

By **PATRICK BUTLER** pbutler@pioneerlocal.com

Niles Chamber of Commerce Director Katie Schneider wasn't surprised when Bloomberg Businessweek named Niles one of the best affordable places in the country to raise kids.

It was something local residents already knew, "but it's wonderful we were nationally recognized," she said, referring to the magazine's nationwide survey of 5,418 middle-income communities of fewer than 50,000 residents. The survey considered factors like crime rates, employment and job growth, schools, affordable housing, air quality, ethnic diversity, and access to jobs, parks, theaters and zoos.

"There's a strong quality of life here," Schneider said. "We border the city of Chicago, but we're also a corridor to the North Shore. It (Niles) has both an urban and suburban feel to it."

Schneider, who lives in Chicago but has friends who often go to Niles to shop at places like Jerry's Fruit Market and Schmeisser's Meats, added: "Niles is a little of both, which is nice."

Schneider said Niles has a strong industrial base that includes a Coca-Cola bottling plant, as well as a vibrant community that includes several large shopping centers like Golf Mill. There's also a growing number of Korean shops serving immigrants from that country.

Despite the recession Niles' unemployment rate went from 9.6 percent in October 2009 to 7.8 percent the past October, according to the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Property taxes are also lower than many surrounding communities. Village Manager George Van Geem told Business Week the property-tax rate in Niles is \$5.80 for every \$100 of assessed value, while according to the Cook County Clerk's office, the rate in nearby Mount Prospect was slightly more than \$6.50.

The village of Niles provides free local bus service from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., as well as the innovative Teen Center and Family Fitness Center.

According to Business Week, schools in Niles outperform the statewide average. During 2007, Niles Township High School's fine-arts program was singled out for excellence by the Kennedy Center in Washington.

Other communities Business Week listed among the best medium-sized, middle-income communities were North College Hill, Ohio, 10 miles from downtown Cincinnati, and Rowland Heights, Calif., 25 miles from downtown Los Angeles.

"It's a place where people are born, raised and come back to raise their own children," Schneider said.

Survey: Niles one of best U.S. cities to raise kids in



Mark Williams, youth coordinator of Niles Teen Center, stands outside the center located in Golf Mill Shopping Center. | Ryan Pagelow~Sun-Times Media



Adam Skutnik, 14, of Niles, jumps up to block a shot by Dennis Narsso, 14, of Des Plaines, at the Niles Teen Center located in Golf Mill Shopping Center. | Ryan Pagelow~Sun-Times Media



Malik Smellie, 12, of Des Plaines, and Denzell Lewis, 12, of Des Plaines, walk out of Niles Teen Center located in Golf Mill Shopping Center. | Ryan Pagelow~Sun-Times Media



Dennis Narsso, 14, of Des Plaines, Adam Skutnik, 14, of Niles, and Lavan Rousseau, 14, of Niles, hang out at Niles Teen Center located in Golf Mill Shopping Center. | Ryan Pagelow~Sun-Times Media