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Huntington Beach Rated 'America's Safest City'

Designation: Kansas publisher ranks large U.S. municipalities based on recently released FBI crime statistics for 1993. Santa Ana places 29th.

ALAN EYERLY
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Huntington Beach, known for its surfing beaches and its laid-back lifestyle, was named "America's Safest City" Thursday by a Kansas-based publisher using FBI crime statistics.

Two other California cities placed at the top of the list—Glendale was rated second and Fremont, in the San Francisco Bay Area, was ranked third. Santa Ana, the other Orange County city included in the rankings, placed 29th. Atlanta was named as the least safe of the 93 cities surveyed.

Morgan Quitno Press, publisher of "City Crime Rankings," based its findings on statistics released last month by the

Crime Rankings

Huntington Beach rates as the safest of the nation's largest cities, according to a new reference book. The cities' rankings reflect the crime rate, with the lowest rank possible being a 1.00 if a city had the lowest rate in each of six categories. Here are the five safest cities and the five least safe:

SAFEST CITIES		LEAST SAFE CITIES	
City	Rating	City	Rating
Huntington Beach	5.50	Atlanta	90.50
Glendale, Calif.	6.00	St. Louis	85.00
Fremont, Calif.	6.50	Newark, N.J.	84.33
Honolulu	7.67	Little Rock, Ark.	82.83
Virginia Beach, Va.	7.67	Kansas City, Mo.	82.00

Source: "City Crime Rankings," Morgan Quitno Press, Lawrence, Kan.

Los Angeles Times

FBI. The new reference guide compares large American cities in terms of overall rates of violent crime. It also looks specifically at rates of murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault, robbery and property

crime.

The findings contrast with a survey released last spring by Money magazine that rated Irvine as the nation's safest large city in terms of violent crime.

An FBI study released around the same time last year ranked Irvine as the seventh-safest U.S. city, with a crime rate of 39.9 crimes per 1,000 residents. Huntington Beach was ranked below Irvine, with a crime rate of 48.6 per 1,000 inhabitants.

The fact that California cities swept the top three places in the Morgan Quitno survey came as a surprise to Scott Morgan, president of the publishing firm.

"Across the board, Huntington Beach did well—that's why it ended up on top," Morgan said. "We didn't exactly think it was going to be California towns one, two, three. You think of California as a great place, but a little wild."

Morgan Quitno's 300-page reference guide, which will sell for \$19.95 at bookstores, is a new addition for the Lawrence, Kan., firm. The company publishes three other annual statistical guides commonly found in public libraries: "Crime State Rankings," "Health Care State Rankings" and "State Rankings."

Huntington Beach's No. 1 ranking was good news for city officials, who have been

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Pringle Gets Coveted Panel

U.S. F.

ORANGE COUNTY

CITIES: Huntington Beach Rated Safest

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struggling since December to cope with Orange County's financial crisis.

"This is great," said Deputy City Administrator Richard Barnard. "We knew it, but it's nice to see somebody else give us recognition based on the activity we have in the community."

Barnard acknowledged that the city of 190,000 residents "gets a lot of bad press" for drawing rowdy crowds on the Fourth of July. But the holiday trouble needs to be put in perspective, he said.

"It's a day when we have maybe 300,000 people come to a parade," he said. "They party within the bounds of reason and have a good family outing."

This fact is often overlooked by the media, he said, which focuses instead "on the young people who get out of hand."

Barnard said Huntington Beach is a "well-maintained, clean community" with a "very participatory" style of government.

"We have very active recreational programs for youth; we have an excellent educational system," he said. "We have a lot of nonprofit agencies that provide services we need."

And when there is a problem, Barnard said, the community tends to pull together rather than "just bury our head in the sand and pretend it doesn't exist."

Police Chief Ronald E. Lowenberg said he is "cautiously optimistic" about the survey results.

"I'm quite pleased, especially in light of the fact that we find ourselves in a much larger metropolitan area called Southern California," he said. Lowenberg was referring to the regional preponderance of drugs, gangs and "what appears to be a trend of our society becoming increasingly more violent."

The police chief credited the city's transition to community-oriented policing as one of the reasons for the No. 1 safety ranking.

"We try to do the best we can in getting a cross-section of the community to give us an honest evaluation of what the city looks like and what we need to do to control crime," he said.

News of the city's ranking comes at a time when there are 27 Police Department vacancies—both civilian and sworn officers. Lowenberg said this was caused by an "inordi-

nate number of retirements" and a tight city budget in the wake of the county bankruptcy.

When the department is at full staffing, it has a ratio of 1.2 officers for every 1,000 residents, Lowenberg said. The statewide municipal average is 1.8 officers per 1,000 residents. The department is authorized to have 235 police officers, Lowenberg said.

"We say that we're already understaffed," he said, "so to have any vacancy at all exacerbates that problem."

The situation becomes particu-

larly acute when hundreds of thousands of visitors crowd onto the city's eight miles of beaches, he said.

"Thank God most of those people decide to behave themselves," he said. "But some of them don't."

Lowenberg was heartened by the fact that the city's ranking was based on 1993 statistics. The city's 1994 crime rate actually dropped slightly, he said.

"If they're making us No. 1 in 1993, we're in pretty good shape for the next couple of years," he said. "Maybe we'll 'three-peat.'"

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