

# Tampa has much to crow about

**Chester Smolski**

**TAMPA, Fla.** — When the Tampa Bay Buccaneers won their first game last fall, after 18 straight losses, the whole town turned out to celebrate the win of their two-year-old National Football League team. In a city that needs positive identification, the celebration exemplified some of the new spirit that one senses here in Florida's third largest city, and the team, itself, signifies this city's attempt to make it as one of the big league cities of this nation.

Of all the major cities in this tourist-minded Sunshine State, Tampa has perhaps the least orientation toward tourism, having few of the attractions, with the exception of its Busch Gardens, dog racing and jai alai, that other cities here claim in their quest to garner visitors. Although it is working to generate more tourist activity, this city, as one planner stated, "is more like a factory town of the industrial Northeast rather than like its Florida counterparts."

This major seaport located on Florida's best ocean inlet is a service and distribution center, with all types of goods and freight also passing through what is claimed to be the best jet airport in the country. The solid industrial base, with considerable phosphate mining and Florida's only steel mill, is the foundation for this working city which, incidentally, has perhaps more bars and lounges per square mile than any other place in the South.

Still a young city, this multi-faceted and heterogeneous urban center manifests many of the same characteristics of the old industrial cities of the Northeast. The

part of Tampa and it had established a reputation as a lively Latin city with activities, festivals and night life reflective of that culture.

After the war, urban renewal and interstate road construction decimated Ybor City. Many residents moved to the suburbs and other minorities moved in. The siting of a community college and some government office buildings have further changed the character of the area.

Some young merchants have capitalized on the Latin heritage with most shops on East 7th reflecting this still-evident Latin flavor and artists, occupying loft space, display their work and contribute to character of the place, but in actuality only the artifacts remain. One sees Spanish signs, hears some Spanish spoken and notes some of the distinctive architecture. Yet this community, occupied primarily by Blacks with some elderly Spanish and Anglos, is no longer the Ybor city of a generation ago and is a disappointment as a tourist attraction. Cigar manufacturing still continues here (Tampa claims to be the "Fine Cigar Capital of the World.")

Tampa has experienced three growth periods: manufacturing in the last century, primarily because of Ybor City; the Florida land boom years of the 20s; and the period of post-war suburbanization. This city has an area four times that of Providence and much construction takes place in the "suburbs" but within city limits. Also, Tampa annexed a sizable piece of land in the 50s which greatly added to its area and population.

People here speak of the positive changes they see taking place in the city. Although faced with many of the same problems of the older cities of the Northeast, Tampa does exhibit a new spirit of optimism with slogans such as "Tampa — where the good life gets better" and "I like Tampa" displayed on bumpers and billboards. A new pedestrian mall is now operating in the downtown and the Downtown Development Authority is working on plans for new investments in the only real downtown in a metropolitan area of over one million people.

The Chamber of Commerce is going nationwide with its publicity and just recently announced the relocation of the headquarters of a Rochester based pharmaceutical firm to the city. And the local economy continues strong with two universities in the city adding further strength to the economic base.

As New Englanders we can take heart from what is taking place in Tampa. This "old industrial city" is trying to overcome problems similar to our own and make it as a big league city. And, who knows, perhaps the Buccaneers will make it also.

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**'Where the good life gets better,' as the slogan says**

obvious include generally poorer roads than one normally finds in Florida cities, although still better than in the cities of the Northeast; more older and damaged cars in use; the evident decline of the downtown with many vacant shops; derelicts a common sight; and few pedestrians on the streets, day or night, whose general attire indicates a lower-income population. The less-obvious characteristics include a lack of pride and a sense of negativeness about the city and, according to another city planner, a blue-collar orientation and general lack of sophistication. It is still very much a provincial small town in its outlook.

Another feature similar to Northeastern cities and very dissimilar to cities of the South is the semblance of ethnic neighborhoods. West Tampa has large numbers of Spanish, Cubans and Italians but perhaps the best known area is Ybor City, an area of about 100 city blocks centered on East 7th Avenue and the locale in which cigar manufacturing brought recognition to Florida's major west coast city.

By 1885, some 61 years after the first settlement, Tampa was still a small fishing village of about 700 people. Two Spanish-owned cigar firms, Ybor and Manrara being one of them, came from Key West that year to purchase a site for their activities just east of the village center. Cuban workers were brought in and by 1900 Tampa could claim over 10,000 residents. Ybor City became a self-contained, small Spanish-speaking community with its own housing, services and facilities.

By the mid-1930s Ybor City had 25,000 Spanish, Cubans and Italians living in this