



# DOWNTOWN DIALOGUE

A COMMUNITY OF NEIGHBORS GROWS AND FLOURISHES

BY LIZ BERGER



*Lower Manhattan is a neighborhood of parks and children and more*

I moved to Lower Manhattan almost three decades ago. It was the frontier, and only my banker friends knew how to get here, but I loved living Downtown. Fred followed the next year. It was an adventure. We loved living off the (street) grid, the huge buildings on the tiny streets, being close to the water and, back in the day when walking across the Brooklyn Bridge was a novel experience, knowing in some powerful, visceral way that Manhattan was an island. We loved the views, how all the subway and bus lines came together and the feeling that we were at the center and beginning of everything.

As unique as we felt, we weren't alone, and bit by bit a community of neighbors grew from a collection of independent pioneers. We got older, got married, had children, hung out in the park, applied to nursery school and realized that there were many people just like us, making a life in Lower Manhattan. But not too many, and we liked that intimacy.

Today, our little village is one of the fastest-growing residential areas in New York City. The residential population has more than doubled since 9/11: More than 55,000 people now live Downtown. And, we're here to stay. According to a residential trend survey released last week by the Downtown Alliance, nearly two-thirds of Lower Manhattan residents have lived in the area for five or more years, and almost 90 percent intend to stay for at least another three.

Forty-seven percent of us own our homes, up from 40 percent three years ago. And, while Lower Manhattan appeals to 20-somethings, our survey shows that couples and households with children outnumber singles. In fact, close to 25 percent of Lower

Manhattan's households have children younger than 18. And 40 percent of residents under 45 years old without children say they plan to have kids in the next three years. (The new schools for our area are opening not a moment too soon.)

Lower Manhattan is different. Nieuw Amsterdam was the New World's first live/work center of trading and commerce, and it has stayed that way. Four-hundred years later, the residential population adds new value to the premium of a Downtown business address, and the proximity of work to home and play is a major reason more and more people choose to live here. The average commute time for a Lower Manhattan resident is 22 minutes, while the average commute time for all New York City residents works out to 38 minutes—the highest in the nation.

But walking to work is only one reason people want to live in Lower Manhattan. According to our survey, 84 percent came for the right apartment and 82 percent because you can get anywhere from here on public transportation. Eighty-one percent cited neighborhood safety, 75 percent said the parks and waterfront were an attraction and 74 percent pointed to the area's history and character. And confirming what has been widely reported, 76 percent of families with children said they were drawn to Lower Manhattan by the local schools.

The top reason? It's everything. Does it surprise you that 88 percent of those polled said the overall quality of life is why they like living in Lower Manhattan? Of course not, you're already here.

—Liz Berger is President of the Downtown Alliance