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SOUTH LAKE  
UNION ARRIVES

# BELLEVUE BOOM

ONCE A RURAL OUTPOST TO SEATTLE, AND THEN A BEDROOM COMMUNITY, BELLEVUE—THE EASTSIDE'S LEADING CITY—IS TAKING OFF WITH A DOWNTOWN EXPLOSION OF OFFICE TOWERS, CONDOS AND RETAIL COMPLEXES. WILL THIS BOOM LAUNCH A SUBURB INTO SEATTLE SISTER-CITY STATUS? >>>>>>>>

BY JOE FOLLANSBEE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKE HIPPLE

IF YOU APPROACH downtown Bellevue via I-90 and the Bellevue Way exit (rather than via I-405), you find yourself traveling through a landscape most Seattleites envision when they think of this suburban city: boulevards lined with tall conifers, ranch houses on curvy residential streets, and convoys of family cars and SUVs.

But as you near Bellevue's downtown, the view begins to change. Among the glass-enclosed office and condo towers that increasingly fill Bellevue's skyline are a half-dozen red, white and orange construction cranes. And on the ground, a cadre of men and women in safety vests direct traffic around deep holes in the earth that presage yet more new skyscrapers. You're witnessing the emergence of a new Bellevue, unlike, to paraphrase a car commercial, your father's Bellevue. ¶ "Sometimes I think of our city as a teenager running to catch up and now we're in our 20s," says Connie Marshall, a Bellevue city council-

woman and self-described "one-woman chamber of commerce." The state's fifth largest city is undergoing a metamorphosis that's turning heads in Seattle, its biggest neighbor. Bellevue is no longer just a satellite to Seattle's planet—but a city spinning off into its own space, becoming the center of the Eastside universe. ¶ Marshall sums up 21st-century Bellevue this way: "Intensely urban, culturally rich, lots of commerce and single-family neighborhoods." Amenities, such as the Bellevue Arts Museum, a planned performing arts facility, new upscale shopping center, residential high-rises and expanding office development are online or coming soon. Today, 4,500 people live in downtown Bellevue; 14,000 are expected to live there in 2020, swelling the city's total current population of 117,500. Many of the newcomers will work in Bellevue or the Eastside instead of commuting to jobs in Seattle. ¶ Stretching east to west from

## BELLEVUE BY THE NUMBERS

**POPULATION:** 117,500 \*  
**DAILY EMPLOYMENT:** 130,000 \*\*  
**LAND AREA:** 31 square miles \*\*

### WHO LIVES IN BELLEVUE

**MEN:** 50.8 percent  
**WOMEN:** 49.2 percent  
**MEDIAN AGE:** 38.7 years

### RACE

**CAUCASIAN:** 68 percent  
**ASIAN:** 25.1 percent  
**HISPANIC OR LATINO:** 5.6 percent  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN:** 2.7 percent  
**NATIVE AMERICAN/ALASKA NATIVE:** 0.2 percent

### EDUCATION

(ages 25 and older)  
**GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE:** 22.5 percent  
**BACHELOR DEGREE:** 36.6 percent  
**SOME COLLEGE:** 17.6 percent  
**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE:** 11.1 percent  
**HIGH SCHOOL (NO DIPLOMA):** 2.8 percent  
**LESS THAN NINTH GRADE:** 2.3 percent

### MARITAL STATUS

(ages 15 and older)  
**NEVER MARRIED:** 26.9 percent  
**MARRIED:** 59.7 percent  
**DIVORCED:** 11 percent

### HOUSEHOLD TYPE

**HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS:** 31 percent  
**FEMALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD:** 6.7 percent  
**SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLD:** 30.2 percent  
**AVERAGE FAMILY SIZE:** 2.9

### HOUSEHOLD INCOME \*\*\*

Less than \$10,000: 4.3 percent  
\$10,000 to \$14,999: 3.4 percent  
\$15,000 to \$24,999: 7.2 percent  
\$25,000 to \$34,999: 8.6 percent  
\$35,000 to \$49,999: 15.2 percent  
\$50,000 to \$74,999: 20.4 percent  
\$75,000 to \$99,999: 14.5 percent  
\$100,000 to \$149,999: 14.7 percent  
\$150,000 to \$199,999: 5.4 percent  
\$200,000 or more: 6.4 percent  
Median household income: \$62,338  
Median family income: \$76,868

Except as noted, figures are from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey.

\* Washington State Office of Financial Management

\*\* City of Bellevue

\*\*\* 2000 U.S. Census

Lake Sammamish to Lake Washington, and north to south from Redmond nearly to Renton, the city is determined to keep the negative effects of growth limited to downtown, though the impact of the current influx of building and people is unpredictable. The biggest fear is more traffic in a city built for cars. No one is sure what to do about the problem.

But growth is in Bellevue's DNA. The question is: growth into what? The Bellevue Downtown Association's (BDA) mission statement acknowledges the community's "continuing evolution" as "the economic and cultural heart of the Eastside." But that description doesn't suggest an end point. Says BDA President Leslie Lloyd: "We've done a fair bit of navel-gazing, but we haven't decided what we want to be."

Bellevue partisans see their city as a center of activity for the Eastside, but are careful to position their town as complementary to Seattle, offering different choices, rather than as a rival stealing people and business away. And in reality, that's how Bellevue functions in the big picture,

**"It's not Seattle versus Bellevue. Seattle and Bellevue are really integrated parts of a whole."**

according to Dick Conway, a regional economist who publishes *The Puget Sound Economic Forecaster*. Seattle can't handle the region's growth by itself, and so growth appears elsewhere, such as in Bellevue, manifested by new office towers, retail space and residential development. "It's not Seattle versus Bellevue," he says. "Seattle and Bellevue are really integrated parts of a whole."

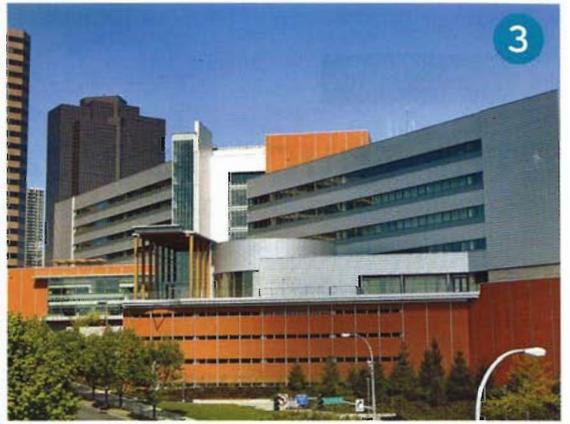
Bellevue has always welcomed development, and the completion of the first Lake Washington Floating Bridge in 1940 opened the door to a new bedroom community. The once-rural area attracted high-income professionals and executives from Boeing and downtown Seattle who could live in the country and commute to the city. In 1946, Kemper Freeman Sr. opened Bellevue Square, the area's first shopping destination outside Seattle.

Bellevue incorporated as a city in 1953 with just 5,900 residents.

Fifty-three years later, Freeman's son, Kemper Freeman Jr., is at the center of Bellevue's current transformation. He and his family still control Bellevue Square, as well as nearby property, and he is adding one of the most important high-rises to the new skyline: Lincoln Square. First proposed in 1989, the project was little more than an underground parking garage in 2002, when the then-developer ran out of money in the wake of the dot-com bust. The project sat idle for months until Freeman Jr. bought it for \$40 million in 2003. Two years later, the retail, hotel and condo portions opened; the 28-floor office tower will be finished in the summer of 2007. Freeman has seen his share of development cycles in Bellevue, and even he is amazed at the mega-boom under way today. By his calculations, as much as 12 million square feet of new construction could be added to the six million feet that already exist downtown. "Bellevue has the largest queue of development projects that I've ever seen," he says.

Though he's reluctant to say the city is overbuilding, Freeman believes the pace is not sustainable. He predicts some of the planned projects won't be built. "I don't believe the economy will support what's happening," he adds.

For the moment, however, office space is hard to find—the vacancy rate earlier this year was 7.9 percent—and there's no sign that demand is slowing. Microsoft has already leased 15 floors of Lincoln Square's unfinished office tower for its North American sales headquarters. Retailer Eddie Bauer has leased 10 floors in the same building. In 2005, Symetra Financial moved more than a thousand employees from its Redmond campus (kitty corner from Microsoft) to the former Rainier Plaza, renamed the Symetra Financial Center, and nearby Key Center. Roger Harbin, Symetra's executive vice president and COO, says downtown Bellevue gives



## NEW + COMING

Bellevue's skyline is changing dramatically with more than two dozen projects recently completed, underway or in the planning stages. The six here are among the most significant.

1. Washington Square
2. Lincoln Square
3. City Hall
4. Bellevue Towers
5. City Center Plaza
6. The Bravern



## THE EDUCATION CARD

Families who head to the suburbs for schools will be happy with Bellevue. Even as it grows, the public education system remains stellar

Seattle parents who have lost faith in the city's sprawling school system have traditionally cited the Eastside's public schools as a reason to move across Lake Washington. Bellevue's schools have consistently earned praise for their quality. They gained national prominence in 2003 and 2005 when high schools in the Bellevue School District were named to a *Newsweek* list of top schools in the nation.

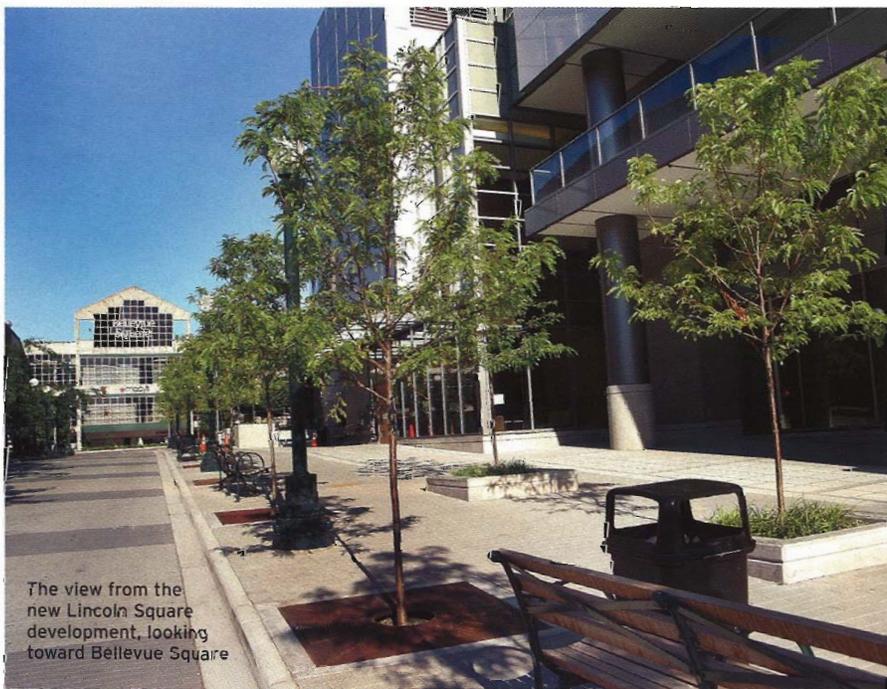
The magazine credits school superintendent Mike Riley with much of the success. Hired in 1996, Riley reshaped the district's fragmented, "site-based" management and curriculum in favor of a centrally managed organization. He also encouraged students to take advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) courses (essentially college-level work for high school students). Eighty-five percent of graduates of the district's Class of 2005 took at least one AP or IB course; 40 percent took four or more.

"We aim at trying to get all of our kids into advanced placement or international baccalaureate courses by the time they graduate," Riley says. "Every kid ought to get the kind of education that allows them to go to college."

Bellevue students' Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores underline the district's achievement. More than 87 percent of Bellevue 10th-graders met the 2004-2005 reading standard; better than 72 percent met the math standard. Statewide, 72.9 percent of 10th-graders passed the reading WASL, while 47.5 percent passed the math portion.

Although Bellevue's student enrollment is more ethnically diverse than enrollment in the state as a whole, Riley acknowledges that his students face fewer challenges than found in more heterogeneous districts, such as Seattle. For example, 36.5 percent of Bellevue's 16,000 students are minorities, compared with 58.7 percent of Seattle's 46,000 students. The percentage of students that qualify for free or low-priced school meals, a measure of poverty, is more than twice as high in Seattle than in Bellevue.

Despite Bellevue's advantages, Riley believes parents and students in his district are fundamentally similar to parents and students in other cities. "Do demographics play a part in our success? Absolutely," he says. "But people have similar aspirations in Seattle as in Bellevue." *J.F.*



The view from the new Lincoln Square development, looking toward Bellevue Square

employees access to a transportation hub, restaurants, shopping and green spaces. "Bellevue is securing its place as a major business center in our region," he explains.

Bellevue is also attracting residents to new high-rise condominiums. One of the projects is Washington Square, a \$1.2 billion complex of 900 condos and town-

houses, plus a hotel, restaurants, office and retail spaces covering 10.5 acres. The project is sited on one of downtown's so-called "super-blocks," an area quadruple the size of an average city block in Seattle. These blocks, often separated by busy, four-lane arterials, are headaches for developers trying to live up to the city's goal of a

pedestrian-friendly downtown. Wasatch Development Associates of Salt Lake City, Washington Square's developer, will attack the problem by creating tree-lined walkways with benches and fountains. Prices for Washington Square condos range from \$220,000 to \$2 million. (The average condo price in downtown Bellevue in early 2006 was \$363,947.)

Floyd and Jeanette Schlaus of Sammamish rushed to buy one of the first Washington Square condos when units went on sale in April. The couple currently lives in a quiet, forested area next to the third tee of a popular golf course. Golf doesn't interest the pair, and nothing, as Jeanette puts it, happens after dark in her neighborhood. A retired flight attendant, she was looking for a more exciting lifestyle. So she and her husband opted for an urban environment, and are looking forward to moving to Washington Square when the project opens in late 2007. "I miss the vitality of life. I miss wondering, 'What wonderful choices am I going to have today?'" she says. "That's not happening when you live in the woods."

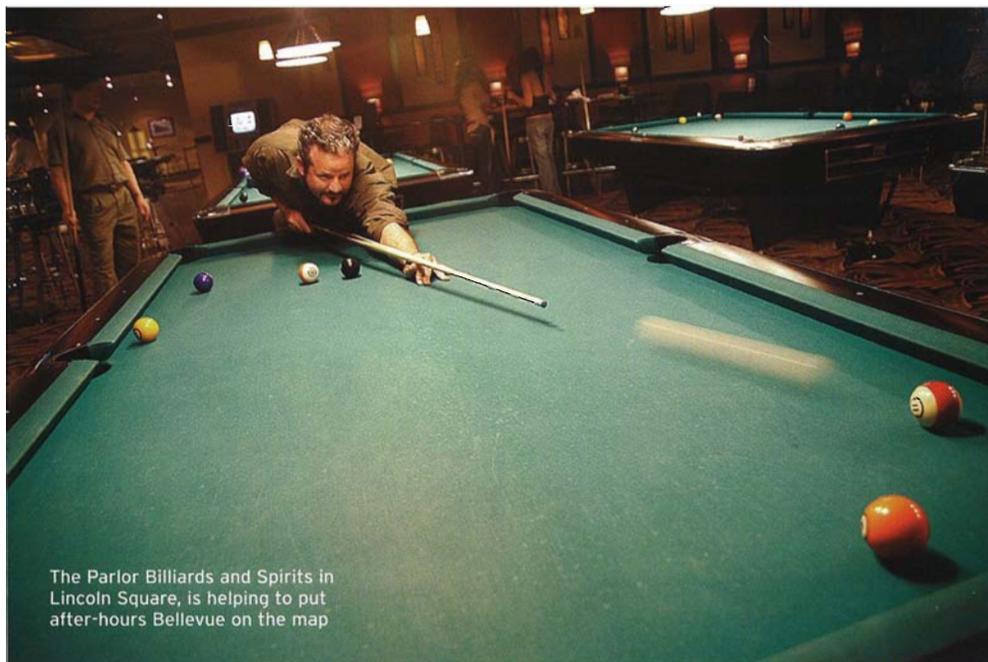
Some of the Schlaus' new neighbors will live a couple of blocks away at The Bravern, a two-tower project featuring 550 condos, 12 floors of office space and upscale shop-

ping. But the big news is Nieman Marcus' decision to anchor The Bravern's retail space. Dan Ivanoff, co-founder of Schnitzer Northwest, The Bravern's developer, says some people were surprised the Dallas-based retailer picked Bellevue, given downtown Seattle's established reputation for selling high-end merchandise.

But research conducted by Schnitzer and Nieman Marcus made the decision a no-brainer. For example, nine out of the 10 top net-income zip codes in the region are on the east side of Lake Washington. (The one exception is the zip code for Seattle's Madison Park neighborhood, and it ranked eighth.) Another point: The number and household income of shoppers Nieman Marcus expects to serve in Bellevue almost exactly mirror the market supporting Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, California. "It's a lot of net worth and a lot of bodies," Ivanoff says.

The developer also sees specialization occurring between Seattle and Bellevue's intellectual capital: Seattle focuses more on biotechnology, while Bellevue is more interested in software development. Employment growth, once focused on Seattle, is now more or less balanced between Seattle and the Eastside. And the growth in high-rise residential gives people another choice; living in the sky is no longer exclusive to Seattle. While most Bellevue boosters prefer to see their city as complementary to Seattle and not a rival, Ivanoff, because his company has properties on both sides of the lake, is one of the few people willing to say that Bellevue is actually competing with its bigger, more established sister. "Ten years ago, you never would've talked about Bellevue as a competitor to Seattle," he says. "But you're starting to see a structural change."

A competitive force shared by the cities is the demand for land. Hemmed by urban growth boundaries, planners in Bellevue are packing most of the projected total population growth of 29,950 by 2020 and new property development on two percent of the city's land, including a strip on Bellevue-Redmond Road to the east, Crossroads Mall, Factoria to the south, and, of course, the downtown core. There's a hard boundary between the 410-acre central business district (CBD) and residential neighborhoods; cross NE 12th Avenue, the CBD's northern border, and you're in an area of older (for Bellevue) single-family homes and



The Parlor Billiards and Spirits in Lincoln Square, is helping to put after-hours Bellevue on the map

## NIGHTLIFE

### BELLEVUE AFTER HOURS

Bellevue finally has a nightlife—if you don't like it, go to Kirkland or wait 20 years

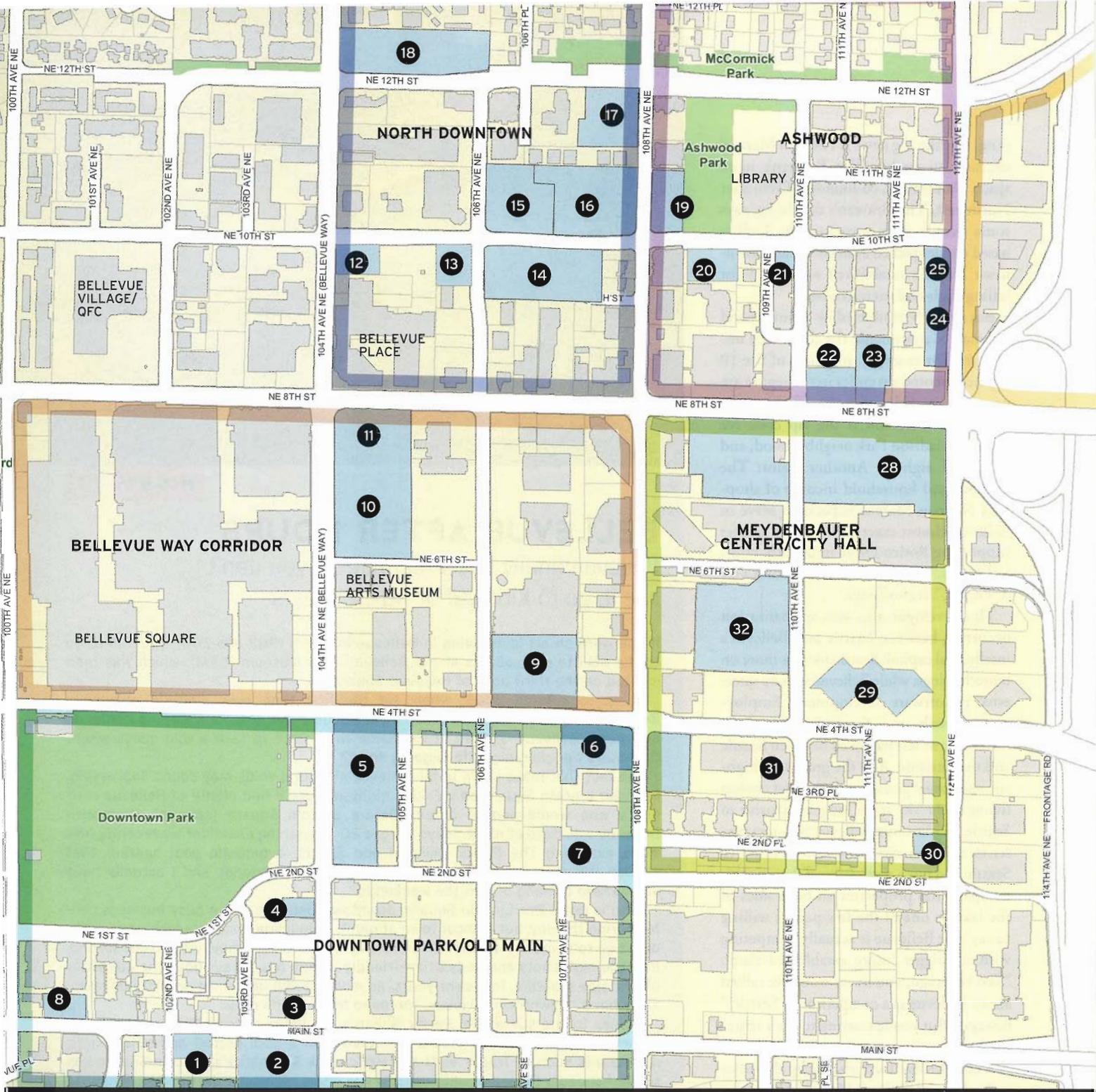
If you were an art lover living in Bellevue between 1983 and 2001, you had to go to the mall to get your fix at the Bellevue Arts Museum (BAM), which was then located on the third floor of Bellevue Square.

Jump to autumn 2005, when, for the first time ever, nightlife arrived in Bellevue. It just so happens that Lincoln Square—an upscale shopping center in downtown Bellevue—arrived at the same time. Care to take a wild guess where Bellevue's fledgling nightlife is going down?

The fact that malls seem to fill Bellevue's cultural voids may sound depressing, but visit Lincoln Square on a Friday night and you'll find plenty of Bellevue residents who would beg to differ. "Before Lincoln Square [opened], downtown Bellevue was dead at night," says Greg, a 20-something Eastsider we recently met while exploring The Parlor Billiards and Spirits, a gigantic pool hall/bar that opened last December in Lincoln Square. "Now my friends and I actually have somewhere to hang out on the weekends."

Greg is right. Pre-Lincoln Square, downtown Bellevue was a busy business center during the day, but a ghost town at night. If Bellevue residents looking to party didn't go to Seattle, that left Kirkland, which, with its charming waterfront setting, multiple nightspots and pedestrian-friendly layout, has always been the epicenter of Eastside nightlife. In recent years, as more people began moving into development-happy downtown Bellevue, the need for nightlife grew.

Thanks to the success of Parlor Billiards (its lively crowd and booming sound system make it feel more like a nightclub than a pool parlor) and neighboring restaurants such as Trader Vic's and McCormick & Schmick's, Lincoln Square has single-handedly turned downtown Bellevue into a nighttime destination. When we visited, the Parlor Billiards crowd was a perfect snapshot of Bellevue's affluent 20- and 30-somethings. The majority of guys wore khakis and pastel polos, while the girls sported tanktops and designer jeans. Overall, the scene felt generic, but not because of the homogenized look of the crowd. (Every type of nightlife crowd has a homogenized look. Visit Capitol Hill on a Friday night, and you'll see hundreds of indie rock kids walking around in the same black-rimmed glasses and T-shirts with ironic messages.) The nightlife felt fake because, well, it was happening under the same roof as shops such as Paper Source and The Container Store. But if Bellevue's young and fabulous don't mind partying in a mall (and trust us, they don't), then who is this style of nightlife really hurting? Not Seattleites, who obviously don't need to cross the bridge for post-sun fun. OK, maybe it hurts Bellevueites who wish their city center had a more authentic scene, but to those folks we offer hope: In 2001, after spending nearly 20 years in a mall, BAM moved into its own space. Give your young nightlife some time and it, too, will move beyond the mall. *Chris Clayton*



**THE FACTS**

**DOWNTOWN PARK/MAIN STREET**  
 9,400 sq. ft. of commercial space completed since August 2005  
 495,745 sq. ft. under construction; 201,800 sq. ft. of PP\*  
 30 residential units completed since August 2005  
 368 units under construction ; 351 units of PP\*

**Development snapshot:** Old Bellevue gets a makeover complete with approximately 700,000 square feet of commercial space and multiuse complexes; the planned Bellevue at Main building will include 75,000 square feet of office space, 37,000 square feet of retail and 138 residential units.

**BELLEVUE WAY CORRIDOR**  
 310,000 sq. ft. of commercial space completed since August 2005  
 530,000 sq. ft. under construction  
 148 residential units completed since August 2005;  
 558 units under construction  
 337 hotel rooms completed since August 2005

**Development snapshot:** The recently completed Lincoln Square, located across from the ever-popular Bellevue Square, defines the term "multifunctional" with ground-floor retail and restaurant space, the One Lincoln Tower condo complex and the fully loaded Westin Bellevue. An office tower is still under construction.

**NORTH DOWNTOWN**  
 120,000 sq. ft. of commercial space under construction  
 11,500 sq. ft. of PP\*  
 578 residential units under construction  
 515 units of PP\*  
 351 hotel rooms PP\*

**Development snapshot:** The area just north of Bellevue Square is becoming the new place to both live and play, with 1,097 total residential units and the slated construction of the Performing Arts Center Eastside and 37,000 square feet of commercial set to begin this year.

# THE BELLEVUE BOOM

Hot new retail, restaurants, condos and a vibrant nightlife have brought this former business and shopping burg to life COMPILED BY KATE PALMEN



## NEW DOWNTOWN BELLEVUE DEVELOPMENT

- \* Completed since August 2005
- + Currently under construction or site preparation
- ± Planned, permitted and scheduled for construction in 2006-2007

### DOWNTOWN PARK MAIN STREET

**1. Apartments at Main Place\*** (Vander Hoek Corporation), 10245 Main St.; 9,400 sq. ft. office/retail; 30 units.

**2. Bellevue at Main±** (SRM Development), 15 Bellevue Way SE; 75,000 sq. ft. office; 37,000 sq. ft. retail; 138 units.

**3. Main Street Gateway±** (Vander Hoek Corporation), 5 Bellevue Way NE; 25,000 sq. ft. office; 50,000 sq. ft. retail; 80 units.

**4. Gregg's Bellevue Cycle+** (Gregg's Greenlake Cycle), 105 Bellevue Way NE; 10,745 sq. ft. retail.

**5. Avalon Meydenbauer+** (Avalon Bay), 300 Bellevue Way NE; 85,000 sq. ft. retail; 368 units.

**6. Tower 333+** (Hines/Washington Capital Management), 333 108th Ave. NE; 400,000 sq. ft. office.

**7. Ventana on Main** (HMI Real Estate), 10,713 Main St.; 1,000 sq. ft. retail; 68 units.

**8. 10020 Main Street** (Main Bellevue Partners, LLC), 10020 Main St.; 4,800 sq. ft. retail; 65 units.

### BELLEVUE WAY CORRIDOR

**9. Bellevue Towers+** (Gerding/Edlen Development Company), 10608 NE Fourth St.; 558 units.

**10. Lincoln Square and One Lincoln Tower\*** (Kemper Development Company), 600 Bellevue Way NE; 310,000 sq. ft. retail; 148 units; 337 hotel rooms.

**11. Lincoln Square Office Tower+** (Kemper Development Company), 700 Bellevue Way NE; 530,000 sq. ft. office.

### NORTH DOWNTOWN

**12. Hyatt Regency Bellevue+** (Expansion) (Kemper Development Company), NE 10th Street and Bellevue Way NE; 351 rooms.

**13. Performing Arts Center Eastside±** (Performing Arts Center Eastside), 855 106th Ave. NE; 110,000 sq. ft.

**14. Washington Square+** (phase 1, ground floor) (Wasatch Development Associates), 833 108th Ave. NE; 10,000 sq. ft. retail/commercial space; 379 units.

**15. Belcarra±** (BRE Properties), 10688 NE 10th St.; 11,500 sq. ft. retail; 296 units.

**16. VUE Tower±** (The Hanover Company), 10710 NE 10th St.; 219 units.

**17. The Belletini+** (Leisure Care), 115 108th Ave. NE; 150 units.

**18. 1200 Bellevue Way+** (The Dwelling Company), 1200 Bellevue Way NE; 49 units.

### ASHWOOD

**19. TEN20 Tower+** (The Hanover Company), 1020 108th Ave. NE; 129 units.

**20. Pacific Regent Tower II±** (Sunrise Senior Living), 919 109th Ave. NE; 230 units.

**21. European Tower±** (GIS International), 930 109th Ave. NE; 18 units.

**22. Courtyard Marriott Hotel\*** (BCBM, LLC), 11010 NE Eighth St.; 253 hotel rooms.

**23. Bellevue Gateway±** (Alliance Realty Partners), 11011 NE Ninth St.; 130 units.

**24. Ashwood Commons II±** (Su Development), 909 112th Ave NE; 48,000 sq. ft. retail; 276 units.

**25. 989elements\*** (Su Development), 989 112th Ave. NE; 166 units.

### I-405 CORRIDOR

**26. Overlake Hospital South Campus+** (expansion) (Overlake Hospital Medical Center), 1035 116th Ave. NE; 200,000 sq. ft.

**27. Group Health Multispecialty Medical Center+** (Group Health Cooperative), 925 116th Ave. NE; 200,000 sq. ft.

### MEYDENBAUER CENTER CITY HALL

**28. The Bravern+** (Schnitzer Northwest LLC), 11025-11155 NE Eighth St.; 750,000 sq. ft. office; 300,000 sq. ft. retail.

**29. Bellevue City Hall\*** (renovation) (city of Bellevue), 450 110th Ave. NE; 377,000 sq. ft.

**30. Meydenbauer Inn±** (Mastro Properties), 211 112th Ave. NE; 68 units.

**31. The Summit\*** (expansion) (Bentall Capital), 355 110th Ave. NE; 194,500 sq. ft. office.

**32. City Center Plaza+** (Equity Office and Wright Runstad), 10903 NE Sixth St.; 572,000 sq. ft. office.

Source: Downtown Bellevue Association

### ASHWOOD

48,000 sq. ft. of PP\* commercial space

166 residential units completed since August 2005

129 units under construction; 654 units of PP\*

253 hotel rooms completed since August 2005

**Development snapshot:** With five building complexes in either the construction or planning stages, the Ashwood neighborhood may look the most visibly different in the next couple of years, bringing 48,000 square feet of commercial space and 783 new residential units to the area on the edge of I-405.

### I-405 CORRIDOR

400,000 sq. ft. of commercial space under construction

**Development snapshot:** With a combined 400,000 square feet of expansion and new space across I-405, the interconnected Overlake Hospital South Tower and Group Health Multispecialty Center will feature a 48-station emergency trauma center and will employ approximately 1,000 physicians and staff on campus.

### MEYDENBAUER CENTER/CITY HALL

571,500 sq. ft. of commercial space completed since August 2005

1,622,000 sq. ft. under construction

68 residential units of PP\*

**Development snapshot:** With the completed renovation of Bellevue City Hall (in a building formerly occupied by Qwest Communications), the surrounding area has become a bona fide urban center, with just under 2 million square feet devoted exclusively to business office space.

\*PP = proposed, permitted buildings, set to begin construction in 2006-2007

Source: Bellevue Downtown Association, courtesy of Patrick Bannon, communications manager. Statistics include updated information on downtown developments through August 25, 2006. Commercial space and residential units detailed above include buildings completed since August 2005, buildings currently under construction and buildings that are planned, permitted and scheduled to begin construction within the 2006-2007 calendar year. Thanks to the Downtown Bellevue Association, Patrick Bannon and staff for statistical information and consultation, and to Emil King with the Bellevue Department of Planning for the maps.

## THE MAIN ATTRACTION

Pedestrian-friendly is more than a marketing slogan on Bellevue's Old Main Street

When Charles P. LeWarne thinks about downtown Bellevue, the city's shiny new high-rises aren't the first images that come to mind. For the 76-year-old Bellevue historian, who spent his childhood just off old Main Street—a walkable stretch of brick-covered sidewalks and street-level storefronts between NE 100th Avenue and Bellevue Way—the historic retail district is still the heart of the city.

"When I was a child, Main Street was downtown Bellevue," says LeWarne. "We knew the people that worked in the stores and they knew us."

Old Main remains one of the only areas in Bellevue dominated by independent retailers and family-owned shops. Not long ago, the retail strip's original early- and mid-1900s-era buildings still had a quaint, small-town vibe, says LeWarne. But in the last five years, he's seen a surge of new development—with upscale boutiques and restaurants replacing quirky old-time merchants such as the Bellevue Barber Shop, a rare-stamp store and a pawnshop.

"As Bellevue grew north, [Main Street] was kind of left behind; it didn't change an awful lot for a long time," he says. "Now it's dramatically different."

The influx of chic, trendy retailers on Main Street can be attributed to Bellevue's overall boom—and many of the street's current merchants are optimistic about the neighborhood's facelift.

Steve Gilbert, whose deli Gilbert's on Main has occupied its spot at the retail strip's western edge for 11 years, says business has never been better thanks to new shops like Posh on Main, a luxury women's shoe store; the swanky 520 Bar & Grill; and high-end home accessories store Watson Kennedy—all of which are attracting new customers to the area. Two multistory, mixed-use developments in the works, one helmed by Bellevue developer Stu Vander Hoek and the other by Spokane-based SRM Development, promise to bring even more vibrancy to the area, says Gilbert.

"Ten years ago, you'd see one or two pedestrians," he says. "Now there're always pedestrians, dogs or kids. It's much more alive."

For Kelly Gaddis, who recently opened gourmet food store Porcella Urban Market on Main Street, the burgeoning strip represents a happy medium between over-crowded Seattle and chain store-dominated Bellevue Square. A former chef at Campagne and Flying Fish, Gaddis chose the area because of its "old world shopping" ambience and resemblance to Seattle's First Avenue when he first started his culinary career.

"I kind of see in this neighborhood what [Flying Fish owner] Christine Keff saw in Belltown when she opened 12 years ago," Gaddis says. "It's got great potential. I'm banking on it, literally." *Jasmine Moir*



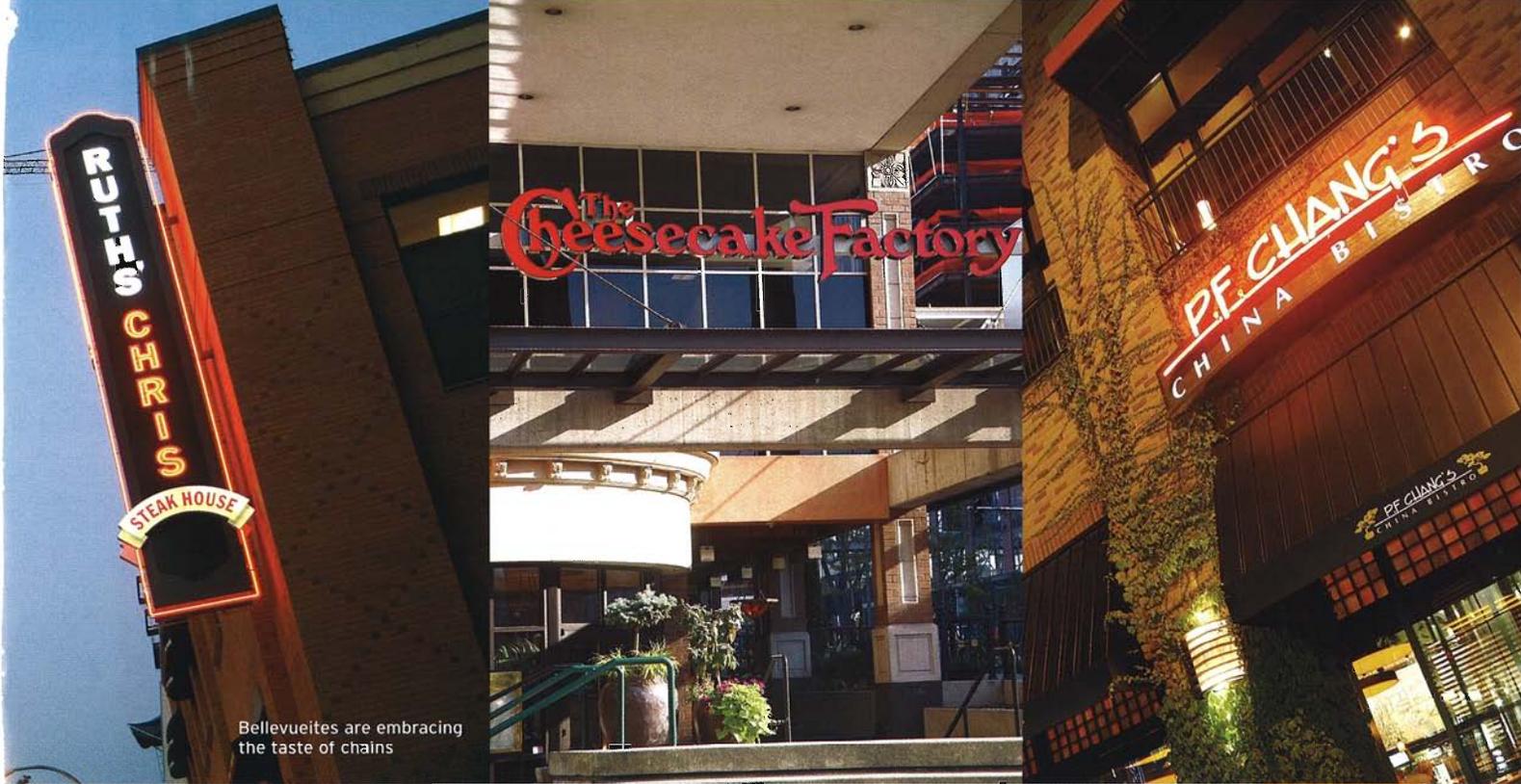
Looking to shop in Bellevue? These shoppers, near Bellevue Square, have another choice just a few blocks away: Old Bellevue

the occasional gated community. Planners are determined to maintain the city's suburban feel right next to the urban core.

After growth management, the most daunting challenge for planners is transportation. Bellevue is blessed and cursed with its prime location; it's easy to get there from Seattle via Interstate 90, Interstate 405 and State Route 520. But the trip can take forever during rush hour. Even getting across town on Bellevue arterials can take as long as a freeway drive to Seattle. Some folks think the solution to traffic congestion is simple: bigger roads. Kemper Freeman Jr. cites figures showing the current 11 million car trips per day in the region multiplying to 17 million car trips per day by 2030. "We should start every discussion with that number," he says. "What are we doing to provide for those trips? Almost nothing." Freeman—who has a reputation for opposing mass transit projects—believes expanding freeway and arterial capacity by only six percent would solve the problem for nearly a generation.

But more freeway lanes and wider streets are out of style, politically, these days, even in car-dependent Bellevue. In July, the Bellevue City Council joined three other Eastside cities in calling for a light rail line between downtown Seattle and Redmond. The proposed line would run alongside I-90 across Lake Washington through Bellevue. Sound Transit, the regional transit authority, may put a tax measure on the November 2007 ballot to pay for the line. Meanwhile, bus transportation around Bellevue has always been challenging with fewer bus routes and stops, compared to what's available inside Seattle's city limits. Connie Marshall, the city councilmember who also sits on the Sound Transit board, hopes that will change. "If you want to continue the dream of downtown, you need to develop mass transit," Marshall says.

As Bellevue dreams, it has so far avoided the nightmares that come with urbanization, such as rising crime, failing schools and concentrated, intractable poverty, even as the city becomes more racially and economically diverse. In 2005, the violent crime rate was 1.5 crimes per 1,000 people; Seattle's was 7.2 crimes per 1,000. The property crime rate in Bellevue was nearly half of Seattle's. And Bellevue is losing its lily-white reputation. In the 1990s, the percentage of Caucasian residents fell from 86.5 percent to 74.3 percent, while the population of Asians and Hispanics



Bellevueites are embracing the taste of chains

DINING

# CHAINS R US

If you think you've seen Bellevue's restaurants somewhere else—you have. Corporate-style dining is alive and well here **BY MICHAEL HOOD**

IF YOU HEAD TO DOWNTOWN Bellevue for a restaurant meal, you might mistake the scene for Indianapolis or another mid-western city where culinary diversity is measured by the presence of both Chinese and pizza franchises.

With few exceptions, Bellevue lacks small, inspired, chef-owned restaurants—the kind that distinguish Seattle. Where are the Veils, the Zoës, the Crushes, the Dinettes?

Bellevue has a smattering of small ethnic restaurants, but food-loving Bellevueites fret that the apex of the downtown fine dining experience may be forever limited to the meaty environs such as Ruth's Chris, the cholesterol-laden menu at the Cheesecake Factory or Maggiano's Little Italy, where the aromas of garlic or oregano are whisked away before they can cling to anyone's coiffure.

John Howie, whose Seastar Restaurant and Raw Bar is a thriving, downtown Bellevue exception, is not optimistic that the situation will change. "Most of the guys [restaurant operators] I've talked to say when they tried to get in over here, it was too difficult." In downtown Seattle, he says, there are older buildings with owners or developers willing to convert existing spaces. "It's not as expensive as putting something into a brand new building," Howie says. "Everything over here is, for the most part, brand new."

The predictable plethora of shopping mall dining and national food franchises is part of a grand plan by Bellevue developer Kemper Freeman, says Dan Thiessen, corporate executive chef at Salty's for two years. Thiessen and a deep-pocketed partner will open (they hope by Thanksgiving) a 275-seat

restaurant and wine bar in the Hyatt Hotel at Bellevue Way and NE Eighth Street in a space formerly occupied by another restaurant, Equus.

"The mindset that these developers have is, 'Let's go out and land something big and later go with the little boutique type places,'" adds Thiessen. Funding, he says, is easier to attract with the corporate chains in place.

Howie, whose Seastar was a Bellevue groundbreaker, isn't so sure that those small chef-owned operations are forthcoming any time soon. "It takes a while to get the business up and running over here unless you're tied in with an area like Kemper's developments." Howie says he's trying to negotiate more Eastside restaurant locations, none of which sound likely to be in downtown Bellevue.

Mina Williams, an Eastside restaurant publicist, thinks the big franchises may just be giving Bellevue what it wants. "We were noticing recently that while there's a half hour wait at Maggiano's, 45 minutes at The Cheesecake Factory, there was no wait whatsoever at Luciano's, an independent around the corner. Bellevue people don't seem to care about supporting the independents."

Well, maybe that's not entirely the case. Bis on Main, an intimate restaurant tucked into a small storefront in the charming Old Main neighborhood, has thrived for almost a decade. Does that success prove that with the right mix of food, location and ambiance, diners will follow? Or is it a model restaurant with a business plan and format that small restaurateurs will never again be able to duplicate in Bellevue? Time will tell.

A newly revitalized Bellevue Arts Museum is the most visible evidence of a growing Bellevue arts scene



nearly doubled. The percentage of African-Americans, however, dropped slightly, from 2.2 percent to just 2 percent. (Seattle, according to 2000 census figures, was 70.1 percent white, 13.6 percent Asian, 8.4 percent black and 5.3 percent Hispanic.) In addition, the number of immigrants as a percentage of Bellevue's population rose 132 percent in the 1990s.

## Many native Seattleites can't think of Bellevue as anything more than Bellevue Square surrounded by rich neighborhoods. That's a stereotype; today's Bellevue is more interesting and engaging.

Bellevue also has class diversity, despite its image as a locus of personal wealth. Median household income in the city was \$62,338 in 1999, according to the U.S. Census, compared to \$53,157 for King County as a whole. Nearly 12 percent of Bellevue households earned more than \$150,000 in 1999, compared to 7.2 percent for the county at large. In contrast, 5.7 percent of Bellevue residents lived in poverty, compared to 8.4 percent county-

wide. Hopelink, an Eastside not-for-profit social services agency, says every month, its food bank serves more than 600 Bellevue families. Doreen Marchione, president of Hopelink, says Eastsiders are generous with dollars and time. "[But] we have a continuing battle to educate people that there is a need on the Eastside for these services," she says. "We had a sign a few

years ago that said 'We have everything on the Eastside, even hunger.'"

Homelessness touches Bellevue as well. Early this year, 138 homeless households were counted in east King County by homeless advocates. Unlike Seattle, where homeless men and women beg on the street, Marchione says, most Eastside homeless are families with children who seek shelter out of the rain and away from threats to safety. A few panhandlers hold

up handmade signs at freeway ramps and major intersections. It's unlikely any of them will find homes in the new downtown. The average apartment rent in Bellevue west of I-405 is \$1,107 a month. Furthermore, city code provides limited incentives for development of affordable housing, and no developer has taken advantage of them.

IF BELLEVUE IS, as Connie Marshall suggests, like a 20-something person, then, as a young city, it has yet to reach that point when it truly feels comfortable with where it's going and to achieve a sense of serenity that sets it apart from all other communities—even its Eastside neighbors. A generation ago, the calculus for Bellevue was easy: residential development plus good schools plus some shopping equals suburb. But the addition of new variables, such as high-rise living, an office core, arts and culture and more shopping opportunities makes the equation harder to solve. Some people call Bellevue an "edge city," that is, on the edge of Seattle's influence, or a "sub-regional city," with Seattle as the "regional city." These words, though, don't describe a city's soul.



## COMING OF AGE

How a mall and a bunch of condos are helping Bellevue's art scene

IT'S NO SECRET THAT BELLEVUE suffers from a certain image problem, perhaps best captured in an e-mail that circulated earlier this year. The tongue-in-cheek narrative offered descriptions of imaginary Barbie dolls, each embodying stereotypes associated with cities around the state. Seattle Barbie, for example, comes with Nike yoga clothes, while Everett Barbie chews tobacco. Bellevue Barbie carries Kate Spade handbags, owns a cookie-cutter dream house and comes with or without tummy tuck, face-lift and breast augmentation.

At first glance it looks as if the frenzied development occurring in downtown Bellevue will only solidify Bellevue's rep as a Barbie princess. Ironically, however, the new luxury condos, office towers and upscale malls are breathing life into the city's art scene, giving Bellevue—dare we say it?—some soul.

In recent years, Bellevue has shown its potential to be a great art town. The Bellevue Philharmonic (BP), which spent 30-plus years as a volunteer orchestra, became professional in 1999 and is more popular than ever under the strong leadership of music director Fusao Kajima. In 2001, Bellevue Arts Museum (BAM) moved from its out-of-the-way home on the top floor of Bellevue Square to a large new building downtown. Although BAM briefly closed due to financial crisis in 2003, it has since emerged as one of the region's finest museums thanks to its sharp new focus on craft-based art and a snazzy remodeled interior. Though architecturally sterile, the 410-seat theater at Meydenbauer Center (the downtown convention center) has nonetheless become an asset, serving in recent years as the main performance space for local arts groups such as BP, Ballet Bellevue and the small but stellar Bellevue Civic Theatre.

But an art scene needs more than patrons and venues in order to thrive. It needs restaurants and bars—places for people to eat before a show and hang out after. It needs foot traffic—people casually stopping into museums and galleries off the street. In short, it needs energy outside the theaters and museums as well as in. Bellevue may finally have it.

When the upscale mall Lincoln Square opened in 2005 across from Bellevue Square, it added a density of restaurants—along with a 16-screen movie theater—giving locals reason to linger downtown. New condos and office buildings are adding yet another layer of density, and, for the first time ever, people are filling the sidewalks downtown—and not just during the lunch hour.

"Downtown Bellevue is finally an attractive destination," says Stephen Elliott, theater manager of the Theatre at Meydenbauer Center. "And this can only help the city's art scene."

Richard Collins, executive director of Performing Arts Center Eastside (PACE), a 2,000-seat theater set to open in downtown Bellevue in 2009, agrees. "With all the development going on [in downtown Bellevue], it makes no sense not to have a world-class theater," says Collins, who hopes that PACE's focus on regional, national and international acts will draw big Eastside crowds.

Some people may mourn the days when downtown Bellevue was filled with asphalt parking lots and strip malls. But the development that's swallowing those things is also helping to build Bellevue's art scene—which may eventually change the Bellevue Barbie stereotype. Heck, someday Seattle Barbie may even leave the yoga mat long enough to explore Bellevue's cultural landscape. *Chris Clayton*

It's hard to nail down the city's essence. Outside the CBD, the message is clear: it's a place for families. Many of the residential streets feel pastoral; horses graze on private open spaces in one neighborhood. Ninety-year-old Pat Sandbo, whose father commuted by ferry to Seattle before the floating bridges were constructed, lives in a 1914 house near downtown. She remembers Main Street before it was paved. "It

was a community where everybody knew everybody else," she says. "I feel fortunate that I'm still here."

But today, nothing acts as a theme for downtown. Downtown Park, first opened to the public in 1987, is a wide open, water rich, almost joyful space, but it hasn't been around long enough to evoke a sense of timelessness.

There's no iconic sculpture or signature

building to impress the memory, no university campus to anchor the city's intellect and no Pioneer Square-like district that encourages a sense of roots. Time will cure some of these problems, but today, a pedestrian sees more people in cars than on foot, except for the lunch-hour rush to the pho joints.

Bellevue's soul may lie elsewhere. After the uptown bars close, some downtown working people head to the Mustard Seed Grill & Pub, a yellow, cinder block watering hole at the end of a driveway off Main Street in Old Bellevue—the city's original retail strip that still features slow traffic and opportunities for window shopping. David "Oly" Olin, a beer-bellied, talkative man with a cherubic face, has chatted with regulars and served Olympia drafts at the Mustard Seed for 17 years. Born and raised in Bellevue, the changes don't sit well with him. "I think it's getting too sterile," he says, adjusting the fishing trophy snapshots taped by patrons to a post. "It's not the Bellevue I grew up with. It's scary. It's not comfortable any more."

Oly could soon be out of a job. The Mustard Seed may close as early as this fall, a victim of property prices that make the leased spot more valuable for new construction. Oly is considering moving to Woodinville and becoming a micro-brewer.

Many native Seattleites can't think of Bellevue as anything more than Bellevue Square surrounded by rich neighborhoods. That's a stereotype; today's Bellevue is more interesting and engaging. And it's getting more attention from downtown Seattle. "Up until about a year ago, downtown [Seattle] was the only center for the area," says Kate Joncas, executive director of the Downtown Seattle Association. "But Seattle is becoming more like other regions with several nodes in the regional network. Bellevue is really coming on."

But like the colorful pieces in a kaleidoscope, a fresher image of Bellevue won't come into focus until the cranes, the developers, the retailers, the planners and the newcomers pause long enough for the neighbors to take stock. Standard Bellevue jokes Seattleites tell at the office microwave (How many Bellevue women does it take to screw in a light bulb? One. She holds the bulb in the socket and waits for the world to revolve around her.) are stale. If we're not careful, the joke may be on us. **S**