

Viewpoints

Running the numbers since moving to Ogden 30 years ago

Since moving to Ogden more than 30 years ago, I have covered almost every block of the city on foot or bicycle or some other form of locomotion. Many of my outings led to serendipitous discoveries. For example, I found my current home after a cross country ski outing on the east bench when the path I chose at the end of the day dropped me onto a charming residential street that I had never seen before. One of the benefits of self-powered transportation is that you have time to notice details that the speed of an automobile obscures.

If you have walked or jogged or biked through much of Ogden, you know that the city is rather diverse. Indeed, I have heard many people say that they moved to Ogden because they were attracted by the city's diversity.

With the power of the Internet, anyone can access micro-level census data that gives some insight into the demographic diversity of the city. To provide some insight into the nature of Ogden's diverse population, I want to take you on a virtual jog across the city.

We will start the run at Weber State University's Swenson Gym, where I have started many actual runs. As we run up Country Hills, Lakeview and Beus Drive, toward the Bonneville Shoreline Trail, we find ourselves in one of Ogden's classiest locales. Average household income in this neighborhood is \$123,977. The unemployment rate among residents is almost non-existent; 99 percent of neighborhood's workforce is employed.

A brief jog along the Shoreline Trail brings us to the 22nd Street trailhead. As we exit the trail onto 22nd and Buchanan Ave., we find ourselves in one of Ogden's typical, middle-class, east bench neighborhoods. Here, average household income is \$64,500. More than 90 percent of the residents are white. The unemployment rate is less than 2 percent.

However, as we run west down 22nd Street, things begin to change. By the time we are able see the intersection of 22nd and Harrison Blvd., the average household income of residents has dropped to \$43,690; the unemployment rate has risen to 4.2 percent.

When we cross Harrison, we enter a neighborhood where the majority of residents are non-white. The largest single

ethnic group is Hispanic. Residents have an average household income of \$38,000, and the unemployment rate is 5.8 percent.

When we reach 22nd and Washington Blvd., we find ourselves in a neighborhood where the unemployment rate is well above 10 percent, and average household income is \$23,726. More than 20 percent of the residents live below the poverty level.

In terms of economic prosperity, Ogden is certainly diverse. Our jog was approximately the same distance as a weekend 10K run. A skilled runner could cover this distance in a little over half an hour. In this short time, we traveled from a neighborhood where the average household is more than twice the U.S. average to one where income is less than half the U.S. average.

A disproportionate number of Ogden residents lie at the bottom of the income spectrum. Looking at the entire city of Ogden, the most densely populated income category is comprised of households making \$10,000 to \$20,000. Slightly more than 16 percent of Ogden residents fall into this category, which is more

than those falling into any other category. Across the entire state, more Utahns fall into the \$75,000 to \$100,000 category than any other.

So, does our run end on "Desolation Row," or is there a rainbow and pot of gold here somewhere? Actually, there is a ray of hope.

According to a recent study done by a group of economists, the metropolitan area that encompasses Ogden has the highest rate of income mobility in the nation. In Ogden, and surrounding Northern Utah, children born into a household living in the bottom 20 percent will, on average, climb to the middle of the income distribution by the time they are working adults. Remarkably, children born into the bottom 20 percent have an 11.5 percent chance of rising to the top 20 percent of income earners during their working career.

This means that a good number of those children living in Ogden households making \$10,000 to \$20,000 will follow a path that reverses the trajectory of our hypothetical run. They were born at the bottom of the hill, but they have a fair chance of climbing their way to the top. It will be interesting to see who they turn out to be.

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

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Commentary

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