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Sioux City Economic Development Department

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Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which adversely affected global, national, and local economic activity, the Sioux City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has retained the top spot for populations under 200,000 in Site Selection magazine's annual economic development rankings.

After finishing third in 2018 and first in 2019, the Siouxland tri-state MSA held on to the top spot in its population category for January through December 2020 according to results released by Site Selection located in Peachtree Corners, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta.

Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, who was in Sioux City to announce the national award at a 9:00 AM press conference, was joined by Mike Wells, the President and CEO of Wells Enterprises in Le Mars, Iowa. Wells currently serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors of The Siouxland Initiative (TSI), a not-for-profit economic development organization focused on increasing and enhancing employment opportunities throughout the tri-state region.

Addressing a gathering of local business executives, community leaders, and elected officials at the brand new \$15 million Siouxland Expo Center in downtown Sioux City, Governor Reynolds stated, "This is welcome news and serves to confirm that, in spite of the challenges presented by the coronavirus, when it comes to economic development, communities throughout Iowa continue to be among the very best in the nation." Reynolds added, "I am thankful for the entrepreneurs and executives who have elected to grow their businesses in Iowa, and I am especially grateful for the jobs they have created and the capital they have invested in this particularly demanding year."

Site Selection's Managing Editor, Adam Bruns, who has journeyed to Siouxland to present this award on several occasions in the past but was unable to do so this year due to safety-based travel restrictions, released a statement which read, "I feel like I know Siouxland's economy like the back of my hand. So I know what a struggle this past year has been, especially for an area with such prominent food-processing employers. It must be gratifying to area leaders to see the metro area finish No. 1 among Tier 3 again. But this year's rankings carry extra good news, as Siouxland also ranks as the Tier-3 No. 1 when the numbers are examined on a per-capita basis. Truly outstanding results for a standout region."

In his first year of a two-year term as TSI's Chair, Wells reflected, "No one really knew what to expect from the first global pandemic in over a century, but it is reassuring to learn that despite enormous obstacles, our economy continued to perform well relative to similarly-sized communities throughout the United States." Wells went on to explain that he is acutely aware of and sensitive to the ongoing struggles faced by many businesses and individuals adding, "As a native of Siouxland, I am always proud of the way our community comes together in a crisis and that is certainly what we observed in the past year. TSI is indebted to the numerous local businesses that chose to expand right here in Siouxland, and we remain deeply appreciative of the many thousands of citizens who have focused on supporting our locally owned and operated businesses during the unprecedented difficulties brought about by COVID-19."

TSI President, Chris McGowan pointed out that the metro had qualifying projects in all three Siouxland states contributing to the fact that Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota currently have the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Highlighted by Sabre Industries' August announcement of a \$25 million expansion, which is projected to create 76 new jobs, the Sioux City metro had 17 qualifying projects in 2020. Said McGowan, "With leaders like Governor Reynolds and Mr. Wells, I have every confidence that the cooperation between the public and private sectors, which is essential to robust economic development, will continue for many years to come."

In addition to Sioux City's top ranking, the Council Bluffs-Omaha MSA also appeared in the "Top-Ten," finishing ninth in the tier-two category representing communities with populations between 200,000 and one million. While visiting western Iowa, Governor Reynolds, took a moment to call attention to several eastern Iowa communities which were listed in Site Selection's annual rankings. Citing the magazine's inclusion of Clinton, Dubuque, and Davenport, along with Sioux City and Council Bluffs, Governor Reynolds expressed, "Iowa's collective performance in economic development this past year, is a testament to the determination and productivity of the exceptional people of Iowa." In the "Mississippi River Corridor" rankings, Clinton ranked first and Dubuque finished second for the number of qualified economic development projects per capita based on the 18 months concluding December 31, 2020. That same analysis has Davenport joining those two eastern Iowa cities in the magazine's Top-Ten cumulative rankings, with Davenport finishing sixth, Dubuque seventh, and Clinton ninth among Mississippi River communities. The Governor expressed her belief that the Site Selection rankings corroborate Iowa's classification as the state, along with Utah, to have the lowest risk and highest resiliency in recovering from COVID-19.[\[1\]](#)

Each March, Site Selection magazine publishes its annual rankings. The publication specifies, "Qualifying projects are those meeting one or more of Site Selection's criteria for inclusion in the Conway Projects Database: a minimum investment of \$1 million, creation of 20 or more new jobs or 20,000 square feet or more of new space."

The 2020 ranking marks the ninth time since 2007 that the Sioux City metro has ranked first in the nation in its population category by Site Selection. The Sioux City MSA was also recognized as the top economic development community for populations under 200,000 in 2007, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019. The Siouxland metro ranked second in both 2009 and 2014 and finished third in 2006 and 2018. The metro region has ranked in the top three nationally in its population category a remarkable thirteen of the last fifteen years.

<http://siteselection.com/>

Photo (left to right): The Siouxland Initiative Board Chair & Wells Enterprises President & CEO Mike Wells, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Sioux City Economic & Community Development Director Marty Dougherty, City Manager Bob Padmore, Business Development Coordinator Renae Billings & Economic Development Specialist Chris Myres

[1] COVID-19: Fiscal Impact to States and Strategies for Recovery, A Report by the Council of State Governments <https://web.csg.org/covid19/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/07/fiscal-impact.pdf>