

ORLANDO Business Journal



JULY 13-19, 2007

orlando.bizjournals.com

Orlando best city for small biz

Four of nation's top five markets are
in the Sunshine State.

BY DAN PING | STAFF WRITER

Citrus, once the driving force behind Central Florida's economy, has been replaced by a new "crop" — small businesses.

A study released this week by Bizjournals indicates Orlando is growing far more small businesses than oranges. In fact, the report ranks Orlando as the No. 1 city in the nation in which to start a small business, defined as having 99 or fewer employees.

The ranking comes as no surprise to Jerry Ross, director of the Disney/Small Business Administration National Entrepreneur Center, one of two such facilities in the nation.

"There are resources in this town you don't find in other communities," Ross says. Among those are institutions dedicated to helping small businesses, such as the University of Central Florida and Orange County government.

Ross also cites Orlando's large pool of creative talent in diverse fields such as art, science and technology. And, he says, it helps to have a roster of companies such as Walt Disney World that are willing to give startup companies opportunities. "If you want to start a business [in Orlando], somebody will give you a shot."



Ross

'Full speed ahead'

Orlando was the only U.S. market to snare a spot in the top 10 metro areas for three key factors: population growth, small business creation and small business concentration.

**'If you want to start
a business [in Orlando], somebody
will give you a shot.'**

Jerry Ross,

Director, Disney/Small Business Administration
National Entrepreneur Center

The latter category compares each market's number of small businesses with its population. Orlando's ratio of 2,821 small businesses per 100,000 residents is 16 percent better than the study group's average of 2,439 per 100,000.

"Orlando is going full speed ahead," says Mark Vitner, senior economist for Wachovia Corp. "Most people think of it as Disney World and Mickey Mouse, but it's much more than tourism. It has a tremendously diverse base of industries — high-tech, software development, defense, benefits administration, video-game manufacturing."

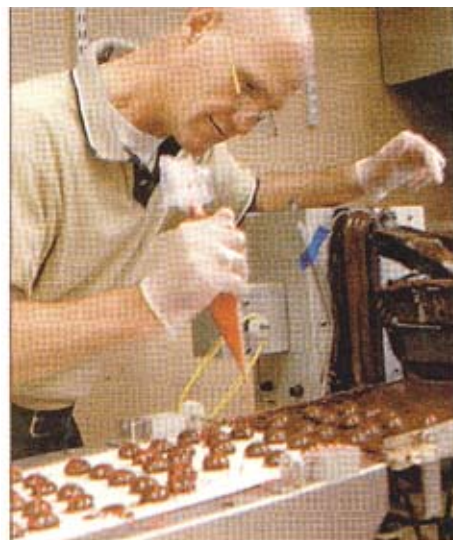


PHOTO BY JIM CARCHIDI

Orlando has a diverse base of small businesses, ranging from video-game manufacturers to candy makers.

Diverse industries

That diversity is important in growing the local pool of small businesses, says Rod Vargas, CEO and president of Apex Environmental Engineering & Compliance Inc.

"It's inspiring to see all these different types of companies and the innovative things they do," says Vargas, who was named the Small Business Administration's 2007 Florida Small Business Person of the Year. "It's contagious. It drives you to do something that hasn't been done before."

DAN PING can be reached at (407) 241-2895 or via e-mail at dping@bizjournals.com.

Four of nation's top five markets are in the Sunshine State.



Orlando is the clear choice for first place nationwide in the creation and development of small businesses. It's the only market that makes the national top 10 in three key categories: small businesses per 100,000 residents, growth in small businesses since 2000 and five-year population growth.

Why we're No. 1

Category		Rank
Change in small businesses (2000-2005):	+25.1%	2
Change in population (2000-2005):	+17.6%	6
Small businesses per 100,000 residents:	2,821	9