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Publicity 'like a shot in the arm' for Cape Coral

Written by Thomas Stewart

City leaders are hoping the recent Forbes magazine ranking of Cape Coral as one of the top 25 places to retire in 2012 will bring with it an infusion of outside money.

"It gives us some very good publicity," said Mayor John Sullivan. "It should help bring in more residents."

Those potential residents would be spending pensions and Social Security checks, he said, all of which equal new revenue for area businesses. "It's like a shot in the arm for the economy," he said.

The magazine's annual ranking noted the city's vast canal system, sunny weather, lack of state income tax, low cost of living and average home price of \$108,000. The only con listed was the poor economy.

"It's pretty, it's sunshiney, you don't have to shovel anything, you can go for months without air conditioning or heating your home" boasted Councilwoman Rana Erbrick. "It's an easy, laid-back lifestyle."

As for those who might say the city shouldn't actively court a reputation as a retirement community — especially after snagging a similar spot last year in CNN

Money's list of the top 25 places to retire — Erbrick said today's retirees don't play to the stereotype.

"It's much more likely in today's world that a retiree is just not going to be ...sitting on a porch in a rocking chair," she said. "They're going to be out there boating and fishing and traveling and gardening and all those other things."

Many are also looking to start a second career in a new city, she added. Dana Brunett, the city's economic development director, said rankings such as the Forbes list are nothing but good news for the city and only make his job easier.

He said the position will be touted in city

newsletters, publications and in talks with developers and potential residents.

"I find that the last thing (people) read about Cape Coral, that's what's in their mind, so anything positive is important," Brunett said.

And although the city can shout all it wants about how great it is, there's nothing quite like an independent source to verify the claims, he said.

David Bruns, an AARP Florida spokesman, said the stakes in the effort to lure retirees are high.

Baby boomers — 78 million strong — are retiring at a rate of 10,000 a day, he said. Of those, about 1 in every 5 will relocate when they retire.

"That still means that close to 20 million are going to be moving," he said. "Well, stories like this help determine where they're going to move."

But while Florida has always had a reputation for attracting flocks of retirees, it has been slipping in recent years.

"Florida used to get — back in the '70s, '80s and '90s — we used to get 50 percent, half of all the retirees who relocated to somewhere in America," he said. "Now we're No. 5 behind North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Arizona."

As a result, the AARP has been lobbying for a state agency in charge of marketing the state to boomers.

In the meantime, Councilman Marty McClain said the city's only downside, according to Forbes, is already on the mend.

Recent data show the city's housing market increased in value by an estimated 3.5 percent last year and building permits are picking up as well. "A bad economy can be fixed," McClain pointed out. "Bad weather can't."