

Character Town Socio-Economic Features

The “Character Towns” of Central Florida...#2 of the Analytical Series

Central Florida’s Character Towns.

The concept of *character towns* is that people care about their small city or town by demonstrated by their preserved and enhanced unique and authentic character; the town becomes and remains an interesting, pleasant and prosperous places for residents, businesses and visitors.

The Orlando Region of Central Florida is fortunate to have many small cities and towns with caring people, great neighborhoods and vibrant downtowns in the “main street” tradition. Ten living examples that prove the concept have been selected for examination in *The Series* described to the right.

Several socio-economic variables have been chosen to describe each of the ten towns. Many variables and approaches are possible; the selected socio-economic variables reflect factors that both describe the town and begin to address aspects that indicate prosperity. The variables discussed below are:

- Population
- Median Age
- Percent over 65 years
- Households
- Persons per Household
- Employed Persons
- Percent Unemployed
- Median Household Income
- Mean Household Income
- Percent of Residents working outside their Place of Residence
- Total Crime Index

The Idea of a Character Town.

A “character town” is a small city or town with unique and authentic qualities that foster home town pride. Character Towns are friendly and inviting places with great neighborhoods, vibrant downtowns and respected resources, historic and natural.

Character Towns support a sociable and civil society; a society that is proud of its home town, protective of its heritage and committed to its well-being. A character town is an interesting, pleasant and prosperous place for residents, businesses and visitors.

The Series.

*CharacterTowns.org has published ideas and information on character towns since January 2014. **The Series** presents specific information about ten selected towns [see Attachment A] within the Orlando Region exploring the features that make each town unique, authentic and attractive.*

The Character Town Workshop.

The initial gathering of ten Central Florida town officials has grown to seventeen. Town planners, downtown development directors, and economic development directors meet in a workshop setting every quarter in a different town in the Orlando Region.

The sessions are informal with two main features: a Roundtable discussion with each town presenting their current activities, dilemmas and questions followed by a presentation of current activities in the host community.

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Small Towns in a Metropolitan Region.

Each of the selected towns has developed a presence of its own. Each is a complete city, except each city relies for the metropolitan economy for employment and regional sports and cultural activities. Appreciating regional systems and participating in regional programs is a critical activity for the small cities and towns, with and without character.

Population and Households.

City size ranges from twelve thousand to sixty thousand, but the heart of the range is between twenty and thirty thousand residents. The list by household makes it easier to see the larger and smaller towns. Generally size matters; the bigger towns have more extensive main streets.

Kissimmee, Sanford and Winter Garden are the largest of the ten towns. They also have the largest average household sizes, lowest average age and lowest percentage of people over 64.

Mount Dora is the exception that proves the rule; a character niche can overcome lack of size. Mount Dora has the smallest population of the ten towns and one of the oldest; plus it has the shortest main streets. However, it prospers from massive amounts of visitors who find the town both charming and interesting.

Lake Mary is also among the least populated cities, but it is the wealthiest. Its success at attracting industry with well-paying jobs has been based in its quality of life and its aggressive pursuit of economic development.

Winter Park belies the statistics. Its Park Avenue is by far the most popular main streets and perceived to be the most successful. Its long history, prosperous populace and persistent demand for quality have stood it in good stead over its century-plus history.

	Population	Households	Population/ Household	Median Age (yrs.)	% Pop. Over 64 Yrs.
Clermont	29,582	10,678	2.77	41.4	19.8%
DeLand	27,872	10,079	2.77	38.9	20.5
Eustis	18,920	7,394	2.56	42.4	22.6
Kissimmee	63,392	20,616	3.07	33.6	10.5
Lake Mary	14,605	5,083	2.87	45.0	14.7
Mount Dora	12,663	5,343	2.37	46.7	25.3
Sanford	55,296	18,267	3.02	34.7	11.2
Tavares	14,343	6,127	2.34	52.4	35.3
Winter Garden	36,826	12,213	3.02	34.5	9.8
Winter Park	28,771	11,747	2.45	42.2	19.4

Source: wckplanning from The American Fact Finder, US Census Bureau.

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Employment.

Kissimmee, Sanford and Winter Garden have the largest number of residents employed. They also have the largest employee per household ratio among the ten towns. Lake Mary is the other town with a high ratio. Kissimmee and Sanford, along with Eustis and Tavares have the highest unemployment rates.

- Kissimmee and Winter Garden are near Walt Disney World which is the state’s largest employer. In addition, both towns are reasonably near downtown Orlando and the job market in south Orange County.
- Sanford undoubtedly benefits from the economic development success of Lake Mary and Seminole County who have successfully recruited large, tech companies over the past two decades. Lake Mary, with its newer housing stock and better schools has attracted the higher paid employees to reside in its town.

Income.

Household and family incomes are a primary metric for any city interested in the quality of its resident’s lives. Businesses and jobs create incomes for families along with taxes and fees for the city. Retention and recruitment of businesses with well-paying jobs is a fundamental responsibility of the community, mostly led by the business community.

Lake Mary is the leader in both median and mean income. Winter Park has a high mean income and lesser median household income with the lower median number reflecting a more diverse population.

Economic and education programs can improve these numbers in every town with the character of the town being the most effective recruiting tool. Character towns appeal to employers and to the employees they recruit.

	Population	Employed Persons	% Un-Employed	Median Household Income	Mean Household Income
Clermont	29,582	11,932	9.5%	\$55,336	\$67,772
DeLand	27,872	9,711	5.6	37,417	52,880
Eustis	18,920	8,357	11.9	37,203	55,162
Kissimmee	63,392	32,682	11.3	35,452	47,591
Lake Mary	14,605	7,761	9.3	84,741	106,643
Mount Dora	12,663	5,624	8.1	48,434	66,257
Sanford	55,296	26,550	14.8	39,776	49,315
Tavares	14,343	4,741	12.7	38,872	50,267
Winter Garden	36,826	19,238	8.6	58,355	76,749
Winter Park	28,771	13,254	7.3	56,995	117,946

Source: wckplanning from The American Fact Finder, US Census Bureau.

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Economic Development.

Each of the ten towns is very conscious of the need to retain and recruit new businesses. Each of the ten towns also find that their residents are largely employed outside their towns and benefit from the job market in the Orlando Region.

DeLand has the fewest people leaving town to go to work, only about half. It also has a large number of workers who commute into DeLand to work in the city and at the industrial park at their airport. Downtown DeLand is one of the most successful with restaurants, museums, shops and active street life, yet it suffers from its remote distance from the center of Orlando. The extension of the SunRail commuter train will draw DeLand closer to the action.

Taxation is always a factor in business development programs. While property tax millage rates only reflect part of the story, they are reported on the table below. Clermont, Kissimmee, Lake Mary, Winter Garden and Winter Park have the lowest rates. Interestingly, Lake Mary and Winter Park with the highest mean incomes have the lowest rates.

Crime is everywhere, but the two largest cities on the list have the highest Total Crime Rate according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. This statistic matters to developers looking for apartment sites and businesses looking for new locations. Programs to improve this statistic are important primarily to improve community safety, but also to reduce the barriers to new investment.

Assorted Characteristics: 2014 Character Towns of Central Florida					
	Population	% Working Outside Place of Residence	Millage Rate 2015	Total Crime Index	Length of Main Street Active Zone
Clermont	29,582	68.7%	4.0261	1251	2,300'
DeLand	27,872	45.3	6.9995	1528	2,000'
Eustis	18,920	79.2	7.5810	827	650'
Kissimmee	63,392	74.0	4.6253	3097	1,750'
Lake Mary	14,605	71.2	3.5895	313	1,200'
Mount Dora	12,663	68.7	5.9970	511	650'
Sanford	55,296	70.0	7.3250	3130	2,000'
Tavares	14,343	70.1	6.6166	451	2,100'
Winter Garden	36,826	79.1	4.2500	1179	1,800'
Winter Park	28,771	71.4	4.0923	1107	2,600'

Sources: wckplanning
 Population and % Working Outside from The American Fact Finder, US Census Bureau.
 Millage Rates from the Florida League of Cities.
 Total Crime Index, FDLE, Uniform Crime Reports from Cities

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Conclusions.

The ten character towns in the Orlando Region of Central Florida selected for study have a variety of socio-economic conditions. Some are larger than others, although there is a pretty consistent range. Some are wealthier than others, some older, some safer and some more employed.

In each case, the town has built its infrastructure and developed its character over a century. The “bones” are good, they have been retained and they now form the basis for the character they exude. Each has poor neighborhoods, older schools and commercial strips developed before anyone cared about the visual quality of the town.

Go figure Lake Mary; the newest and highest income town of the bunch. It is the town with the least history to overcome and the beneficiary of new infrastructure, new schools, new neighborhoods and a commitment to quality.

Yet, each has neighborhoods that are great or can become great. They each have a downtown core; most have a vibrant main street. Each has respect for its history and uses its historic assets to grow the town and enrich its culture.

The ten towns came to life with the coming of the railroad. Some will benefit from the coming of modern commuter rail. Most have history centers to celebrate their past and form the base for their future.

Most have had good political leadership and professional management for extended periods of time. Those few with a history of political strife have seen their growth and prosperity retarded, but each seems to have overcome past discretions and joined the crowd uniformly using good governance to create towns that are interesting, pleasant and prosperous for its residents, businesses and visitors.

Character and commitment to quality matters.