Dallas gets 'mostly good' marks

Citizen survey shows positive outlook on police, fire; low on streets

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — A community survey the city of Dallas conducts every two years shows, by most measures, citizens view the town positively — with a few exceptions.

Citizens were asked to measure each category on a four-point scale: Poor, fair, good or excellent. Positive responses were those that were either good or excellent.

The 2017 survey was conducted by National Research Center in January and February. It was mailed to 1,500 residents, and 485 people completed and returned the survey.

It measured eight characteristics: General safety, mobility (ease of travel), natural environment, built environment, economy, recreation and wellness, education and enrichment, and community engagement.

Among the highlights for Dallas are ratings in public safety, and recreation and wellness.

Dallas Police Department was rated as 86 percent positive. Dallas Fire rated at 91 percent, and Emergency Medical Services (ambulance) was given a 92 percent positive rating.

Citizens viewed city parks at 89 percent positive, and the Dallas Aquatic Center received an 80 percent grade.

The Dallas Public Library received an 86 percent positive rating, and 63 percent of respondents said they used the library.

People are particularly pleased with the ease of travel in town, ranking traffic flow, travel by bicycle, ease of walking, and path and walking trails higher than the average for similar cities. Sixty-four percent of those who participated in the survey said that they had walked or biked around town instead of driving.

JOLENE GUZMAN/ Itemizer-Observer file

Overall economic health is rated at 30 percent by those who responded to a community survey conducted by the city of Dallas every two years.

Not all results were positive, but the areas with the most negative ratings weren't surprising to city officials.

Street repair received a 34 percent positive rating. Bus and transit services ranked at 36 percent positive. City Manager Ron Foggin said he expected those results, due to lack of street maintenance funding and public transit service.

Citizens gave recreational opportunities a 45 percent positive and social activities 34 percent. Dallas approved funding for a recreation coordinator to help in both of those areas.

The lowest ratings were given to how residents view the local economy and economic development. Overall economic health is rated at 30 percent, shopping opportunities at 15 percent, employment opportunities at 13 percent, "vibrant downtown" at 22 percent and places to work at 34 percent. All those measures rated below those of similar cities.

"Folks recognize that they want to see new businesses," Foggin said. "They want to see improved businesses and they want to see industry."

The city recently hired AJ Foscoli as tits economic development director to help bring more business to town.

"As we move forward through the next couple of years, there's a couple of spots where we are going to be laser-focused, and we are going to try to increase these percentages," Foggin said.

Dallas chamber forms female group

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Since JD Shinn took over as executive director of the Dallas Area Chamber of Commerce, membership is up from 121 to 154.

"That is 100 percent Ashley (Kahl)," Shinn said. "We've been making more efforts on a broad scale. Rather than going out and asking for membership, we've been trying to engage the community."

Kahl said one of her biggest focuses has been on quality over quantity.

"Our members are happier than they were before," she said. "We want to make sure who we have currently are satisfied and their needs are being met."

One way Kahl is filling a need for chamber members is through a new monthly meeting aimed at woman, Women Engaging.

The group meets on the third Wednesday of the month from 8 to 9 a.m. at Pressed Coffee & Wine Bar.

"It's for women at any level of business," Kahl said. "If you have a job, come."

The group, which will meet for its third time on June 21, is a safe place for women who work to "have coffee, eat treats, and talk about our struggles and our triumphs over the last month," Kahl said.

Networking is not prohibited, but not the focus, either, Kahl said.

"I want everyone to find their new best friend in this group," she said. "Networking will happen organically, but first, let's find out how long have you been married; where do your kids go to school, and then just connecting people, having people available who's gone before you, who's been there."

Two women have agreed to be mentors for others, Nancy Adams and Sue Dunham.

"They're available for all the women to call and say, 'I've had a bad day, do you have a minute?' or 'Can you go over this with me?'" Kahl said.

When she was beginning her business, Crunchy Mamas, she said she longed for the guidance of a mentor.

"There were so many elements to the business, I didn't know where to start," Kahl recalled.

Dunham and Adams can help point others in the right direction or be a listening ear, Kahl said.

"We need people; we need a community; and that's what it's about," she said. "Yes, it's business, and supporting each other in that aspect, but just in life in general. Just being able to run into each other and say, 'How are you?'"