

Staten Island Gets a Boost From City Jobs

By Joseph De Avila, Wall Street Journal
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Bolstered by its large number of government employees, Staten Island now has the highest median income in New York City, and it weathered the economic downturn better than any other borough, according to new Census data.

About 23% of Staten Island workers was employed by the government in 2010, by far the highest rate of all the boroughs and higher than the city's overall rate of 14.1%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

The borough is known as a favored residence for police and fire fighters.

Experts said those solidly middle-class jobs were a major reason the city's least populous borough was the only one with an increase in median income, to \$70,560, in 2010. Manhattan was second at \$63,832, down about \$6,000 from 2009, although its average income of \$119,199 remained the city's highest.

"Staten Island has long been a relative oasis for public service employees. As many established roots there, others followed," said Jonathan Bowles, director of the think tank, the Center for an Urban Future. "A lot of those folks can't afford to live in Manhattan."

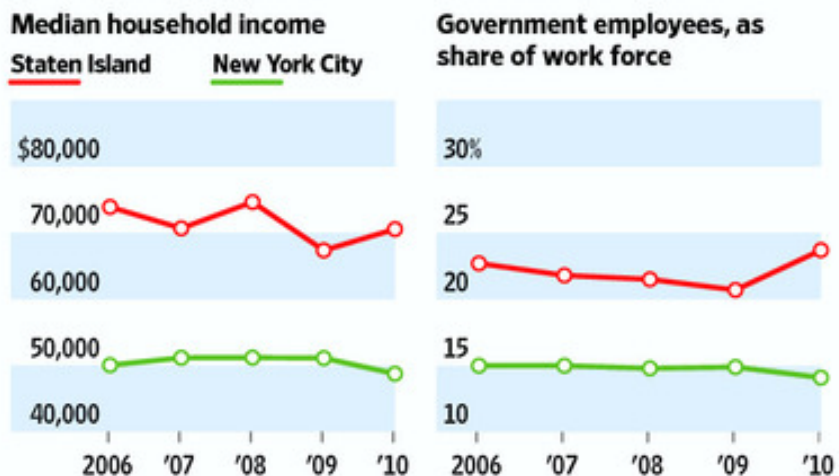
Staten Island's strong economic performance may not last through 2011, said James Parrott, chief economist of research group the Fiscal Policy Institute. Painful government budget cuts may have caused job losses that lagged behind the private sector's problems, he said.

"At some point you are going to see an effect on Staten Island," Mr. Parrott said.

Staten Island's low cost of living, along with quiet streets and low crime rates, are the main draws for public employees like Walter Olsen, 56 years old, a city building inspector who was born and raised in the borough. "Every block, every other house has a firefighter or police officer in many communities," he

Bucking the Trend

Staten Island is the only borough that didn't see a dip in median household income in 2010. Part of the reason is its residents are more likely to have stable government jobs



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

said.

The median asking price for homes for sale in Staten Island is a city-low \$457,000, according to real-estate website StreetEasy.

"It is still cheaper to purchase a house on Staten Island than any of the other boroughs," he said.

Almost 30% of all Staten Island residents work in solidly middle-class fields such as education, health care and social services, which were not as affected by the recession, said Christopher Jones, vice president of research for the Regional Plan Association.

The borough's income levels were also helped by its highly paid retirees, Mr. Jones said. The mean retirement income for Staten Island residents was \$30,259 in 2010, the highest in the city, according to the Census data. The mean for the city overall was \$22,391.

The data from the American Community Survey, released last week, is based on surveys filled out by a sample of the population. It differs from the Census, the official count of the population done every 10 years.

Staten Island was not immune to the downturn.

Unemployment almost doubled from 2007 to 2010, reaching 9.1% last year. But that was the lowest among the five boroughs. The city's unemployment in 2010 was 11.2%, according to the survey.

But it has not had the same problems in certain pockets of the Bronx and Brooklyn where poverty climbed even higher. Staten Island's poverty rate of 11.8% was the city's lowest and less than half that of the Bronx.

— Pervaiz Shallwani contributed to this article.