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Not a top place to visit, but you may want to live here

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Christine Stell's previous job with Yahoo was in Barcelona, Spain, so the New Jersey native definitely has lived in more exotic and exciting places.

But since moving to Omaha for her job six months ago, she's been pleasantly surprised by the inviting people, range of entertainment options and general vibe she's found here.

"It was a big adjustment at first, but it's actually been wonderful," said Stell, 34. "Omaha is growing on me. I'm thinking of looking at some homes here."

While people like Stell still find them-

selves surprised by the quality of life in Omaha, it seems that the secret increasingly is getting out. Forbes magazine recently listed the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area sixth on its list of America's most livable cities.

And to further support that Nebraska's "The Good Life" is more than just a slogan, Lincoln also landed in the livability top 10, tied for ninth. It was the first appearance by either city in the second annual rankings.

The magazine rated the nation's 200 largest metro areas on five equally weighted criteria: unemployment, income

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10 MOST LIVABLE CITIES

1. Pittsburgh
2. Ogden, Utah
3. Provo, Utah
4. Ann Arbor, Mich.
5. Harrisburg, Pa.
6. Omaha-Council Bluffs
7. Manchester, N.H.
8. Trenton, N.J.
- 9 (tie) Lincoln
- 9 (tie) Bridgeport, Conn.

OMAHA VS. LINCOLN

A head-to-head comparison of the Omaha-Council Bluffs and Lincoln metro areas in some key categories. Rankings are among the nation's 200 largest cities.

	Omaha	Lincoln
Low unemployment	5	1
Low crime	93	102
Income growth	41	33
Low cost of living	40	20
Arts and leisure	76	105

Cities: Forbes top 10 includes Lincoln but no cities in California

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growth, crime rate, cost of living and artistic and cultural attractions. Pittsburgh topped the Forbes list, with Utah cities Ogden and Provo ranking second and third.

Des Moines, which was third last year, just missed the top 10 this year, a Forbes spokesman said. The magazine did not release the ranks of any cities outside the top 10.

Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Utah each placed two cities

in this year's top 10. What you won't find on the list are any cities in California, Florida or Arizona.

That probably was a result of how much better the higher-ranked cities have ridden out the recession. Lincoln had the country's lowest unemployment rate, and Omaha's was fifth-lowest. Both Nebraska cities also ranked in the top 50 in both five-year income growth and in low cost of living.

The biggest reason Omaha topped Lincoln in the rankings

was its higher arts and culture ranking, 76th to Lincoln's 105th. On that measure, Lincoln voters may have improved the city's future ranking with Tuesday's approval of a new sports and entertainment arena.

Lincoln was among several college towns to crack the top 10. Forbes pointed out that nearly every city on the list — including Omaha — has a major higher education presence.

Omaha has been showing up on a lot of lists lately, and Chamber of Commerce leaders have

been quick to tout them in their efforts to lure jobs and workers to the city.

Doug McGregor, chief executive of the Omaha software company WebEquity Solutions, said he'll certainly note the latest Forbes ranking as he sells his fast-growing small company to prospective employees.

He admits that Omaha can be a tough sell at first, particularly for people from the coasts.

But McGregor, who came to Omaha from Minneapolis about

two years ago, tells them from personal experience how pleasantly surprised he's been with the quality of life he found. He says he wishes he'd moved his family here years earlier.

When the new workers get here, he said, they tend to have the same experience.

"They get here, and when it's all said and done, they just like it," he said. "Omaha is a little gem in America."

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