

Guest Column to The News-Star
For the Sunday, March 25, 2018 Edition
From
Mayor James E. "Jamie" Mayo
City of Monroe, LA

"An Open Letter to NeighborhoodScout.com"

Re: NEIGHBORHOOD SCOUT MOST DANGEROUS CITIES 2018

Dr. Andrew Schiller:

As Mayor of the City of Monroe, Louisiana, public safety and the image & reputation of our municipality is of utmost importance. It affects our economic well-being, growth and development, quality of life, and the overall morale of our community. A wise person once said, "it takes many years to build a reputation, but only five minutes to ruin it."

A March 7, 2018, article on *realtor.com* entitled "*The Most Dangerous U.S. City Isn't Chicago – or Any Other Big City You'd Expect*" by Clare Trapasso caught our attention. Why? Because in her article, she referenced the NEIGHBORHOOD SCOUT MOST DANGEROUS CITIES 2018 list in which you have the City of Monroe listed as the most dangerous city in our country.

After reviewing your website, it's clear that your various rankings are tools used to draw potential subscribers to the "*for pay*" services that you provide. While we can appreciate your experience and analytical expertise when it comes to numbers, we must respectfully disagree with your assessment of Monroe, as it relates to the "Most Dangerous Cities" list. We also disagree with the comments you made about Monroe in the *realtor.com* article. Please allow me to address the former, and then the latter.

First, let me share a few of the reasons why we say your ranking system is flawed and your website is misleading.

1. On its UCR website, the FBI says Uniform Crime Reporting statistics used to compile rankings of individual jurisdictions are *"...incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions which adversely affect geographic entities and their residents."* This disclaimer should be on every page for every crime-related ranking that you have.
2. Every reporting law enforcement agency does not classify and report all crimes the same way. That means *"uniform crime reporting"* is not truly uniform. For example, a simple verbal threat could be classified and reported as an "assault" in one jurisdiction; however, another agency has the right to and may classify and report it as a lesser crime, such as "disturbing the peace." This variable could easily skew violent crime numbers, depending on how a jurisdiction chose to report certain crimes. Can you 100% guarantee that each of the municipalities used in your rankings report every crime the same way?
3. According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com) there are 19,505 cities, towns, and villages in the United States. However, you have, apparently, excluded roughly 18,625 of them from your rankings because their population is less than 25,000 residents. You can't accurately give Monroe the title of "Most Dangerous City in America" when you purposely choose to exclude 95% of the municipalities in this country in your rankings. Why do you exclude so many other cities from your rankings? What is the motivation behind doing that?
4. However, you have chosen to include some cities below that 25,000-population mark in your Crime Index ratings. Your Crime Index gives Monroe a rating of 0, indicating that every other city in America is safer than Monroe. Your Crime Index also gives West Monroe a rating of 1, indicating that 99% of all other cities in America are safer than West Monroe. Thousands of residents in the Twin Cities would vehemently disagree with that assessment.

Finally, in the *realtor.com* article, you described Monroe by saying “...People are leaving...There is no big business and economic hub that would draw a lot of talent to that place (or) lots of high-wage jobs that would push up the values of real estate.” We beg to differ.

The population of Monroe has increased since the 2010 Census. Because of that growth, new high-end subdivisions and affordable housing developments have been built in recent years, and/or are being constructed.

Monroe is the economic development, education, art, retail, entertainment, and medical hub for northeast Louisiana. Our city has a plethora of major employers who pay very good salaries. Monroe is home to the corporate headquarters of CenturyLink. CenturyLink is the largest Fortune 500 company headquartered in Louisiana. Following the completion of its merger with Level 3 Communications in November 2017, the combined companies are projected to generate annual revenue of \$24 billion, which places CenturyLink in the vicinity of such companies as Progressive, Northrop Grumman, McDonald’s, DuPont and Macy’s. Companywide, CenturyLink employs more than 40,000 people. Statewide, CenturyLink employs approximately 2,700 people with a combined annual payroll of more than \$200 million. Most of CenturyLink’s Louisiana employees work in the Monroe area — approximately 2,300 employees.

IBM is building a new applications center here, which will be opening in just a few months. In addition, a snapshot list of local employers such as J.P. Morgan Chase, Gardner-Denver Thomas, Graphic Packaging, St. Francis Medical Center, Walmart/Sam’s, Vantage Health, Brookshire’s, and University Health Conway each employ several hundred people. These go without mentioning the City of Monroe, Ouachita Parish Police Jury, Monroe City Schools, and Ouachita Parish School systems - which employ thousands more. Our city also has many highly successful self-employed entrepreneurs in areas such as agriculture, culinary arts, oil & gas, and more. And, according to the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics our current unemployment rate is only 4.7% as of January 2018.

We have the University of Louisiana at Monroe and Louisiana Delta Community College within our city limits. In addition to that, Louisiana Tech University and Grambling State University are within 35-miles of Monroe. Many employees, students, and graduates of these fine institutions live, work and play in Monroe. Pecanland Mall is the retail hub for the entire Ark-La-Miss region (NE Louisiana, and portions of SE Arkansas, and NW Mississippi). Monroe also has more than three dozen parks, seven community centers, a half-dozen museums, multiple art galleries, two public pools, two public golf courses, and a tennis facility.

Monroe Police Chief Eugene Ellis, the dedicated men and women of our police department, and I are 100% committed to serving our community, combatting crime, and ensuring the safety of our residents and visitors. We will continue to research and implement innovative practices. We will continue to partner with other law enforcement agencies. We will continue to work with businesses, schools, churches, non-profits, neighborhood groups and individuals to reduce crime. Residents of Monroe and all U.S. cities, towns, and villages should all be judged uniformly to ensure that rankings are an accurate reflection of our communities.

Sincerely,

James E. Mayo, Mayor
City of Monroe, LA