

“If you repeat something enough times, everyone will start to believe it, even you.” We have all heard this before and it’s true. Whether it is something about us personally or about another individual, group, business or place, positive and negative myths and rumors often evolve and develop. They then can take root to the point that people in general, even the most logical and grounded of us, begin to believe it.

Well, come to find out, the same thing is true for our City. While preparing for our Cities “Branding” exercise, I have found that many of the perceptions that some have developed regarding our City are either exaggerated or simply not true. The facts, gathered from a variety of sources, actually paint a pretty clear and surprising picture of life in our City and in general, who we are. Here are a few perceptions that I hear on a regular basis.

Perception: “The risk of a crime is greater in Bonita Springs than other areas.”

Reality: Not true. The “Crime Risk” in Bonita Springs is significantly lower (yes, that’s right...lower!) than in the U.S., Florida, Lee, Collier and most Cities in S.W. Florida. In fact, while Bonita scores an 84, two Cities in S.W. Florida score a 285 and a 161, representing 2 and 3 times the risk! Bonita Springs, even in our Downtown Area, is a pretty safe place.

Perception: “Bonita has a larger percentage of poor people than other areas.”

Reality: Not true. The percentage of households beneath the poverty level in Bonita Springs is a full 2% lower than Lee and Collier and 6% lower than Florida. Although there are obviously people who are in financial trouble in Bonita Springs, it is more often than not, a bigger problem, elsewhere.

Perception: “There are more Hispanics in Bonita Springs than any other area.”

Reality: The Hispanic population in Bonita Springs is somewhere between 17 and 22% while Collier County is around 25%. So regardless of the perception, we are not that different. The subject of immigration has become a very volatile and emotional subject, but basically, Hispanic people have come to live most everywhere in the U.S. (15%) and Florida (20%)

Perception: “The people in Bonita Springs are generally older and in general make more money.”

Reality: O.K. You’ve got me there. 32% of Bonitians are over 65 years old, compared with 22% in Lee and 24% in Collier and the household median income in Bonita Springs is more than \$10,000 higher than the Florida, Lee or Collier County median incomes. The combination of higher incomes and life experiences that some of our “more seasoned” residents have brought with them, is a blessing and an invaluable resource for our City and all its residents. Incidentally, the average age in Bonita Springs is around 54 years old. (So, I have 1 more year before I’m above average?)

I know that many of these statistics (and there are more) fly in the face of “the conventional wisdom” and that your reflex may be to say “No way!” (or worse). But our perceptions have been, without a doubt, crafted over decades by a comment here and there, an experience, a newspaper article, a visual sighting or a drive down a particular street at a particular time.

Luckily, “the door swings both ways” on perception and reputation, so let’s not permit perception to be the reality... let’s allow reality to be the perception.

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