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FC

# DRIBBLES

## Our Region is Anything but Miserable.

**W**hat us, miserable? Hardly. But that's what *Forbes* magazine seems to think, as earlier this year it released its list of the 20 Most Miserable Cities in America. We were pretty stunned to find Cleveland topping the list, but by the time we finished reading and found four other cities from our region among

the "miserable," we were bewildered and decided to take matters into our own hands. We spoke with our wronged cities' officials to get the scoop on where *Forbes* went wrong in their determining. And to show that we are not taking these criticisms seriously, we recruited Last Call Cleveland comic Mike Polk to add his two cents on the matter.

## CLEVELAND

RANK 1

### → WHAT FORBES SAID:

"Cleveland nabbed the top spot as a result of poor ratings across the board. It was the only city that fell in the bottom half of the rankings in all nine categories...Residents of the Mistake by the Lake endure brutal winters, high crime and a tortured sports history. They are voting with their feet as the net migration out of the metro area was 71,000 over the past five years."

### → WHAT IT MISSED:

While we cannot defend political corruption – although judging a city by their number of corrupted officials is a little nonsensical as the knowledge of said officials means the problem is being rectified – we can attest to Mayor Frank Jackson's successful implementation of a five-year budget plan, a 15% drop in vacant and distressed properties in the city, and the recent approval of \$95 million to assist the Department of Economic Development. Meanwhile, high-level projects including the proposed Medical Mart and the Tower City Casino show great promise, and the Lake Erie Energy Development Corporation's wind turbine project could create thousands of jobs while crafting the city a strong foothold in the emerging industry. As far as sports teams are concerned...nobody's perfect.

### → CLEVELAND'S RESPONSE:

In a letter to *Forbes* (which was also sent to the mayors of the other 19 cities as well as the Greater Cleveland Partnership, a business umbrella group constituting the CEOs of our region's 50 largest corporations), Chief of Staff Ken Silliman questioned the article, its writer, and its methodology, "Your online report mentions nine ranking criteria...briefly we can state...Clevelanders are not oversensitive on the harshness of our winters (a 1970s saying 'Cleveland, you gotta be tough,' was probably based in part on what it takes to get through our long winters)...A weather ranking based solely on winter is incomplete, as even *The Places Related Almanac* realized in its own climate rankings. We are...working collaboratively with many federal and state agencies to improve safety in our neighborhoods...The worst misstatement concerns commute times. Your reporter stated that Cleveland finished in the bottom half of all ranking criteria. Yet *Forbes.com* has just published a rating of cities' commute times which shows Cleveland having the 10th shortest commute times among 60 metro areas...I am confident that Cleveland and each of the other cities appearing on your list could shred the methodology as it was applied to their respective communities."

# FROM THE DESK OF MIKE POLK:

Dear Forbes,

To quote barnyard cartoon luminary Foghorn Leghorn, "How dare, I say how dare you sir?!"

It has just come to my attention that you have named Cleveland "America's Most Miserable City, 2010." Balderdash! I, of course, felt obliged to voice my protest.

Now I won't pretend as though I myself have not needled the Cleve in the past. But I'm allowed, because I live here. It's kind of like how you're allowed to punch your own little brother in the arm, and then force him to wear your sister's Easter dress and dance to Christina Aguilera songs for the collective amusement of you and your buddies. But if anyone else did that to Dustin, I wouldn't stand for it.

Firstly, I question your criteria for concluding which city is the most miserable. No matter how you try to justify it, miserableness is not something that you can quantify using some arbitrary algorithm. I understood and accepted it when someone dubbed us The Poorest City in America. That's something you can actually measure.

But what makes a city "miserable?" And more directly, why does Detroit not take first place every year? The very fact that it has only held the dubious honor once (in 2008) just proves that your judging criteria is flawed and completely unfair. But we're not here to point out our sister city's misfortune, that's not my purpose. So let's do what most people are doing and get away from Detroit for the moment.

Let's talk about New York City. Home to Forbes Publishing. After doing my own research and applying my personal criteria, I regret to announce that NYC is, in fact, the most miserable city in the United States.

How did I come to this conclusion? It's based upon the following factors:

#### Cost of Living

Wait, let me get this straight? I get this sweet 6ft. x 6ft. apartment for just \$2,500 a month!? Awesome! I love being able to touch my roommate from anywhere in my apartment. In Cleveland, you can buy your own closed steel factory for \$800 and play arena football in your living room.

#### Overcrowded

New York is like a Brazilian soccer riot everywhere you go. This also creates a pungent aroma that smells like a dead raccoon left out in the sun for three weeks. Who would have guessed that having eight million people living together in 20 square blocks might create an unpleasant aroma?

#### The A-Hole Factor

No one has a higher sense of entitlement and superiority than New Yorkers. "I live in the most populated city in America. That makes me cool, right? Doesn't it? Say it! Say I'm cool!" Consider this - New York is home to George Steinbrenner, Donald Trump, and Derek Jeter, otherwise known as the "A-Hole Holy Trinity."

#### Safety

As the most populated city in the United States, it's a desirable target for anyone wishing to do America harm. How far do you think Cleveland is down the bad guy's list of "places to mess with?" We're as safe as kittens here!

So there you have it Forbes - New York is the most miserable city. And you must agree the formula I used to arrive at my conclusion is no less valid than yours. So congratulations on your title. And get off our back. If anyone is going to make fun of this city it's me, and I'll do it with love.

Best,

*Mike Polk*

Mike Polk

(dictated but not read)



READ MIKE'S ENTIRE LETTER AT [WWW.GLLMAGAZINE.COM](http://WWW.GLLMAGAZINE.COM).

# → BUFFALO

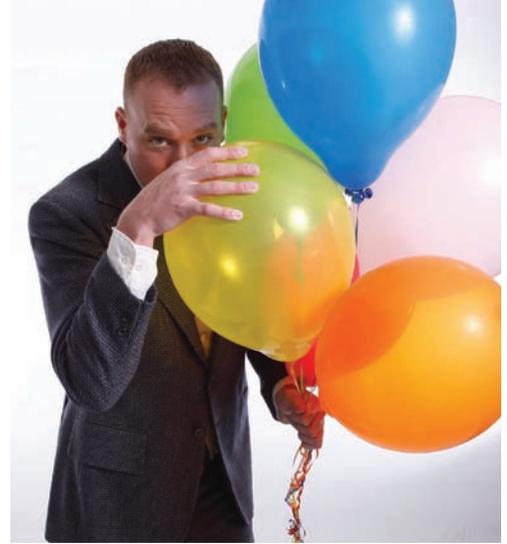
RANK 8

**WHAT FORBES SAID:** “This snowbelt city is still the second largest in New York state, but the population has fallen more than 50% over the past half-century as the industrial base waned.”

**WHAT IT MISSED:** Where do we begin? Buffalo’s appearance on this list shocked us, especially after learning that *Forbes* recently named Buffalo one of the best cities to raise a family in. Yup, that’s right. The same magazine that named Buffalo one of the most miserable cities in America also named it one of the best to raise a family in. Seriously. Buffalo ranked number ten on the list – which also featured Pittsburgh, Syracuse, and Rochester representing our region. Strangely enough two of the deciding factors on both lists were commute times and crime rates. Additionally, the city of Buffalo and Erie County proper have managed to pull something off that every other city in America is salivating over – budget surpluses to the tune of \$44-million for the county and \$140-million for the city. Mayor Byron Brown declared 2010 as the year of the “Extreme

Makeover for the City of Buffalo” which will include the reform of the city’s zoning code to initiate a place-based economic development strategy for the city’s neighborhoods and the city’s homicide rate has reduced by 50% since 2006. Newsweek even recently gave the city accolades, naming Buffalo’s City Honors High School the tenth best high school in the nation. Doesn’t sound so miserable to us.

**BUFFALO’S RESPONSE:** “There’s been almost a conspiracy in the national press in the last decade or so called ‘Buffalo Bashing.’ *Forbes* is just continuing this in a relatively ignorant way,” says Erie County Executive Chris Collins. “The facts are the facts. We’ve suffered as many other rustbelt cities have since the decline of manufacturing. We are much smaller than we were 15 years ago, but I can’t think of a city that has rebuilt itself as Buffalo has. To be named one of the most miserable cities is ignorant and not based on facts. We are stable economically while the rest of the world is melting down. We are living the renaissance of Buffalo and Erie County.”



# → CANTON

RANK 9

**WHAT FORBES SAID:** “The home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and home of President William McKinley has seen a net migration out of Canton in each of the past 15 years. Only 18% of the adult population has a college degree.”

**WHAT IT MISSED:** For starters, the fact that Canton is technically ineligible for this list. According to *Forbes*, one of the prerequisites

Healy, this meant taking statistics on crime, traffic, sports teams, etc. from the Cleveland area, meaning that Cleveland somehow factored into becoming the most miserable city in America twice. D’oh

**CANTON’S RESPONSE:** “It was really a bogus deal,” says Mayor Healy, “but they can write whatever they want, it’s their magazine. It’s ridiculous if you go down their list of

“We’ve worked too damn hard to move our cities forward for some company to write a story bashing us while they can care less about the negative impact of doing so.”

– WILLIAM HEALY, MAYOR OF CANTON, OHIO

for consideration is a population of more than 245,000 people. Yet Canton’s city population is a mere 78,000 people. In order to allocate the figures required for Canton to be a part of this “study,” *Forbes* had to look into the greater metro area of the city (more than 407,000 people) which allegedly spans across a three-county radius. According to Mayor William

qualifying standards, they basically rigged it so we would fit into these categories. They had townships from two counties away factored into this. The city of Canton has had a 40% drop in crime in the last three years. These are monumental figures that were surely not considered when putting this report together.”





# → AKRON

RANK 12

**WHAT FORBES SAID:** “Home to Goodyear Tire and LeBron James, misery will be off the charts if favorite son James bolts the Cavaliers after this season for a new NBA team. Akron’s 2.25% local income tax rate is one of the highest in the state.”

**WHAT IT MISSED:** Like every other rustbelt city, Akron’s stake in being a manufacturing city is long gone, but it has become one of the first in our region to move itself from rustbelt to renaissance. Today the city is an emerging hamlet with its bustling nightlife, dining, and entertainment cultures. The

city government has gone lean, cutting unnecessary expenditures to help stabilize the budget while Mayor Donald L. Pusquellic’s efforts to get international recognition for the city has resulted in interest more than 29 companies in Europe, Israel, and Asia establishing business and creating jobs within the city.

**AKRON’S RESPONSE:** “Where Akron is concerned, there are too many problems with the methodology of this study to even mention,” says Press Secretary Mark Williamson. “I wouldn’t know where to begin. And, there are so many ‘studies’ and lists out there; they’ve become nothing more than fodder for morning radio people looking for things to talk about.”

40. WE CAN’T GET ENOUGH OF THE AVALON RESTAURANT EXHIBIT AT THE ERIE ART MUSEUM.

41. A NIGHT OUT AT THE BAR FOR LESS THAN \$20 IS A POSSIBILITY.

42. NON-EXISTENT SMOG ALERTS.

43. LETCHWORTH STATE PARK IS THE “GRAND CANYON OF THE EAST.”

44. ASHTABULA’S CHRISTMAS WORLD COULD GET ANY SCROOGE IN THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT.

45. A UNIQUE DINING CULTURE IS EMERGING IN OUR REGION COURTESY OF SOME TRULY INNOVATIVE CHEFS.

46. WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO LAUGH AT OURSELVES.

47. THE IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION AT THE ALBRIGHT KNOX ART GALLERY.

48. WE INVENTED THE BUFFALO WING.

49. BECAUSE ANY SANDWICH CAN BE TOPPED WITH FRIES AND SLAW, BUT IT DOESN’T MAKE IT A TRUE PRIMANTI BROS. SANDWICH.

50. HAVE WE MENTIONED THAT LAKE YET?

51. WE GET THE OPTION OF BAR- OR WINERY-HOPPING.

52. STAY OR GO; WE STILL LOVE YOU LEBRON.

53. EACH SUMMER FEELS LIKE A REBIRTH.

54. OUR REGION AND ITS CHARACTERS ARE STEEPED IN HISTORY FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR TO THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD TO THE NUREMBERG TRIALS.

55. OUR FOUR BEAUTIFULLY DISTINCT SEASONS.

56. WE HAVE THE SMALL-TOWN CHARM AND THE BIG-CITY AMENITIES.

57. NIAGARA FALLS TRULY IS A WONDER OF THE WORLD.

58. BECAUSE WORLD-CLASS ENTERTAINMENT DOES NOT OVERLOOK US ON ITS WAY TO NEW YORK CITY OR CHICAGO.

59. OUR REGION HAS SOME OF THE MOST COLORFUL FALL FOLIAGE.

60. WE NEVER HAVE TO DREAM OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS.

61. WE HAVE THE WORLD’S LARGEST SUPPLY OF LIFE-SUPPORTING FRESHWATER.

62. WE REALLY KNOW HOW TO GET INTO ST. PATRICK’S DAY.



“Get off our back. If anyone is going to make fun of this city, it's me...and I'll do it with love.”

– MIKE POLK

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# → YOUNGSTOWN

RANK 18

**WHAT FORBES SAID:** “Youngstown’s favorite son, former Congressman Jim Traficant, is considering running for Congress again after serving seven years in prison on bribery, racketeering, and tax evasion charges. Needless to say Youngstown ranks high on our corruption metric.”

**WHAT IT MISSED:** To be blunt, Jim Traficant’s presence in any city would be enough to skyrocket their corruption meter. But Mayor Jay Williams’ track record is quite the opposite. The youngest mayor in the city’s history was

recognized by the JFK Library Foundation and the Harvard Institute of Politics in 2007 for “contributions to elected office, community service, or advocacy which demonstrates the impact and value of public service in the spirit of JFK.” He was also named one of *Governing Magazine’s* Public Officials of the Year in 2009 while Youngstown was named one of the Ten Best Cities in the U.S. to Start a Business by *Entrepreneur Magazine* in 2009 while the Youngstown 2010 “right sizing” initiative, which is downsizing city neighborhood sizes to prioritize funds, has generated interest from the

*Wall Street Journal*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and the American Planning Association, among others.

**YOUNGSTOWN’S RESPONSE:** Despite repeated attempts by *GLL*, Mayor Jay Williams was unable for comment. We only hope he wasn’t too distraught over his city’s appearance on the list to return our calls. Don’t worry Mayor Williams. As you can see, we are not taking *Forbes’* methodology to heart, we hope you aren’t either.

– Mark Toriski

## HOW FORBES DETERMINED MISERY

Is it even possible to measure misery? *Forbes* believes so, with their handy little method dubbed the “Misery Measure.” Looking at nine key factors they believe to be the lead causes of misery in a community, *Forbes’* Misery Measure accounted for commute times, weather patterns, violent crime rates, unemployment rates, income and sales taxes, Superfund pollution sites, corruption of public officials, and the performances of each city’s sports teams (really?). The data was allocated from a variety of sources – mostly government data, indexes, and apparently the ESPN ticker – with Cleveland ranking near middle for every category, earning it the dubious honor of dethroning last year’s victor, Stockton, California, thus ensuring the East Coast–West Coast feud is far from over. This year also saw the expansion in the list of cities under consideration to include the 200 largest metropolitan statistical

areas, giving an additional 50 cities the chance to be deemed miserable.

“Everything we do whether it is a list or a news story is meant to serve our readers,” says Kurt Badenhause, Senior Editor for *Forbes* and author of the Miserable Cities list, on *Forbes* decision to create the annual feature. “Obviously, what we are doing is focusing on the negatives, the things that cause people misery. By no stretch are we trying to make the argument these cities don’t have good things to offer. It’s not a matter of what we overlooked in the finer points, it’s the hardships that people in these cities have to deal with. We are saying it could be hard to live in these cities.”

With all due respects, *Forbes*, we appreciate your concern, but next time, let the actual citizens of these cities measure their own misery.

READ THE FORBES ARTICLE FOR YOURSELF AT [WWW.FORBES.COM](http://WWW.FORBES.COM).



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