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## **Savannah, Hinesville among country's 'best performing' cities**

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Savannah has jumped from 78th to 34th in the just-released 2007 Milken Institute/Greenstreet Partners Best Performing Cities Index, which ranks metro areas - both large and small - according to their ability to grow and sustain jobs.

In the small metro category, Hinesville-Fort Stewart moved into the top 10, going from 20th to fourth.

The index breaks 379 metropolitan areas into the 200 largest and 179 smallest markets, looking at both long-term and short-term measurements of employment and salary growth. There are also four measurements of technology output growth, which are included because of technology's crucial role in regional economic growth, according to Milken spokeswoman Jennifer Manfre.

Savannah's move up the ranks in the 200 largest cities category is due in large part to growth at the port of Savannah, said Armen Bedroussian, a research economist at Milken and an author of the study.

"A weak dollar has boosted global trade and led to more port activity. The expansion of Gulfstream Aerospace has also had positive impacts on the local economy," Bedroussian said Thursday.

In the smaller category, Hinesville's dramatic jump is because of 41 percent growth in employment in the heavy- and civil-engineering construction sector last year, due in part to the additional development around the MidCoast Regional Airport at Wright Army Airfield, the study said.

Warner Robins, located outside of Macon and home of Robins Air Force Base, also made the Top 10 best-performing small cities list this year, moving from 25th last year to 10th.

Elsewhere in Georgia, the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta MSA moved up 32 places to 86th and was sixth in a separate ranking of the 10 largest U.S. metros. Augusta-Richmond County ranks among those that lost significant standings, dropping 53 spots from 110 to 163.

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