

Buford named one of the best cities to call home

By [Rick Badie](#) | Thursday, April 3, 2008, 10:49 AM

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

He learned about the honor in an e-mail from City Hall.

"I was thrown back," said Tim Koenning, president of the Buford Business Alliance. "It still hasn't sunk in yet."

The word is out about Buford, thanks to CNNMoney.com, a service provided by CNN, Money and Fortune magazines. The north Gwinnett town was named the third-best U.S. city to live in and launch a business. The March 26 online profile praised the community of 13,576 for its affordable housing (median home price of \$195,493), scenic environment (Lake Lanier) and business acumen.

What makes the ranking so sweet is how it came about. Civic leaders and town officials had no idea the town was even in the running. No one contacted Koenning, and he didn't seek the publicity, though the article praised the nonprofit alliance for its work in the community.

The unsolicited ranking fell like sugar from the sky. Bufordites I came across Wednesday on the Badie Tour bask in the sweetness. Truth be told, some are a little perplexed, too.

If CNN knows how great the town's business and leisure mix is, why do so many people right in its backyard appear clueless?

"It's amazing how so few people know about this," said Petra Hope, co-owner of Sperata, an upscale restaurant in historic downtown where Koenning and I ate lunch.

Soon, more people will. The business alliance, in conjunction with City Hall, has produced a TV commercial that will soon debut on the local cable channel. The ad shows various scenes in the "Leather City" as a narrator encourages viewers to "live, work and play — the Buford way."

Long term, Koenning envisions Buford creating signature events that help define the town as a destination. Think the Duluth Fall Festival. Buford has held some events that have proved attractive, but it lacks a venue that can hold masses of people.

"Right now with our amphitheater, we'd be lucky to hold 1,000 people at a time," said Koenning, a history buff and managing partner with Magnolia Financial Advisors in downtown Buford. "There are discussions about doing something with the greenery across from City Hall. The vision is definitely here. [City Hall] has embraced the alliance as a marketing arm, and the alliance's vision is to bring the civic groups, schools and businesses together as a community. It's not just to network, even though the alliance gives businesses the opportunity to do that."

Despite lack of an ample venue, the town makes do.

An arts and jazz festival, set for May 10, will take place in front of the Bona Allen Mansion. (The mansion, built in 1912-13, was the home of Bona Allen Sr., a leather and tannery magnate). The work of artists associated with the artists' colony in Tannery Row will be on display during the festival. Local high school jazz bands will perform during the day, then turn the stage over to "professionals" at night.

It's too early to say how, but Koenning says the town will capitalize on the national exposure granted by the CNNMoney.com ranking.

"I don't know how they found us, but I'm thankful for it," he said. "People are excited. "We're proud Bufordites."

For more information, visit www.visitbuford.com.

Rick Badie's column appears on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Contact him at 770-263-3875 or e-mail: rbadie@ajc.com.