

Orlando thrives next to Disney World

The rapid expansion of facilities caused

an overbuilding of hotels and motels, as well as houses and apartments. Only now is this supply more in line with the current market.

Even in a population growth period there are still problems of an employment structure with an inadequate manufacturing base, a level of jobs inadequate for a highly educated population, and an urban infringement on agricultural lands. City, county and regional planners are working on these problems.

Angus Smith, Executive Director of the Downtown Development Board, also must deal with too many empty shops in the downtown and still try to maintain a viable retail setting. His more than \$300,000 budget, the bulk of which comes from a \$10 per \$1000 tax his agency imposes on all income-producing property in the 976-acre downtown, makes his job somewhat easier than in many other cities.

My reason for stopping in Orlando on my way to Disney World was a neat tourist information sign on the Interstate, and other signs directing me to the Chamber tourist office. The good service, adequate materials, pleasant personnel and several tourist attractions prompted me to stay for three days spending my tourist dollars. Although Providence is no Orlando, it could do the same thing with its Interstate 95. A simple and attractive tourist information sign and these other services could reap big dividends for the city.

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Chester Smolski

ORLANDO, Fla. — They call it an old city — it was incorporated in 1875 with 85 residents. By 1900 the numbers had grown to 2,500, and before World War II 37,000 people were living in this agricultural center located in mid-Florida. But it really took off after the war.

In the decade of the 50's the number of jobs increased by 106 percent, causing the Federal Commerce Department to rank Orlando as the sixth "most successful" city in the nation for providing new job opportunities. (Anaheim, California, home of Disneyland, was ranked second at the time.) This new growth was sparked by the opening of the Martin Marietta plant in 1956 with employment rising to 11,000 in a few years and making it the largest employer in Florida at the time.

The space program of the 60's, centered at the Kennedy Space Center 55 miles to the east, brought in a large number of highly educated scientists, most of whom were employed locally in industries related to that program, and by 1965 total employment in non-agricultural jobs had climbed to 102,000 in the Orlando Metropolitan Area.

It was that eventful year, 1965, that the late Walt Disney announced the start of another Disney entertainment venture to be built just 20 miles down the road from this largest urban center in this part of the state, and it has been "all systems go" from that time.

The \$700 million Disney World officially opened in October 1971 and has grown to be the largest tourist attraction in the world, with more than one million visitors a month coming to the Magic Kingdom. But the excitement continues unabated, for the Disney Experimental Prototype City of Tomorrow (EPCOT) will start construction this year and when opened in 1980, it is anticipated that the number of visitors will grow to nearly two million a month, current employment at Disney World of 13,000 will climb to more than 20,000 and, of course, several hundred million dollars will be injected into the economy.

The current number of jobs in the metropolitan area exploded to 214,400, more than double the 1965 figure, and the

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population in the area now stands at 630,000, up from 411,000 in 1965. Estimates of the city population place it at 128,000, a 28 percent increase over that of the last official census count in 1970.

Nearly seven million tourists now stop at Orlando each year. With motel rates less expensive than those in nearby Disney World and with the Daytona Beach motels 60 miles away at 100 percent occupancy in mid-February because of the "Daytona 500," one finds it extremely difficult to find accommodations here. But once situated, the tourist attractions available are both mind-boggling and purse-emptying.

Capitalizing on the draw of Disney World, there is now a Sea World, the world's largest marine life park which opened in 1973 at a cost of \$23 million, a Mystery Fun House, Six Flag's Stars, Wet n' Wild, the nearby Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus World, and a host of other opportunities to enjoy.

In downtown Orlando there has been a nice restoration of an old shopping arcade on Orange Street. This French Market houses 17 restaurants and attractive shops. The Church Street Station, a renovated old hotel near the railroad tracks, now features Rosie O'Grady's Good Time Emporium and two other period restaurants, one of which has the 800-pound brass chandeliers originally hung in 1904 and salvaged from The First National Bank of Boston. These two facilities represent most of the night life of the downtown.

An interesting arrangement to handle tourists has been worked out by the local Chamber of Commerce. Located in a new building close to the downtown on an exit ramp off of Interstate 4, the route to Disney World, it serves as the tourist information center.

Although the city provides \$60,000 annually for the service, this amount does not completely cover all expenses. Not only is the financial arrangement good for the city but the Chamber's building location is ideal also.

According to Betsy O'Daniel, Director of Economic Research, the arrangement is mutually beneficial because this is good exposure for the Chamber and it gives them recognition for their community work, makes the Chamber more tourist minded, and gives it a feel for tourist needs and activities in Orlando. The Chamber, with its staff of 30 and 10 CETA employees, feels that it has a good grasp of the tourist market as a result of this service and can provide good data to investors.

One of the useful pieces of information put out by the Chamber is the 61 percent occupancy rate for hotels and motels in 1977. This relatively low rate identified one of the problems in the Orlando area.