

Published Mar 3, 2014

Published Tuesday March 4, 2014

Nebraska is No. 1 in magazine's list on corporate improvement projects

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Work is well underway on the Fidelity data center near 108th Street and Cornhusker Road in Papillion on Friday.

Midlanders have scored a triple-crown victory of sorts for economic development efforts.

Site Selection, a 60-year-old Atlanta-based national magazine that tracks job creation and business investment across the United States, on Monday announced [its annual rankings](#) of states and metro areas with the best job and corporate facility growth.

Nebraska claimed the top spot among states for having the highest per capita number (per 1 million people) of corporate investment projects in 2013. The 109 Husker initiatives met at least one of three criteria: involves at least \$1 million in capital investment; creates at least 50 new jobs; adds at least 20,000 square feet. The ranking process didn't count retail, government projects, schools or hospitals.

Among metro areas with 200,000 to 1 million people, the Omaha-Council Bluffs area also finished No. 1, with 48 business growth projects.

The Sioux City metro area, which spans four counties in three states including Nebraska and Iowa, tied for first place among smaller metro areas, those with less than 200,000 population. Otherwise known as Siouxland, the metro area chalked up 14 projects.

The three standings sparked excitement from leaders who said recruitment and retention efforts from government and chambers of commerce are paying off.

"I'm thrilled," said Gov. Dave Heineman. "Businesses locating in Nebraska are impressed with our friendly and honest citizens, our strong work ethic, low energy costs, low cost of living, great education system and an outstanding quality of life."

Heineman said a wide variety of businesses — those focusing on technology, insurance and financial services, food processing, agribusiness and energy — saw capital investment last year. "You have to compete literally across the board," he said.

Among more prominent projects that propelled Nebraska to its spot were [the planned \\$200 million Travelers Indemnity data center](#) in the Omaha area, a \$390 million facility for Prairie Breeze Wind Energy near Elgin and Sutton Ethanol's \$188 million expansion in Sutton.

The magazine also cited Yahoo's renovated data center that brought nearly 100 new jobs to Sarpy County; Fidelity Investment's new \$200 million data center, also in Sarpy; the expansion of Scottsbluff-based air transport provider EagleMed; and Teledyne Technologies' \$12 million investment and 100 new hires in Lincoln.

In the magazine edition that hits the streets Monday, Heineman touted Nebraska's "very strong pro-business attitude" that strives to compete globally, and the state's business tax incentives created under the Nebraska Advantage Act.

"Twenty-five years ago, we would change our incentives, and they would be good for two decades," he said. "Now we have to look at our

incentives, the tax structure — everything relative to the business environment — almost every year.”

David Brown, president of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, said organizations like his yearn for their communities to be on the top of the Site Selection lists because the rankings are eyed by national site selectors whose job it is to find the right fits for companies seeking to expand or build new.

The Omaha area’s No. 1 showing, he said, gives the chamber “bragging rights” to tell recruited companies that “they’re looking at the right place.”

Brown expects expansion to continue at a good clip in 2014 — as the chamber started off with 250 active files of companies looking to invest in the Omaha area. Among big projects that have already jelled, he said: the \$93 million Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital and anticipated investment of up to \$150 million at U.S. Strategic Command headquarters.

Among investments that the Omaha area claimed in 2013:

>> The Nebraska Crossing \$112 million, 350,000-square-foot outlet mall in Gretna.

>> Nelnet’s 25,000-square-foot west Omaha call center that added up to 250 jobs.

>> Airlite Plastics’ \$57.8 million expansion north of Omaha’s Eppley Airfield that will add 117 jobs over five years.

>> U.S. Cold Storage’s new \$20 million facility in Omaha.

Data centers and manufacturers in particular have been attracted to Nebraska, Brown said, because of the state’s lower utility costs and legislative-driven tax incentives that reduce the overall cost of business.

Leaders of Site Selection magazine, the official publication of London-based Red Hot Locations and the Industrial Asset Management Council, were to be in Omaha today to meet with the governor, Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert, Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh and chamber leaders.

Editor Mark Arend said the magazine’s annual ratings, based on data collected by Conway Data Inc., are regarded by corporate real estate analysts as the “industry scoreboard.”

Many of the publication’s 45,000 subscribers are involved in deciding where to grow corporations, he said.

This year marked the first time Site Selection awarded a “governor’s cup” to a state for having the most new and expanded facilities per capita, or per 1 million people. That allowed smaller states like Nebraska to better compete. Iowa finished sixth, behind fifth-place Kansas, in the per-capita contest.

The traditional governor’s cup, based on the raw number of business growth projects, has been awarded since 1978. That distinction again went to Texas, which had 657 qualified projects.

“By either measure, the states ranking at or near the top are to be commended for fostering business climates that are most conducive to attracting capital investment and creating jobs,” Arend said.

In the metro rankings, the Omaha area’s first-place finish marked a jump from last year’s third place.

Siouxland tied for first with Iowa’s Dubuque and Pennsylvania’s Altoona metros, a slip from last year when Siouxland had a solid lead over its competitors.

Top 10 Metro areas

Populations of 200,000 to 1 million; with number of new or expanded business facilities in 2013.

1. Omaha-Council Bluffs, 48
2. (tie) Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, Pa.-N.J., 46
2. (tie) Baton Rouge, La., 46
4. Greensboro-High Point, N.C., 35

5. Tulsa, Okla., 33
6. Des Moines-West Des Moines, 31
7. Dayton, Ohio, 28
8. (tie) Youngstown-Warren-Boardman, Ohio-Pa., 22
8. (tie) Lexington-Fayette, Ky., 22
8. (tie) Madison, Wis., 22

Top 10 small Metros

Metro areas with less than 200,000 population; with number of new or expanded business facilities in 2013.

1. (tie) Sioux City, Iowa-Neb.-S.D.; Altoona, Pa.; and Dubuque, Iowa, 14
4. Odessa, Texas, 12
5. Gainesville, Ga., 11
6. (tie) Decatur, Ala.; Bowling Green, Ky.; and Battle Creek, Mich., 9
9. (tie) Sheboygan, Wis., and Auburn-Opelika, Ala., 8

Top 10 states, per capita

Ranked by number of new or expanded business facilities per capita, or per 1 million population, in 2013.

1. Nebraska, 109
2. Ohio, 480
3. Louisiana, 180
4. Kentucky, 163
5. Kansas, 106
6. Iowa, 104
7. Alabama, 159
8. Michigan, 312
9. Georgia, 299
10. Illinois, 383

Top 10 States, raw numbers

Ranked by overall, raw number of new or expanded business facilities.

1. Texas, 657
2. Ohio, 480
3. Illinois, 383
4. Pennsylvania, 348
5. Michigan, 312
6. Georgia, 299
7. North Carolina, 223
8. Virginia, 208
9. Florida, 193
10. Tennessee, 187

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