

Efforts To Attract Residents Are Working

From September 2005 through September 2007, Downtown Pensacola added 242 net new households to the mix of downtown uses. These new households have moved into new, renovated, or previously vacant apartments, duplexes, single-family detached homes, townhouses, lofts, and condominiums to boost the occupancy of built residential units to a record high of 86% or 830 households. This significant movement back to downtown makes it the fastest growing residential sector of the City. Including the residential units that are existing but vacant, Downtown Pensacola now contains a total of 967 residential units.

The 830 downtown households collectively contain 1601 people currently enjoying downtown living. This represents an increase of 543 new residents in the last twenty-four months. The average household size is now 1.92 persons – up from 1.8 in 2005.

The typical downtown resident is now most often male (53%) – a six percent increase from 2005. Similar male majority percentages held true for all parts of the survey area.

The average age of downtown residents can be found in the low fifties with the largest age category (36 %) of downtown residents being between 50 and 64 years of age. The next largest age group (24%) was found among those that identified themselves as being between the ages of 35 and 49. The percentage of downtown residents under the age of 18 decreased from 11% to 8% while the number of downtown residents over the age of 75 doubled from 5% in 2005 to 10% in 2007.

Sixty-nine percent of the downtown residents now have at least a college degree – up two percentage points from 2005. Thirty-three percent also have a graduate or advanced degree as well. Only 9% of those over the age of 18 did not have at least some college training.

The number of downtown households without children (under the age of 18) declined during the past two years from 89% in 2005 to 84% this year. While more households now include children, the majority of such households still only have one child. As in 2005, 38% of downtown residents live alone. The most common family unit continues to be spouses or partners living together.

The combined annual income of downtown households also increased during the two-year period. In 2005, 61% of households had combined incomes of more than \$60,000 with 30% having a household income of more than \$100,000. Exactly two years later in September 2007, 62% of downtown households now have a combined income of more than \$60,000 with 37% reporting household income of more than \$100,000.

The number of downtown residents over the age of 18 that are employed now stands at 66%. Five percent are unemployed but many of these are full-time students or stay-at-home spouses; and 29% are retired. The number of downtown residents identifying themselves as retired has grown by 8% since 2005. Of those residents that are still in the workforce, general business continues to be the larger sector of employment (23%) followed by medical, government/non-profit, and the service sector. The employment sectors populated by downtown residents that experienced the largest growth during the last two years were the military, technology, restaurants and retail, and creative services.

Downtown residents increasingly work at locations within downtown (35% in 2005 and 48% in 2007). Fewer households own automobiles in 2007 (94%) than in 2005 (96%). Most still buy their groceries at Wal-Mart, Albertson's, Apple Market and Ever'mans – in that order. However, it should be noted that the percentage that patronize Wal-Mart, Albertson's or Winn Dixie as their primary source for groceries has declined during the last two years. Conversely, the number of downtown households that use Ever'mans and Shoreline Food Store as their primary source for groceries have both increased significantly.

Before moving downtown, residents primarily lived in another Pensacola neighborhood or someplace in Escambia County outside of the City. However, it should also be noted that the number of downtown residents relocating from Alabama and other states or countries outside of Florida or Alabama also increased by significant percentages during the last two years. The majority of downtown residents have lived downtown for five years or less while 13% have called downtown home for more than twenty years. Downtown residents identified downtown's central location and its convenience as the greatest factor for choosing it as a place to live. Following central location/convenience in importance during the location decision were a.) the ability to walk places, b.) cultural attractiveness, c.) proximity to the waterfront, and d.) quality of life offered by the neighborhood.

These most encouraging results are exactly what we hoped for in early 2004 when the DIB and the CRA started promoting and encouraging more residential units and occupancy in downtown. Much more is yet to come and in the pipeline. Downtown Pensacola – what a neighborhood.