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## As economy slows, is any area really `recession-proof'?

By ALLEN G. BREED  
The Associated Press  
Monday, April 28, 2008; 7:51 PM

RALEIGH, N.C. -- The catering business isn't what economists would call "recession-proof." Luckily for J.W. Walton, most of his biggest clients are.

The Catering Company of Chapel Hill specializes in gala affairs, with fireworks, floral centerpieces and menus that feature things like panna cotta with Macedonia di Frutta, and orange muffins with smoked turkey and lemon verbena jelly. About 70 percent of the firm's business comes from the Triangle's three big research universities \_ Duke down the road in Durham, North Carolina State in Raleigh and, of course, the University of North Carolina's flagship campus right there in Chapel Hill.

Even with the national economy slipping toward the doldrums, business is steady here.

"We're in a funny place," says Walton, a partner and the firm's catering/decor services designer. "The universities and the hospitals and the things that make the unique mix of business in this area are somewhat less driven directly by the economic conditions."

There's all kinds of talk these days about companies, industries and careers that are immune to these economic downswings. But are there "recession-proof" places?

Business consultant Mark Hovind thinks so.

Using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Hovind, president of JobBait.com, compared job expansion in a number of key industries and work-force growth in various metropolitan areas. He came up with a list of about two-dozen areas where jobs outpaced the work force during the recessions of 1990 and 2001, and in the past year, and figured they'd likely fare well in another downturn.

"It's like keeping up with inflation," says Hovind, an engineer who describes himself as "a career coach for six- and seven-figure executives." "When the cost of living goes up 3 percent, you need a 3 percent raise just to stay even."



Among the metropolitan areas making his list were Prescott, Ariz.; Fayetteville, Ark.; Bakersfield, Calif.; Grand Junction, Colo.; Bend, Ore.; Valdosta, Ga.; and Morgantown, W.Va.

Each has an economy built around some industry \_ or mix of industries \_ that "don't follow the business cycle pattern," says Matt Martin, an economist with the Federal Reserve Bank's Charlotte office. They're regional health care centers, state capitals or university towns.

Like State College, home to Pennsylvania State University, which is also on the list.

With its 24,000 full- and part-time employees and record fall enrollment of 42,200 students, the school is the economic engine that runs this town nestled amid the hills and hardwood forests of central Pennsylvania.

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