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We're #1: Alexandria is named fastest growing micropolitan in state, 17th in nation

Despite challenging economic times, economic development in Alexandria and the Douglas County area is flying high.

By: **Al Edenloff**, Alexandria Echo Press

Despite challenging economic times, economic development in Alexandria and the Douglas County area is flying high.

The trend was reflected in a recent report by Site Selection magazine on the 2009 top "micropolitans," which ranks communities based upon the number of qualifying significant commercial construction/expansion projects.

The Alexandria micropolitan statistical area (MSA) was ranked as the fastest growing MSA in Minnesota and tied for the position of 17th fastest growing MSA in the United States.

Achieving a highly ranked micropolitan status is a feather in the community's cap, according to Jason Murray, executive director of the Alexandria Area Economic Development Commission.

"The rankings bring national publicity through Site Selection magazine – a great venue to capture site selection consultants, real estate developers and business leaders and share some of the success of this community and region," Murray said.

In past years, the Alexandria regional community has ranked highly on Site Selection's list of Top Micropolitans, including:

- 2007 – Fastest growing in Minnesota, tied for 10th fastest growing MSA in the U.S.
- 2005 – Tied for second fastest growing in Minnesota, tied for 20th fastest growing MSA in the U.S.

"This is the third time that the community has been ranked in the top 100 micropolitan ranking, which speaks highly for the businesses that are making the investment in our community that meet the size and investment criteria," Murray said

Among the ranked MSAs from Minnesota for 2009, only two communities achieved the status of top micropolitans – Alexandria and Albert Lea.

This isn't an easy designation to achieve.

According to the December 2009 report by the Office of Management and Budget, there are currently 576 officially recognized Micropolitan Statistical Areas in the U.S. – approximately 11.5 per state.

"Most of the cities and regions in the poll that ranked in front of Alexandria are significantly larger in population and geographical area than our community," Murray noted. "It's rewarding to be able to compete with the larger micropolitan areas."

Minnesota is home to 16 MSAs.

Qualifying projects that were included in this ranking from throughout the Alexandria regional community included:

- 3M – abrasives division (plant expansion).
- Pfeninger Warehousing LLC (new facility construction).
- Peaceful Bliss Assisted Living (new facility construction).
- Douglas Machine/Douglas Scientific (plant expansion).

Those four projects resulted in the creation of 87 new jobs for the region, with the construction of 154,000 square feet of new building space and total estimated project costs of more than \$55.3 million.

Qualifying projects must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Project cost: at least \$1 million.
- Number of new jobs created: at least 50.
- New square footage: at least 20,000 square feet.

Project types can include manufacturing, call centers, headquarters, distribution warehouse, office, or research and development.

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