


# Oklahoma's regional economy positioned to thrive

BY DON MECOY Comments  1  
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The Great Plains states from North Dakota to Oklahoma have weathered the recession better than most, and are well placed to thrive as the nation's economy recovers, the publisher of Forbes said Thursday in Oklahoma City.

Rich Karlgaard, Forbes publisher, author, blogger and entrepreneur, noted that Oklahoma City has the lowest unemployment rate among the nation's large cities. The region's relatively low cost of living and doing business, and the growing importance of the energy sector also should help boost Oklahoma in the coming years, Karlgaard said.

"You really have the wind in your sails right now, and it can get windy here, so that's a good advantage," he said.

Karlgaard writes Forbes' "Digital Rules" column, and produces a daily blog at Forbes.com. He also co-founded two companies, Garage Technology Ventures in 1997, and Upside magazine in 1988, and one civic organization, the 5,500-member Churchill Club.

Karlgaard, who traveled extensively when researching his book "Life 2.0: How People Across America Are Transforming Their Lives by Finding the Where of Their Happiness," said the character of people in different regions of the country varies widely.

"I don't think it's a coincidence that the Plains states are outperforming the rest of the country right now," he said. "I think that Oklahoma City is in great shape going forward."

## Price pressure

The global economy is putting a lot of pressure on prices, which hurts those who live and work in areas with high costs.

The urban coasts, which did well in the 1980s and 1990s, are now stuck with high costs of living and doing business while the global economy is demanding a less expensive environment. Markets that offer relatively low housing cost and right-to-work states have "huge advantages," he said.

"In a competitive global economy, this is going to behuge going forward," Karlgaard said.

The economic malaise and political pessimism of the 1970s is similar to the current environment, Karlgaard said. But that period also marked the origins of some of the world's great companies, he said. Firms that launched in the 1970s include Federal Express, Southwest Airlines, Microsoft, Oracle and Apple. That decade also included the introduction of Intel's first microprocessor, the invention of the discount brokerage by Charles Schwab and the modern-day creation of venture capital.

"The 1970s was one of those decades where the world really divided into the future and the past," he said. "When you look at the 1970s (economically), it was not great. But when you peel away the top layer, there were pockets that were absolutely fantastic."

Like today, the economic problems had varying impact on the nation's cities and regions, he said.

"Are we in one of these periods when the economic future is going to split wide open between those industries, those companies and those regions and cities that get it — that know where the future is going — and those that don't?" he said. "I would suggest that that is going to happen once again — that the recovery is going to be uneven. It is certainly playing out so far."

For some cities, one great entrepreneur — such as Bill Gates or Michael Dell — can boost an area's confidence and create fertile ground for entrepreneurs, Karlgaard said.

"You never know who that person's going to be," he said. "Make sure you do everything you can to nurture that one person, who may look like a guy you'd never invest in. ... Make sure when they have that killer idea that they feel welcome here and that they can stay here and don't have to move elsewhere."