



Solon

It's lunchtime in Solon, this year's top-ranked suburb and one of only three that have now earned that top spot consecutively. The Solon Community Park is filled — more so than many restaurants serving lunch to business crowds. Under the shade of trees, moms are trying to keep their children's hands clean enough to finish a sandwich and piece of fruit.

Aarti Marwah watches one of her two daughters mingle with the other kids. About 50 parents are here, and most have at least two kids in tow. Marwah says she moved here in part because of schools ("When my kids go to a good school, it makes me feel good, like I'm investing in our future") and in part because of the low crime rate ("We feel safe here, in our neighborhood and everywhere in Solon. We always see police around").

And that's to be expected in a suburb ranked as well as Solon. After all, that's part of the formula we use. Dig deeper, though, and you'll see things that go beyond the numbers on the following pages. This is more than a city. It's truly a community.

Carol Olszewski, 29, has two children. She moved here because of the Solon Early Childhood PTA. The group accepts even expecting mothers. That, she says, shows the commitment to children here. Between the park, the library's wealth of programs, the No. 2 ranked school system and the recreation center, it's no wonder you see so many young parents around.

Step back from the park, though, and you'll see more reasons why Solon is what it is.

Emily Johnson, 32, moved here from South Euclid. "Solon is a place where you see people walking, cycling and jogging. Mothers here buy jogging strollers."

Her point was evidenced on the south side of town, where a woman plodded toward Twinsburg (our No. 5 'burb) with a dalmatian panting behind her, and three more spaced behind, including a man with a stroller.

Solon is easy to get around, with more than half its streets lined with sidewalks. Several big roads also contain bike lanes. An RTA Park-and-Ride is in town as well.

The city has fitness on its mind, evidenced by the partnership it has with Medical Mutual of Ohio to provide the Healthy Solon initiative, which sponsors events and talks and gives free health screenings.

Solon boasts three golf courses in its city limits — Hawthorne Valley Country Club, Grantwood Golf Course and Signature of Solon — with a combined par 213.

The city passes the grocery store test, too. Anyone who has lived in Solon for a while will likely run into someone else they know at the supermarket.

This community of 22,257 isn't content to just maintain itself, though. The city has a vision for remaking its sprawling center of town. The Coral Co. has submitted a plan to tear down a traditional strip mall to remake the area. Voters may have a chance to decide in November whether they want to re-zone the center of town to allow the project to move forward.

The proposal, a so-called "lifestyle center" connected to the street grid, will, if executed properly, function more as a part of the town than as a separate boutique shopping center.

It would include condominiums, apartments, 100,000 square feet of restaurant space, 800,000 square feet of retail shopping, 1 million square feet of office space, a 200-room hotel and 11 acres of park space, adding to the 1,115 acres of parks already in the city.

Leif Erik Havnen, a 36-year-old who spends three days a week as a stay-at-home dad and two days as an entrepreneur, says he's excited about the proposal, because it would give Solon the only thing he feels is missing: a touch of urbanity. "Large towns in Norway have more of a downtown," he says. "I'd like to see something like that instead of strip malls."

Sound worthy of our highest suburban honor? Well, come join them, Olszewski says. "There were only six houses to choose from when I was looking," she says. "Now there are a lot more."

Far be it from her to tarnish the city's welcoming reputation.



POPULATION 22,257 SQUARE MILES 20.5
SCHOOL DISTRICT Solon City Schools
PERCENTAGE PARK LAND 8.5%

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- SAFETY (lock icon)
- EDUCATION (books icon)
- HOUSING (house icon)
- TAXES (dollar sign icon)
- ENVIRONMENT (tree icon)
- SERVICES (shopping cart icon)
- WALKABILITY (person walking icon)
- DEMOGRAPHICS (two people icon)

COLOR KEY

- Cuyahoga (yellow)
- Geauga (purple)
- Lake (blue)
- Lorain (light blue)
- Medina (red)
- Portage (orange)
- Summit (green)