th in the nation as a place to bring up baby.

The group compared 112 cities in the United States with populations larger than 100,000 people, that were not considered major cities or suburban/outer cities.

Fargo, N.D., topped the list. In Michigan, Grand Rapids ranked the highest, followed by Lansing (90) and Flint (109).

Cities were compared based on population change, birth and crime statistics, along with economics, pollution and transportation numbers.

But the criteria used to rate cities may not be relevant when it comes to raising children, said Teresa Thome, executive director of Grand Rapids Children's Museum.

"I think that diminishes other quality-of-life indicators, like having safe places for kids to come together, libraries and cultural organizations," she said. "I see a real passion to make sure kids in the community get to experience what (Grand Rapids) has to offer. This community demands children be served."

Grand Rapids received an "A" for its minimal population change, but received a "D" for its number of bad-air days.

Zero Population Growth did highlight PhilanthroTech, a Grand Rapids-area agency that runs technological projects to provide educational, emotional and physiological enrichment to children affected by sickness, disability and poverty.

"If you want to really be optimistic, you can say we're above-average," Thome said. "I was surprised we were so low."