

DOWNTOWN CRIME: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

"It is one of the safest areas in the City of Wilmington," says Wilmington Police Captain Nancy Dietz. "The highly publicized crimes that you hear or read about are not typically in the Downtown area," says Dietz. If so, then why does Downtown often suffer a false reputation when it comes to safety?

"It's a matter of perception versus reality," says Marty Hageman, executive director, Downtown Visions (DTV). "The News Journal reports the record number of shootings and homicides in the City of Wilmington," he says, "which may cause readers to believe that it's unsafe to come Downtown. The reality is that none of the shootings last year occurred Downtown. The unfortunate truth is that outside the perimeter of Downtown in any major city you'll find troublesome areas."

With the courthouse at 5th and King Sts., "there's a plethora of local, county and state police, and federal agents moving in and around Downtown, daily," says Mike Maggitti, DTV's director of safety. He points to low volume of pedestrian traffic, especially in the evening, as one of the main reasons for the public's misperception about safety Downtown, and Captain Dietz, an officer with 28 years of service who worked in the Downtown area, agrees.

"Statistically, Downtown is very safe when compared to other areas of the city, the Christiana or Concord Mall, or even Philadelphia's Broad Street – which, in terms of real crime, is much worse," says

Maggitti. "It just feels very different because we don't have the critical mass of people out and about to make people feel safe."

Buccini/Pollin Group's initiatives to create a more vibrant residential community, however, and Main Street's efforts to attract more commerce and cultural venues will help to generate more foot traffic in the area to change that.

Downtown – defined as the 70-square block Business Improvement District – is one of the most heavily patrolled areas in the city with at least five WPD officers by day, two by evening, and numerous other officers working extra duty assignments at the DuPont Theater, The Grand, and other places of business.

In addition, DTV patrols the area 16 hours per day, seven days a week, by motor vehicle, bicycle and foot, and monitors the area through the Wilmington Video Safety Partnership. This video surveillance system is the only one of its kind in the country – as its cameras cover the entire Downtown, and have assisted in more than 1,300 incidents and more than 300 arrests since the program's inception in 2001.

The next time you're downtown, look around and look up. You'll see our ambassadors on the street and cameras manned by our staff keeping careful watch over you, supporting the WPD in keeping you safe – so you can relax and enjoy yourself.