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Twin Ports a good place for college students

News Tribune staff

The Twin Ports is one of America's best small metropolitan areas for college students, according to the American Institute for Economic Research.

The nonprofit institute ranked the Duluth-Superior area 14th in the Small Metro category in its 2012 College Destinations Index. This is the first year Duluth made the top ranks. The index includes the top 75 towns and cities in the United States for college students out of the 227 metro areas with student populations of 15,000 or more.

Making it on the list is good news for the whole community, according to the institute.

"The characteristics that make up a great college destination often make a location ideal for business, retirement and tourism," Steven Cunningham, the institute's director of research and education, said in a news release.

To create the index, the institute evaluates data from a number of sources, including the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, to rank a community's academic and cultural environment, quality of life and employment opportunities.

"Students come to Duluth and fall in love with the area," said Andrea Schokker, University of Minnesota Duluth executive vice

chancellor for academic affairs. "We have a great job placement rate and many students who want to stay in Duluth are able to do so. For a town of our size, we have incredible cultural events and cutting-edge businesses. Students embrace the many outdoor activities and enjoy being in a town and campus that makes sustainability a priority."

The Duluth metropolitan statistical area, which includes all of St. Louis, Douglas and Carlton counties, was the only Minnesota location that made the top rankings for areas with populations between 250,000 and 1 million. Topping the list was



The Duluth-Superior area ranks 14th best in the nation among small metro areas for college students, according to nonprofit American Institute for Economic Research. File / News Tribune

Ann Arbor, Mich., in first and Madison in second.

Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington was ranked sixth among major metropolitan areas (those with populations more than 2.5 million).

The Fargo, N.D.-Moorhead, Minn., MSA was ranked 12th among college towns with fewer than 250,000 residents. The Grand Forks, N.D.-East Grand Forks, Minn., MSA was

ranked 17th.

Founded in 1933, the nonprofit American Institute for Economic Research conducts independent, scientific economic research. It began publishing the AIER College Destinations Index in 2008. Before that, the index was published by a regional planning organization in Wellesley, Mass., which had published the index since 2003.

Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Duluth can be next great urban hot spot

Is Duluth positioned as the next great urban hot spot? If not, we're certainly moving toward that, according to a panel of national experts on creating vibrant, wanna-live-there, gotta-work-there and gonna-have-fun-there cities.

The experts on urban design, transportation, housing, community planning and more first descended on Duluth in 2005. They focused on our eastern downtown, eastern hillside and waterfront, and they hosted what they called a "charrette." After its many meetings and workshops with, literally, hundreds of us, they made suggestions

— lots of suggestions — about how we could be more hip, artsy and creative; how our downtown and streetscape could be more welcoming and accessible, especially to pedestrians and others without cars; and how all of that could be a magnet for new businesses and residents.

The experts returned last fall to see how we were doing. Their report — "The Duluth Creative Corridor" — is scheduled for release this morning. And it's looking like we're going to be pleased.

"The team's conclusion was that the progress (has) been extraordinary and that

in (seven) years Duluth (has) accomplished what it would take many places two decades to achieve," the city's Jessica Tillman wrote to the media in announcing the report's release. "(This) will position Duluth to become one of the country's great urban spaces."

Responding to the experts' recommendations, Duluth, over the past seven years, has become a more walker-friendly, accessible, better-connected and more-vibrant place. We have small, manageable city blocks and other favorable features.

"And there's such a won-

derful historic fabric here. You feel like you're in a real place. ... You know you're in Duluth," one of the experts, Mary Newsom of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte Urban Institute, said in a meeting 13 months ago with the News Tribune Opinion page. "The city could be a national player. I think you've got it all."

She and other national experts see our potential, promise and progress. We can start seeing it, too, and embracing it and capitalizing on it. Together, we can build a more-vibrant, gotta-be-there future.

Those behind the report

The national experts: The national experts in transportation, housing and urban planning — who studied Duluth's waterfront and eastern downtown and hillside and who are offering the report today — are from the University of Miami School of Architecture and from a Knight Community Building Fellows team.

The local sponsors: The city of Duluth, Duluth Local Initiatives Support Corp. and the Greater Downtown Council.

Local funders: The planning process in large part was funded by the Community Opportunity Fund and the Knight Fund of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation; additional support came from Minnesota Power, the Duluth Economic Development Authority and Duluth LISC.