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## Gary rises in Best-Performing Cities index of 2012

**Rob Earnshaw, Times of Northwest Indiana Correspondent**

The city of Gary was one the biggest gainers in the [Milken Institute's](#) annual index of Best-Performing Cities of 2012.

The Best-Performing Cities index includes measures of job, wage and technology performance in ranking the nation's 200 large metropolitan areas and 179 smaller metros.

Gary was ranked No. 112, a leap of 83 slots from No. 195 in 2011.

The index does not use quality-of-life metrics, such as commute time or housing costs. In the Institute's index, employment growth is weighted most heavily due to its critical importance to community vitality. Wage and salary growth measures the quality of jobs created and sustained.

Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson said the improved ranking is consistent with a plan of action to increase the assessed valuation of the city, which is done by creating jobs and bringing in new businesses.

"While I think a lot of the increase came from the recovery we saw in the auto industry and as a consequence from the steel industry, it is still the direction we want to move in terms of our efforts to secure jobs for local residents," she said. "I think we will continue to see improvement because of growth at the airport, because of our efforts of other areas of economic development. We will also see improvement in terms of quality of life because I think those go hand-in-hand."

Jená Bellezza, marketing and community relations director for Gary-based Indiana Parenting Institute, said it's encouraging to have the word "growth" attached to the city, especially in the areas of jobs, wages and industry.

"I think it important for citizens to understand how growth works; how growth in one industry spurs growth in others," she said. "Add to that being made aware that primary growth is occurring in the areas of tech and manufacturing helps vocational education institutions like Ivy Tech know where to focus to prepare our residents to attract industry and jobs here to Gary."

Bellezza thinks the report brings hope to a struggling city.

"Struggle doesn't just happen when you're falling, but also when you're rising," she said. "It's called growing pains. This report lets Gary know that what we're currently experiencing is not the struggles of decline but the struggles of growth. We now have our proof – Gary is indeed on the comeback."

Bellezza said for an organization like Indiana Parenting Institute, such information helps them to better help the families they serve.

"We can help them re-direct and get more effectively focused on their path to success, and thus become a beneficiary of this good news," she said.

The leader of the index was San Jose, "the capital of Silicon Valley." Indiana communities include Fort Wayne at No. 59, a vault from No. 127, and Indianapolis-Carmel at No. 51, up from No. 121.

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