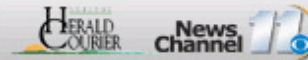




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## Bristol Virginia dubbed a good place for youth

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By Brent Carney  
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David Crigger/Bristol Herald Courier  
From left, Adair Fuller, Nicholas Ratliff and Bethany Derden wait to speak during a press conference announcing Bristol VA being listed in the 100 Best Communities for Young People in 2008.

BRISTOL, Va. – Bristol's motto is "A Good Place to Live," and for kids and teenagers growing up here, "good" is an understatement, according to the nation's largest youth alliance.

America's Promise selected Bristol Virginia as a 2008 winner of the 100 Best Communities for Young People award.

Bristol Tennessee made the same list last year, so this "gives us a chance to celebrate together," Bristol Tennessee City Councilwoman Margaret Feierabend said.

More than 300 cities applied for the award, which recognizes excellence in providing the best environment for young people. Bristol was one of six winning cities in Virginia and is eligible for up to \$300,000 in grant money for support of youth programs and services.

A list of the winners was broadcast nationally Thursday morning on NBC's Today show.

Later in the morning, Bristol Virginia Mayor James Rector along with leaders from Bristol Youth Services and several students from city schools gathered at the Bristol Public Library to announce the award locally.

City officials agreed the success of their family and pregnancy counseling programs, along with a wide variety of activities designed for children and teens, led to the honor.

Several essays by students involved in the city's youth programs were included in the application for the award.

Speaking at the library Thursday, teens who wrote the essays agreed they didn't realize how many opportunities were available to people their age here until they began listing them.

"It's good that Bristol offers stuff for kids to learn future skills and to lend a helping hand," said Nicholas Ratliff, a junior at Virginia High School. "I'm really just thankful to live in a place that supports my ambitions and what I have to say."

Ratliff is a member of the city's youth council, a group that meets regularly with civic leaders.

In all, more than half the community's students take part in some sort of after-school program, with 18 percent participating at least five times per week, according to Bristol Youth Services.

The investment the city has made in its young people has started to payoff, said Jo Hutton, the director of Bristol Youth Services.

Whereas teenagers used to look for the first one-way ticket out of town, more and more teens have expressed to Hutton an interest in eventually living downtown or starting a local business.

"What I've seen in the last five or six years is young people may leave and go to college but they plan on coming back," she said.

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