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Sidney No. 1 micropolitan

By Jim Painter

Staff Writer

Despite reports of an economic downturn around the country, Sidney and Shelby are bucking national trends, according to one independent research group.

Sidney has been named the top micropolitan in Ohio, and 20th in the nation, by POLICOM, a research firm based in Palm City, Fla.

All 577 micropolitan areas ranked are defined by the federal Office of Management and Budget as having a city of at least 10,000 but fewer than 50,000 residents.

Last year, Sidney ranked 37th in the nation, and highly improved over its ranking of 65th in 2006.

Rankings for other area micropolitans for 2008 included Bellefontaine at 145th, Wapakoneta at 263rd, Celina at 268th, Greenville at 272nd and Urbana at 416th. Miami County was not included because it exceeded the study's population guidelines.

Nationally, the top micropolitan was Hilton Head Island-Beaufort, S.C., followed by Edwards, Colo. All statistics may be found on the company's Web site at policom.com/microrank.htm.

In its evaluation, the study took into account the growth and size of the regional economy, changes in business sectors that typically show how much money is flowing into a community and local trends in welfare and Medicare.

POLICOM has been collecting information since 2002. Among the 3,142 counties in the United States, 577 are micropolitan areas that are home to 11 percent of the nation's population.

Sidney City Manager Steve Stilwell spoke of statistics reflecting the ability of many people working together.

"POLICOM has a different look at the same statistics that are out there" he said. "But the ranking is a testament to this area being the right site with the right attitude.

"It shows a combined effort of public, private and utilities to make this area an attractive place for investment. We are proud of what we have accomplished."

W. Michael Dodds, executive director of the West Ohio Development Council, said, "Obviously, I am pleased with the results of the Policom report. The ranking is relatively new since the Office of Management and Budget did not collect statistics on micropolitans until 2002. I think the study speaks well for Sidney and Shelby County.

"The methodology used in ranking the micropolitans is interesting. Policom assumes that the quality of the economy is based on what people earn. Consequently, wage statistics from all wage earners are considered.

"Also, the study looks at small business, retail, and construction activity to determine the flow of money coming into the area. Finally, the study considers the growth of welfare and Medicaid assistance as negatives in a community's economic condition. Sidney scored well in the areas measured. We are optimistic that the trend will continue and improve."

Jeff Raible, president of the Sidney-Shelby County Chamber of Commerce, agreed with Dodds and Stilwell regarding the report's reflection upon the area.

"For many years now we have known what others are only beginning to find out, that Sidney and Shelby County is a great place to live, a great place to raise a family, and a great place to grow a business.

"The spirit of cooperation among all stakeholders in our business community is the key to our success. Local government, our schools, the West Ohio Development Council and the Chamber work well together to foster a climate attractive for business. The absence of a robust business climate in any community will make it difficult to achieve success."