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Southeastern North Carolina ranks among top metropolitan, micropolitan areas for economic strength

ELIZABETHTOWN, N.C. – Several areas within North Carolina's Southeast's footprint appeared on lists of metropolitan and micropolitan areas that have shown "rapid, consistent growth in both size and quality for an extended period."

"It comes as no surprise to us at North Carolina's Southeast that so many of our localities are known to have thriving economies," said NCSE president Steve Yost. "It just goes to show that our counties are prime locations for businesses of any industry that want to grow."

The lists were compiled by POLITICOM, a Florida-based economics research firm that specializes in analyzing the dynamics of local and state economies. You can read more about their [rankings and methodology online](#).

The Pinehurst-Southern Pines micropolitan area in Moore County ranked at the top of the list for micropolitan areas in North Carolina with great economic strength. A micropolitan area is classified as an urbanized area of at least 10,000 population but less than 50,000 population.

Moore County has a population of more than 103,000 residents, showing steady growth since 2014 when the population was just over 91,000. On average, a majority of the population has an associate's degree or higher. The county's top industry is health care and social services with a total of 13,930 jobs in the field.

"Moore County's rankings over the past 5 years affirm that our economy has been consistently strong and resilient which has helped position our community to more evenly weather the effects of negative economic events like the pandemic and recessions," said Natalie Hawkins, Executive Director of Moore County Partners in Progress. "And I think we can all agree that given the increasing amount of new residential and commercial development we are seeing right now, it's pretty evident that Moore County's economy is not only strong and resilient, but it is also definitely growing."

Other areas that made the list of micropolitan areas showing economic strength include Kinston in Lenoir County, standing at 13th in North Carolina; Lumberton in Robeson County, standing at 16th in North Carolina; Rockingham in Richmond County, standing at 19th in North Carolina; and Laurinburg in Scotland County, standing at 21st in North Carolina.

As for metropolitan areas, Wilmington in New Hanover County ranked number four in North Carolina in terms of economic strength. A metropolitan area is classified as having at least one urbanized area with a population of 50,000 or more, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration into the core community.

New Hanover County has a population of over 232,000 residents with an average age of 39 years old. Its unemployment rate is below the national average with 129,000 people in the workforce. The county's largest industry is health care and social services with 16,000 jobs.

Other areas within North Carolina that made the metropolitan list include Jacksonville in Onslow county, standing at 10th place; Fayetteville in Cumberland County, standing at 12th; New Bern in Craven County, standing at 14th place; and Goldsboro in Wayne County, standing at 16th place.

You can visit North Carolina's Southeast's website to [learn more about each county](#).

North Carolina overall ranked as the second most improved state in terms of economic strength. The state had 14 more metropolitan areas make the list compared to 2019, bringing the total to 17 metropolitan areas. North Carolina also had 19 more areas make the list of micropolitan areas, jumping to a total of 22.

A public-private partnership headquartered in Elizabethtown, N.C., North Carolina's Southeast's mission is to provide strong economic development leadership in southeastern North Carolina through innovative marketing and collaborative regional initiatives that will support the creation of new jobs, generate capital investment and secure new business locations. Member counties include Anson, Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Duplin, Hoke, Jones, Lenoir, Montgomery, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland and Wayne. For additional information, visit www.ncse.org