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Economy Not Key To Residents' Love of San Jose

Gallup and Knight Foundation Study Explores What Makes People Emotionally Attached to San Jose, other U.S. Communities

SAN JOSE, CALIF. (Sept. 29, 2009) – A Gallup study of San Jose and 25 other U.S. communities has found that the worst economic crisis in decades is not a key factor in residents' passion and loyalty for their community.

“While the pain from the recession is deep, other factors far outweigh economics when it comes to determining how emotionally attached people are to their communities,” said Warren Wright, managing partner for Gallup, which conducted the study with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

While the current economic crisis doesn't seem to make a difference in residents' love for their community, the study found that positive feelings do have a connection to local GDP growth over a longer-term period.

The Soul of the Community study was designed to explore this connection between economic growth and residents' emotional attachment to their community. The latest results suggest a significant correlation between the two.

Within a smaller microcosm, such as a company, Gallup has been able to show that increasing employees' emotional connection to their company leads to improved financial performance of the organization. Researchers continue to explore if the emotional connection to the place where one lives drives economic growth for these communities in a similar way.

“The findings are particularly important in a globalized economy made more competitive by the economic crisis,” said Paula Ellis, Knight Foundation's vice president for strategic initiatives. “Local leaders, urban planners and residents can use the study's results to better understand their community.

“We hope that the information helps places like San Jose fight for the innovative, creative and productive talent needed to build healthy communities.”

In San Jose, the study has pinpointed several top factors that emotionally attach residents to the area: openness (how welcoming a place is), aesthetics (an area's physical beauty and green spaces) and education (described as public K-12 and colleges and universities.)

For residents, San Jose's perceived openness to different types of people was the main emotional draw. The study found it to be a community strength, with immigrants being perceived as the most welcomed group.

Aesthetics, particularly the parks and trails, and education, especially the local colleges and universities were also rated highly.

While social offerings (fun places to gather) was also an important draw, the survey suggests that community leaders need to do better in that dimension if they want to increase residents' attachment to the San Jose.

Knight Foundation has made several recent investments in the San Jose area in an effort to advance the community's cultural and civic identity. The grants were given to Zero1: the Art and Technology Network to strengthen its biennial arts festival and to leadership collaborative 1st ACT Silicon Valley, to fortify the arts and the region's cultural vibrancy.

“Places to gather and have fun – the kinds of places that build common ties and great cities – are critical to San Jose's cultural and economic future,” said Dave Mills, San Jose program director for Knight Foundation.

The communities surveyed vary in population size, economic levels and how urban or rural they are. Gallup randomly surveyed a representative sample of more than 10,000 adults from Feb. 17 to April 25, 2009, by phone.

The following communities were included in the survey: Aberdeen, S.D., Akron, Ohio, Biloxi, Miss., Boulder, Colo., Bradenton, Fla., Charlotte, N.C., Columbia, S.C., Columbus, Ga., Detroit, Mich., Duluth, Minn., Fort Wayne, Ind., Gary, Ind., Grand Forks, N.D., Lexington, Ky., Long Beach, Calif., Macon, Ga., Miami, Fla., Milledgeville, Ga., Myrtle Beach, S.C., Palm Beach, Fla., Philadelphia, Pa., San Jose, Calif., St. Paul, Minn., State College, Pa., Tallahassee, Fla., Wichita, Kan.

For complete survey findings on San Jose, visit www.soulofthecommunity.org.

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About Gallup

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the world's leading scientists in management, economics, psychology, and sociology, and our consultants assist leaders in identifying and monitoring behavioral economic indicators worldwide. Gallup's 2,000 professionals deliver services at client organizations, through the Web, at Gallup University's campuses, and in 40 offices around the world.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote community engagement and lead to transformational change. For more, visit www.knightfoundation.org.