

Sylacauga once again selected one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People

By Antrenise Cole

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SYLACAUGA - The city has been selected as one of the **100 Best** Communities for Young People by America's Promise Alliance. Sylacauga is among the 44 communities that have been recognized in the national competition three times in a row, which is a first in **100 Best** history.

More than 300 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico - nearly 750 participants - took part in the competition. The America's Promise Alliance, partnered with Capital One, announced this year's winning communities that made the well-being of children and youth a top priority.

"It is a great honor for Sylacauga to be named three years in a row," said Joe Richardson, executive director of the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce. "We are very fortunate to be in a city where everyone pulls together for the common good. The improvements to downtown, the new movie theater, and improvement of our parks - all show we're doing the right thing for Sylacauga and the whole community. We are on a roll."

According to a press release from America's Promise, Sylacauga is one of the **100 Best** Communities for Young People because of its ability to find effective ways to ensure young people receive the resources necessary to stay in school and succeed.

"Partnerships are the foundation upon which the city has built its infrastructure to support the healthy growth and development of its youth and their families," the press release said. "Practically every sector of the community has been involved in using strategic data analysis to define the gaps in services and opportunities, developing successful strategies and activities to address those gaps."

Sylacauga Promise Chairwoman Margaret Morton agreed that every sector of the community is responsible for Sylacauga being recognized. "I just think it's a tribute to the entire city and the community," Morton said, "the Sylacauga Parks and Recreation, Talladega County and Talladega City school systems partnering with SAFE, the city of Sylacauga, Cheaha Mental Health, the Sylacauga Police Department, our award-winning library, the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce, Coosa Valley Hospital, businesses, industries and individuals in the community.

"They should be proud and pat themselves on the back for a job well done," Morton said. "I don't think we received the award because we're a perfect community. It's everybody working together to solve problems. Everything that's being done is to assure children are put first and the five promises (caring adults, safe place, a healthy start, an effective education and opportunities to help others) are fulfilled."

Mayor Sam Wright said being recognized three years in a row is amazing. "We were shocked and amazed the second time we were selected, but the third time is just outstanding," he said. "It shows the good job the people at SAFE are doing. It's a great tribute to a lot of the things that go on in the city. We have to continue to work hard to stay at this level."

Charon Douglass, a member of Sylacauga's Promise Committee, said she hopes this recognition will bring more people into the city. "This is very good publicity," she said. "What this means for the city is that it could possibly increase the population and attract new businesses and industries. More people will want to bring their families to live here. We hope being recognized will help to make us eligible for grant funds."

Sylacauga and the other winners of the **100 Best** competition were chosen by a distinguished panel of civic, business and nonprofit leaders, including: United Way President Brian Gallagher, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Thomas Donohue, CEOs for Cities' President and CEO Carol Coletta, former Denver Mayor and President of Webb Group International Wellington Webb, West Virginia's first lady Gayle Manchin, Child Welfare League of America's President and CEO Christine James-Brown, and Pew Partnership for Civic Change Executive Director Dr. Suzanne Morse.

"The **100 Best** competition is more important than ever," America's Promise Alliance's President and CEO Marguerite Kondracke said in the press release, "because it's become harder for cities and towns to focus on the needs of their children, with all the challenges facing them, and we see the impact of this in our dismal high school graduation rates. These communities rose above, and through their actions remind us that there are cities and towns that are going the extra mile every day to make sure young people reach their potential."

For the third year in a row, America's Promise Alliance has named Sylacauga one of the **100 Best** Communities for Young People.