

St. Petersburg: Inviting, Inspiring and Growing Brighter Every Day

[Lynn Waddell](#) | 1/26/2018

St. Petersburg is a bright star in one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation. To the west, it is bordered by barrier islands with some of the nation's finest beaches. To the east, it rests on the expansive blue Tampa Bay.

Home to world-class museums, Major League Baseball, a professional soccer team and events such as the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, it is a metropolis of arts and entertainment. Anchored by the major industries of health care, life science, financial services, specialty manufacturing and tourism, it is also an inspiring place to work.

The city's downtown is almost unrecognizable for those who haven't visited in 20 years. Condominium high-rises, amenity-filled apartment buildings and hotels fill the skyline. Streetscapes of sidewalk cafes, coffee shops, boutiques, nightclubs and iconic architecture — new and old — are in every direction.

Sidewalks are bustling with not only visitors, but residents of all ages. Some are college students attending the city's major research university, the state college, the private liberal arts college, nursing school or law school, all of which are based in the city.

St. Petersburg, or the "Burg" as locals call it, honors its past while it forges a vibrant future filled with dynamic businesses, entrepreneurial millennials and youthful baby boomers. The green benches? Well, now the name falls to Green Bench Brewing, which hosts a diverse clientele and frequently a local indie market.

An Expanding Renaissance

Since 2010, St. Petersburg's growth rate has tripled year over year. It also has grown younger. The percentage of millennials increased by 6% between 2010 and 2015, inching the median age down to 41.8.

In recent years, dramatic growth has extended beyond the city core. Vacant neighborhood lots, particularly those close to downtown, are being filled with new homes and townhomes that typically sell before completion. Apartment complexes are going up all over the city.

Developer NRP is finishing Avanti, its second apartment complex in downtown St. Petersburg with 366 units. It plans to start construction on another complex with 240 units and 5,000 square feet of retail in the city's Grand Central Corridor in the summer of 2018. "Most places can't compare," says Kurt P. Kehoe, NRP vice president of development in Florida. "St. Petersburg has the vibe and funky arts feel that other downtown areas just don't have."

Boutiques, art galleries, vintage furnishings stores, breweries, coffee houses, bike shops and more have opened like lilies after a summer shower. Craft breweries have become such an integral part of the local culture that the county tourism office offers beer trail maps.

New local and independently owned restaurants have put the Burg on the foodie map. In 2017, USA Today named St. Petersburg one of the "Five Under-rated Food Cities on the East Coast." The city is home to celebrity chefs including Michael Mina and Don Pintabona at Locale Market and Jeremy Duclut of the Food Network show "Chopped" fame at Cassis American Brasserie.

“We’re seeing amazing growth throughout all of our districts and corridors, and we’re very excited about that,” says Kanika Tomalin, St. Petersburg’s deputy mayor. “Business permits and business registrations are up at record levels, and we attribute much of that to the alignment of the public and private sectors working together to create a viable economic landscape to not only attract great businesses, but create the infrastructure required to retain them.”

In 2017, a record \$671.1 million in construction was underway. Though most was residential, many businesses repurposed existing structures. For instance, empty warehouses have been converted into artist galleries and sometimes former garages into restaurants.

The momentum attracts a variety of entrepreneurs and encourages the growth of existing companies. The city has 16,000 businesses and counting. Mayor Rick Kriseman’s weekly calendar is packed with ribbon cutting ceremonies.

As the local economy booms, the city government is also doing well, not only in revenues but also in finance management. In 2017, the Fiscal Times ranked St. Petersburg among the top 25 fiscally healthy cities in America, the only Florida city to make the cut.

With a cityscape dotted by cranes and new homes rising throughout neighborhoods, there’s no doubt about it. St. Petersburg is growing in ways that are strengthening its traditional appeal to tourists and retirees as well as becoming more inviting to millennials and business.

Most notably, three world-class museums are under construction downtown and slated to open in 2018 and 2019. A \$79-million city police station rises on the edge of downtown with an architectural style that reflects the city’s welcoming vibe. The tallest building on the west coast of Florida — the One condominium tower — nears completion. An addition to the city’s largest shopping mall and multiple expansions of corporate offices outside downtown are also underway.

Beyond, the future looks bright as the city plans to redevelop the 86-acre parcel on the edge of downtown now occupied by Tropicana Field, home of the Tampa Bay Rays. With or without a new baseball stadium, the property is slated for a research and tech campus, hotel/conference space, housing and retail.

As more people rediscovered the St. Pete lifestyle, downtown condominium development exploded around 2010. More recently apartment complexes have sprung up downtown and beyond. Large single-family homes are replacing many smaller ones, and vacant neighborhood lots are filling fast.

“So many people who chose to come to Florida are choosing to come to St. Pete because it’s so cool here,” says Lari Averbeck, a residential agent with RE/MAX Metro. While demand close to downtown outpaces supply, Uber, improved bicycle lanes and expanded public transit have helped fuel housing growth beyond the city core. “People often ask, ‘How far of an Uber ride is it?’” Averbeck says. “With Bike Share, you can Uber downtown and ride bikes once you get down there.”

Though the St. Petersburg real estate market is hot, opportunities for commercial development remain.

Ron Wheeler, CEO of The Sembler Company, a major developer and manager of shopping centers throughout the Southeast, says St. Petersburg’s retail market is also strong.

“We’ve got a really healthy retail market in particular downtown where occupancy is very high,” Wheeler says. “There’s certainly opportunity for more development — primarily redevelopment.”

On the horizon, Wheeler says “the biggest real estate deal” will be the Tropicana Field property, which holds the possibility for a large corporate headquarters, housing, retail and more.

In large part, the growth is fueled by the discovery of the St. Petersburg lifestyle, one that's kissed with sunshine and embraced by diversity, arts and a love for all things local. It also doesn't hurt that on average, St. Petersburg has a lower cost of living than many other metropolitan areas.

Huffington Post in 2016 wrote that St. Petersburg was becoming "America's Hottest City" based on its vibrant arts community, craft beer, burgeoning restaurant scene, LGBT-friendliness and having no state income tax.

The city's charm is so intoxicating to visitors that sometimes they cannot leave, or at least they leave only long enough to sell their homes elsewhere.

Three years ago, artist Julie Angerosa, 36, and her husband, a geologist, were considering a move from upstate New York to a progressive city with a dynamic arts community. They read an article about St. Petersburg and put it on their list of possibilities. She says, "Then we came for a visit, and before we left we put in an offer on a house."

Sunniest City in America

A key appeal of St. Petersburg has long been its weather. It is literally the sunniest city in America, holding the world's record for the most consecutive sunny days at 768. Typically, the city has 361 days of sunshine in a year with an average daytime temp of 83 degrees. You can dine outdoors comfortably in short sleeves most days of the year.

Early city leaders played to the temperate climate in their designs and helped make St. Petersburg also one of the nation's most walkable cities. They laid out streets on a grid, allowed for wide sidewalks, and preserved seven miles of waterfront for all to enjoy with parks of green grass and palms. A downtown pier offered fishing and picture perfect views.

Through the years, city leaders and residents built on the early framework, creating more trails and beautifying them all. Today, an African American Heritage Trail encourages a walking tour of significant historical sites. You can take city history and mural tours, made easier by a Bike Share program with 30 locations around the city.

You can travel on foot or bicycle throughout the entire Pinellas County on the paved Pinellas Trail, which was once a railroad line. Bicycle to work or to the beach along designated bike lanes. Little wonder the League of American Bicyclists in 2017 recognized St. Petersburg as a Silver Level Bicycle-Friendly community, a designation held by no other large or mid-size Florida city.

A weekly Saturday market, street art festivals, orchestra performances in the park, music festivals and more occur regularly under the Burg's sunny skies. The list of outdoor activities seems limitless particularly when you throw in the city parks with ball fields, tennis courts, golf courses and dog parks. One of the nation's largest, the city park system spans more than 2,400 acres.

And let's not forget that the city is surrounded by water on three sides. Watersports abound here. Sailboats, triple decker yachts and catamarans fill marinas. Waterfront homes often feature docks for personal watercraft.

A new \$50-million pier with parks, public art and outdoor event space is under construction and promises to be a waterfront recreational hub for decades to come.

Though St. Petersburg's population nears 260,000, the city is still characterized by residents as a big small town. The neighborly vibe is evident in the city's vibrant neighborhood associations, community

events and simply, individual friendliness. This all in spite of having a diverse population that spans age, race, religion and sexual orientation.

“One of the things I like about St. Pete is you go out and you see millennials and boomers and everyone is OK with that,” says Jeff Johnson, state director of AARP. “That’s something you don’t see everywhere.”

A progressive city, St. Petersburg welcomes all. One of its most popular annual events celebrates its diversity.

What started in 2003 with a small LGBT Pride parade along Central Avenue just beyond the city’s downtown core has grown to be the largest Pride celebration in Florida and one of the largest in the nation.

In recent years, more than 200,000 people have attended the St Pete Pride Weekend. It’s a community family-friendly affair. Area corporations and non-profits enter parade floats. Many city and state leaders join in, riding in convertibles in the colorful parade that now rolls down Beach Drive.

The inclusiveness goes beyond festivities. The city employs a full-time liaison in the mayor’s office and police department to assist the growing demographic and has adopted LGBT-friendly policies. In 2016, the Human Rights Campaign gave the city a perfect score in the Municipal Quality Index, which is based on non-discrimination laws, employment practices, city services and city leaders’ positions on equality issues.

“The sun is shining brightly on St. Petersburg. We are seeing growth and change here like never before. We are also seeing a renaissance in opportunity. Whether it’s those seeking to start a new business, or continue their education, or receive training, we are working every day to ensure St. Pete is the kind of city where anyone can thrive.”

Mayor Rick Kriseman
City of St. Petersburg

Icon of the Bay

The \$50-million New St. Petersburg Pier planned for opening in early 2019 is anticipated to be a defining city icon for decades to come. A 3,065-foot-long expanse stretching over Tampa Bay, the pier will be packed with varied potential experiences from fishing to concert viewing to fine dining. It will include an outdoor amphitheater, market space, transient boat docks, kayak launch, learning center, a park and more. A \$20-million pier approach project will connect the pier to downtown.

Homes of St. Pete

St. Petersburg’s neighborhoods are as eclectic as the people who fill them. The city’s Jungle Prada neighborhood is home to an ancient

Tocobaga Indian mound as well as resident peacocks that sometimes roam the shady brick streets. While the Kenwood neighborhood is known for its craftsman-style bungalows.

In the city’s older neighborhoods, you will be hard pressed to find two single-family homes exactly alike. Some homes date to the early 1900s and feature rusticated brick. Others such as the birdcage homes, so-called for their large screened areas, date from the mid century. Grand Spanish Mediterranean revival

homes of the 1920s can be found throughout the city. The new homes are also a mix of styles, though generally larger than most older ones. Whatever your dream home style, you can be sure to find one in the neighborhoods of St. Petersburg.

Neighbors Who Care

St. Petersburg is the kind of place where neighbors look after one another and those who are fortunate help those less so.

Inspired to improve the lives of underserved and at-risk teens, R&B recording artist and St. Petersburg resident Alex Harris together with Herbert Murphy created the non-profit Arts Conservatory for Teens (ACT). It's an afterschool arts program where teens learn from professional artists and get the opportunity to perform on stages throughout the area. ACT student Jennifer White says, "It's really done so much for me as a person, not just an artist. It's had me step out of my shell on stage, and I've stepped out of my shell in real life, too." Of the more than 1,000 teens who have passed through the ACT program since 2009, 90% have gone on to pursue higher education.

The Tampa Bay Rays, the city's Major League Baseball team, gives back off field. In 2017, former third baseman Evan Longoria contributed \$500,000 to help fund an expansion of the Great Explorations Children's Museum based at Sunken Gardens, a historic city attraction.

Most local heroes aren't celebrities. At the St. Petersburg Free Clinic, a local charity that has been caring for underserved residents facing temporary emergency needs since 1970, more than 80% of its funding comes from local residents and businesses; more than 450 volunteers each month pack food, mentor or provide other services. In 2017, with a significant gift from retired business executive David Baldwin, the Free Clinic purchased a 7,000-sq.-ft. building to expand the health and wellness services it provides for thousands of low-income, uninsured adults each year.