



**+ MIDDLETON, WIS.**  
 The Maynes on their front porch in Middleton Hills. The town pool is a big attraction in the summer. Lakeview Park is one of the many green spaces throughout the town.

Money | 2007

BEST PLACE TO LIVE

# BEST PLACES TO LIVE

SOME TOWNS HAVE EVERYTHING ANY FAMILY COULD WANT

BY KATE ASHFORD, ASA FITCH, STEPHEN GANDEL, JOSH HYATT, SARAH MAX, JENNIFER MERRITT AND DONNA ROSATO

**W**HEN YOU'RE YOUNG, the big city is a great place to be. There comes a point, though, when you're ready to trade night life for shade trees, sushi for pizza and roommates for children.

It's time to find the place where you'll spend the better part of your adult life—raising your kids, climbing the career ladder and building your family's future. For most folks who have the option, that means a place that's smaller, safer and greener.

But there's a big difference between a gated McMansion subdivision and a town where you can put down roots and participate in a community that has a broader list of concerns than the height of the hedges. The latter are the kinds of places MONEY looks for in naming America's Best Places to Live. This year we focused on smaller places, between 7,500 and 50,000 in population, that offered the best combination of economic opportunity, good schools, safe streets, things to do and a real sense of community.

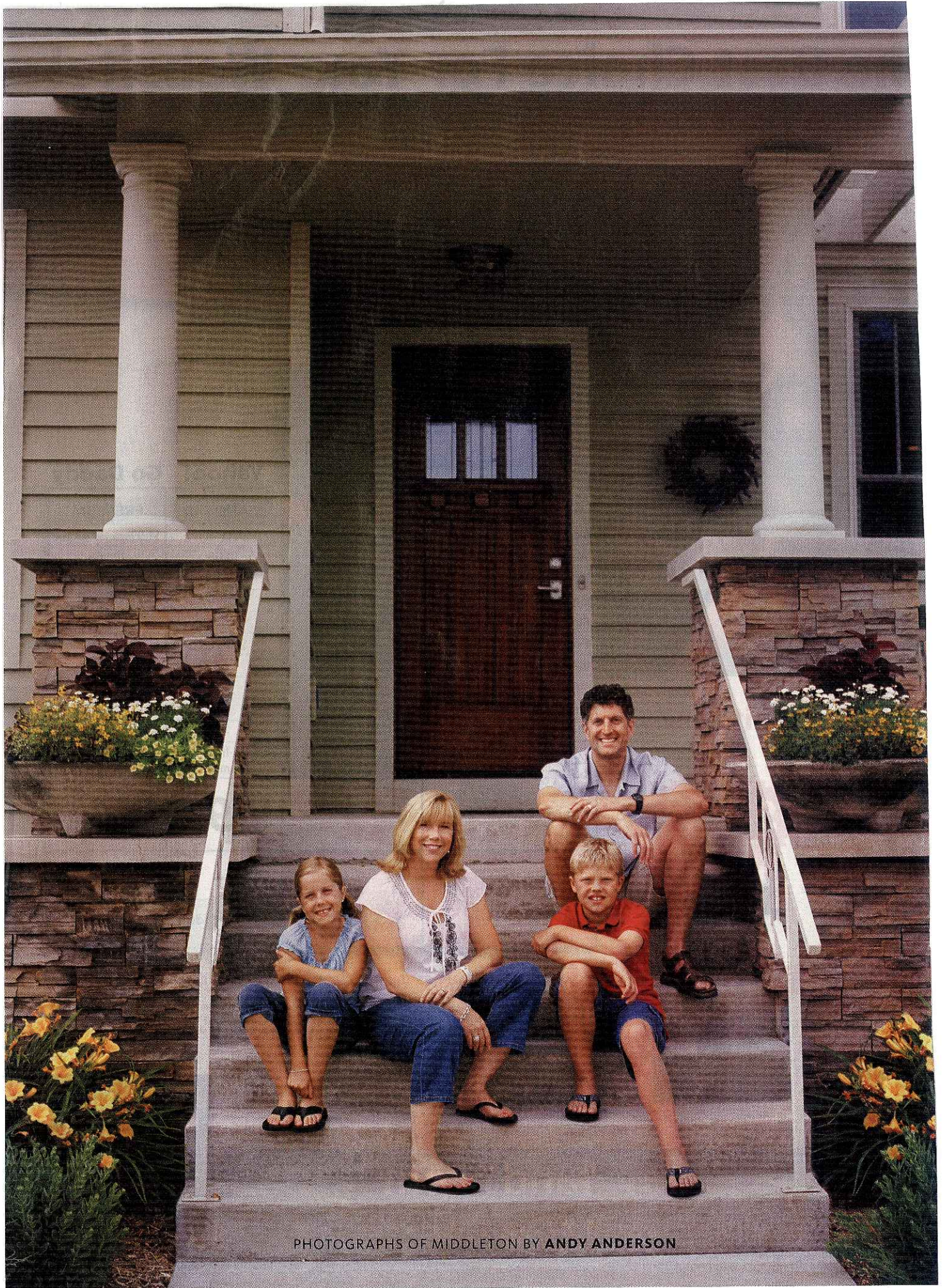
We made a few tweaks to our methodology (for a detailed explanation, see page 89), adding a ranking for ethnic and racial diversity and—with the cost of housing an issue for so many families—paying extra attention to home prices and property taxes. That meant a few expensive locales that have been on past lists slid in the rankings, while some more affordable places moved up. And the winner is... >>>

**IN THIS ISSUE**

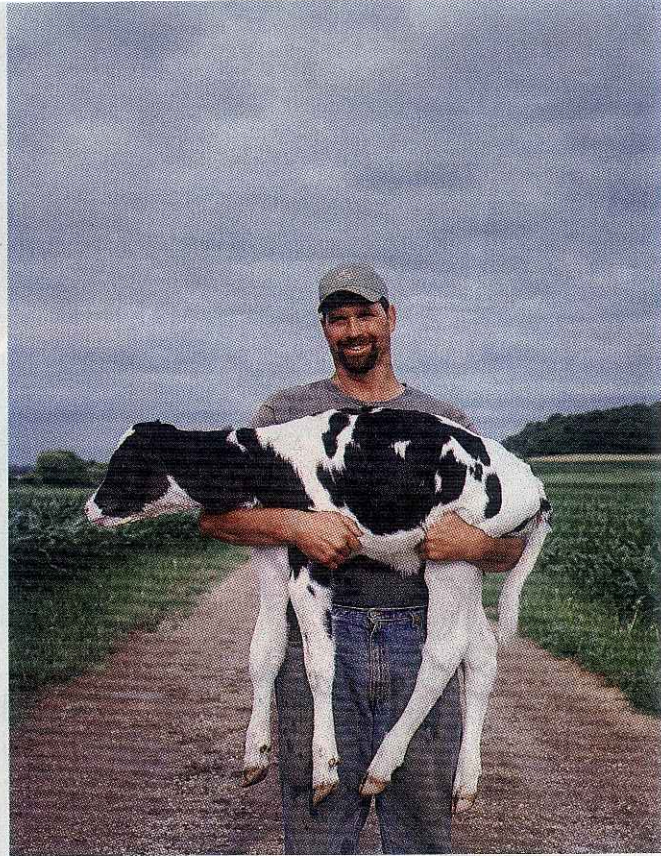
- 90** The Top 100 Small Towns
- 97** 20 Years of Best Places
- 104** Where We'll Live Tomorrow

**ON CNNMONEY.COM**

- Stats** The numbers for 3,500-plus places
- Video** An up-close look at the winners
- iReport** Send us photos or video of your town.
- Poll** Cast your vote for the best big city in America.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF MIDDLETON BY **ANDY ANDERSON**



1

**Middleton, Wis.**

POPULATION: 17,400 | TYPICAL SINGLE-FAMILY HOME: \$325,000  
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES: \$6,200

- ↑ PROS: Small-town charm; booming economy; extensive parks and bike trails
- ↓ CONS: Do you like winter?



**Troy and Sally Mayne**

...liked Madison just fine, but they were looking for something more—a tight-knit community where their two children could play with friends, go to school and bike to their heart's content. They found what they wanted seven miles away, in Middleton, this year's No. 1 spot. The Maynes bought a home in Middleton Hills, a nationally recognized "new urban" development with large swaths of open space and close proximity to the 520-acre Pheasant Branch Conservancy. Five years on, they feel they have the best of both worlds. They benefit from the economic and cultural advantages that come with Madison's status as home to the University of Wisconsin and as state capital. But the pace of life in Middleton is a little slower, the people friendlier. "In Madison you weren't tied in with the fabric of your community," says Troy, 43, a real estate attorney. "It's just the opposite here."

Many Middletonians, like the Maynes, commute to Madison, where Sally is a government lawyer. But Middleton proper has a strong pool of jobs too, mainly in the pharmaceutical, tech and medical industries. Dollmaker American Girl is one of the town's largest

employers, and more outsiders commute to Middleton than residents leave for Madison.

After business hours Middleton has more going on than you might expect for a town of 17,000. The beer garden at the Capital Brewery is host to corporate mixers, and there are good restaurants downtown. But make no mistake: Family life is what Middleton is about. In the summer you'll see parents and kids plying the bike trails of the conservancy, splashing in the town's water-slide-equipped pool or sailing on Lake Mendota.

On the downside, winter is tough, and there's not great ethnic diversity. But for Bronx natives Mary and Carmelo Saez, who settled here in 2005 after a long search for a safer community with better schools than they could find close to home, the positives easily outweigh the negatives. First, there's bang for the buck. "There are houses here that you can afford comfortably,"

**+ GREEN ACRES**  
Since leaving the Bronx, the Saez family has taken up fishing; Reggie Ziegler at his dairy farm just outside town; Shannon Osterholz behind the bar at the Capital Brewery.

says Mary, 35, who works in the district office of the elementary school her girls attend. Second, there's a sense of tranquility they've longed for. "Out here it's more relaxed," says Carmelo, 37, who teaches adult education in Madison. "People are really comfortable around one another."

