

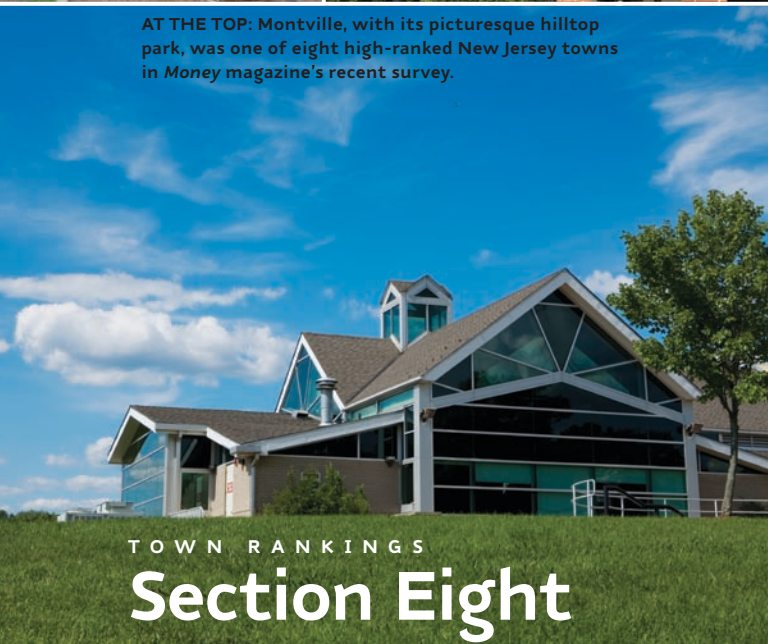
garden variety

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AT THE TOP: Montville, with its picturesque hilltop park, was one of eight high-ranked New Jersey towns in *Money* magazine's recent survey.



TOWN RANKINGS

Section Eight

By Jennifer L. Nelson

HOW'S THIS FOR A SLOGAN? "NEW JERSEY AND MONEY MAGAZINE—Perfect Together." In *Money*'s "Best Places to Live" issue, the Garden State placed eight municipalities in the Top 100, up from four in 2005 and five in 2006. Middleton, Wisconsin, snatched the number-one spot, and only California, with nine, had more top-rated cities or towns.

Moorestown, which topped the 2005 list, dropped to 78th this time around. Montville earned the highest Jersey ranking with a thirteenth-place finish, which may be explained by the focus of this year's Top 100: small towns with fewer than 50,000 residents, offering, among other things, "a real sense of community." Montville attractions include a hilltop park with a playground, AstroTurf soccer field, and community center.

"It's a true bedroom community; there's not a lot of retail or commercial industry," says longtime resident Richard Kurland.

Moorestown mayor Kevin E. Aberant, noting that the magazine

TOWN ROLL CALL

MONTVILLE (13): Population 22,100. Median home price \$581,073. Why on the list: scenic hilltop park.

HILLSBOROUGH (23): Population 41,100. Median home price \$375,000. Why on the list: nearly half open space or farmland.

RIVER VALE (29): Population 9,500. Median home price \$657,126. Why on the list: 8,000 acres of parkland and open space.

MARLBORO (33): Population 38,500. Median home price \$557,186. Why on the list: outdoor concerts, recreation programs.

BERKELEY HEIGHTS (45): Population 14,000. Median home price \$590,762. Why on the list: Downtown shopping and dining.

SAYREVILLE (47): Population 45,200. Median home price \$363,349. Why on the list: marina view, skateboard park.

READINGTON (58): Population 19,000. Median home price \$484,525. Why on the list: scenic vistas, forestland.

MOORESTOWN (78): Population 20,700. Median home price \$532,828. Why on the list: Victorian homes, good schools.

bases its choices on different criteria each year, says the South Jersey hamlet's plummet this year doesn't faze him. In fact, he says, "I'm sure residents here would still say that Moorestown is the best place to live."

One Sayreville bigwig claims that he's actually relieved his town didn't finish higher than 47th.

"The residents know what they have, like what have, and want to keep what they have," Mayor Kennedy O'Brien says. "Everyone's looking for a nice place to live, and we're not looking for people to move here."

David A. Cohen, mayor of 45th-ranked Berkeley Heights, is poised for the next go-round. "We'll be number one next year," he predicts. "We're taking you down, Wisconsin!"

PHOTOS: THOMAS MEDVEDICH