

## Hillsborough / Temple Terrace

### Oak trees, strip malls, downtown visions?

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Named for the Temple oranges that once dotted the region and the flat "terrace" landscape the city was built upon, Temple Terrace is one of only three incorporated areas in Hillsborough County (the others are the City of Tampa and Plant City). Its close proximity to the Museum of Science and Industry, the University of South Florida and the Hillsborough River makes it an attractive location for businesses as large as Verizon's data center and as tiny as The Olde World Cheese Shop.

With a population of approximately 23,000, Temple Terrace seems minute when compared to Tampa. But in some ways it's more like Tampa than other parts of Hillsborough County: it has its own mayor (Joe Affronti), its own five-person city council and its own chamber of commerce - and, like Tampa, it's in the midst of a push to create a vibrant downtown.

The roads that meander through Temple Terrace neighborhoods are welcoming, and many of them are lined with giant oak trees. They're a point of particular pride for the residents - so much so that, last year, when the city began to reconstruct streets in an effort to reduce the effects of storm water during flash floods, there was widespread concern about possible damage to the oaks. Not to worry: Temple Terrace hired a certified arborist to make sure they were taken care of properly.

The heart of the area's business community is anything but a sleepy tree-lined avenue. It's busy 56th Street, a long stretch of chain stores of every variety, from Blockbuster Video to every flavor of fast-food joint. But small businesses thrive on the 56th Street corridor, too. The Meridian Hookah Lounge, a recent addition, is geared toward the college students who live nearby. The traditional Mexican-style restaurant Café Don Jose is a local favorite for lunch and dinner. Books for Thought, a bookstore targeted toward the area's African-American population, fits a neighborhood niche.

Temple Terrace, which this year celebrates the 80th anniversary of incorporation, adheres to the slogan "A city for living." While you might argue that every city is about living, not all are as livable as this one. With its new downtown redevelopment plan, Temple Terrace hopes to make its slogan truer than ever.

#### **Eminent Victorian: Cathy Statz of Victorian Village**

Cathy Statz's Victorian Village is a pink-and-green fantasy of nostalgic commerce, a mix of shops that includes a tearoom, an ice cream parlor, an accessories boutique and Statz's own knickknack-filled gift shop. But a decade ago, there was nothing on this Fowler Avenue site but an A-Z Beverage store and a used auto dealership. Statz, who was a realtor at the time, decided to invest in the property after the owner put it up for sale. Through renovation and additional construction she created a unique spin on the traditional strip mall. "I never anticipated it would be this huge," says Statz.

Her shop, which is also called Victorian Village, contains more than 30,000 different *objets*. They range from seasonal decorations to coffee mugs, from Walt Disney collectors' items and Precious Moments figurines to elaborate Swarovski crystal pieces. A Temple Terrace resident for much of

her life, Statz thinks a major reason her business thrives is because of its strong presence in the community.

"One thing about Temple Terrace is that it's a great place to live," she says. "We're truly committed to the community.

So that the business can maintain its visibility, Statz and her staff sponsor two or three special events per month, including fundraisers and collector meet-and-greets.

She is careful about which businesses she allows to move in. Emphasizing her need to be selective, she says it took five years for the idea of the tearoom to materialize into an actual business.

In the future, she might think about franchising the Victorian Village idea or helping someone in another city open a similar place. But for now, she will continue to expand on the good thing she already has.

And if she could have it entirely her way, she would keep her shop stocked full of Christmas items year-round.

"Everybody loves Christmas," she says.

*Victorian Village, 6870 E. Fowler Ave., Temple Terrace, 813-989-0908.*

### **Still Hair: Casey's Barber Shop**

There is a hair salon in practically every strip mall in the country. But whatever happened to the days of the in-and-out \$8 men's haircut? There are still a few places around that don't charge \$25 for a basic trim, and Casey's Barber Shop is one of them. Casey's is located in the Terrace Plaza Shopping Center at the heart of the city's commercial district. The small barbershop is a Temple Terrace landmark that even the mayor visits when he needs a cut.

Casey's opened in 1967, and the barbers there today still use the same cash register that was used when the store first opened. It's not nearly as elaborate as most other hair studios, yet generation after generation of Temple Terrace locals give the barber shop a steady client base.

Connie Buggeca, whose uncle is the original Casey, has worked at the barbershop for 25 years. She is a former manager but now works only as a barber. She said the regular old-fashioned haircuts at cut-rate prices are what keep customers coming back.

"Trendy styles come and go. Basic haircuts are your bread and butter," she said.

Buggeca said that Casey's doesn't usually advertise but sometimes sponsors local high school athletic teams.

Manager Mark Barrios has worked at Casey's for 17 years. In that time, he says, "the shop itself hasn't changed much."

He thinks Casey's will survive through the redevelopment scheduled to begin in 2007.

In fact, it has already survived one of the low points in the downtown's history. When a Publix that was located in Terrace Plaza several years ago moved out, other businesses in the strip mall

followed because they could not survive without the grocery store's lure. In the midst of the center's decline, Casey's clientele remained steady.

Interestingly, neither the manager nor the former manager actually lives in Temple Terrace.

"It's such a well-established shop that there's a lot of business, so it's worth the drive," says Barrios, who commutes from Riverview.

*Casey's Barber Shop, 8885 N. 56th St., Temple Terrace, 813-988-4691*

## **FORE! Past & Present**

What was supposed to be a golf course community for wealthy visitors turned into what is today the City of Temple Terrace. In the early part of the 20th century, a businessman named Potter Palmer sold the land to a group of men who formed Temple Terrace, Inc. to create a haven that would attract affluent snowbirds with the allure of orange groves and vacation homes.

Architects and city designers gathered to plan different aspects of the new town in 1922. The architecture was modeled after the Mediterranean revival style then popular in Florida, and a booming success was predicted. The city was incorporated into Hillsborough County on May 18, 1925.

After the Great Depression, however, city development slowed for 30 years. (Many of those Mediterranean-style buildings are now used by Florida College as dormitory and recreational facilities.) The city finally began to grow again in the 1950s.

Today, Temple Terrace has benefits that unincorporated areas do not. For example, it has its own police force, one with a fairly fearsome reputation. As an incorporated area, it has the ability to pass laws that are different than those of Hillsborough County, such as how to handle finances. Another benefit of a small, incorporated city is the sense of community that rises from it. Temple Terrace residents gathered in large numbers to offer ideas about revitalizing the city's downtown, and the result was the master plan, Vision 2020.

## **The Plan, The Plan: Vision 2020**

The estimated cost of the changes proposed in Vision 2020 would be \$300 million, but only \$60 million of that would come from the City of Temple Terrace. The rest will be paid by the developers. The municipality has already purchased 35 of 38 acres it plans to use for the downtown project, which will be located southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street.

Redevelopment Director Ralph Bosek foresees a neighborhood built on the premises of New Urbanism, a style that employs mixed-use development to enhance community feel. He envisions a pedestrian-friendly town center, where small businesses at ground level are built with lofts and office spaces above them. He hopes that, 10 years from now, Temple Terrace's downtown will be a place people can have dinner, shop, go to the theater and sleep at night, all in a single location.

"The future of Temple Terrace is really in the urban core," he says.

Bosek says Temple Terrace's current "central business core" is not a traditional downtown. He believes the redevelopment, scheduled to begin in 2007, will change that.

The plan is expected to meet a local need for low-maintenance housing and may add 2,000 to 3,000 residents within city limits. That could mean a 15 percent population increase for the city. The city is currently reviewing five contractor proposals.

Will Temple Terrace's dreams come true? No one can be sure. St. Petersburg's downtown is a successful redevelopment model; so, in another way, is Westchase in Tampa. Other projects, such as Centro Ybor, are suffering.

And even though the city continues to support smaller, independently owned restaurants and stores, the potential for corporate sprawl is apparent. Verizon owns a large area of land in Temple Terrace, and Disney houses a call center nearby, just off I-75 and Fowler Avenue. Other corporate offices that have moved in include Citigroup and Coca-Cola.

A downtown project similar to Temple Terrace's was considered in five different areas of New Tampa. Each time, however, a large corporate builder bought out the planned community area.

But Bosek said that will not happen to Temple Terrace. The corporate campuses are on the other side of town from the town center. And besides, megaplexes aren't part of the plan.

"We're not going to allow the big boxes to take over," he says. "The New Urbanist environment doesn't allow larger stores."