

Greencastle's Image and Outlook

Survey Produces Candid Responses

People who live outside of Greencastle give the city higher marks than do its own citizens, according to a survey of Central Indiana residents conducted for the Hometown Greencastle Alliance. Respondents rate Greencastle positively for, among other things, having access to a local college or university, a low cost of living, and being a safe community.

“A critical component of the marketing and development initiative was to evaluate how familiar the general population of Central Indiana is with Greencastle, what is important to them when considering where to live, and to understand how local residents perceive our own community.” said Mayor Nancy Michael. As such, two on-line surveys took place this spring, conducted by Strategic Marketing and Research of Indianapolis. One gathered image and familiarity perceptions of more than 600 Central Indiana residents, and another collected the opinions of nearly 650 local residents. The results provide a glimpse of how others see us and how we feel about ourselves.

The Central Indiana study queried people who live within a 50 mile radius of Greencastle. Among this population, Greencastle had the lowest familiarity rating when compared with Zionsville, Greenfield, Noblesville, Plainfield, Danville, Crawfordsville, Bloomington, and Avon. The respondents who claimed to be familiar with Greencastle were asked to place the community on a map. Greencastle was placed in a mistaken location by 29 percent; more people were in error about Greencastle's location than they were about the sites of the other communities studied.

In a clear indication of how awareness can impact favorable opinions, Greencastle tied with Crawfordsville as being the least desirable place to live; Zionsville achieved the highest overall score as

Factors Important to Central Indiana Residents in Choosing a Place to Live

On a 5 point Rating Scale (3.5 or higher is considered very important)

Feature	Rating (5 point scale)
Safety	4.69
Friendliness	4.42
Clean & healthy environment	4.42
Quality healthcare	4.24
Desirable lifestyle	4.14
Low cost of living	4.09
Strong local economy	4.07
Quality public schools	3.98
Sense of community	3.98
Short commute to work	3.93
Parks & recreation	3.89
Range of housing options	3.89
Chain stores/restaurants	3.76
Access to an interstate	3.70
Leisure activities	3.57
Unique/independent stores/restaurants	3.56
Diversity	3.48
Sports and arts events	3.36
Access to downtown Indianapolis	3.25
Festivals	3.17
Historic/authentic feel	3.06
Access to Indianapolis airport	3.02
Local college/university	2.99
Vibrant nightlife	2.41

*Source: May, 2006 Greencastle Image and Awareness
Study, Strategic Marketing & Research, Inc.*

a desirable location. Residents of Central Indiana gave Greencastle a higher rating as a place to live than did the citizens of Greencastle themselves.

Survey respondents were asked what qualities are most important to them in a place to live. Several “core factors” were identified that can be considered the “price of entry” – features that must be present in a community before that community will merit consideration. These include quality health care, a desirable lifestyle, a low cost of living, a strong local economy, and a short commute time to work. Several attributes are likely to be important to people who are looking for a good place to raise their family. These include safety, friendliness, a clean and healthy environment, quality public schools, and a sense of community.

Distinctive features that make a community “unique” were also studied. Those that were the most important to respondents were parks and recreation, a wide range of housing options, leisure activities, and unique/independent stores and restaurants. Attributes that are less important to the general population are diversity, sports and arts events, festivals, a historic/authentic feel, access to a local college or university, and vibrant nightlife. It’s important to note, however, that these “unique” factors rated higher among people who prefer to live in a college town.

In addition, since Greencastle is fairly accessible to many, more urban, amenities, survey respondents were asked to rank a number of convenience factors. Convenience to chain restaurants and stores and easy access to the interstate were most important to Central Indiana responders. Accessibility to downtown Indianapolis and proximity to the airport were less important.

In an index where 100 is average, Greencastle rates above average among Central Indiana residents for having access to a local college or university, a low cost of living, being safe, having a historic/authentic feel, and a clean environment. Greencastle receives average ratings for friendliness, offering a sense of community, and accessibility to the interstate.

Greencastle residents gave slightly higher ratings of the community than Central Indiana respondents in categories such as having access to a local college/university, commute times, cost of living, safety, and friendliness. On the other hand, residents were more critical than the outside population of Greencastle’s lifestyle, healthcare, and economic assets. Interestingly, locals rated Greencastle lower than other Indiana residents for having historic buildings and an authentic feel. And additional below average ratings clearly suggest that citizens want a better sense of community and more shopping and dining, leisure and recreational opportunities.

Greencastle fares better when respondents were split to include only those who prefer to live in a town of 50,000 or less. The local survey also included respondents who work, but do not currently live, in Greencastle. Among that group, 45 percent said they either would consider moving to the community, or had not made a decision either way. This group gave Greencastle higher ratings than current residents of the community.

Greencastle residents also responded in great number to the survey's request for open-ended comments. The most prevalent suggestions again communicated a desire for more restaurants, shopping, entertainment and a community center. As one resident said, these things are necessary "to keep young professional and middle-to-upper income families in Greencastle." While many of the remarks were critical, respondents frequently commented on how much they enjoyed the community because it has qualities that make it "comfortable, easy to get around, and has people who are friendly."

How can Greencastle address its external image predicament and its local low self esteem? In the short term, Greencastle can make strides in building awareness by listening to customers and residents, understanding the trends, finding a unique selling point, creating a memorable and distinctive brand image, and putting together an effective sales, media and Internet strategy. Over the next decade and beyond, the community will need to understand, develop, and invest in those assets that will make Greencastle a more desirable place to live. Interesting trends that could very well benefit the community, particularly in terms of housing and migration patterns, will be explored in the third installment of this series that will appear in tomorrow's paper.

This is the second in a series of five stories that will appear daily this week through Saturday to share the research findings and early conclusions from Phase I of the city's marketing and development plan with the greater Greencastle community. The series can also be accessed on line at www.bannergraphic.com. An essential part of Phase II includes collecting continued feedback from residents. A community input session will be held Thursday, June 8, 2006, 6:00-7:30 p.m. at the Greencastle Middle School. The public is invited to attend. Further, residents can also send comments and suggestions via e-mail to Greencastle Chamber of Commerce at gchamber@ccrtc.com.

The Alliance, supported by donations from local businesses and organizations, is working to develop a marketing and community development plan to be completed by late summer of this year. The details of the survey can be reviewed at the Greater Greencastle Chamber of Commerce, 16 S. Jackson St.

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