

ORANGE COUNTY
(REFERENCE
PAMPHLET FILE)

OC's fastest growth: pessimism

More residents than ever studying a move, poll finds

By Marilyn Kalfus
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Orange County residents predict a gloomy future for this area, but few see themselves as part of the problem — or the solution, a new survey shows.

And for the first time, a high income isn't helping to ease such daily frustrations as traffic and congestion, the 1989 Orange County Annual Survey found.

"For the first time, it looks as though money no longer buys happiness with Orange County," said Mark Baldassare, the University of California, Irvine, professor who directed the poll.

As a result, more people than ever are contemplating a move.

"People are thinking about alternatives, wherever they are," Baldassare said. "They're looking for paradise, whether it's in the south county or outside the region altogether."

Last year, county residents encouraged by news of the county's growth-management plans and possible traffic solutions had a relatively upbeat outlook. But today, the negative views of previous years have returned.

"I think there were some raised expectations last year," Baldassare said. "But another year has passed and traffic hasn't improved."

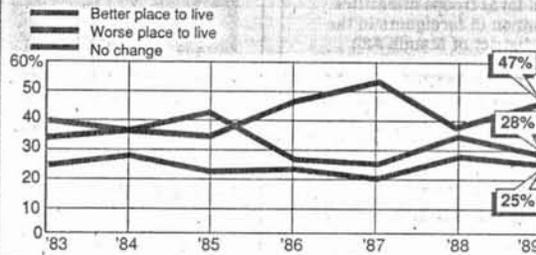
Pessimism about the future has increased from 38 percent to 47 percent in a year, the survey shows. Just 28 percent of residents believe the county will become a better place to live, compared with 35 percent last year.

This year's survey, which polled 1,085 county residents, for the first time asked questions about air quality and volunteerism.

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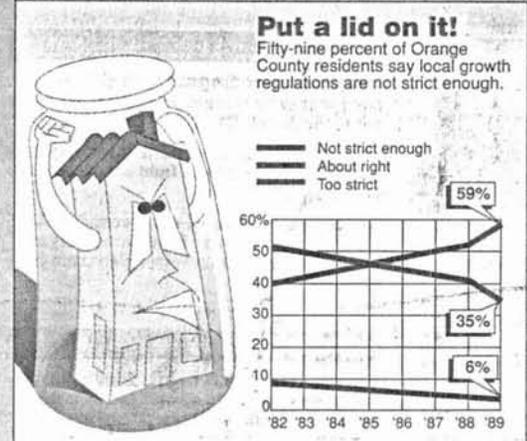
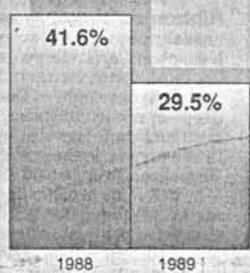
Paradise lost?

Nearly half of Orange County residents are pessimistic about the area's future. Less than one-third believe this will become a better place to live.



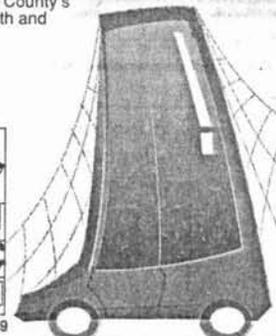
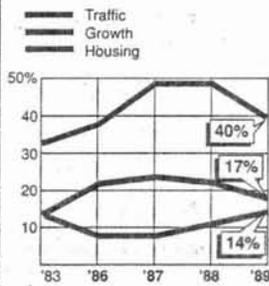
Money doesn't matter

It looks as though money no longer buys happiness in Orange County. Just 29.5 percent of those with annual household incomes of more than \$50,000 think things are going very well.



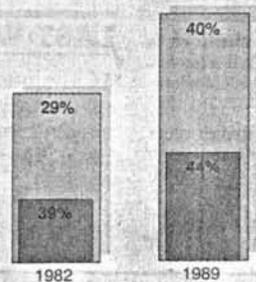
Stuck in the slow lane

Traffic still is considered Orange County's worst problem, followed by growth and housing.



On the road again

Fed up with congestion and housing costs, more people are considering leaving the county.



Source: 1989 Orange County Annual Survey, UCI

Jeff Goertzen / The Register

1989 ORANGE COUNTY ANNUAL SURVEY

SURVEY: Gloomy future seen by Orange County residents

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And, Baldassare said, whatever the issue — whether it was improving air quality by banning gas-powered lawn mowers, alleviating freeway congestion by ride-sharing or helping the needy by contributing time and money — he found a similar pattern. Residents simply aren't willing to make sacrifices.

"They perceive a problem," he said, "but they don't see themselves as part of the problem, so they're not willing to be part of the solution."

He added, "More affluent people have this sense of wanting to be in control of their lives. As a result, they're less willing to have other people tell them what to do. This is one phenomenon in Orange County which makes us less willing to change than our counterparts elsewhere."

This year, less than one-third of those with household incomes of more than \$50,000 said things are going very well, compared with 41 percent in 1988.

As a result of their frustrations, many people are interested in moving, Baldassare said. And of those who are, nearly half would like to leave the county. Most blame congestion.

But Orange County supervisors said residents are partly to blame for their own problems.

"People want a better quality of life, but those are the same people who had bumper stickers that said, 'No on M,'" Supervisor Don Roth said, referring to a recently failed measure to raise taxes to pay for transportation improvements.

He does not foresee an exodus.

"They may be getting more serious thinking about (moving), but I don't think there's a surge of people moving out of this area," he said. "The number of people increasing just by births alone is staggering. In the last 12 months, Orange County hospitals delivered 42,000 babies — that's like a city the size of Tustin."

“More affluent people have this sense of wanting to be in control of their lives. As a result, they're less willing to have other people tell them what to do.”

Mark Baldassare

UCI professor who directed poll

State demographers say more people are moving into the county than moving out. Last year, the difference came to nearly 20,000 people, said Elizabeth Hoag, research manager at the Demographic Research Unit of the state Department of Finance.

Forty-eight percent of Orange County residents rate air quality as a big problem, but fewer than half support restrictions that would affect their lifestyles, such as imposing parking fees or restricting barbecue starter fluids.

As in previous years, residents see traffic as the top problem, followed by growth and housing costs. Traffic and growth are perceived as bigger problems among south county residents.

Despite the bad traffic, however, residents still are reluctant to share rides; their habit of driving to work alone has not changed since 1982, Baldassare said.

"If we could solve that problem," said Thomas Riley, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, "most of our other problems would be gone."

Still, though satisfaction with the freeways has slipped by 25 points since 1982, not everyone is unhappy.

"Don't complain about the traffic," said Dennis Mahle, owner of Harbour Limousine in Garden Grove. "That's what makes my business."

"Traffic is so bad that people can't get to work anymore," Mahle said. "So they'll call the company and have a car take them."

Others aren't so lucky.

"Typically in Orange County, higher-income residents commute longer distances and spend more time in their cars," Baldassare said.

Fifty-nine percent of residents say local government growth regulations are not strict enough. That response shot up seven points since last year, and 19 points since 1982.

"It's going to take a growth-management policy with some teeth in it," said Tom Rogers, a south county resident who headed last year's failed slow-growth movement.

The 1989 survey shows the median monthly mortgage is \$740 and the median monthly rent is \$680. Those costs have changed little since last year.

And once again, county residents consider drug abuse the most pressing social ill. Health care and homelessness run a distant second and third.

But, typically, they aren't contributing to charity; the 1989 median donation of \$285 is just \$23 more than the amount given two years ago and has not kept pace with inflation. Seventy percent do not volunteer their time.

The survey also showed:

■ The median household income is \$45,000. In the past year, incomes rose an average of 2 percent, while the inflation rate was 5 percent. Consumer confidence in current economic conditions is declining.

■ Residents support a 1990 statewide measure to raise the gasoline tax and are divided on an initiative that would double the tax rate for business property while decreasing the tax on residential property. Overall, the county profile is slightly more Republican than it was eight years ago.

■ Renters are "surprisingly" optimistic about their prospects for owning a home, Baldassare said. Today's renter population is more affluent than in previous years, and renters are more likely to be in their 30s and 40s than older or younger.

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