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Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
Web: www.friscostyle.com

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New development encroaches upon Frisco pasture
photo by Chris Fritchie

An Award Winning Year

By Debbie Vallejo

JOHN F. KENNEDY ONCE SAID, “Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies.” Creating a positive living environment for all Frisco citizens, including new residents, long-time residents, singles, college students, young families, retirees, seniors and business owners takes the hard work of many different people with different motivations. Their purpose, however, is the same; making Frisco a great place to live, work, grow and play.

The expansion of a small town to a thriving city provides some overwhelming moments for locals constantly maneuvering through congested roadways, working the aisles of packed stores and waiting in long lines at restaurants. The level of change in Frisco, not to mention the speed of the transformation, may cause a few to wonder, “Is the future result worth the pain of progress?” How an individual answers that question almost certainly depends upon personal preferences and his or her tolerance factor for certain inconveniences that occur in the midst of change. So, in the interest of discovering your personal “tolerance factor,” let’s wander through the current state of affairs and see if the considerable benefits of progress and development are worth it in the long run.



part of a city is connected and what happens to one business, park or school touches other parts of the city and influences business and the population at large. When a large business moves into a city, it brings jobs that in turn bring people who buy houses, shop, eat out and use recreational facilities like city parks, ballparks, movie theatres, etc... The money people spend creates more tax revenue, creating more money for city upkeep, school operations and so on. In turn when a large business fails or moves from a city it takes with it the money tied to the population who leave as a result of the move. A perfect example is the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) contract awarded to an area near Waxahachie, south of Dallas, in the late 80s. Construction began in 1991, but costs for the project skyrocketed out of control and Congress pulled the plug in 1993. The closing of the SSC resulted in a recession for the south Dallas area. Many businesses previously dedicated to moving into the region pulled out of contracts over fears of an economic downturn, creating a vacuum that sucked out necessary tax revenue for building the community.

A LITTLE DEMOGRAPHICS UPDATE

The median household income in Frisco is approximately \$95,000; \$45,000 over the national median of just under \$50,000 and \$10,000 over the Collin County median income of \$85,000. The median age of the Frisco resident is just over 30, the majority of households include families of two or more, and the average house in Frisco is worth approximately \$205,000.

In the ten years from the 1990 to the 2000 U.S. Census, Frisco's percentage growth was 449 percent with Frisco's population growing from a little over 6,000 in 1990 to more than 92,000 as of December 2006, and still climbing.

By 2015 the city is projected to hit the 200,000 mark.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Along with the massive influx of people comes the positive and negative aspect of economic growth. The city has grown from a small rural town to a thriving city almost overnight. The variety of recreation opportunities for families, shopping venues, restaurants and top schools provide city officials with plenty of selling points when approaching a business about a possible move to Frisco.

The economic development of a city is multi-faceted and multi-layered. Each

Frisko's approach is to attract a variety of businesses to bring new jobs and money to the area. As the businesses make money, so then does the city. In addition, the more companies in the area providing revenue, the less of a burden on the taxpayer. Mayor Mike Simpson sees the situation as a win-win for both the taxpayer and local business owners. "Anytime we are in front of a company to offer economic incentives, we're doing that because we feel they will bring the right jobs and job opportunity for Frisco," explains Mayor Simpson. "The more job opportunities in the city, the less people have to commute long distances to work."

There are also more global community

benefits to moving companies into an area where they become invested in the overall success of the city and its citizens. "Businesses help build the infrastructure of the city," explains Mayor Simpson. "They also become good corporate citizens by sponsoring local community events."

The Frisco Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) plays a large roll in attracting new businesses to the area. According to Mayor Simpson, more than 4,500 new jobs created within the past three years are as a result of the efforts of the FEDC. "The EDC works with companies looking to relocate and sells them on why they should make the move to Frisco," says Mayor Simpson. "The various sporting venues, parks and shopping centers all pull a company to our area... The entire job of the EDC is to convince people they should come to Frisco."

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Jim Gandy is president of the Frisco Economic Development Corporation. "In 2006...the FEDC directly facilitated the attraction of 15 new businesses that chose to locate and/or expand in our city," says Mr. Gandy. "...they will expand Frisko's tax base by at least \$87,324,000...and these businesses are projected to create at least 2,477 new jobs in the city of Frisko." Large retailers such as Target, Wal-Mart, and grocery store chains have their own teams researching market areas and possible new store locations. They follow the money, which generally follows new jobs and population growth.

NEW ADDITIONS

The year 2006 saw a few widely anticipated new additions to city

The logo for Frisco Style Magazine features a red square on the left containing the letters 'FS' in a white, stylized, cursive font. To the right of the square, the word 'frisco' is written in a lowercase, cursive script. Below 'frisco', the words 'STYLE' and 'MAGAZINE' are stacked in a bold, uppercase, serif font.

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*Police Chief Todd Renshaw
in front of the new Police Station
photo by Chris Fritchie*

government. The new City Hall and Library, as well as the new police and central fire stations, are now complete. The new buildings provide welcome relief to the men and women previously crammed in smaller facilities until bond money built the current locations.

The new Police Station on Stonebrook Parkway opened its doors on October 30th. Officers and staff working in the building are now able to stretch at their desks without spilling piles of folders or elbowing the person next to them in the face. The new 86,590 square foot facility provides considerably more space than the 10,000 square feet available in the previous building. The new building stands on 11.5 acres and is expandable to over 125,000 square feet. "There is plenty of room to grow," says Police Chief Todd Renshaw. "The goal is not to need an additional facility for another 10 years." Sixteen million dollars of a 2002 bond package was utilized to build the facility. All police officers thank taxpayers for making their quality of life better, literally. "We are so grateful for the building," says Chief Renshaw. "It's like going from the outhouse to the henhouse."

The new 11,161 square foot Central Fire Station opened its doors November 15th, two years after the ground breaking. Walking into the station, visitors enjoy the mural on the lobby floor, created by artist Garrison Roots of Longmont, Colorado. The mural is a portrait of two firemen in full gear, ready to serve.

In addition to the state-of-the-art emergency management and training centers, barracks, office space, workout room and equipment area, the station also holds the newly built Frisco Fire Safety Town. Safety Town will provide education on fire safety and prevention to young children and their families. The 8,000 square foot indoor educational complex consists of a training room, complete with kitchen, living room, and



bathroom, where children and adults are educated in fire safety tips and techniques. An upstairs room allows children to practice leaving a second story building in the middle of a fire.

Outside the educational facility resides a small outdoor town holding 24 buildings, each sponsored and built by local businesses and homebuilders. Each building is on a 5/8th scale and is directly proportional to the Frisco business it represents. Throughout the buildings are streets, working traffic signals, traffic signs, a toll booth and a railroad crossing. Frisco firefighters and community educators will utilize Safety Town to

train in bicycle and pedestrian safety. The program is already creating a buzz among other communities interested in developing a similar program. "I've had people call me to come look at Safety Town," says Fire Chief Mack Borchardt, "...and we weren't even using the facilities to teach yet."

Chief Borchardt gives full credit to local area sponsors for bringing Safety Town to life. "The local business owners and builders who sponsored each of the buildings in Safety Town are providing a real service to the community," explains Chief Borchardt. "They have gone above and beyond what was asked of them and



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deserve all the credit for making Safety Town happen.”

EDUCATING THE YOUNG IN GROWING NUMBERS

As mentioned earlier, one part of a city often impacts the operations of another. The growth of Frisco’s economy effects the growth and budget of the school district. As more families move in to take advantage of new jobs and amenities, more students register in the Frisco Independent School District (FISD). In turn, as more businesses show up in Frisco, collected taxes rise and provide more money for the school district. Secondary benefits to FISD students are also noticeable in the programs available through police and fire stations that have enough staff and money to offer quality education programs such as Safety Town.

The school district is the largest single employer in Frisco, currently providing jobs for more than 2,500 people.

Dr. Rick Reedy is the superintendent of Frisco Independent School District. “There are two sides of the budget,” explains Dr. Reedy. “The operations side and the debt service side. Businesses contribute to the operations part of the budget, but not as much to the debt service.” The building of new schools and facilities fall to the taxpayer, creating the need for municipal bonds and other means of funding. “Overall the impact has been very positive,” explains Dr. Reedy. “Economic development makes the tax base grow which is favorable to the school district.”

The testing of a resident’s “tolerance level” when it comes to area schools comes more in the form of rezoning issues than budgetary. Rezoning occurs in Frisco more than other Texas school districts because of the increase in student population each year. Frisco ISD has a commitment to keep secondary school size smaller than most districts

with similar student numbers. Rezoning can be difficult and ruffle some feathers of parents not wanting to move to a new school when their address no longer falls in the attendance zone of the school their child previously attended.

The school district is the largest single employer in Frisco, currently providing jobs for more than 2,500 people. With so many new schools built every year, approximately a third of the staff beginning each school year are new to the district. How does the district cope with all the growth and the need to build new schools and hire so many new teachers every year? Dr. Reedy attributes much of the success to the school board and their willingness to hire individuals in leadership positions that are essential in assuring success in the schools. "Having a progressive school board is a huge factor in handling the growth," says Dr. Reedy

FUN, FUN, FUN!

Cities will not attract large businesses without the recreational facilities for their employees and families. Frisco city officials make a concerted effort to provide all manner of recreational opportunities for its citizens. In addition to the various sports venues in the area, the city is in the process of building a 100,000 square foot Recreation and Aquatics Center, one of the largest in the state. The fitness rooms will hold the latest and greatest equipment, and a Stay 'n Play area and separate teen facility will allow parents to drop off children in supervised recreation areas while they work out. Racquetball courts, multipurpose rooms, large locker rooms, pools complete with large slides and lazy rivers, gymnasiums, game rooms, and a café round out the list of amenities. Projected time of completion for the center is summer of this year.

Grand Park is still in the planning stages, but is set to become an exceptional addition to the city. Current plans have the park's location on the west side of





Preston Road & State Highway 121 construction disrupted Frisco area businesses

Frisco between the Dallas North Tollway and Legacy Road, north of Stonebrook Parkway. Parts of the park, including a civic center, will fall on the east side of the Tollway. Grand Park will include a festival green complete with stage, an activity lake, a festival hall, kids' play place, a private development and plenty of open space and walking trails.

BOND ISSUES

Even with the increasing number of companies moving into the area, when a city is growing as fast as Frisco there is often a need for additional sources of income. Enter municipal bonds.

Passing bonds in an area growing as quickly as Frisco is essential for a less painful transition from small town to bustling city. With fast growth comes the need for new roads, additional schools, more parks (if you want happy local citizens), increases in emergency management personnel and facilities and a host of other necessary expenditures. Local bond issues fund projects such as the newly completed Library and City Hall, the Police and Fire stations, as well as the Recreation and Aquatics Center currently under construction. Tax revenue handles the maintenance of current facilities and roads, but is nowhere near up to the task of building ahead of growth so necessary additions are actually available when needed. As it is, Frisco's new Police Station made it just

in the nick of time.

The bond items passed in 2006 include: new fire stations and equipment, improvements in the police department and public safety communications, a City Hall parking building, Heritage Park, a new branch library, road construction, additional parks and trails, the acquisition and development of Grand Park and a cultural arts center. The total bond package was \$198,000,000. The price tag feels rather large, but is actually very affordable considering the tax rate for the city of Frisco is still lower than all its surrounding cities, with the exception of Little Elm.

The traffic that comes with the exponential growth in population is the bane of any Frisconian's existence.

THE ROADS, THE ROADS, OH, THE ROADS!

Driving in Frisco during the day is almost manageable if the driver stays off the roads between the hours of 6-9 a.m. or 4-6:30 p.m. The traffic that comes with the exponential growth in population is

the bane of any Frisconian's existence. The city roads are actually taken care of in a relatively timely manner and, compared to most cities of similar size and growth patterns, are working rather smoothly. The state roads are another story. Included in the state roads are Highway 121, Preston Road, Eldorado Parkway, Main Street, and FM423. The hoops the state must jump through to begin road construction are more substantial than for local governments, so state roads tend to fall behind and cause considerably more chaos.

Where the road construction limits accessibility to a business, that business sees a definite decline in patronage. The Chick-fil-A located at the southeast corner of State Highway 121 and Preston Road saw a sharp drop in business the very week construction began on Ohio and cut off access to S.H.121. Construction was already creating congestion at the intersection of S.H.121 and Preston, so shutting down Ohio was the final straw for some patrons. Wendy Stewart is the marketing executive for the store. "We saw a decline in business of almost 10 percent the very week Ohio was shut down and no longer crossed S.H.121," explains Ms. Stewart. "Some businesses in this shopping center have not even been able to stay afloat long enough to wait out the completion of the roads." She's right. Chuck's Burgers went out of business in the same shopping center



photo by Chris Fritchie

not long after construction on the roads began.

With the constant change, local retailers are forced to become creative in their marketing strategies in order to entice customers to fight inconvenient traffic and construction to come to their store. "I went to all the local schools and businesses to hand out free store coupons to bring in more people," says Ms. Stewart.

The upside is citizens will eventually see completion of all the roads and business should once again boom in the areas most affected by road construction. As soon as the Preston Road overpass crossing S.H.121 was complete, Chick-fil-A saw a rise in sales and is almost back to normal. "We anticipate sales to keep going up during the first part of the year," explains Ms. Stewart.

AWARD WINNING DEVELOPMENTS

Several Frisco projects earned awards for excellence in various areas of economic development in 2006. Pizza Hut Park won Best Community Impact. The Frisco Technology Campus of T-Mobile USA, Inc., won Office Best New Development, and Baylor Medical Center at Frisco the Land Plan Development Campus won Best Medical Project.

The City of Frisco earned the Community Economic Development Award (CEDA) from the Texas Economic Development Council

(TEDC) for the year 2006. Projects submitted to the Council are judged on innovativeness in different aspects of development, and on their ability to offer community commitment or leverage packages including enterprise zones, tax abatements, tax increment financing and public improvement districts.

Residents living in Frisco for longer than the previous 10 years remember the two lane roads, small community churches and the local grocery store...

The specific objectives of economic development in a community considered for the award are valued by a measure of job creation, job retention and/or improvement and additions to the tax base created by specific developments or projects. Projects are also judged on additional secondary benefits the development brings to other activities in the area and whether the program is transferable to other communities in similar situations. Development projects

submitted to the TEDC for the 2006 award included T-Mobile USA Frisco Technology Campus, Technisource, Inc., DebtXS and the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

Amy Swank is director of operations for the TEDC. "The award is an honor of excellence. A panel looks at the synergy between a community and an economic development project submitted by the city," says Ms. Swank. "Cities compete against other cities in the same population category and are judged by a fifteen member committee. It is really an honor to receive a CEDA."

REALITY CHECK

Though it is hard to tell from looking at the variety of retail and businesses in the area, Frisco is still in the beginning stages of economic development. "One of our ongoing challenges is balancing availability of adequate commercial space for lease and/or sale with the ever changing real estate market," explains Mr. Gandy. "The absence of adequate vacant commercial space reduces our competitive position to attract certain firms to Frisco." It can be a risky business for developers to build office and commercial space before companies agree to relocate to the city. Still, many developers have taken the plunge and are increasing the possibility of attracting companies interested in immediate occupancy of work space.

Of course, one of the down sides

of the fast moving economy and close proximity to retail and recreation activities is a more personal one. Collin County has one of the highest foreclosure rates in the state, even with a higher-than-average median income. With the increase in local retail stores comes the additional temptation of overspending. One may conclude that the community benefit of easy access to retail becomes a personal disadvantage because, well, there's easy access to retail.

The other worry is the fear of losing Frisco's "small town feel." Residents living in Frisco for longer than the previous 10 years remember the two lane roads, small community churches and the local grocery store where running into an acquaintance or friend while making a food run was common place. Not so now. There are many grocery stores to choose from, many more churches and the roads tell their own story. Both Mayor Simpson and Superintendent Reedy are determined to keep the small town feel in the city and throughout the school district. Creating and maintaining city-wide events such as Merry Main Street during the Christmas season, and keeping school sizes as small as possible, allow residents to experience small town quality in a fast growing city like Frisco.

THE NATIVE FRISCONIAN

It's impossible to discuss the impact of economic development without paying some consideration to the long-time Frisco resident. Before the dramatic increase in large area grocery stores and retail outlets, there were small, local grocers and merchants taking care of area residents. There are some native Frisconians who have witnessed the economic ups and downs of the area, since before the majority of current Frisco residents were even born. What do they have to say about all the change?

Larkin Vandeventer, who has lived in Frisco for more than 70 years, says there are both pros and cons to all the new development in the city. "I kind of like the easy life of the small town," explains Mr. Vandeventer. "But it is nice to not have to travel way out of town to get the car worked on or to do some shopping." For the Vandeventers, the biggest drawback



In-town pastoral settings may be in the sunset for Frisco

photo by Chris Fritchie

is the traffic and the crowds. "Now if you want a gallon of milk you have to fight the traffic just to get to the store," says Mr. Vandeventer, who remembers the old days when Standerfer Boals owned the local grocery store and delivered groceries to his patrons at their homes. Even with the growth and change the Vandeventers wouldn't think of living anywhere else, but it is fun to reminisce about the good ol' days.

Obviously there are far more people moving into Frisco than moving out of it, so the general population leans rather favorably toward the constant

change. Complaints heard around the water cooler dwell primarily on traffic and congestion, but the tone is one of accepting some inconvenience as a part of life in Frisco until the development is complete. Each new addition such as City Hall and library, Safety Town, the police and fire stations, the recreation and aquatics center, Grand Park, and a myriad of others, reminds us that progress, though sometime painful, is rather beneficial and often very satisfying.

Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer living in Frisco.