

## South Jersey's Top Towns 2009

...From the pages of South Jersey Magazine...

What's the hottest town going in South Jersey? It's Haddonfield, according to South Jersey Magazine's inaugural Top 25 Towns ranking, which rated the towns across the publication's Burlington, Camden and Gloucester County market area.

Famous for dinosaurs (Hadrosaurus), Colonial history (the Indian King Tavern) and its contribution to popular culture and film, Haddonfield pulled ahead of Moorestown and Voorhees in the statistical compilation. Moorestown topped a breakout top-10 list for Burlington County, while the spotlight was on Harrison for a similar Gloucester County subset.

"The towns you expected to show up did. These are towns with good, strong credentials," says Steven Zweig, a New York-based statistician hired by South Jersey Magazine to produce the rankings from a range of data provided. "There were some towns that had some above-average crime rates that were in the top 25. (But) the educational factors were so strong, that's what made them appear."

The ranking was based on an examination of average residential property values in the three-county area, average property taxes paid, crime rates and the quality of schools. The ranking also controlled for population, setting 8,000 and above as a cutoff for the overall picture. However, an additional subset ranking of the top 10 small towns, with populations at 7,000 or below but above 1,500 the chosen threshold, was produced off the overall analysis of data.

Additionally, school quality was expressed as a composite score derived from data that included average SAT scores; the number of advanced placement tests offered; and the percentage of students who scored as proficient on the statewide 11th-grade test required for high school graduation. A low composite score reflects a quality school system.

Crime rates were expressed as a percentage of the number of crimes reported per 1,000 people. All of the factors were used to create a composite score for the towns, for which a low score was considered better, and the resulting scores yielded the rankings.

Zweig points to the education score as interesting, with towns that did well also reflecting comparatively inexpensive average property values. "Those could potentially be good investment opportunities. The crime rates were low, too," he says.

### Home Sweet Haddonfield

It's not easy being Haddonfield.

This graceful, 2.5-square-mile community of just over 11,000 residents, located in the heart of Camden County, is a model, many believe, for "living life the way it was meant to be."

Even in these days of festering cynicism and doubt, Haddonfield remains the real deal. Only Moorestown and Princeton, in this region, can approximate results for just the right mix of historic, Colonial-era charm and modern day convenience. When you get it right, it's an elixir for the soul.

Haddonfield Mayor Letitia Colombi is rightfully proud. "If you could sit down and describe a perfect town where you would like to live, it would be Haddonfield, New Jersey," she says. "All of the quality-of-life issues that we look for in a place – to raise and educate a family, to shop, to entertain ourselves – are found in Haddonfield.

"What people find when they move to Haddonfield is a real community," she explains. "When you come here, you are immediately accepted into the fold." Haddonfield residents have always set the bar high. First, when the Haddon Family originally established the town in 1695 as a haven for religious freedom, on a 500-acre tract of land. Then, in 1777, when New Jersey declared its freedom from England at the Indian King Tavern Inn. Then again, many years later, when the borough applied for and passed the first historic preservation ordinance in New Jersey

Kings Highway runs through the center of town, originally a wagon trail, but wide enough so “the kings army” could march down it. It remains the main artery today, and the core of Haddonfield’s historic town center. The tree-lined boulevard anchors four blocks of narrow, three-story colonial-era structures with large-windowed storefronts of all variety. There are over 200 businesses in town, 25 of which have been there for 20 years or longer.

Haddonfield is predominantly for pedestrians. You can walk everywhere. Its antique-style streetlights are decorated with hanging flowerpots in the spring and Christmas wreaths in the winter. A clock tower punctuates the town center. There is a stone marker dated 1773 that proclaims “ 5 miles to Glou.” And a duck-billed Hadrosaur statue commemorates the discovery in Haddonfield in 1858, of the first full skeleton of a dinosaur ever found in North America.

“I can’t tell you how many times I have been out and people have come up and told me how they were looking to relocate, drove down our Main Street, and said ‘wow,’ let’s buy a home here,” Mayor Colombi says.

Haddonfield is dry, but always eager to party. First Night is Haddonfield’s very own version of a New Year’s Eve bash. Now in its 12th year, residents and visitors alike are treated each year to a unique, alcohol-free, outdoor event that features several fireworks displays, and over 40 separate venues with music and assorted other street performers.

The Haddonfield Arts & Crafts Festival is held every year in July when Kings Highway is closed to traffic and tents are set up to host over 200 artists and their creations. An estimated 120,000 people participate annually in the two-day, weekend event. There is also an annual Fall Festival, and, during the month of December, the Christmas spirit is celebrated each Friday evening with candlelit shopping, horse-drawn wagon rides and lots of caroling.

Haddonfield is also a community of beautiful homes, many of either a Victorian or Colonial style, set on large, wooded lots that are impeccably landscaped and maintained. According to the most recent census, there are 4,500 households in Haddonfield, many of which are younger families with kids. Over 4,000 children participate in organized, community sports.

That should not be surprising, as one of the main attractions for Haddonfield residents is its schools. Recognized among the top-rated schools in the state, the borough sends 97 percent of its graduating, high school seniors on to college. An average of 20 graduates or so are accepted to Ivy League institutions each year.

“I think what people find when they come to Haddonfield, is that they have come to a real community,” Mayor Colombi says. “It is about supporting families from cradle to grave. We have families come here, they have their children here, they live here for 50 years, their children move back, and now their grandchildren are here.

“So what Haddonfield provides, most importantly, is the ability to sustain community relationships. When we live in a world where technology has taken over people’s lives, Haddonfield becomes a place where you live the way life is supposed to be.”