

Calgary No. 1 draw for brains, bucks

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Calgary is the most economically dynamic and attractive city in Canada, says a new report from the Conference Board of Canada.

The Ottawa-based economic research and policy organization says money and businesses go where highly skilled people go -- and that's Calgary.

"Calgary stands tall among Canadian census metropolitan areas as the city that is most attractive to people," said Mario Lefebvre, director of the board's Centre for Municipal Studies.

"Attracting highly skilled workers and the business investment they encourage is crucial. Places attractive to people will also attract business investment," Lefebvre added.

"Calgary is blowing everyone away with its economy, but doesn't rank low with any other measures -- and that makes the city very attractive to people."

Mayor Dave Bronconnier said the report reflects the stature and reputation Calgary has achieved in recent years.

"Calgary has been the beacon of the country and a magnet for people moving here," said Bronconnier.

"It lines up with what Alberta's all about and particularly Calgary -- and that's opportunity."

Along with ranking head and shoulders above other Canadian cities, Calgary ranks third overall in all of North America, trailing only Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas.

The seven criteria used in the analysis -- the board's first-ever report on Canadian cities' attractiveness -- were economy, innovation, environment, education, health, society and housing.

"It wasn't the economy domain alone that propelled Calgary to the top," says the report, to be released today. "Calgary was the only (metropolitan area) to earn A or B grades across all seven domains."

Large cities dominated the upper tier of attractive places to live in Canada, with Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton and Victoria rounding out the top five. The lowest-ranked of 27

cities studied was Thunder Bay, Ont., with Saguenay, Que., and Saint John, N.B., not far behind.

Analysts said Tuesday the new report confirms what mobile Canadians have known for years: Calgary is a place where almost anyone can be successful.

"It's funny how economic growth will do that," said Tsur Somerville, director of the Centre for Urban Economics and Real Estate at the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business.

"People foremost move for jobs. The best predictor that somebody is going to move to your city is that your economy is doing well and there are jobs," Somerville noted.

In both 2004 and 2005, based on its size, Calgary attracted more migrants than any other Canadian city and between July 2005 and July 2006, it set a record for interprovincial migration. Between 2001 and 2006, Calgary was Canada's second fastest growing large city, according to figures from Statistics Canada and between 2002 and 2006 Calgary attracted more arrivals on a per capita basis than any other city.

The conference board report emphasized that Calgary sits in the top echelon of cities across North America because of its youthful population, strong labour market and rapidly expanding economy, which has led all Canadian cities in three of the last four years and is expected to lead again in 2008.

"Canada's star (metropolitan area), Calgary, sits comfortably near the top of the list, just behind first-place Washington and second-place Austin," says the 96-page report. "The good news is that Calgary held its own among the field of 54 cities, thanks to its league-leading employment rate, robust employment growth and young labour force."

Adam Legge, director of research and business information for Calgary Economic Development, said the conclusions of the conference board report aren't surprising.

"It reaffirms a lot of the research that we do that demonstrates that Calgary is a national leader across virtually every economic indicator," said Legge.

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