

'MONEY' MAGAZINE SURVEY

# WELLINGTON: THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE

*The village wins national recognition at No. 72 in the 100 best places to live.*

By MITRA MALEK  
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WELLINGTON — Low crime and high scholastic scores are among the calculable reasons the village snagged the 72nd spot on *Money* magazine's ranking of the nation's 100 best places to live.

But it's the neighborly waves and local zest for getting knee-deep in village programs — the *je ne sais quoi* of a thriving community — that residents say fills them with a sense of satisfaction to call Wellington home.

"This is a community where involvement has been not only gratifying, but sustained and ongoing," said Valerie McKinley, owner of an intermediary firm who has lived in the village for a quarter-century.

When residents created Wellington's comprehensive plan, they made sure to include an equestrian component, one that grew to mark the village internationally for the polo and equestrian industries.

"Almost extraordinary is the interest of the citizens in making the community a fine place to live," McKinley said.

Shauna Hostetler moved to Wellington two decades ago because of the schools. Nine of the 10 public schools were A rated in 2009.

In time, her appreciation grew to include the fact that Wellington is home to a diversity of houses of worship: Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, Baptist, Methodist.

Plus the village is a "year-round family community" in an ideal location: 20 minutes from beaches, an airport, downtown West Palm Beach and an interstate that leads to big cities.

"You've got a suburb, yet it doesn't feel like you're too far away," said Hostetler, 50, a mother of five.

Wellington's foundation, literally, allowed the village to flourish, Mayor Darell Bowen said.

## On Wellington mayor's wish list: More jobs and college campus

Back in the 1970s, Palm Beach County hailed plans for the development of the community's first 7,400 acres as one of the best. Credit Investment Corp. of Florida and Gould Florida built for young families and polo. Wellington incorporated into a municipality in 1995.

The local government that eventually ran the village helped foster its prosperity, Bowen said, pointing to the staff's visionary approach.

"We have been in general very fiscally responsible," he said, "but we've also been willing to spend money on things that really enhance the community."

Wellington has nearly completed an amphitheater and its first city hall. It just finished renovating its community pool and building a barrier-free park. It plans to open a 360-acre wetlands restoration and recreational project known as Section 24 this summer. To boot, some of those projects were partially financed through donations and by other governments.

Howard Trager moved to the village more than two decades ago after having lived in major cities throughout the United States most of his life.

"Wellington appeared to me to be close-knit community out in the country," said Trager, 77, president of the Wellington Seniors Club. "Most of the roads were single-lane roads. The community has matured."

But there's room for growth and improvement, Bowen said.

"We're only 15 years old," he said. "There's no way we can have everything accomplished

in 15 years."

For one, Wellington is largely a bedroom community, with many residents traveling south and east to work.

"We still need more high-paying jobs out here," Bowen said.

To that end, the village is creating a "medical arts" district that could lead to 4,000 jobs.

And Bowen said he believes Wellington would benefit from a college or university building a campus in town.

Palm Beach State College had considered expanding to the village, but negotiations fell through last year.

Still, Wellington's notable features apparently eclipse its shortcomings: In 2003, *Money* magazine ranked the village No. 7 as the best place to live among cities with fewer than 100,000 people in the East.

Tom Wenham was mayor then.

"It's the hometown feeling that does it," said Wenham, 77. "It's just the friendliness of the people."

Staff researcher Michelle Quigley contributed to this report.

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