

11/17/09

Source: Bloomberg Business Week

## America's Best Place to Raise your Kids

You'd think that the character of a village that grew from 12,000 to 60,000 residents in less than 40 years might have changed with the population. But young families move into **Tinley Park, Ill.**, a proud village 25 miles southwest of Chicago, for the same reason that Edward and Emily Zabrocki chose to raise their children there in 1970.

"We looked at the schools and the community services," said Zabrocki, a retired high school guidance counselor who has been Tinley Park's mayor since 1981. "And we found a house that was good for our pocketbook."

Tinley Park, with its top-rated schools, low crime, beautiful parks, relatively affordable houses, and easy access to jobs, is the winner of *BusinessWeek's* Best Places in America to Raise Kids. Working with [OnBoard Informatics](#), we chose a winner for each state, but the Chicago suburb—only an hour south of last year's winner, Mount Prospect, Ill.—scored the highest.

Named after the village's first railroad master in the 1800s, Tinley Park has two train stations, which carry commuters to Chicago in 45 minutes. Single-family homes for sale in Tinley Park start at \$166,000 for a two-bedroom, two-bath house spread over 1,200 square feet to brand-new four-bedroom house for \$630,000.

### Settling Down

All three of the main high schools serving Tinley Park are ranked in the top 100 in the state. And the students are closely tied to the community and often stay there after graduating.

At Andrew High School, where each student is required to complete 24 hours of community service to graduate, only about 3% of the 2,400 student body move away during high school, compared with the state average of 14%, said principal Robert Nolting.

"There are a high number of kids in Tinley Park who have lived there their whole life," Nolting said. "Of the communities I've lived in or have been part of, it has more interconnectedness to it. It feels smaller than it is."

### Friendly Atmosphere

Safety, along with school test scores, air quality, and affordability, were weighted especially highly in this year's calculations. But we also considered job growth, diversity, and amenities such as museums, parks, and theaters.

Many of our picks also share Tinley Park's family-friendly atmosphere. Owensboro, our top pick for Kentucky, is a good example. The industrial town, about 100 miles southwest of Louisville known for its mutton barbecue and as the birthplace of actor Johnny Depp, takes pride in its school district and hires accordingly, said Keith Lawrence, business reporter for the *Messenger-Inquirer* newspaper in Owensboro. The town's former superintendent left to become superintendent of the Lexington school district. The median home is about \$100,000, and it's so safe that two middle-aged women once set out to walk every mile of the 18.7-square-mile city. "They started walking after getting off work at 10 p.m.," Lawrence said. "There aren't a whole lot of cities you would do that."

"It's kind of a 21st century version of *Leave It to Beaver*—church and family and Little League and soccer," said Lawrence who raised a family in Owensboro. "It's really family-oriented. If you're single, though, it's rough."