

THE PENSACOLA STORY: A FEW MILESTONES ON THE JOURNEY

More than a decade ago, when its revitalization process began, Pensacola was feeling the aftermath of several decades of economic decline. It had been ravaged by a hurricane. There was a huge talent drain, and young people left for better opportunities. Not surprisingly, downtown was dotted with many vacant buildings.



Today, much has changed. Downtown Pensacola is thriving, and new businesses are popping up everywhere. Many new stores, restaurants, and other businesses have opened up, and more are coming as we move toward vibrancy.

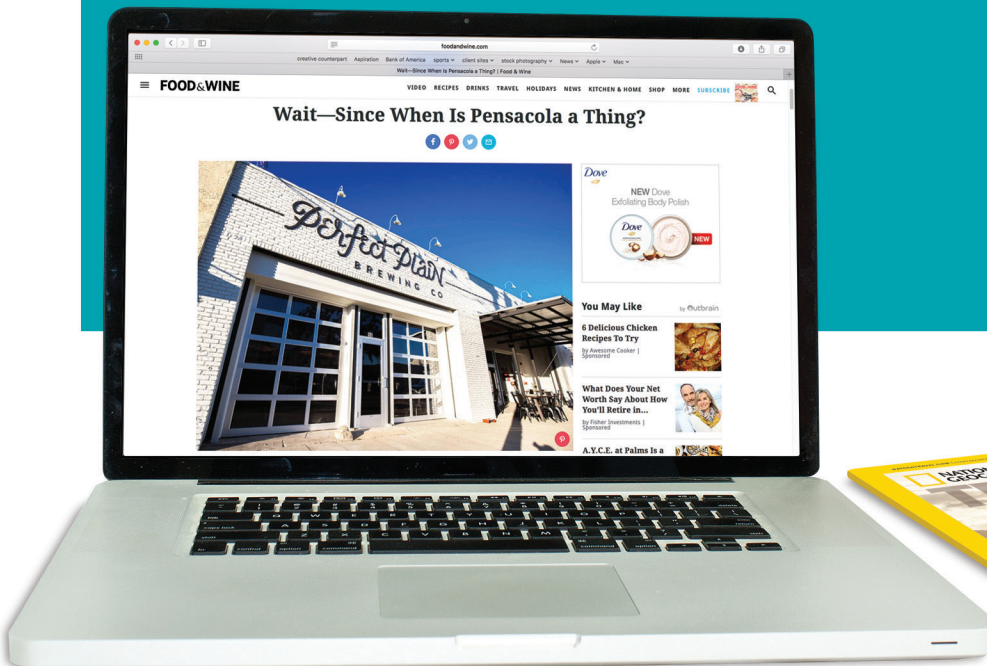


HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE GREAT THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING:

Soaring Property Values. In the past five years, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) went from an assessed property value of \$675 million to \$850 million, which equates to 25.9 percent growth. There are projects worth \$100 million being built right now that don't even count toward this total. There is more downtown construction taking place than at any time in modern history.

Awards and Accolades. Here are a few recent ones:

- In 2013, Palafox Street was named one of the “Ten Great Streets in America” by the American Planning Association, as part of their national program, Great Places in America.
- Downtown Pensacola was named the 2017 Great Places of Florida People’s Choice Winner, following a poll administered by the American Planning Association of Florida.
- In 2018 *National Geographic Traveler* magazine named Pensacola in a story celebrating urban renewal, great main streets, and smart development policies.
- *Food & Wine* recently did a feature titled “Wait—Since When Is Pensacola a Thing?”



Well-Programmed Downtown. When building a vibrant downtown, the first order of business is to create events that draw people there. For example, in Pensacola we have the annual Seafood Festival, Gallery Night one Friday night each month, and many running clubs and fundraising walks.



Vince J. Whibbs Sr. Community Maritime Park. This complex provides waterfront access to citizens and visitors as well as a place for community events. It also houses the baseball stadium for the Double-A team the Blue Wahoos. Since 2012 they have drawn more than 300,000 fans per year to Pensacola.

Highly Activated Business Community. Our strategy has been to galvanize the army of citizens who are business owners, turning them into catalysts for and sustainers of change. Studer Community Institute (SCI) is at the center of this effort. Its live workshops, webinars, online content, and toolkits help businesses achieve service excellence, increase productivity, reduce turnover, and promote business growth and job creation. Since its inception, SCI has provided more than 25,500 hours of training, reaching 3,500 attendees and close to 500 organizations. The average rating for “value of the training” is 9.7 out of 10.

EntreCon. This annual business conference focuses on entrepreneurship and continued learning, offering tactical advice for business growth and leadership. Because it’s held locally, it’s a cost-effective, convenient way for local business owners to get world-class training without the expense of travel.



CivicCon. To drive civic engagement, SCI and the *Pensacola News Journal* created a speakers’ series called CivicCon, which stands for “Civic Conversation.” The nation’s leading thinkers and experts on community-building speak on a variety of topics. The CivicCon lecture series has been extremely well attended, with more than 300 citizens at each event and averaging more than 5,000 live video views for each session. Upcoming topics will focus on prosperity, infrastructure, smart planning, civic engagement, caring community, and quality of life.

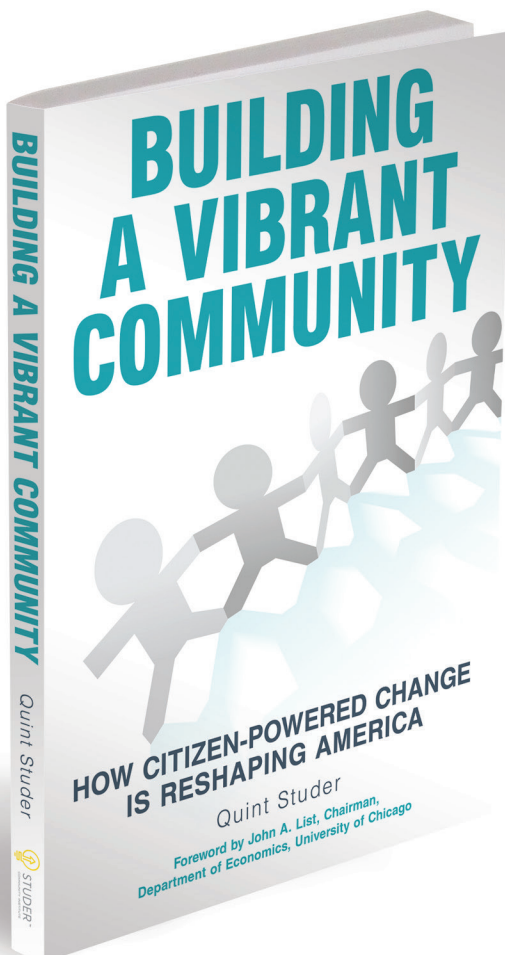


CIVICCON
*Empowering Pensacola
 Through Civic Conversations*

Pensacola Center for Civic Engagement. Engaged and activated citizens are the engine of every community. When they know how to turn their energy and passion into action, they are a powerful group. This program educates and trains community leaders and neighborhood associations through classes like *The Engaged and Empowered Citizen: Why It's Time to Become One (and How to Do It)* and *The Next-Level Neighborhood Organization: Becoming a Force for Lasting and Meaningful Change*. The plan is to soon expand to attract regional and national participants who are seeking to create a vibrant community of their own.



Early Learning City.™ Pensacola realizes that a strong education system creates a strong talent base and appeals to investors. To impact high school graduation rates long term, we know we first need to tackle kindergarten readiness and—to intervene even sooner—early brain development. We started a pilot program with local hospitals to work with new mothers on making sure their babies are hearing enough words. Now Pensacola is making a name for itself as America's first Early Learning City.



Vibrant Inclusion Policy. Inclusion improves buy-in and gets everyone engaged, which is necessary to create vibrancy. That's why we're actively working to include people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ages, and economic levels in the decision-making process and to promote their economic success. Our goal is to create a culture of inclusive prosperity in Pensacola. For example, we used a Covenant for the Community to guarantee that contractors would use local minorities in the revitalization of downtown.

National Learning Lab. Now that Pensacola has made some good progress, we want to share what we've learned—our mistakes and our wins—with other communities. We regularly host government officials and community leaders from other cities and share strategies and tactics on how to revitalize. We hope Pensacola's journey can be a bit of a blueprint as they move toward vitality. Our story, as well as the tactics we used to revitalize our community, are described in the new book titled *Building a Vibrant Community: How Citizen-Powered Change Is Reshaping America*.