Upper Midwesterners - including those of us in the Chippewa Valley - are humble folk. With the exceptions of our children and the Green Bay Packers, you'd be hard pressed to find us bragging about much of anything to outsiders.

Humility may be a virtue, but sometimes it can get in the way of promoting our community.

In fact, we in the Chippewa Valley can be self-critical to a fault: "Gas is too expensive here," we complain. "And so are taxes. And the streets have too many potholes and they aren't adequately plowed and ..."

You get the idea.

We're so self-deprecating that when it comes to touting our many good qualities, we're often silent.

As a step toward changing this, let's join together with this declaration: Say it loud, we're smart and we're proud!

This isn't empty bragging: Our mental agility actually has been measured. According to a just-released study, the Eau Claire and La Crosse area is one of the brainiest parts of the United States. Specifically, we ranked 23rd out of 169 metro areas on a new list of America's brainiest locales.

Obviously, we're smart enough to take such rankings with a bit of skepticism. (For example, Eau Claire recently ranked No. 7 on Kiplinger's list of 10 Best Cities for Cheapskates, in part because of our nonexistent cranberry museum.) Still, we should be proud that our intelligence is getting attention.

The rankings came last week from Lumos Labs, the maker of Lumosity, which the company describes as a "leading online brain exercise program." In layman's terms, Lumosity is a collection of computer games designed to stimulate memory, attention, problem solving and other brain skills. (For example, one game tests players' memories by asking them to keep track of a pond full of virtual fish and feed each fish only once.)

The company tracked the performance of more than 1 million users of its software, plotted them geographically and created an index that controlled for age and gender. Perhaps unsurprisingly, college towns did well: No. 1 was Charlottesville, Va., home of the University of Virginia, while Madison was No. 4. However, college students weren't the only reason.
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"Since our analysis controlled for age, the reason (these cities) score well is not simply that they have a lot of young people," said Daniel Sternberg, a Lumos Labs data scientist. "Instead, our analysis seems to show that users living in university communities tend to perform better than users of the same age in other locations."

This suggests once again that our local institutions of higher education, including UW-Eau Claire and UW-Stout, are crucial assets: Smart people come here, are developed here and stay here. It doesn't take a genius to recognize their importance to our success as a community.

- Tom Giffey, editorial page editor

To learn more about the list of American's brainiest cities, go to www.LeaderTelegram.com/links.

The issue: Eau Claire ranks high on a new index of America's brainiest metro areas.

Our view: While such rankings must be viewed with some skepticism, this is another example of why we should be proud of our community and take more time to promote ourselves.