



DOWNTOWN DIALOGUE

LOWER MANHATTAN IS WHERE EVERYONE WANTS TO BE

BY LIZ BERGER



The Downtown Little League kicked off its season Saturday

When I moved to Lower Manhattan in the early 1980s, just 10,000 people lived here. My husband and I can remember life in the neighborhood before a single deli stayed open at night, when restaurants closed early on Friday evening and didn't reopen until lunchtime on Monday, when the closest supermarkets were in New Jersey.

In those days, we schlepped bags on the subway and had everything else delivered—basic things most New Yorkers take for granted—like dry cleaning, fresh vegetables and laundry detergent. We wanted safety and a doorman within walking distance of our jobs—and a place that really looked and felt like New York.

We fell in love with Lower Manhattan, and as it turns out, we weren't alone. Today, Lower Manhattan is where everyone wants to be.

And, at the Downtown Alliance, we've done the research to prove it. While the 2010 Census says the number of people living below Chambers Street has doubled in the last decade, our research reveals a significantly bigger population.

The data behind our residential market research indicates that the population south of Chambers Street has more than doubled in the last decade—to 56,000. For this reason, the Downtown Alliance strongly supports Mayor Bloomberg's challenge of the citywide 2010 Census results.

Still, no matter whose totals we use, the numbers show Lower Manhattan booming—as a global destination for businesses, residents and visitors. Our one square mile has nine grocery stores, 11 public and private elementary, middle and high schools, 319 residential buildings, 625 stores, 445 restaurants, eight museums and 18 hotels. Our streets and sidewalks are filled with business people, baby strollers, dog-walkers and joggers.

From historic Stone Street to Battery Park City, where Danny Meyer will soon open three new restaurants, from Maison du Chocolat on Wall

Street to Pasanella and Son on South Street, from J&R on Park Row to Broadway's Century 21, from Canali Broad Street to Greenwich Jewelers on Trinity Place—and every place in between—Lower Manhattan is a shopping and dining mecca like never before.

This resurgence is all the more remarkable in light of 9/11. On one of the worst days in American history, 2,752 people lost their lives in and around the World Trade Center. Seven buildings with a total of 14 million square feet of commercial office space were damaged or destroyed. More than 20,000 residents were at least temporarily displaced, and more than 65,000 jobs disappeared or were temporarily relocated. Thousands of miles of fiber-optic, telecom and electrical cable were ruined. Hundreds of stores and restaurants were temporarily closed. Public transit lines were seriously disrupted.

Yet here we are, flourishing as never before. What makes a neighborhood work? Jane Jacobs wrote that in real life, "only diverse surroundings have the practical power of inducing a natural, continuing flow of life and use." In Lower Manhattan, business executives, government officials and community leaders have all worked together, thinking globally, but acting locally to create an extraordinary new kind of place in the oldest part of New York City.

Our momentum is unmistakable. While there's still much to do, Lower Manhattan will continue to grow and thrive. We have always known how to reinvent ourselves. The neighborhood where George Washington took the presidential oath and Herman Melville was born is now home to the Digital Sandbox at the New York Technology Center. It's a destination for 306,000 workers a day and nine million tourists a year.

And yes, for 56,000 of us, it is home.

—Liz Berger is President of the Downtown Alliance