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## Owensboro in 'comfortable' position, Brake says

By Keith Lawrence Messenger-Inquirer

Oct 3, 2023



Nick Brake

Over the past two years, Nick Brake has been studying 51 communities, including Owensboro, to see what causes some to excel and others to stagnate and wither.

He read the newspapers of all 51 cities on a regular basis

Brake has published the results of his study in a couple of economic development publications — most recently in the Economic Development Journal.

He divided the cities into categories ranging from distressed to prosperous.



Owensboro is in the “comfortable” category.

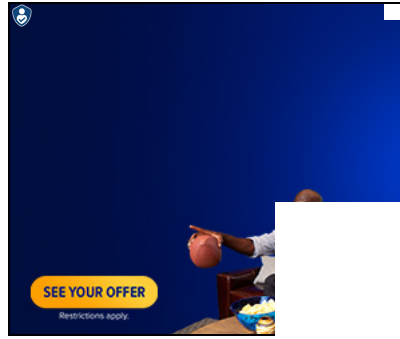
“We are upper middle in the study,” Brake said. “We punch above our weight.”

Brake was president of the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corp. from 2006 to 2013 and superintendent of Owensboro Public Schools from 2013 to 2019.

Since 2020, Brake been director of the doctoral program in the School of Leadership and Professional Studies at Western Kentucky University.

He said he sees Owensboro currently transitioning between the old guard and younger people who are moving into positions of leadership.

“We’re still very siloed,” Brake said of people who stay in their own groups. “But we’re moving in the right direction.”



Work done downtown a decade ago “has positioned us well,” he said. “But we took away the position that worked with downtown development.”

Joe Berry was named director of downtown development in 2011. But when he moved on to other jobs in 2014, the post was eliminated.

“We need the downtown development manager position back,” Brake said. “There has to be someone dedicated to working with downtown. Prosperous communities all have someone in that position.”

He said, “We’re in a good place. We’re comfortable. But we need a sustained message.”

Diversity is an important piece in attracting business to a community, Brake said.

“We’re not terrible,” he said. “But negativity on things like LGBTQ issues, drag shows and the Confederate statue are very, very damaging.”



Negativity on those issues and talks of book bans, Brake said, “will set us back five years. When site selectors see things like that, they take you off their list immediately.”

Making a community better to attract development is an ongoing process, he said. And local leaders have to continually focus on it.

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