

Best Places Survey

Hourglass Foundation

Hourglass Quality-of Life Surveys consistently tell us that we love Lancaster County. We took it upon ourselves to ask people what they like best about Lancaster County; why they feel it is a very special place.

We posted a questionnaire on our website in June and asked Hourglass panel members to tell us what are their five favorite, locally-based things that make them feel that Lancaster County is one of the best places. Their answers, while not statistically representative, are insightful and remind all of us to appreciate what we have.

Let's first look at the quantitative results of the survey based on the 51 responses we received. Since this was an unaided survey, people could write down anything that came to mind. The most mentioned favorite is Lancaster City, cited by 45% of respondents. In fact, many of the top mentions by our panelists were downtown Lancaster based. Here are the top responses:

- 45% Lancaster City
- 43% Central Market
- 27% Farms/Farmland
- 22% Restaurants
- 16% Fulton Opera House
- 14% Longs Park Music
- 12% Location/Proximity
- 12% People
- 12% Diversity
- 12% Culture/Arts
- 10% Clipper Stadium
- 10% Franklin & Marshall
- 10% Small Towns
- 10% Local Food/Farm Stands
- 8% Generosity of People
- 8% Susquehanna River
- 8% My Neighborhood
- 8% Parks
- 6% Millersville University
- 6% Lititz
- 6% Lancaster Co. Farmland Trust

While there are many things about Lancaster County that we agree about, it is interesting to note that different people have different reasons for loving Lancaster County, and that

makes us all the more special. Now let's look into why people answered as they did. Here's a sampling of responses:

"Beautiful farms – beyond the absolute beauty of Lancaster County farms, is a visual sense of history, hard-working families, peace and quiet, and life as it was meant to be."

"City of Lancaster -- a great place to live; it's a walking city, the car stays in the garage; great restaurants; close to work and 'it's on the move'."

"Farmland – beauty; productiveness of people and resources; basic life and death living; my heritage; local food."

"Downtown Lancaster -- from Farmers Market to Clipper Stadium, lots going on. All it lacks is a movie theatre, and during the summer we have outdoor movies at Binns Park."

"Central Market -- the calmness and sense of not being rushed. The quality and price of the fresh produce; the chance to see old friends unexpectedly, and to watch the tourists enjoying themselves; to watch the children delight in choosing a treat,"

"Lancaster Barnstormers – interesting, fun, inexpensive baseball."

"Lancaster City -- I love to gaze at the architecture of different areas of the city. In the spring/summer/fall there are beautiful flowering trees, the lovely flower baskets hanging from the lampposts, and of course the leaves as they change color."

"The Fulton -- quality theatre in a wonderful facility."

"Diversity -- you can be in close proximity to people different from you, and learn from each other, and be exposed to something new."

"Characters Pub – George and Garry are wonderful. Great food and great service, reminds me of Cheers, everyone knows your name."

"Driving, biking, and walking the scenic roads -- There are so many scenic roads. Just today I drove from Lancaster City to Nottingham on 222 and 272. It was a beautiful day with blue skies. Along the way, I stopped off and bought some berries, baked goods and flowers at a couple of roadside stands. The views of the farmland and the little towns along the way are awesome."

"Central Market – keeps me closer to those who grow the food, which makes me feel more responsibility to the environment that allows Lancaster County to produce healthy and delicious food."

"Lancaster City – it is a wonderful blend of history and the arts with many fine buildings of various vintages well preserved. Also the city and surrounding areas have many fine

restaurants, an outstanding Symphony Orchestra, and excellent institutions of higher learning.”

“Small towns -- I truly enjoy visiting the small towns such as Lititz, Mount Joy, Millersville, Strasburg, etc. They each have unique qualities and a distinct community character. It’s great to stroll down the pedestrian-friendly streets, visit the shops and restaurants, and enjoy the historical flavor.”

“I love the farmland – but sadly too much is being developed, which makes what remains ever more valuable. None of us can live without food, and the rich soil here deserves to be valued and used wisely. Thankfully there are organizations working to save it – like Lancaster Farmland Trust. Driving around and seeing grazing cows, horses, mules, and sheep, growing corn and grains, beautiful sunrises and sunsets, acres of meadows feed one’s soul and eyes.”

“Downtown Lancaster – great shops, fun events, good restaurants, art galleries.”

“Clipper Stadium – it is so much fun to go to a game and see multigenerational families having such a great time. Also it is just plain exciting to be a part of the crowd.”

“Whoopie pies – what’s not to like?”

“Parks and trails – visiting the local parks and trails is a great way to relax and connect with nature. There are many opportunities near by and they are seldom crowded.”

“Franklin & Marshall College – adds to culture and offers a myriad of activities to locals; a beautiful place to walk, sit and ponder; gives back much to the City and its neighbors.”

“People, People, People – There is a wonderful diversity here which I cherish. While I have many friends around the world, I have dear friends from many countries, racial and ethnic groups I have met without leaving Lancaster County. I have never met a person from whom I could not learn something. And while I may be biased, I think Lancaster County has the most generous, caring, fascinating people found anywhere. And oh, the amazing children of our community!”

“Central Market -- our county’s treasure...a blending of all that’s right about our hometown.”

“Restaurants – we’re blessed with an abundance of great, fun, and interesting restaurants. Everything from gourmet dining to full-of-character family owned establishments,”

“Longs Park Summer Entertainment Series – where else can you get such great entertainment for free? July 4 concert with the Lancaster Symphony with the 1812 Overture, the cannons and the fireworks.”

“Art Morris – this gentleman is one of the city’s best advocates and relevant positive critics. His former post as mayor and continued efforts on behalf of the city represent a lifetime of service to the city.”

“Fulton Theatre – it brings us music and drama of the highest rank.”

“The architecture downtown and the farmlands – beautiful buildings and wonderful scenery – we have it all!”

“Prince Street galleries – the galleries have added so much and so many to the downtown scene. First Fridays are wonderful, especially on Prince Street.”

“People – we have a wonderfully diverse population, people who care, who volunteer and who step up to the plate whenever a need arises.”

“Proximity to larger cities and opportunities – New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington DC are all within relatively short distances, with all they have to offer without having to live in the crush of people, the concrete, and the dinginess.”

“Wilbur Chocolate factory – I love the smell, the chocolate, the ‘Wilbur Ladies’ who work there year after year. It feels like home.”

“Cultural events – Lancaster County is host to many cultural events from local festivals and museums to the Fulton Opera House and PA Renaissance Faire. Each week there are opportunities to attend an array of events or visit historic sites, museums, and other places of interest. I think it is important to market these opportunities.”

“Prime farmland – we are so blessed in Lancaster County to have this amazing farmland all around us. I am worried that too much of it is being developed improperly and that not enough is being done to protect our heritage – by preserving our farmland (especially on the County level). I hope the Commissioners have a referendum to float a bond to preserve more farms.”

“Lancaster Convention Center – it’s not here yet, but when it is, it will return Lancaster City to a thriving Pennsylvania destination.”

“Revitalizing city – the restaurants, galleries, shops are coming back and the city is once again vibrant.”

“Variety of good quality restaurants – I like to eat!”

“Central Market on a Saturday morning – the bustle of the market, the freshness of the offered products, and the wonderful people make this a gem – and a wonderful weekly ritual.”

We also asked Hourglass panel members to tell us their favorite things about Downtown Lancaster. As you might suspect, Central Market was the most mentioned (60%). For almost half of the respondents, it was their first mention. The next most mentioned thing people say they love about Downtown Lancaster is “restaurants”, followed by Fulton Opera House, architecture/historic buildings, Clipper Stadium, unique shops, art galleries, walkability, art/culture, First Fridays, diversity, 300 block N. Queen St., churches, revitalization, Binns Park, education, history, cultural events, and lots more. Here is a sampling of what people said:

“Central Market – nothing can brighten your day faster than a stroll through the market. It’s fun place to be. Everyone is happy and the food is great. It captures so much of what makes Lancaster special – farms, food, architecture, history, and people.”

“300 block North Queen Street – proud of their quirkiness, the odd and the elegant things can be found on this block, with a preponderance of friendly merchants.”

“Cultural diversity – the mix of people makes the place exciting.”

“Restaurants, bistros, taverns – I like good food and drink in a small city.”

“Prince Street – the developing ‘arts corridor’ and the cultural opportunities it promises. Actually, that it already provides – but I think more people are finally becoming aware of.”

“Unique shops – the downtown is dominated by owner/operated businesses, where your tastes and preferences and shopping needs can be catered to, and you can become friends with those in the shops over time. The goods are unusual or unique.”

“Fulton Opera House – maintaining our cultural and classical art is key to a vital lifestyle.”

“Walkability – I love being able to walk to anything I might need.”

“Clipper Stadium – I’m not a sports freak, but golly, these ballgames are fun! If I won the lottery, one of the first things I’d buy would be a skybox – they’re great!”

“Mayor Gray – thanks largely to the leadership of the Mayor there’s a new, fresh buzz of hope and excitement for Downtown Lancaster. He has a first rate team working to make Lancaster an even better place to live, work and visit.”

“First Fridays – it provides many venues to celebrate, has an exciting atmosphere, brings lots of people together, and is for people of all ages.”

“Historic buildings – Fulton Opera House, Lancaster Newspaper and the Greist Building for example. Lots of old well kept homes, and places to walk to enjoy the downtown.”

“Restaurants—some of my favorite places downtown are The Loft, Isaacs, Characters, Cherries, and others.”

“300 block of North Queen Street – funky cool.”

“Sense of community – the downtown is a community of like-minded, although diverse, people. We know each other by face, if not by name and personality. There’s a feeling of belonging as a result.”

“The Convention Center – I’m glad they are keeping the façade. I’m expecting great things to happen with overall revitalization of the downtown.”

“The arts – provides entertainment and beauty – the gallery row and Fulton Opera are gems.”

“Energy – people who live downtown almost anywhere tend to be more creative, inventive, adventurous than suburbanites. They like to be around other people and that synergy is easily felt walking around town.”

“Food – great pizza at Casa Bella, decadent long johns at Achenbach’s/Central Market, Wendy Joe’s chocolate dipped cookies, fish and chips at Annie Baileys, mushroom soup at The Loft, and the list is endless.”

“Central Market – fresh flowers, gourmet coffee and tea, fresh produce, fresh meats, and baked items. Lots of different kinds of people there.”

“History – the preserved buildings help make the city unique.”

“Church bells – I love to hear the 6 p.m. chimes echoing around the city.”

“The people – people from so many backgrounds who are dedicated in ensuring that Lancaster County remains a wonderful place to live and explore. I do think that people need to become more involved with their communities and in the civic debate, as we all play a part in preserving the quality of life here.”

“First Friday – it’s like a big party.”

“Historic architecture – Lancaster is such a walkable city, and its streets are lined with all these old buildings that are built on such a nice human scale. I just love walking around and looking at them, peeking into backyard gardens, admiring all the little details. And I love the way the setting sun makes the bricks seem to glow. Beautiful!”