

Huntington Beach surprised at rating

City tops income survey of largest cities

By Dana Kennedy
The Register

HUNTINGTON BEACH — This city could never be accused of having an inflated self-image.

When it was learned that a recent study ranks Huntington Beach No. 1 in individual and household income among the 100 largest cities in the United States, the response was candid.

"Well, I'll be doggoned," said City Clerk Alicia Wentworth.

"Really? I always thought this place was kind of rundown," said 19-year-old surfer Jeff Palance.

Steve Fjeldsted, a reference librarian at the Huntington Beach

A SURPRISE: Most Huntington Beach residents were surprised to learn of the No. 1 ranking/A2

Public Library who spotted the survey, summed up local reaction.

"I almost fell out of my chair when I read it," he said.

Believe it or not, according to one New York economist, it's true.

Newport Beach, Beverly Hills and Scarsdale, N.Y., may attract all the attention. But it was Huntington Beach — short on yachts, movie stars and investment bankers but long on solid, two-income, middle-class families — that captured first place in a survey of large cities in the most recent edition of "Book of American City Rankings."

The average per-capita income in Huntington Beach is \$12,225 and average household income is \$34,206, according to the Facts on File publication.

But as compiled by economist John Marlin, the lists that place Huntington Beach at the top for per-capita and household income must be put in perspective.

According to Marlin's data and other surveys, well-known haunts of the wealthy such as Newport Beach still may outdo their neighbors in per-capita income, but those smaller cities don't make the publication, which deals only in 100 largest U.S. cities.

Huntington Beach (population 180,000) is the 85th-largest city in the country and 11th in the state, according to local officials.

Unlike the metropolises, such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, Huntington Beach lacks the minority populations and poor areas that reduce overall income levels. But it is large enough to qualify for big-city status over such virtual hamlets as Newport Beach (population 67,000), Beverly Hills (population 32,000) and San Marino (population 14,000).

And it doesn't hurt that Huntington Beach lies within Orange County, which has one of the highest average household income levels (\$35,000) in the nation, officials said. Or that it contains the low-profile but high-income Huntington Harbour area, a separate census tract and the home of many captains of industry.

By contrast, Baltimore is the

poorest major city in the country, with an average household income level of \$13,000.

"It's rare to find a large city that's really that exclusive," said Marlin, who gathered the data with co-author James S. Avery on behalf of the Council for Municipal Performance, a Manhattan-based research group. "Once cities start getting larger, you get a lot more variability."

But despite Huntington Beach's size, the city has the demographics of a bedroom suburb, according to city planner Hal Simmons.

Most striking is the city's lack of ethnic mix. Few minority residents are found among the country's smaller communities, but the two largest cities, Anaheim (population 244,000) and Santa Ana (population 222,000) have many minorities. Those two cities have a 17 percent and 44 percent Latino population, respectively.

In Huntington Beach, 85 percent of residents are white, 7.8 percent are Latino, 5.8 percent are Asian or Native American and 0.6 percent, or 1,200, are black, Simmons said.

Only one other city among the country's 100 largest has a smaller black population than that of Huntington Beach, according to Marlin. Warren, Mich., just outside Detroit, has a .18 percent black population, he said.

What keeps Huntington Beach afloat, according to Marlin, is the predominance of "mostly settled people living in good-sized houses."

But "Cosmopolitan Girls" can take heart. There's more to the city than families. The singles population is plentiful (40,000). Forty-three percent — well below the national average — is female.

"It's a great place for singles," Marlin said.

Several other almanacs list cities on the basis of income, but Marlin's study is the only one in which Huntington Beach is No. 1. A survey of the 199 largest cities ranks Huntington Beach seventh in household income and ninth in per-capita income.

"Everyone looks at data a different way," Marlin said. "Some submerge it all into metro or regional areas. If everyone did it the same way, it'd be plagiarism."

INCOME

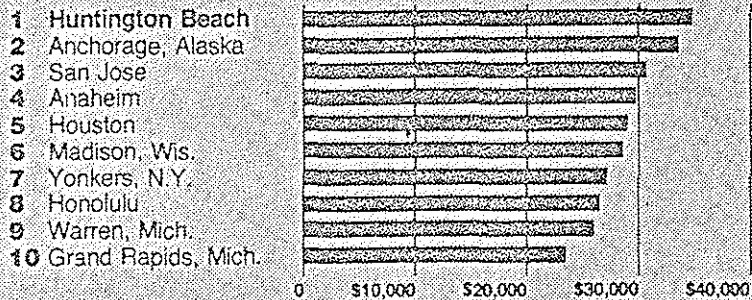
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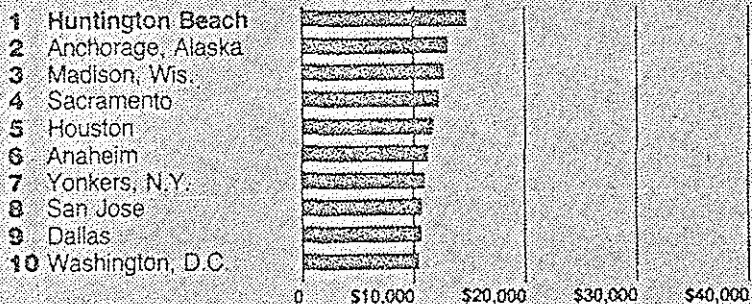
MOST AFFLUENT LARGE U.S. CITIES

There's more than sand and waves in Huntington Beach — a lot more. The community has been designated as being No. 1 in individual and household income among the 100 largest cities in the United States. The announcement was made in the most recent edition of the "Book of American City Rankings." Below are ranking of the top 10 cities in individual and household income categories.

Income per household for 100 largest U.S. Cities



Income per capita for 100 largest U.S. Cities



Source: "Book of American City Rankings," Facts on File publication, New York, N.Y.

Most Huntington Beach residents fit 'stable, settled' description

By Dana Kennedy
The Register

HUNTINGTON BEACH — Funny, they don't really act like posh suburbanites. They don't talk like them, either.

"I don't think you'll want to use us," said Bev Titus, when called upon for an interview. "We don't have the BMW and the Mercedes. And we don't take exotic vacations or anything."

Titus was surprised, as were many Huntington Beach residents, when told of the city's recent ranking as No. 1 in individual and household income among the country's 100 largest cities.

But the Titus family — Ron, 43, Bev, 34, Steve, 16, Brennan, 6, and dog Buttons — seems close to what the author of the "Book of American City Rankings" said are typical Huntington Beach residents: "stable people settled in houses."

The Titus family is not nearly so dull as that description may suggest, but they admit to a modest, and somewhat traditional, lifestyle.

Instead of the BMW and the Mercedes, two sensible sedans — a Mercury Topaz and a Buick — rest in the driveway of their two-story tract house near Edison High School.

Ron and Bev are a two-career

couple, but their jobs are more dependable than flashy. Ron is the vice president of an insurance brokerage firm in Anaheim, and Bev is a medical secretary.

They spend most of their free time with their sons. Steve, a junior at Edison, is an avowed surfer but recently stayed out of the water to study for final exams. Brennan is a student at a local Christian school because his parents "want to see those principles applied and taught."

Religion is important to the Tituses. They attend the South Coast Community Church in Irvine because it appeals to the whole family, Bev said.

One of their few luxuries is a cleaning lady twice a month, an expense Bev said "usurps other pleasures."

"First it was a luxury, but now it's a necessity," she said.

The Tituses described Huntington Beach as a low-key, family-oriented community where traditional values are "still very much in place."

"I can't really think of any other place I'd rather live," Ron said. "You meet a lot of neat people here; you find a lot of parents who care. And, of course, you've got the climate and the proximity to the beach. Basically, it's average, not pretentious like other areas."