

10

BEST TOWNS

Reprinted from the August 2011 issue of
FamilyCircle
www.familycircle.com

for Families

After searching the country for perfect places to call home, we chose these communities because of their top-notch schools, affordable housing, green space and giving spirit.

By Seema Nayyar

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER OUMANSKI

1 ST. CHARLES, ILLINOIS

Chicago residents Mike and Monica Corbett were diehard urbanites. But after visiting St. Charles on a weekend golfing trip, the couple was so smitten they decided to trade the Windy City for this town, 40 miles west. It was the right choice. "We have twice the living space plus an acre of property," says Monica, 47, a music teacher. "And we can walk downtown and take in great culture and restaurants." Along with their four children—Morgan, 17, Palmer, 14, Tommy, 11, and Hadley, 8—the Corbets spend much of their time outdoors at Pottawatomie Park, which has panoramic views of the Fox River. Education is first-rate: Last year North High became the third school in the district to earn a U.S. Department of Education National Blue Ribbon award. But Monica and Mike, 45, a finance manager, are even more impressed with St. Charles' community spirit. "I'll never forget the time a police officer rewarded kids who wore bike helmets with free coupons for ice cream, or when our neighbor offered to lend us his car while he was away for the winter," says Monica. "This place is a little slice of heaven."

GOOD DEEDS ♥ Every September St. Charles' high school drill teams begin fundraising for the American Cancer Society and a local health center; the campaign, which netted an impressive \$74,000 last year, culminates in October at the homecoming football game, where people line up across the field and do 100 kicks.

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Population **33,015**
Median Income **\$84,881**
Median Home Price **\$221,000**
Households with Kids **37%**
Student/Teacher Ratio **17:1**
Great Schools Rating **9**

HOW WE CHOSE

With the help of Onboard Informatics, a New York City research firm that provides real estate, demographic and other data, *Family Circle* initially assembled a list of 2,500 cities and towns with populations between 15,000 and 150,000. We narrowed that down to nearly 1,000 localities, all of which had a high concentration of households with median incomes between \$55,000 and \$95,000. We then assessed which places best meet our family-friendly criteria—including affordable homes, quality schools, access to health care, green space, low crime rate and financial stability—and ranked them from top to bottom. *Family Circle* selected the 10 winners from among the highest-rated towns.