

# Michigan Town One of the Happiest Places in the U.S.

Holland, Mich., Ranks 2nd on Well-Being Index, Topping Honolulu

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Feb. 17, 2010—

When you think of happy places in America, a few names always top the list: [Boulder, Colo.](#) is known for its fresh mountain air and its healthy outdoor lifestyle.

Honolulu, with its lush tropical locale, is another city that needs no explanation for why its residents are so happy.

Both of these places ranked high on the [2009 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index](#), released by the Gallup Group. Boulder topped the list, while [Honolulu](#) came in third.

But coming in a surprising second between these two shoe-in cities is Holland, Michigan -- a city on the blistering cold outposts of one of the poorest states in the union.

"If a small community located in the state with the worst economy can feel good about itself, seems to me we've got hope in the country," Mayor Kurt Dykstra said.

The rankings were based on more than 353,000 interviews with Americans who were asked questions about all aspects of their lives including their physical and emotional well-being, healthy behaviors, work environment, and community.

## 'City of Churches'

Arrive in town and ask the 35,000 residents why they're so happy and [religion](#) is the first answer.

"Our churches have a lot of good, caring folks in them that are like family to us," Mary van Heuvelen, a Holland resident, said.

Known as the "City of Churches," Holland has 170 places of worship and even a college named Hope. The churches form an informal network that gets practical help to people who can use a helping hand.

"If you need gas for the week I've heard of several churches that will give you gas cards and help you through," Charles Bullock, who is unemployed, said.

Radio host, Juke Van Oss, added, "If people are out of work we try to help them in some way -- if they are our neighbors we try to steer something their way.

## Culture of Giving

The town is also very proud of its generous [philanthropy](#).

Despite its 16 percent [unemployment rate](#), Holland has over 100 volunteer-based service organizations fanned out through the city. This is an extraordinary number for such a small town, according to Linda Jacobs, executive director of Good Samaritan Ministries.

Holland along with a few other nearby towns in Western Michigan were recently named the second most generous region in the country by the [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#), right after Salt Lake City, Utah.

## **Community Spirit**

A strong sense of community is another reason why people here continue to smile.

"There's a great community spirit. And at the end of the day, people are very optimistic that Holland, as a community, will survive and thrive," Dykstra said.

That sentiment is echoed by Cheryl Koeman, who owns the Good Earth Café with her husband.

"My husband and I traveled a fair amount around the country, and Holland has something that we very rarely find in other places in the country. It's a sense of community, a sense of acceptance -- making people feel like they are special," she said.

## **The Norman Rockwell Life**

Think of Holland as a real city still living in a Norman Rockwell version of a small town.

Residents here know that solutions to problems are not found in the maze of ideas that come out of Washington, but from the rewards that come from caring about their neighbors.

The Dutch, who founded this city 163 years ago, have a word for this -- gezellig -- which translate to 'close-knit community.'

**Read more about the [Well-Being Index](#)**

## **Top Ten Healthiest, Happiest Places in America**

- 1) Boulder, Colo.
- 2) Holland-Grand Haven, Mich.
- 3) Honolulu
- 4) Provo-Orem, Utah
- 5) Santa Rosa-Petaluma, Calif.
- 6) Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-Goleta, Calif.
- 7) San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, Calif.
- 8) Washington, D.C.- Arlington, Va.- Alexandria, Va.
- 9) Ogden-Clearfield, Utah
- 10) Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura, Calif.

[Find out where your city ranks.](#)

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