

New Jersey
MONTHLY

BEST PLACES TO LIVE 2011

FOR MOST OF US, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME. Then again, the market for homes is not what it used to be. Falling home prices, rising taxes and the financial pressures facing most towns have reshaped the nation's real estate landscape.

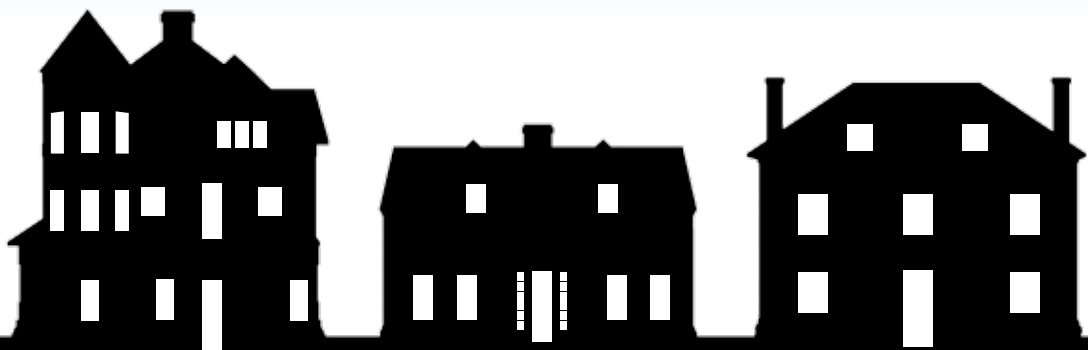
Of course, some towns are more susceptible than others to the latest shift. Our 2011 list of New Jersey's Top Towns reflects that reality—with the state's most affluent towns dominating the rankings. What's more, the top-ranked towns in our list are generally in northern counties such as Bergen, Morris and Somerset, where much of the state's wealth is concentrated. Conversely, the rural and southern counties—hard hit by job losses and foreclosures—fare poorly.

Michael Greenberg, a professor at the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, who served as an advisor for this year's rankings, says the results “correspond

closely to the distribution of wealth to the advantaged and less advantaged—and the resources and services that go along with that.”

On the pages that follow, you'll find this year's Top 100 Towns (a full list of 513 ranked towns is available at njmonthly.com), as well as breakout lists sorted by region, population and factors such as home prices and taxes.

This year's survey was conducted by Leflein Associates, a Ringwood-based research company; the methodology appears on page 53. Note that we have made some methodology changes that significantly affect the results. Several factors have been dropped since the 2010 rankings (population change; open space; joblessness), and we no longer rank towns with populations below 1,500, since it is difficult to get statistically significant data on small municipalities. ■



Top Town: South

CHESTERFIELD

Population: 7,699

County: Burlington

Overall rank: 47

If you were dropped into the middle of Chesterfield, you'd probably think you were somewhere in the Midwest. The town is a testament to minimalism: Just one stoplight, no gas stations, a neighborhood tavern and an Italian restaurant called Coltello's. That's about it.

Then there's farming.

Whether it's horses, vegetables, flowers or grains, Chesterfield prides itself on its farms. These spreads are the source of income for many families here, and the township has permanently preserved more than 4,000 acres of farmland (and counting) under different local, county and state programs.

"It's a nice little community we've got here," says Mayor Larry Durr, a former grain farmer. "The people who live here appreciate the importance of our agriculture and what it adds to our community."

Durr says the town's population swelled by about 50 percent during the last decade. Evidence can be seen in a new elementary school along with a newly designed "village" neighborhood modeled after the town's older Revolutionary War-era hamlets.

"It's cozy," says Durr. "We may be in flux, but we know where we come from."

—NICK DIULIO

TOP 10 SOUTH

Overall Rank	Municipality
47	CHESTERFIELD
73	MOORESTOWN
108	POINT PLEASANT
111	NEW HANOVER
115	HADDON HEIGHTS
116	HADDONFIELD
117	SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP
118	MEDFORD LAKES
119	HAINESPORT
123	JACKSON

METHODOLOGY: In compiling *New Jersey Monthly's* 2011 Top Towns list, researchers at Leflein Associates, an independent research firm based in Ringwood, considered five categories to represent the quality of life in New Jersey's 566 municipalities: home values, property taxes, crime rate, school performance and a lifestyle factor (explained below).

Due to a lack of statistically significant data, towns with a population of under 1,500 were dropped from the survey. The research team ranked each of the remaining towns based on the following indicators: change in median property tax bill (2007-2010) combined with effective property tax rate for 2010; change in median home sales price (2007-2010); total crime rate (2009) combined with violent crime rate (2009); student proficiency on state-mandated standardized tests for students in grades 4, 8 and 11 (2010); and a lifestyle factor that considers the number of acute-care hospitals, live performing-arts theaters and full-service restaurants within 10 miles of the municipality's main zip code, and average commute time for those working out of home. The final rankings are based on each municipality's combined rankings for all five indicators.

The following sources were used: NJ State Data Center (for population figures); NJ Division of Taxation (for property taxes); NJ Division of Taxation/Office of Property Administration (for home sales prices); NJ Division of State Police (Uniform Crime Report); NJ Department of Education (School Report Card); NJ Department of Health (hospital locations); NJ Council for the Arts and NJ Theater Alliance (theater locations); *New Jersey Monthly* Dining Database (restaurant locations); and the U.S. Census/American Community Survey (commute times). The annual crime rate and violent crime rate are based on reported crimes per 1,000 residents.