



Staten Island the exception to downturn, as median income rises 5 percent

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Even as many Staten Islanders were dealt a blunt blow by the Great Recession, in some ways the economic downturn has been less sharply felt here than in other parts of the city, new Census data show.

While median household incomes across the city fell by nearly 5 percent, the median income was up by nearly 5 percent on the Island between 2009 and 2010, to \$70,560, according to the 2010 American Community Survey.



Advance file photo

One man's trash is another man's treasure.

Analysts say the Island may have been buffered slightly from the recession by its strong middle-class job base, which comprises numerous city, state and federal employees.

In fact, the ranks of workers in government jobs on the Island remained the highest in the city, the data also show, with 24 percent of workers here in 2010 on the public payroll, up from 20 percent in 2009.

"Municipal workers are a pretty big piece of the labor force, and they're to some degree cushioned, because this city is in less financial distress and has been somewhat better-managed, and we haven't had the massive layoffs that some other cities have had," said Jonathan Peters, a professor of finance and a demographer at the College of Staten Island, who closely follows Census trends in the borough. "The public employment is still growing. The problem is, you need tax base to pay for that; you can't have your whole economy based on public-sector employment."

The data are from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey -- a massive annual poll of random households that uses statistical sampling to derive results. The survey has largely replaced the official decennial Census for providing detailed and nuanced economic, housing and demographic information on the population.

It shows that the Island's income patterns, with a strong mid-income range, more closely mirror the classic bell curve than do other parts of the city and nation. Manhattan, for example, serves as a textbook example of the divide between the rich and the poor, and had the sharpest income imbalance in the nation.

In that borough, top earners made an average of \$370,000, bringing in nearly 38 times as much as the bottom fifth -- who made less than \$10,000.

The Census data does not provide a breakdown of incomes above \$200,000, but according to an analysis of Forbes data yesterday by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, the 57 billionaires in New York City increased their net worth by more than \$11 billion in the last year, and now have as much money as 14 million people working full time, at minimum wage salaries, for a year.

Such outsized earnings may have helped skew the average household income in Manhattan in 2010 to \$119,199 (but down from \$131,704 the previous year).

The average household income on the Island, by comparison was \$86,105.

The median household income (a figure not affected by outlying extremes) in Manhattan was less than on the Island, at \$63,832.

"The fact that you have so many city workers, firemen, policemen, teachers, sanitation workers, on the Island has stabilized the economy for Staten Island, and that makes a big impact; that's an important factor," said retired 35-year teacher and union representative Marty Eisenberg, of Greenridge. "Of course, in Staten Island, we still have poverty."

Poverty in the borough did rise, especially childhood poverty, which was up 2 percent to 17 percent, the data show.

Still, the increase was not nearly as stark as the city overall, where poverty overall was at 20.1 percent, and childhood poverty was at 30 percent -- the highest level since 2000.

The borough's lower numbers might simply reflect the fact that the people on the margins here may have simply had to move, said demographer Peters.

"There is not a lot of safety net on Staten Island, which is less connected to subsidized housing and other services than other boroughs," he said. "It's harder for the poor sector to hang on here. If you're not working and don't have reasonable income it's harder to hang on."

Indeed, the 2010 American Community Survey found 374,998 people in the borough of working age -- or above the age of 16.

In 2009, the survey showed some 392,966 working-age Staten Islanders.

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